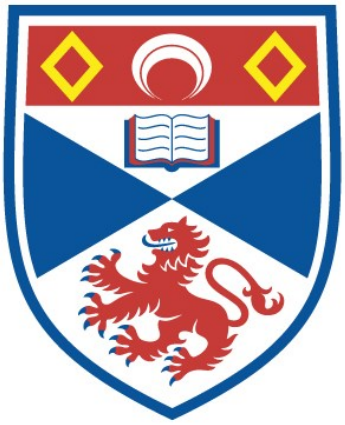
THE UNSEEN WINDOW : MIDDLEMARCH, MIND AND MORALITY

Catherine Wright

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



1991

The Unseen Window: Middlemarch, Mind and Morality

by

Catherine Wright

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Arts of the University of St.Andrews in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

October 28th 1990

"Every day of his life he had a long sitting at the *Memorial*, which never made the least progress, however hard he laboured; for King Charles the First always strayed into it, sooner or later, and then it was thrown aside, and another one begun. The patience and hope with which he bore these perpetual disappointments, the mild perception he had that there was something wrong about King Charles the First, the feeble efforts he made to keep him out, and the certainty with which he came in and tumbled the Memorial out of all shape, made a deep impression on me. What Mr.Dick supposed would come of the Memorial, if it were completed--where he thought it was to go, or what he thought it was to do--he knew no more than anybody else, I believe. Nor was it at all necessary that he should trouble himself with such questions; for if anything were certain under the sun, it was certain that the Memorial never would be finished."

(Charles Dickens, *David Copperfield* Chapter XV)

I, Catherine Wright, hereby certify that this thesis, which is appoximately 89,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

date .....signature of candidate .....

I was admitted as a research student under Ordinance No.12 on 1.10.82 and as a candidate for the degree of Ph.D on 1.10.87. The higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St.Andrews between 1982 and 1990.

date ..... signature of candidate.....

We hereby certify that the candidate has fulfilled the conditions of the Resolution and Regulations appropriate for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of St.Andrews and that the candidate is qualified to submit this thesis in application for that degree.

date ..... signature of supervisors .....

.....

Abstract

Middlemarch is the novel at the centre of this thesis. George Eliot's writing, and *Middlemarch* in particular, is the paradigm of what has come to be known as Classic Realist fiction. In reading *Middlemarch*, it seems, one is introduced to a fictional world. The characters are psychologically complex, and they are presented with moral and social problems which are created and discussed with subtlety and intelligence. Until recently, critical assessment of *Middlemarch* has focussed on evaluation of Eliot's achievement in just these terms. The thesis begins with a question, how, and indeed *is* it possible for a novel to depict a fiction in this way? The introductory chapter proposes an answer to this question which opens the way to a radical critical appraisal of the status of *Middlemarch* as a psychologically realistic novel.

The scope of the thesis is in one sense very narrow: it is on the ways in which George Eliot creates the moral psychology of her characters, and the ways in which she develops and sustains our interest in their motives, their emotions and in general their mental states and processes. My suggestion is that the language Eliot uses is deeply coloured by her commitments in the Philosophy of Mind. The argument will be that in order to take Eliot's fiction to be psychologically realistic, we are committed to sharing her unacceptable philosophical presuppositions. The second chapter of the thesis is a discussion of Eliot's novella *The Lifted Veil*. This is an odd piece of fiction, both technically and in subject matter. It does not fit easily into the Eliot canon, and until recently it has received little attention. The purpose of Chapter Two is partly to redress that balance but more to diagnose Eliot's philosophical commitments. The eerie fantasy of unnatural mind-reading reveals Eliot's ideas in a very explicit way. My suggestion is that in the struggle to make this fantasy coherent, a picture of the mind emerges which is both seductive and ultimately nonsensical.

Narrow as the focus is, the arguments to establish my point take us deep into Wittgenstein's later Philosophy. The fundamental insight of Wittgenstein's work on the philosophy of mind was that in order to understand how it is possible to talk meaningfully about mental states and processes, we must resist the seductive, ultimately nonsensical picture seemingly imposed upon us by the grammar of ordinary psychological remarks. And if those arguments are thought to be convincing, the thesis has important negative implications for at least one important perennial question in the philosophy of aesthetics. The starting point of this thesis takes seriously the idea that novelists can, and ought to, examine themes of deep human significance. The larger goal of this piece of work has been to open up a line of enquiry which might examine, from within the Analytic tradition in philosophy, the extent to which that task is feasible. I have sought to establish an important connection between the creation of the moral psychology of fictional characters, and Wittgenstein's later work in the philosophy of mind. I believe that the examination I have conducted of the way issues in the philosophy of mind, especially those treated in the *Philosophical Investigations*, bear on the way Eliot writes places much of the psychological language of *Middlemarch* in a new light, and discloses certain quite general limits on what is possible in creating fictional minds.

Acknowledgements

My acknowledgements are rather plentiful. My only excuse is that this thesis has had to compete with six crossings of the Atlantic, two babies and two teenagers. Conscience compels me to withdraw the last clause of that excuse: Marek and Emily, my elder two children, have been consistently and lovingly tolerant of the neglect they have suffered in the name of this thesis; more than that, I have often relied on their affectionate, skilful care of their little brothers. I am also extremely grateful for the generous, unstinting help of my parents, Deborah and Arthur Pain. The frontispiece was inspired by my father, who has ventured to compare my thesis with Mr. Dick's *Memorial*.

During the years my parents have patiently hewed wood and looked after my babies, while I eradicated King Charles the First, I have been privileged to be part of two womens' groups. I don't know which phase of the writing of this thesis was the worst: the early doldrums, when it seemed I would never put pen to paper, or the last months, when it seemed it would never end. I shall always be grateful to my first womens group, of which I was part from '84 to '86, for giving me the confidence to cope with the former: thanks to Cathy, Ellen, Jean, Julia, Linda, Liz, Lorretta and Sheila. Since 1987, and so especially over these past months, I have depended on Alison, Allie, Cathy, Chris, Fiona, Gillian, Linda, Marion and Sue for support and friendship. Only they can know what that has meant. I think it would also be hard for an outsider to understand the role that running has played during both periods. Many thanks to Julia Parker: running is refreshing in any case; when it goes along with friendship, its therapeutic effect can't be bettered.

Curiously, for a St.Andrews Ph.D, most of this thesis was written in Michigan. This means I owe a special debt to the postal service: thankyou to my many faithful correspondents, most notably Andy Hamilton, Sarah Heald, Julia Tanney on the e-mail, and the members of the womens' groups.

I arrived in Michigan very much an outsider with no role save that of a wife, which is not an easy one to carry off. My first contact there was Anne Bezuidenhout, for whose intelligence, tact and kindness I will always be grateful. She introduced me to one of the two discussion groups which were the basis of my intellectual life there. The first group consisted of Anne herself, Nalini Bhushan, Eileen John and Sigrun Svavarsdottir. As well as giving me the warmest of welcomes, that group also threw down the gauntlet in the shape of an intellectual challenge to my philosophical Britishness: a heady mixture. I was

no longer an outsider. A second group, The Aesthetics Group, was equally challenging and supportive. Many thanks to Steve Burton, Lisa Eckstrom, Dan Goldberg, Ted Hinchman, David Hills, Eileen John, Gideon Rosen, Bill Taschek, and Ken Walton for many enjoyable discussions. Individually, I have demanded hours of work and affection from Anne Bezuidenhout, Laura Bugge and Sarah Patterson. A special thank-you to Ken Walton who, during one purple patch, patiently read and commented on twenty wild pages per week.

The home team meanwhile.... I don't know if the years of hefty brown envelopes were worse for them than this last horrible summer when I have deluged them with rewrites of the rewrites; they have been amazingly forbearing. Phillip Mallett has been a careful, helpful and kind supervisor throughout the several swerves in direction this peripatetic thesis has taken. He has been patient during periods of inactivity; full of praise during periods of doubt; and indulgent during the panics. I suspect that Roger Squires, who was corralled in when it was swerving in a direction almost ninety degrees away from its ultimate (and initial) direction, has found the ride somewhat unnerving at times. His highly intelligent, sober, sometimes fastidious commentary has been invaluable. I am also extremely indebted to Marguerite Nesling and Bernhard Weiss. I work my friends hard; 'grateful' is a cold word for what I feel.

The research for this thesis was funded by the Scottish Education Department. My thanks to that august body. My greatest debt, emotional, financial, practical, and above all intellectual is to my husband, Crispin Wright.

Contents Page

Chapter One

Introduction

Section I: The 'ordinary' reading

My starting point is the thought that some novels, those which have been called Classic Realist[1] novels in particular, typically give us an extended imaginative engagement with a fiction which resembles the actual world in interesting, intellectually provocative ways. It seems as if such novels represent a fictional world created by the novelist, about which we can have true or false beliefs, and towards which we have emotional reactions. This seemingly innocuous idea raises several questions. What does it mean to say a novel 'creates' a fiction? Given that a novel is, precisely, *fictional*, can its language ever be strictly representational? What kinds of constraints are there, of meaning or truth, on the assertions a novel makes about its own fictions? Can a reader ever be in position to say that a novelist has ignored those constraints?

The starting point, then, is the naive 'ordinary' reading of novels. An 'ordinary' reader might be characterised, very roughly, as someone for whom the central interest of a novel will be the story it presents. Not only will they want to know what will happen, -will Edmund marry Fanny Price or Mary Crawford? -what is Grace Poole's secret? -what will Jane Eyre do if she finds it out? -but also they will trust that, to the extent that the novel is successful, the author will allow the fiction to emerge in such a way that it will stimulate the

---

1Catherine Belsey says
'the term (realism) is useful in distinguishing between those forms which tend to efface their own textuality, their existence as discourse, and those which explicitly draw attention to it. Realism offers itself as transparent... some post Saussurean critical theorists... use the phrase 'classic realism' to designate literature which creates an effect of illusion of reality." (P. 51)
Belsey, C., *Critical Practice* (London, Methuen, 1980)

reader to think about issues which are important. On this view, to appreciate the sharpness of Edmund's moral dilemma and to see the moral validity of his final choice, or to understand why Jane had to run away from Mr.Rochester rather than either bigamously marry him, or simply refuse him, *is* to wonder about the moral and emotional issues Jane Austen and Charlotte Bronte raised. So understanding the fiction is, for the ordinary reader, a large part of understanding the novel.

The focus of the discussion in this thesis will primarily be one particular realist text, *Middlemarch* by George Eliot.[2] Indeed, the focus will primarily be the creation of the moral psychology of the characters of Dorothea and Casaubon. The question will be to what extent is naive 'ordinary' reading tenable. It is, however, somewhat disingenuous to claim that this starting point is exclusively that of the 'ordinary' reader. A great deal of sophisticated criticism of 'realist' novels, and particularly of *Middlemarch,* has been written by critics who share it, to an extent which is clear in their interest in what is presented, as well as how it is presented. Notice the ease with which, even in an article about the *form* of *Middlemarch,* Barbara Hardy, for example, (who is neither naive nor ordinary), slips into talking of its fiction. There are many comments like this. She writes that we should

> "..notice the new stroke of Lydgate's relationship with Casaubon, forming over the obtuse chatter of Brooke, and that of Lydgate's developing relationship with Dorothea."[3]

and she remarks that

> "...once Lydgate has chosen to vote for Tyke rather than Farebrother, we recognise his susceptibility to the varied pressures of Middlemarch."[4]

2In saying *Middlemarch* is a realist novel, all I take for granted at this point is that the fiction of the novel *seems* to represent realistically conceived characters and situations.

3 Hardy, Barbara, 'The Surface of the Novel'

4 ibid

She invites us to think of Lydgate as a man who chooses to vote, and who feels certain things as a result; as someone who establishes 'relationships' with other characters. For Hardy, then, and critics like her, understanding a novel is in part a matter of imagining, as fully and vividly as possible, the fiction which is represented.

And from this perspective, Eliot has been admired for her realistic portrayal of psychologically complex characters in morally interesting situations. Arnold Kettle, for instance, would be regarded as a Marxist critic, rather than a traditional 'liberal humanist', and he feels the novel often fails in its analysis. But in talking about the episode in which Harriet Bulstrode demonstrates her loyalty to her husband he says,

> "In such an episode as this the moral and emotional basis of a personal relationship is explored with an insight and a sympathy wholly admirable."[5]

And W.J. Harvey says,

> "The moral vision embodied in *Middlemarch* creates a corresponding response in the reader.... George Eliot bestows on the reader a wide variety of viewpoints...which enlarge our understanding both of the fictional world and of the real world. ...we are involved with the protagonists and yet.... our sympathies are checked and controlled by our perception of their limitations and blind spots. Bulstrode and Casaubon are analysed with an almost surgical precision; yet at the same time they command our compassion"[6]

Leavis says Eliot's 'genius' rests in her 'profound analysis of the individual'. And when talking about Chapter 30, Barbara Hardy says,

> "This is how certain people react to dying, their own and other people's. The detached attitudes of Brooke and Lydgate are delicately observed, and a spectrum of feeling is organised...[7]

And she is even more impressed with other passages.

> "Other scenes are more striking and subtle in their psychological analysis...

---

[5] Kettle, Arnold, *An Introduction to the English Novel* (Vol. I: to George Eliot) (London:Hutchison University Library, 1967) (P.170)

6 Harvey, W.J. in the introduction to Eliot, G., *Middlemarch* (Penguin Modern Classics, 1965)

[7] Hardy, Barbara, 'The Surface of the Novel'

> "She is in a later chapter (42) to follow Casaubon to the 'dark river-brink' in one of the most moving, solemn, and pathetically accurate movements of feeling and reflection..." [8]

And so on. If judgements of this sort are to be taken seriously, with their talk of insight and analysis, and accuracy and precision, we have to think of the language of the novel as in some way able to represent. In particular we have to think that the psychological descriptions of *Middlemarch* are able accurately to represent fictional states of mind. The question specifically raised by this thesis is whether much of the psychological language of *Middlemarch* is, properly, 'representational' at all.

One debate with which this thesis will have no contact is the question of whether fictional language can *ever* represent. As developments in post-Saussurean linguistics and in the continental tradition in the philosophy of language have become the received wisdom in modern literary theory, the possibility of fictional representation has been called increasingly into question even as a starting point. Post-Saussurean critics believe that to think that language can simply represent is naive; and that to read a piece of writing in order to understand the particular ideas it raises and develops is to diminish it; and that a critical reading is a completely different kind of approach to writing, which should be as demanding and creative as writing. The intelligent ordinary reading, with its interest in the fiction and the ideas of the author, rather than being a primary response to be understood and developed, is castigated as mere 'consumption'. The history of ideas which underpins the adoption of current tenets of modern literary theory is complex. It is not my intention to examine that history, or to try to arbitrate between the conflicting points of view which have given rise to these very different approaches to fiction. The thought I began with is that our understanding and enjoyment of certain kinds of novel at least *seems* to rest on our ability to engage with possible, but non-actual, people and situations and events imagined by the author. Modern literary theorists believe that this

---

8 ibid (P.) In Chapter Four, I shall specifically take issue with Hardy's assessment of Chapter 42

'seeming' has been shown, by compelling arguments, to be delusive. Those arguments will neither be explored nor controverted here. Instead, this project will contribute to an investigation of the apparently commonsense starting point in the light of a philosophical tradition which has very different interests and concerns.

I shall take it, following Wittgenstein, that there is no *tout court* answer to the question of whether and how language can represent. It is accordingly not fruitful to raise wholesale the question of whether language can ever represent, either reality or fiction. What is important and interesting is to see how, in detail, particular texts have or fail to have the content they seem to have.

* * *

Section II: Weak Mimesis

But what is the issue here? How might the language of a realist novel 'represent'? Peter Lamarque writes,

> "Fictional narratives make sense to us and encourage us to picture their imaginative worlds because they employ general terms with the same meaning as in descriptions of the real world: through these general terms they identify attributes and attitudes, thoughts and predicaments which we can quite properly say that the fictions are about."[9]

There are two issues raised by this thought which, though important in their own right, are strictly peripheral to my purposes. First, I am agnostic about the ontology of fictional entities suggested by Lamarque's talk of 'imaginative worlds' and what the fiction is 'about'. What I want to take from Lamarque is the simple thought that the *general* terms of language have the same meaning in realist fiction as in non-fiction; but I do not share his commitments about the

---

9 Lamarque, P., *Philosophy and Fiction* Aberdeen University Press, 1983 (P. 6)

meaning of particular terms like proper names. One of the theoretical conclusions he reaches is that fictional characters can be thought of as *abstract entities*.

> "In short, proper names of fictional characters, as used by an author or an informed reader, refer only to senses, not to persons or particulars of any kind...
> "As characters, though, they can be said to exist, but only as abstract entities. What in a fictional world are persons are merely characters or abstract entities in the real world."[10]

I intend my thesis to be neutral with regard to that matter.

Secondly, Lamarque's account may seem to be too thin. Someone may contend that the expressive force of literature often depends on its using language in ways which are startling or surprising, and in fact are quite different to our ordinary use of language in descriptions of the real world. No doubt in many ways this is true, but I think that any objection based on the point is just a muddle. The use of *metaphor* in fiction, for example, is perhaps often more flamboyant and imaginative than is normally appropriate in other discourses, but it is, for all that, *semantically* no different to metaphor in descriptions of the real world. In order to understand the way language functions both 'in descriptions of the real world' and in the descriptions of fiction, one would have to give an account of the use of metaphor, and its relation to literal meaning. Again, I do not propose to attempt such an account here. But any such account should be constrained by the reflection that no metaphor floats entirely free of literal meaning, and the correct account of metaphor will explain its use in literature as well as in descriptions of the real world. The language with which novels present possible, but non-actual, characters, situations and events seems to resemble the language, metaphors and all, which might be appropriate for descriptions, albeit flamboyant ones, of actual characters, situations and events. I am depending on a simple but compelling thought: to understand what is said in a novel like *Middlemarch* we do not require knowledge of whether

---

10 'Fiction and Reality' *Philosophy and Fiction* (P. 60)

the language describes fact or is fictional. Someone who thought George Eliot's book was a work of narrative history would not be guilty of a *semantic* misunderstanding. It follows that the general terms of fictional language have the same meanings in fiction as they do in non-fiction.

Two corollaries are accordingly worth emphasis. First, there are constraints of *coherence* on the fictional descriptions of realist novels which are the same as, and as demanding as, those placed on the actual descriptions they mimic.[11] A sentence of a fiction should still make descriptive sense, even if it turned out that, had we but known it, the author had intended the work to be literally a history of the lives of actual characters. If George Eliot's language is to represent the "attributes and attitudes, thoughts and predicaments" of her psychologically interesting characters, it must do so in language which would be appropriate to their representation if the story were history, rather than fiction. This is what it means to say that novels seemingly describe states of affairs. The second corollary is that, as Lamarque notes, we should not expect that a work of *fiction* should be distinguishable as such by any strictly semantic properties.[12] The language of novels is distinguished from the language used to describe actual states of affairs, say in history or biography, not by characteristics of its content but by the *intention* on the author's part that the statements contained in the novel should be taken to be part of a fiction, rather than statements of fact.

My project arises naturally out of these reflections: to explore certain purely philosophical considerations about the ways in which the language we ordinarily use to

---

11Talk about the 'truth' of fictional assertions is another issue which is interesting but strictly peripheral to this thesis.

12 'Fiction and Reality' "What we must conclude is that the property of 'being a work of fiction' is not reducible to any set of surface or semantic properties of language but it is at least partly, and essentially, to do with *intention* and *use*," (*Philosophy and Fiction* P. 53)

describe minds does have meaning; this examination will take us deep into the heart of Wittgenstein's later Philosophy of Mind. Then, in the light of that investigation, I want to question whether much of the apparently psychological language Eliot uses in *Middlemarch does* sufficiently resemble actual mental description. My suggestion will be that it does not, and that the claim that it is a work of psychological realism needs at least to be severely questioned in consequence.

* * *

Section III: Constraints on Authorial Omniscience

Middlemarch seems to be rich in psychological analysis and insight. The characters and situations depicted seem to be interestingly like possible characters and situations, and we seem to be given insight into real life as a consequence. The previous section has suggested that the language of a novel is properly viewed as description only if, were it to turn out that the intention of the text were historical, say, rather than fictional, it would still make perfectly good descriptive sense. In this way, the 'general terms' of language have the same meaning in realistic fictional and factual discourses. If an author's deployment in fiction of apparently descriptive language fails this test, it can no longer be thought of as fictional description, as 'representational'.

Some of the ways in which the apparently psychological language of *Middlemarch* diverges from genuine psychological description will best be introduced by thinking about the rather paradoxical idea that there might be constraints on the degree to which an author is omniscient about her own work. Examination of 'psychological omniscience', and the constraints I want to impose upon it, should bring into sharp relief the specific problems which are to be the focus of much of the rest of this thesis.

'Psychological omniscience' is an author's ability not only to move in time and space, but also to move into and out of the consciousness of different characters. Kerry McSweeney describes psychological omniscience thus:

> "The third kind of omniscience is psychological: the power to penetrate the consciousness of the characters and provide authoritative accounts and analyses of their motives and emotions."[13]

The idea is obvious enough. If, in order to create a narrative viewpoint, a novelist makes her narrator one of her protagonists, that narrator's viewpoint will obviously be limited to what that one character can be aware of. And clearly, if the novelist then wants to tell us what some other characters are thinking, 'in their heart of hearts', this will pose an interesting technical problem for the writer.

The 'omniscient author convention' is properly seen as just one solution to this technical problem. It is a popular device, and it is the one adopted by Eliot in *Middlemarch.* If the author adopts what Hillis Miller describes as the point of view which gives the narrator the 'perfect knowledge' of 'pervasive presence', the narrator's veracity can be tacitly set above question, and he can be privy to whatever consciousness he chooses.[14] My questions concern the status of the language George Eliot (or her narrator) uses to reveal the psychological 'facts' to which she in this way makes herself privy. Are there always, in real life, psychological facts to which these facts of realist fiction correspond? Or does Eliot at times create a realm of psychological facts which, in real life, correspond to nothing?

---

13 McSweeney, K., *Middlemarch,* (London: Allen and Unwin 1984)
(The first two kinds of omniscience are 'spatial' and 'temporal'.)

14 Hillis Miller, J., *The Form of Victorian Fiction* (Notre Dame/London: University of Notre Dame Press 1968) Quoted in McSweeney *Middlemarch* (P. 60)

But it might be objected that the insight of *Middlemarch* rests precisely on the suspension of realism. It isn't 'realistic' that the narrator has access to the private mental life of all her characters when in real life no-one ever sees 'inside' anyone's mind but their own. The point of view from which the implied author describes and analyses her characters' mental lives is more privileged than any point of view from which we could be given a description of the minds of actual people. And this unreal insight is one of the perennial pleasures and insights of literature. Wayne C. Booth says,

> "One of the most obviously artificial devices of the story teller is the trick of going beneath the surface of the action to obtain a reliable view of a character's mind and heart. Whatever our idea may be about the natural way to tell a story, artifice is unmistakably present whenever the author tells us what no one in so-called real life could possibly know. In life we never know anyone but ourselves by thoroughly reliable internal signs, and most of us achieve an all too partial view even of ourselves. It is in a way strange, then, that in literature from the very beginning we have been told motives directly and authoritatively without being forced to rely on those shaky inferences about other men which we cannot avoid in our own lives."[15]

And it has been supposed that Eliot's strength lies precisely in her sensitive exploitation of this feature of fiction.[16] As MacSweeney, for instance, comments,

> "George Eliot is a master of psychological omniscience, and for many readers it is the exercise of this many splendoured power that more than any other single factor makes Middlemarch a great novel."[17]

My critique will rest on the fact that much of the language used to describe the inner lives of her characters could not play that role in non-fictional description. Indeed, my suggestion will be that some of the descriptions that come into this category do not make real sense. But it might seem that if these descriptions are unlike those in real life that need only be because in real life we never have the kind of access to our own or others' mental states that Eliot is able to

---

15 Booth, Wayne C., *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (University of Chicago Press, 1961) Ch. 1 (P. 3)

16W.J. Harvey, in *Character and the Novel* argues just this line.

17 McSweeney *Middlemarch* (P. 64)

assume. The claim would be that the fictional depictions in question are just like those we would get of real mental states and events, *if only* there were some ideal narrator who was privileged to know as much about us as an omniscient author knows about her fiction.

This appealing thought is precisely my target. To go back to MacSweeney's claim. He claims the omniscient author has

> "the power to penetrate the consciousness of the characters and provide authoritative accounts and analyses of their motives and emotions."[18]

The first half of that claim is unproblematic. As long as we understand that 'the narrator' is a fictional character, created by the author, it seems perfectly in order to describe as 'omniscience' the narrator's ability to 'penetrate the consciousness of the characters'. An example of this narrative 'ability' in *Middlemarch* occurs in Chapter 54. The narrator is able to say, with perfect authority and veracity, and without any explanation of either,

> "Rosamund sat perfectly still. The thought in her mind was that if she had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him...
>
> "But Lydgate could not help looking forward with dread to the inevitable future discussions about expenditure and the necessity for a complete change in their way of life."[19]

In this way we are able to see what each of these characters is thinking, despite the fact that neither felt free to express their own thought, nor was able accurately to guess the other's. But there is much more involved in psychological omniscience than simply the ability to tell what any character is thinking without speaking. McSweeney adds that psychological omniscience gives the narrator power to 'provide authoritative accounts of (the characters') motives and emotions'. A central question of this thesis is whether the second half of MacSweeney's claim necessarily follows from the first. For if we find this idea of complete psychological omniscience plausible, it is because we make a crucial, extremely natural assumption about the

---

18 ibid (P. 63)

19 Eliot, George, *Middlemarch* Penguin Classics ed 1985 (P. 642-3)

nature of the mind. We assume that our everyday use of psychological language functions as a description of mental states and processes which are *hidden from view*. Very crudely, it can seem that subjects are epistemically well placed to observe, and describe, their own mental states, but not of course one another's. Introspection is seen as a kind of perception; subjects learn by introspection how it is for them mentally and psychologically. They may then choose to describe, honestly and fully, what they have introspected, but no-one can ever introspect/inspect directly another's state of mind. And the omniscient author is simply, as it were, one who generalises this first-personal capacity, one who can move from 'interior' to 'interior' and report what is there to be seen.

But there is more. Clearly, if I have been to a place you cannot visit, I may honestly and fully tell you all that I perceived in that place, and yet fail to tell you many things which were there, because I was too blinkered, or ignorant, or indeed simply too unobservant to give a better account of what was there. This feature of the model is powerful. Its power lies in the seeming innocuousness with which it seems to carry over in its entirety to introspectable mental states. Immediately, without any overt metaphysical assumptions being declared, we have the immensely appealing idea that if an individual does not know how he feels, there may still be a determinate state of mind which he is in, which could, in principle, be described in terms which entirely bypass his own consciousness. His introspection may be faulty (blinkered, ignorant, unobservant, or indeed massively self deceived) but the state of mind he is in is apt for introspection, were he capable of introspecting it.

If one is working with this picture, then the idea of psychological omniscience in an author becomes very interesting. One thinks of the psychological landscape as constituted by mental states and processes which the subject can introspect, either fully, or partially, or not at all. The omniscient narrator can occupy the epistemically privileged position of the subject, and from that privileged position, but fully and with complete authority, can inspect (as

opposed to introspect) the characters' psychological landscapes. A psychologically omniscient narrator can 'penetrate the consciousness' of any character she chooses, including the consciousness of characters who have little or no self knowledge. So this picture makes very good sense of MacSweeney's thought that psychological omniscience allows the narrator to "provide authoritative accounts of (the characters) motives and emotions".

I allow that a novelist can provide an 'authoritative' account or analysis of a motive or an emotion, and that she is free to make the account as bizarre as she likes, --but *only so long* as she continues to use psychological concepts in ways which cohere with the use of those concepts outside her fiction. The events which take place in her fiction are under her sole authoritative control. But the language she uses to create and describe those events, including her characters' mental events, is public, and subject to precisely the same constraints as the language used to describe non-fiction. Clearly there is first person authority for a subject's talk about his own feelings. But it is a deep metaphysical question, one which will preoccupy us in the third chapter of this thesis, whether or not this truism flows from facts about first person epistemic privilege with regard to one's own mental life.

My contention is that George Eliot uses psychological language in ways which are implicitly metaphysically speculative. Or at least she uses language in ways which beg certain metaphysically speculative questions. This implicit commitment to theoretical and philosophical ideas profoundly affects the creation and development of her fiction. The central interest of this thesis is the philosophical ideas to which George Eliot is implicitly committed in her creation of the characters of *Middlemarch*. The intention is threefold. First, to show that George Eliot's fiction does involve specific commitments in the philosophy of mind; second, to argue that the philosophical ideas she is thereby committed to are misconceived; and third, to demonstrate that unless one is willing to make the same philosophical assumptions and commitments as she is, the fictional world she seems so fully to create is disrupted by the

fragmentation of her language into a patchwork in which those parts of her text which are *genuinely* 'representational' are kept apart by passages whose real function is quite different.

* * *

Section IV: Mimesis and Representation

It is one thing not to find the arguments of modern literary theory persuasive, and so be sympathetic to my opening thought that a successful realist novel is one which provides us with 'an extended imaginative engagement' with a fiction. But it is quite another to be persuaded that an analysis of the *language* of *Middlemarch* could impugn its status as a successful realist novel. I have suggested, following Lamarque, that 'fictional narratives make sense to us and encourage us to picture their imaginative worlds because they employ general terms with the same meaning as in descriptions of the real world'.[20] The third chapter of this thesis will rehearse some aspects of a Wittgensteinian account of the meaning of psychological language which call into question whether many of the psychological ascriptions of *Middlemarch* appropriately resemble those of non-fictional psychological ascriptions. If they do not, then, or so my argument goes, they have no precise psychological content. But even if the arguments of my third chapter are found convincing, a sceptical reader may be inclined simply to contrapose. It may be granted that ordinary psychological ascriptions need to be grounded in just the way that Chapter Three suggests; and granted in consequence that much of the psychological language of *Middlemarch* does not resemble actual psychological language. But the suggestion would be that that fact, rather than questioning the psychological authenticity of the novel, rather provides grounds to reject the demand that the presentation of a

---

20 Lamarque, P. *Philosophy and Fiction* (P. 6)

psychological fiction must, in order to be realistic, deploy language as in ordinary psychological descriptions.

So how might this contraposition be elaborated? Often, and crucially for our understanding of the fiction, the language of *Middlemarch* seems to be informative about characters' mental states and processes. We learn about the mental lives of fictional characters in a way in which we are never privileged to learn about real people's, including our own. The novel can be informative, it seems, because of the narrator's epistemically privileged position. Some passages are able to do what we can never do in real life: they simply describe the characters' inaccessible inner reality. Chapter Three will argue that psychological language is not best understood as descriptive of an inner reality. The states of affairs which ground the meanings of particular psychological ascriptions are *not* private and wholly internal to the subject. If those arguments are convincing, the language of *Middlemarch* cannot resemble actual possible descriptions. But the sceptical objection would be that fictional characters emerge from Eliot's language with such vividness that we are convinced that that is how it is for those characters, and philosophical reservations about the status of the language she uses cannot undermine our conviction that, whether or not such descriptions would make sense in real life, we have a sense that these are the mental 'facts' of the fiction. The idea would have to be that if the reader's experience of the fictional creation is sufficiently vivid, that cannot be outweighed by abstract points about the way language functions in ordinary descriptions. If this language, so the contraposition would go, does not resemble any possible description in real life, the demand that it should is too strong. This section will try to block that contraposition.

The dispute centres round the notion of *Mimesis*. The notion has Platonic roots, but whereas for Plato, *mimesis* had a very specific meaning, its modern usage is more diffuse. For Plato *mimetic* and *diagetic* writing were to be distinguished: *diagetic* writing he claimed

was in the voice of the author, whereas *mimetic* writing sought to imitate the voice of another character.[21] David Lodge implies that the modern use of the term *mimesis* is simply a casual application of Plato's idea. He says,

> "Realism as a literary quality, or effect, of verisimilitude, is something we think of as very close to, if not quite synonymous with, the classical notion of mimesis or imitation, and we often describe the novel casually as a 'mimetic' literary form. In fact, of course, only drama is a strictly mimetic form, in which only words are imitated *in* words, and what is non-verbal -- spectacle, gesture, etc.-- is imitated non-verbally."[22]

In fact, Plato's distinction is a fairly remote ancestor of the idea with which literary theorists and aestheticians are now familiar. For one thing, Plato's distinction seems to trade on an oversimplification. An author's choice of voice is not restricted to either his own or his characters': the precise identity and moral stance of the implied author in any particular work is often an interesting question. Moreover, the meaning of the term *mimesis* has undergone a change. The term now has an application both narrower and more general. It is narrower in the sense that while all of drama is strictly *mimetic* in Plato's sense, by the present criterion different plays would occupy a place along a continuum. One end would be occupied by works which are highly 'mimetic' in this sense, plays like Alan Bleasdale's television play *Boys from the Black Stuff*. At the other end of the continuum would be plays like Genet's *The Balcony* or Beckett's *Endgame*, whose aims and methods it would seem more useful to *distinguish* from mimetic works. The application is in another sense wider, in that strictly *diagetic* passages of very realistic novels can, in these terms, be considered mimetic.

---

21 Plato, *Republic III* 392 ff*Collected Dialogues* (Princeton, Princeton University Press 1980) (P. 637 ff)

22 Lodge, David, '*Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text' Paper presented at the George Eliot Centenary Conference, Leicester University, 1980 published in Kettle, A, ed *The Nineteenth Century Novel and itt Legacy* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1982)

The term has now come to refer more generally to art whose purpose is to create a fiction whose relation to real life is fairly direct. Roughly, the easier it is to suspend one's disbelief in the fiction, the more mimetic the work of art. As Lamarque notes,

> "The idea of *mimesis* occupies an enduring place in literary theory, though its logic is not always clearly understood....
> A novel-reader can 'recognise reality' in fictions by recognising properties or combinations of properties which he finds exemplified in people or objects of his acquaintance"[23]

Lamarque does not, so far as I know, attempt an account of the 'logic' of mimesis. He is committed to the idea that Eliot's descriptions cannot be properly representational unless her general terms are used 'with the same meaning as in descriptions of the real world', so whatever account he would endorse, he at least would not try to deny that. The 'sceptical' reader I am imagining, however, (convinced of the validity of my starting point, but not by my conclusion) might propose a stronger idea of mimesis. Her thought might be that there is a 'logic of mimesis' which could explain how the psychological passages of *Middlemarch can* have serious psychological content even though there are no psychological ascriptions in real life which they resemble. The contraposition would start with the thought that one can easily suspend one's disbelief in Dorothea and Casaubon and Bulstrode. One can easily believe they lived and breathed and thought in just the way Eliot portrays them. The argument would be that if the image of the fiction conjured up in the imagination is sufficiently vivid, this could make it *irrelevant* that there is a strict lack of correspondence between the use of the general terms of the fiction and their use to describe real life.

If we take this more robust idea of mimesis seriously, there might seem to be some reason to think that the sort of critique I wish to mount is out of place. But it is worth emphasising how 'robust' mimesis has to be in order to save the language of *Middlemarch.* My

---

23 Lamarque, P. *Philosophy and Fiction* (P. 6)

thinly mimetic suggestion has been that the language of a fiction is meaningful in just the same way as the language we use to describe reality. If the cogency of the Wittgensteinian arguments of Chapter Three is granted, some of the psychological language of *Middlemarch* does not have strict psychological content in the way real psychological descriptions do. The sceptical reader claims nonetheless an imaginative contact with certain depicted mental facts, even when the language used corresponds to no possible real life description. Somehow, then, the language of *Middlemarch must* represent the mental states and processes in question. The conclusion of the contrapositive argument is that the psychological language of *Middlemarch* can be understood in some way other than that I have proposed.

Epistemic Responsibility, by Lorraine Code, tries to develop a theoretical position explaining what such an idea might amount to.[24] One of the corollaries stressed earlier was that we should not expect that any 'set of surface or semantic properties' could necessarily distinguish a work of fiction from a factual document.[25] Code's aim is ambitious. She makes a distinction between 'imaginative' writing and what she calls 'discursive' writing, and her aim is to show that the former 'creates a genuine semantic beyond discursive language' and so is able to tackle the subjects in which 'clarity is not enough'.[26]

---

24 Code, L., *Epistemic Responsibility* (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England, 1987) Given that so much modern literary theory is extremely hostile to the idea of mimesis, it is interesting that Code is in fact very sympathetic to developments in modern continental theory. (The book was the recipient of the Brown University Press First Book Prize Award)

25 Although, as Lamarque notes, one would often be in no doubt. Stylistically they often differ greatly; but these differences are neither necessary nor sufficient.

26 She seems pessimistic about the expressive power of abstract thought. She quotes with approval a couple of remarks by Quinton and Jonathan Culler respectively, which she takes to be saying that philosophers, at least in the analytic tradition, are lured by the prospect of 'rewards in explanatory clarity' into restricting their enquiries to exclude the problematic and the ambiguous. (After that remark, it was with a degree of wonder that I noted McDowell's 'Virtue and Reason' in her bibliography.)

The theoretical position which emerges from Code's discussion is not particularly sharp; its interest is chiefly the fact that its several strands embody some very natural intuitions and prejudices about fiction. Fictions have a distinctive immediacy which other kinds of writing lack. For example, one might learn something of the dilemma faced by white South African liberals from a sociological study, or from an account of the political history of South Africa, or from a history of Black Trades Unionism, and so on. But in a novel like *Burger's Daughter*, Nadine Gordimer, as she unflinchingly allows the story of one young confused woman to emerge, can allow us to *feel* the pressures and dilemmas the social, historical and political facts would put upon her character. The fiction itself, it seems, engages our judgment in a distinctive way which history, or sociology, or philosophy cannot. Gordimer's own overt views, it seems, need not obtrude; further, it seems the fiction can show us a situation which we might try to understand in the light of ideas which Gordimer herself might not necessarily be able to articulate in the abstract. The thought seems to be that through a piece of creative writing a reader has imaginative contact with a fiction. Code tries to develop a theory which gives us grounds to judge the success of a fiction in terms of the imaginative experience it provides. The language of imaginative writing, it would seem, need not be constrained in the same ways as that of non-fiction accounts.

Code first of all puts forward two thoughts which seem, on the face of it, reasonably plausible. The first is that imaginative literature engages the emotions as well as the intellect, whereas discursive literature leaves the affective component untouched. George Eliot herself seems to be taken with a similar thought. In her writing, Eliot had the express intention of exploring ideas in a form which could make them illuminating to her readers, and she believed that fiction is able to explore and express moral issues in a unique way. She says,

> "Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready made, a moral sentiment already in activity, but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment... Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of

> amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot."[27]

Code's second claim echoes a remark by D.H.Lawrence. Lawrence writes that in the novel,

> "Everything is true in its own time, place, circumstance, and untrue outside of its own place, time circumstance. If you try to nail anything down, in the novel, either it kills the novel, or the novel gets up and walks away with the nail...[28]

Lawrence is stressing that the novel makes no generalisations. Rather it only speaks the truth about one instance. He seems to be trying to express something interestingly like Code's second claim, that science, psychology and psychiatry are for those who try to understand the world by making general, universal, standardized claims, while

> "art and literature, by contrast, seek to understand and express individuality and particularity."[29]

But an interesting distinction, let alone a semantic one, between discursive and imaginative writing cannot rest on these thoughts. Despite their initial plausibility, neither is in fact true. Purely factual documents can be very moving. Imagine coming across, say, a policy document drawn up by the administrators of a 19th century Poorhouse, or an account of the fuel consumed in one of the Third Reich's concentration camps. Their very matter of factness would make them eloquent. And few people could be unmoved by, for example, Engel's discursive essay 'The Condition of the Working Classes in England' or Noam Chomsky's impassioned *Turning the Tide*. But both of course are, in Code's terms 'discursive'. And, turning to the second thought, it is just false that scientists, economists *et al* would deny that "a minute and inward understanding of particulars has the capacity to go beyond itself". Organic Chemistry and Micro Economics, to pick examples from a myriad, seek precisely to reach a

---

27'The Natural History of German Life' (*Essays* P. 193)

28 Lawrence, D.H., 'Morality and the Novel' Reprinted in Kettle, A. (ed) *The Nineteenth Century Novel* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1982)

29 Code, L. Epistemic Responsibility (P. 207)

minute understanding of particular situations in order to 'reach beyond'. The better the understanding of the particular, the better will be the understanding shed on the whole subject. Of course it is true that these 'minute and particular understanding of particular situations' have the capacity to 'reach beyond' only because the scientist or economist believes there is something interestingly typical about his particular subject. But that is true of the novelist's subject too. It is only because the minute study of Julien Sorel's life in post-Napoleonic France mimetically presents an interesting *type* of young thwarted intelligent Frenchman that Stendhal valued *Scarlet and Black* as a mirror.

More important, even if there were a distinction of this kind, it is unclear just how it would give an account of what the 'sceptical reader' needs. The contrapositive response to my overall argument needs an account of a *distinctive* way in which the general terms of art and literature can be meaningful.

But another strand in Code's theoretical position rests on drawing a deeper distinction between the way imaginative and discursive writing works. This strand centres on the distinctive phenomenology of reading fiction. A fictional account engages the imagination, in a way in which other kinds of writing do not. To put the point at its most anodyne, when a novel encourages me to imagine a character or situation I will, if it does so vividly enough, experience some of the emotions appropriate to the non-fiction situation it resembles. I can seem to find myself learning, in a very direct way, what I feel and judge about a situation of a kind I need not have previously encountered. The feelings and judgments engendered seem to be my own, rather than necessarily the novelist's. An associated distinctive feeling is echoed by authors. They too talk about the degree of autonomy which their fictional world assumes. Indeed they sometimes talk as if writing fiction were a semi-occult process. Once imagined,

characters seem to take on a life of their own, and the author no longer feels entirely in control of their own characters' fictional lives.[30]

Code's suggestion is that this feeling may give us ground for a distinctive semantic of fiction. She makes slight, but suggestive play with Russell's distinction between Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description. She suggests that novels can provide 'knowledge by second hand acquaintance'; authors may communicate by 'a showing rather than a telling'.

> "The work shows what a situation is like by taking one into it so that one experiences it almost directly..... Knowledge by second hand acquaintance is similar to the understanding one has for oneself. Through literature, one has the possibility of experiencing 'what it is like to be *x*, 'either as an *x* kind of person or in an *x* kind of situation."[31]

Central to Code's 'knowledge by second hand acquaintance' is literature's putative ability to let readers see for themselves what is going on in the fiction. Her thought is thus that the reader's response to the fiction, while it is *generated* by the language the author chooses, takes on an autonomy which is able to transcend the language.

This proposed distinction between discursive and creative writing seems to capture something many writers, readers and thinkers have felt to be important. Repeatedly, in one form or another, one comes upon the idea of 'independence' in remarks by philosophers,

---

30The idea of there being a relationship between characters and writers is vividly developed, with a certain degree of irony and humour, in Pirandello's play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author.*

31 Code, L, *Epistemic Responsibility* (P. 207)
It is interesting that for Code this thought survives the traditional continental line that novels cannot present precisely defined content. Language's lack of 'positive terms' for Code means that the author is not wholly in control of the reader's response, and this is seen to be all to the good. It is a freedom, rather than a limitation. "(A) reader need not exactly recreate the experience the writer is trying to create. A successful work allows a breadth of interpretation so that it is open to many people in different ways. A literary narrative does not represent a pre-given reality. Even the most careful description leaves readers free to re-create the experience in their own terms, within the boundaries drawn by the writer."*Epistemic Responsibility* (P. 208)

critics and novelists. Philosophers and critics stress that their access to the fiction should be 'independent' of the author's commentary. Writers stress their feeling that the fiction seems in some sense 'independent' of their writing. Anthony Palmer, for example, tries to diagnose the failure of the characterisation of Daniel Deronda. In a comparison with the characterisation of Gwendolen Harleth, he says,

> "Gwendolen is a complex conception of George Eliot's while Daniel is no more than the pretended instantiation of a set of complex predicates."[32]

The idea of a 'complex conception' which rises above the complex predicates of the characterisation seems to suggest that there might be a 'logic of mimesis'. Palmer's suggestion is that the difference is that Eliot *tells* us about Daniel's character, whereas we see Gwendolen's for ourselves.

> "Because we find her capable of behaving in one way in one set of circumstances we know the kind of thing that she is likely to do in other circumstances.... In Gwendolen's case we know because of the way in which she is presented to us rather than by what we are told about her what she has it in her to do and not to do."[33]

The mark of successful characterisation, it seems, is its emergence through direct action and dialogue rather than through indirect speech. The fiction, on Palmer's account, should be presented in such a way that it can speak for itself, and the characterisation should not rely on the narrator's commentary. And similarly motivated, W.J. Harvey claims our response to fiction is aptly compared to our response to life.

> "By responding to the discipline of art our sympathy insight and experience are imaginatively extended. Thus the mimetic theory sees critical judgement as essentially a two way process; in judging a work of art we are at the same time testing and judging ourselves.
>
> This imaginative extension is a moral good.
>
> All criticism is rooted in our moral natures. There is no final discontinuity between our response to art and to life. They may differ in degree but not in kind; critical judgements demand the same qualities of intelligence,

---

32 Anthony Palmer, 'Philosophy and Literature', *Journal of Philosophy* April 1990 vol 65 no.252 (P. 164)

33 ibid (p. 165)

> sensibility, rational control, and emotional response that we deploy in our actual lives, though no doubt at a greater pitch and with more concentration and purity than in life itself."[34]

Taken at its strongest, the proposed continuity between our response to 'art' and to 'life' sees our response to fiction to be in the same plane as our response to actual situations. Harvey seems to downplay the language, in just the way the contraposition demands. My feeling is that the apt comparison is between our response to a factual *account* and our response to an author's *account* of a fictional situation.[35]

Meanwhile D.H. Lawrence, for his part, talks as if the author can be faithful or unfaithful to the fiction he presents. He writes,

> "The novel is a perfect medium for revealing to us the changing rainbow of our living relationships. The novel can help us to live, as nothing else can: no didactic Scripture, anyhow. *If the novelist keeps his thumb out of the pan.*"[36](my italics)

---

34 Harvey, W.J. *Character and the Novel*

35There is some reason to think that we should not interpret Harvey quite so strongly. The third chapter of *The Art of George Eliot*, 'The Omniscient Author Convention', is rather scathing about critics who try to suggest the reader can be independent. Harvey quotes with disapproval F.G.Steiner, for example, who objects when he finds Geo.Eliot
"attempting to persuade us of what should be artistically evident"
And Dorothy Van Ghent and Joan Bennett, who both make essentially the same criticism of *Adam Bede*. Van Ghent dislikes the fact that we are,
"uncomfortably conscious that we are not being given the opportunity to make up our own minds but are having a *parti pris* forced upon us"
while Bennett complains that Geo.Eliot shows,
"distrust in her own creative power. She is not convinced that the fruits of her imagination will convey to the reader all that her own intelligence discerns."
Harvey objects to this crude idea. Not that his own position is particularly *clear*. He tries to make some headway with the idea of 'fictional illusion', introduced by Van Ghent. But the attempt falters. He says,
"The fictional microcosm that George Eliot creates is, as Leavis would say, *there* in all its rich truth and complexity, but it is a world surely designed for our contemplation, not for our imaginative participation."
The idea of a fictional world being"there" (even italicised) is rather a blunt instrument with which to approach this subtle semantic problem, and his discussion continues to lean rather heavily on metaphors which suggest an ontology of fictional entities.

36 Lawrence, D.H., 'Morality and the Novel', , A (ed) *The Nineteenth Century Novel* (Heinemann Educational Books, 1982) according to which it was first published posthumously (sic) in *Calendar of Modern Letters*, December 1925. (Lawrence died in 1930)

It sounds as if the fiction has some existence beyond the author's words. And, like Code, Lawrence believes this makes the novel a vitally different medium to 'didactic Scripture' (and philosophy and science, which are equally circumscribed, in Lawrence's view)[37] so long as the novelist allows the fiction to speak for itself. And Eliot herself, in the remark quoted above, sets considerable store by the thought that fiction provides the 'raw material of human sentiment'. Even more strikingly she suggests the fiction exerts some constraint over her creation. She remarks,

> "Aesthetic teaching is the highest of all teaching, but if it ceases to be purely aesthetic -lapses from the picture to the diagram- it becomes the most offensive of all teaching."[38]

The idea behind Eliot's suggestive metaphor seems to be that a novelist can either be directed by the fiction she has created, even if that seems to be counter to the abstract ideas which informed the project (that would be to create a picture); or reject the development the fiction itself suggests in favour of turning the characters into authorial puppets who merely exemplify her preconceived notions (and so lapse into diagram). The fiction seems to take on a life of its own, and this is manifest both in the reader's impression of the fiction having some independence of the author and the writer's sense of being constrained by the fiction.

But again my objection to this is twofold. First, the contrapositive objection, based on such ideas, would require them to be *distinctive* of creative writing. But they are not. A principled distinction between imaginative and discursive writing cannot really rest with the author's sense that she is, or ought to be, constrained by the fictional world she is trying to

---

37 Lawrence, D.H.,'Why the Novel Matters' (reprinted in Kettle) First published posthumously in *Phoenix*, Heinemann 1936, Lawrence says,
"Being a novelist I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and the poet, who are all great masters of little bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog."

38 Haight, Gordon, (ed)*The George ELiot Letters* 9 vols
(New Haven and London:Yale University Press 1954-78) (Vol IV P300)

depict. The metaphor of a 'lapse from the picture to the diagram' seems equally appropriate to describe the intellectual laziness of refusing to follow through abstract ideas when they seem wayward. Similarly, the discursive writer's 'thumb' can also be 'in the pan', with varying degrees of pressure, and a version of the intentional fallacy applies equally to what Code calls 'discursive' writing. In reading a piece of journalism, say, written by someone who does not share our political convictions, the information we might glean about the facts might be figuratively seem as some kind of 'independent access' to the events depicted; and when we study philosophy, for example, we might metaphorically talk about 'direct access', in this case to 'the ideas' rather than to 'the fiction'. Our response to those facts and ideas can be, to the same extent as is our response to a created fiction, 'independent' of the writer.

Second, feelings of 'independence' cannot provide the contraposition required to subvert my argument, because they are often illusory. *The Rhetoric of Fiction* has no particular semantic axe to grind, but Wayne C. Booth's detailed analysis of the way that different novelists orchestrate the reader's responses should make us wary of resting any theoretical weight on the feeling that we can 'see' the fiction for ourselves. He writes,

> "Percy Lubbock taught us forty years ago to believe that "the art of fiction does not begin until the novelist thinks of this story as a matter to be shown, to be so exhibited that it will tell itself." He may have been in some sense right -but to say so raises more questions than it answers.
>
> "Everything he shows will serve to tell; the line between showing and telling is always to some degree an arbitrary one.[39]
>
> "In short the author's judgement is always present, always evident to anyone who knows how to look for it. Whether its particular forms are harmful or serviceable is always a complex question, a question that cannot be settled by any easy reference to abstract rules....Though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear." [40]

---

39 Booth, Wayne, C., *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961) (P. 8)

40 ibid (P. 20)

Booth's subsequent careful analyses should convince us that the novelist's thumb is always, *pace* Lawrence, one way or another in the pan. No 'genuine semantic' can rest on the *feeling* readers or writers have that the fiction is in some way 'independent' of the author.

The interest of Code's ideas is that they express perennial intuitions and prejudices about fiction. But scrutinising them discloses no cogent reason to think that the language of fiction has a kind of content which sharply differentiates it from narrative in history, sociology, philosophy or gossip, a content which somehow fits it to convey things which, used in non-fiction contexts, it could not convey.

The foregoing does not of course *demonstrate* that there could not be a 'distinctive semantic', but I want to end this section with two general remarks. First, there seems to be *a priori* reason to doubt that there could be such a semantic: it is quite unclear why, if there were a way of creating an impression of a state of affairs in language, that form of words would not be open to the discursive writer as well as to the fiction writer. Second, in the particular case at issue, it is equally unclear that a genuine semantic of fiction could forward the contraposition that was wanted. However easily one can suspend one's disbelief that Casaubon and Dorothea and Bulstrode lived and breathed and thought in just the way Eliot portrays them, some of the psychological states ascribed to them are grounded in mental facts of a kind which, if Wittgenstein's arguments are well taken, real people do not possess. Understanding their mental states and processes would be quite unlike understanding the mental states and processes of real people. Their 'properties or combinations of properties', as Lamarque puts it, could never be 'exemplified in people or objects of [the reader's] acquaintance'. However vivid and compelling its creation, a fiction peopled with characters whose mental lives were quite unlike those of real characters could not be psychologically interesting.

There is no easy contraposition of the thrust of this thesis. If the Wittgensteinian ideas explored in Chapter Three are found to be persuasive, the implications for our understanding of the psychological language of *Middlemarch* are profound.

* * *

My programme now is as follows. Chapter Two will examine *The Lifted Veil,* a story of the supernatural in which Eliot explicitly grants (near) 'psychological omniscience' to the central character. The main aim is to try to give focus to what I see as the problems with the idea of 'omniscience' to which she implicitly appeals in her more realistic fiction. Eliot grants the central character of this novella the ability to see into the minds of others. More accurately, he is afflicted, against his will, with veridical vision into the minds of others. In order to depict such vision, Eliot has to commit herself to explicit ideas about what mental states are actually like. In showing what lies 'behind' the veil, she reveals how she conceives of the nature of the mental.

The third chapter is largely exegesis of the later Wittgenstein's ideas about the Philosophy of Mind. It will give an account of the cluster of philosophical ideas which are implicit both in the creation of Latimer's supernatural ability in *The Lifted Veil* and in the adoption of the 'omniscient' stance Eliot takes with respect to the characters of *Middlemarch* . Many of the psychological descriptions in *Middlemarch* only seem to make descriptive sense if we implicitly accept a particular view of the truth conditions which psychological descriptions have in real life. Chapter Three explores Wittgenstein's reasons for believing that this view is unsound.

The fourth chapter will show how the realism of the fiction of *Middlemarch* is undermined by the recognition of the degree to which unsound ideas are implicit in George Eliot's creation of the moral psychology of her characters. I shall try to show that many of the important 'psychological' passages in *Middlemarch* cannot be understood as representational at

all; and that once one is sensitive to the conditions to which truthful psychological description has to answer in real life, these passages emerge as performing a quite different function to realistic depiction of fictional states of mind.

Chapter Two

A discussion of *The Lifted Veil*

Section I: The fantasy

The Lifted Veil is a rather bizarre novella. Out of the normal run of George Eliot's work, it deals in the supernatural. The 'veil' of the title, it is suggested, in real life hides from us both the minds of others, and events which lie in the future. Latimer, the central character and narrator of the tale, has two supernatural abilities. In his case the veil is lifted and he is able to see, with miserable consequences, what lies beyond both in the minds of others and in the future. Also, very briefly, the 'veil' of death is lifted, and a character, again with miserable consequences, is fleetingly restored to life.

The novella is, then, far removed from *Middlemarch*. But it is not merely sensational. Like Eliot's serious fiction it raises interesting moral and philosophical questions. Nevertheless, the main focus here will be on the three supernatural elements in the story. My interest is not to question the degree to which Eliot herself thought that such things should be accorded credence. Eliot, at least as a very young woman, was in fact seriously fascinated by clairvoyance, mesmerism and phrenology. But the point here is in one sense indifferent to that. It is to examine the deeper metaphysical conceptions which are needed to make sense of even the lightest imaginative play with Latimer's particular supernatural gifts.

My interest in this novella is largely diagnostic. The symptoms of George Eliot's commitment to a suspect philosophy of mind are much more obvious here than in her more realistic fiction. The depiction of the central character's supernatural powers reveals very directly some of the beliefs about the nature of the psychological, beliefs which condition Eliot's conception of character in *Middlemarch*. The coherence of any supernatural fantasy obviously rests on our willingness to accept the impossible. The impossibilities may be merely contingent (it is hard to see that the idea of someone being, say, invisible could have

philosophical ramifications), but almost always in imagining possible worlds in which the fantastical can happen, writers must make assumptions about the ways in which we are, as a matter of prosaic fact, constrained in this world. The assumptions *may* turn out to be ultimately uninteresting. For example, although a novel which has time travel as its central fantasy obviously has to make massive assumptions about the nature of time, the philosophical commitments implicit in those assumptions need not be played out in the fiction in a way which makes them metaphysically engaging. But, or so I will argue, in *The Lifted Veil,* the fantastic is philosophically interesting.

Three distinct supernatural elements of this novella display Eliot's commitment to some species of Realism. Realism, in philosophy, is a commitment to the belief that questions in a particular area of enquiry always yield determinate answers, even if we could never, even in principle, verify them. Someone who is a Realist about arithmetic will believe that propositions in arithmetic, for example, are always determinately true or false. Take a proposition like 'The integer 3 occurs five times consecutively in the decimal expansion of pi'. As there is no possibility of ever completing an infinite expansion, no matter how far one expands pi, one can never hope to check all the integers. A Realist about arithmetic would believe that the statement is nevertheless either true or false. Philosophers can be Realists about some areas of enquiry, while not committed to Realism in others. Some for example might feel that Realism about the past or about mathematics is inescapable, while holding that Realism about the mental, or about morality, could have no basis. That is, they might believe that relativism in ethics makes it genuinely undecidable whether a particular action, or ethical principle is justified, but still believe that if one takes a particular proposition about the past, say, 'Male dinosaurs were paler in colour than females', it will be determinately true or false irrespective of whether there is, or ever could be, any evidence for or against it.

The Lifted Veil demands commitment to several substantial and far-reaching forms of Realism. There is, for example, something extremely odd about the relation between the

body and the soul which must be assumed if we want to think that a person can be brought back from the dead in just the way Archer is in this novella. There is a commitment here to a queer Realism about the physical facts which constitute psychological states. This bears *some* relation to Eliot's down to earth fiction, but the idea is only slightly worked, and as it has little intrinsic interest, it will not detain us long. Similarly, there is a distinctly Realist and, it will emerge, unattractive notion about the nature of the future implicit in the lifting of the veil which hides the future. We are to believe that Latimer has a strange gift which enables him to glimpse things that have not yet happened. To take this seriously, we not only have to suspend our disbelief in Latimer's strange powers, we also have to entertain a highly Realist idea of the future. We have to accept that 'the future', under certain unnatural circumstances, can be seen. This seems to demand that we think of the future as something already present, although it is of course, in natural circumstances, hidden behind a veil.

That conception does have some intrinsic interest, but it too will concern me less than the idea which lies behind the most important element of fantasy in this novel. As well as seeing visions of the future, Latimer also sees into the minds of other people. How this strange ability is conceived by George Eliot is extremely significant. First, the philosophy of mind which it betrays is so natural and pervasive as virtually to amount to the 'common sense' position. Second, as the next chapter will argue, this conception has deep philosophical consequences and difficulties. Third, this conception is absolutely central to her depiction of character in *Middlemarch.*

* * *

Section II: A strong 'Physicalist' Realism

The supernatural element which to my mind is least engaging is the momentary lifting of the veil of death. Very briefly, in an incident which occupies only the final few pages of the novella, Bertha's maid, Archer, is brought back to life by a strange experiment

carried out by the physician Meunier. The veil is lifted only long enough to reveal to us her state of mind at the moment of death. This is Latimer's account .

> "The dead woman's eyes were wide open, and met hers in full recognition--the recognition of hate. With a sudden strong effort, the hand that Bertha had thought for ever still was pointed towards her, and the haggard face moved. The gasping eager voice said-
>
> "You mean to poison your husband...the poison is in the black cabinet...I got it for you...you laughed at me, and told lies about me behind my back, to make me disgusting...because you were jealous...are you sorry...now?"
>
> The lips continued to murmur, but the sounds were no longer distinct. Soon there was no sound--only a slight movement: the flame had leaped out, and was being extinguished the faster. *The wretched woman's heart-strings had been set to hatred and vengeance*; the spirit of life had swept the chords for an instant, and was gone again for ever. Great God! Is this what it is to live again...to wake up with our unstilled thirst upon us, with our unuttered curses rising to our lips, with our muscles ready to act out their half-committed sins?" (my italics) (P. 65)[1]

In order to be tempted to find this fantastical happening horrible, rather than simply puzzling, we have to take the thought about the 'set' of Archer's 'heart-strings' seriously. In real life there is no such thing as reactivating a dead body, but within the fiction of the novella, it is not impossible that life could have been restored by the transfusion of Meunier's own blood. But to believe that the success of this strange experiment would have revealed the set of Archer's heart-strings, and so reveal her dying thoughts and emotions, we have to conceive of thoughts and emotions in an extremely curious way: we have to conceive of life as a spirit which could 'sweep the chords' of our physical frames. If the spirit of life is unnaturally reintroduced, the timbre to which the heart-strings were set, in the moment of death, will be revealed. One is reminded of Will Ladislaw's idea of the Aeolian harp. He says of Dorothea,

> "It would be a unique delight to wait and watch for the melodious fragments in which her heart and soul came forth so directly and ingenuously."[2]

Will uses the notion as a metaphor, of course, but in *The Lifted Veil* the idea that we literally embody our feelings and emotions has to be given more than metaphorical meaning

---

[1] All page references, unless otherwise specified, are to *The Lifted Veil* , by George Eliot. Virago Modern Classics edition.

[2] *Middlemarch* Penguin Classics Edition. Pub 1985 P 241

In Meunier's grisly experiment, the unnatural reactivation of Archer's physical state is able to reveal the psychological state which is, undetectably under normal circumstances, *literally* embodied. In order to suspend disbelief in Meunier's experiment, commitment to the crudest possible assumptions about the relation between the mind and the body is unavoidable. In the moment of death we are to believe that Archer had a particular set of feelings towards Bertha. But the idea is *not* that as her life was ebbing away, thoughts of Bertha were still present to Archer's consciousness. In the hours preceding her death Meunier believed her to be consumed with malevolent feelings towards Bertha,

> "Because I have observed for the last five or six hours -since, I fancy, she has lost all hope of recovery- there seems a strange prompting in her to say something which pain and failing strength forbid her to utter; and there is a look of hideous meaning in her eyes, which she turns continually towards her mistress. In this disease the mind often remains singularly clear to the last." (P. 61-2)

But in the last few minutes, she is no longer struggling to express her feelings. Meunier now says, she is "no longer in a state to be conscious of an affectionate presence". There is some irony in Meunier's mistaken belief that Bertha is a devoted affectionate mistress, but presumably he is right that Archer is conscious of nothing,

> "when for a moment the lowered eyelids were raised again, and it seemed as if the eyes were looking towards Bertha again, but blankly." (P. 63)

Archer's feelings towards Bertha are not at that moment conscious.

And little help is afforded by regarding her feelings as dispositions. She is presumably, even in her last moments, disposed to think ill of Bertha. Although there were no questions which would have roused her, had she suddenly become stronger and had her pain abated it is likely she would have started to think about Bertha again. But to say that she *would have* started to think about Bertha again, under particular counterfactual circumstances, does not mean that while she is unconscious, those thoughts have a distinctive status among her many dispositions. There are other thoughts too which, under counterfactual circumstances, would have sprung to mind. Had her return of strength coincided with the arrival of her earliest childhood friend possibly she would have been overwhelmed by the need to make a decent farewell. Had a priest turned up, she might

have begun to wonder about the afterlife. Had her return of strength coincided with the arrival of a large black spider on her bedclothes, she might have given it a momentary thought.

One cannot *order* dispositions in the mind of an unconscious individual. Even if the counterfactual circumstances of some are more likely than others, those dispositions have no special *mental* status if those circumstances do not transpire. What we are to believe is that although they are no longer present to consciousness, the particular set of thoughts and feelings Archer *would have had* towards Bertha *had* she been conscious is precisely specifiable. Moreover they are psychologically immediate, and that psychological immediacy is physically manifest. Archer's thoughts and feelings were frozen in their entirety in the moment of death, and were reactivated by the return of life. One wonders how long into the process of putrefaction this state would persist. Some of the complexities of ascribing mental states will emerge in Chapter Three. It will become clear that purely physical facts about an individual could not alone determine a correct mental ascription. At this point I only want to point out that we have to make strong Realist assumptions about the identity of physical and mental facts in order to understand Archer's revival to be something which could reveal the thoughts and emotions she (unconsciously) had in death.

In Eliot's realistic fiction there is a shadow of this belief that mental states are physically embodied. It is echoed, for example, in *Middlemarch,*. in her handling of two related, but distinct determinist thoughts. First, Eliot conceives of us as a tiny part of some vast process whose workings we cannot perceive. This conception is clearly expressed in the persistent imagery of webs and entanglements, the frequent warnings that we may unknowingly be causally responsible for another's fate, and the expressed conviction that no-one can be independent. Second, there is a suggestion that there are processes at work in us which determine our thoughts and feelings. At times it seems that these processes, too, are determinate in nature, and that they are in principle perceptible. Vital machinations

(social, mental and physical) are explored throughout the novel, both literally, in Lydgate's medical enterprises, and figuratively in the novel's own.

Clearly there is something right about Lydgate's work. There are minute physical causal processes within our bodies. There is something right too about Eliot's purpose as a novelist, to try to expose the ways in which our hopes and fears can interfere with and be affected by those of others. But the further thought that the second idea would at some microscopic level cash out illuminatingly as some physical causal process is unwarranted. It rests on the assumption that a precise physical description could, if we but knew what it was, of itself determine a psychological state.

This queer thought is touched on in *Middlemarch.* In an extended metaphor, a magnifying glass seems to be applied to invisible processes which seem to be both physical and mental. The metaphor is introduced in Chapter 6, where it precedes an explanation of Mrs Cadwallader's matchmaking.

> "Now why on earth should Mrs Cadwallader have been at all busy about Miss Brooke's marriage; and why when one match that she liked to think she had a hand in was frustrated, should she have straightway contrived the preliminaries of another? Was there any ingenious plot, any hide-and-seek course of action, which might be detected by a careful telescopic watch? Not at all: a telescope might have swept the parishes of Tipton and Freshitt, the whole area visited by Mrs Cadwallader in her phaeton, without witnessing any interview that could excite suspicion, or any scene from which she did not return with the same keenness of eye and the same high natural colour.....Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting a natural voracity into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. In this way, metaphorically speaking, a strong lens applied to Mrs Cadwallader's matchmaking will show a play of minute causes producing what may be called thought and speech vortices to bring her the sort of food she needed."

The comparison between the detail revealed by microscopic examination of water droplets, and the detail revealed by close psychological examination commends us to think that Mrs Cadwallader's 'thought and speech' was caused by an underlying process which could not be seen by the naked eye, but which was nevertheless quite determinate. But although the

idea is touched on, in this explanation, the image works well as a conceit. In order to find Eliot's explanation interesting and illuminating, we do not have to be committed to the determinist physicalism which is implicit in understanding the conceit literally. And later, in an elusive passage, Lydgate's enterprise is discussed.

> "Many men have been praised as vividly imaginative on the strength of their profuseness in indifferent drawing or cheap narration..... But these kinds of inspiration Lydgate regarded as rather vulgar and vinous compared with the imagination that reveals subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of lens, but tracked in that outer darkness through long pathways of necessary sequence by the inward light which is the last refinement of Energy, capable of bathing even the ethereal atoms in its ideally illuminated space. He for his part had tossed away all cheap inventions where ignorance finds itself able and at ease: he was enamoured of that arduous invention which is the very eye of research, provisionally framing its object and correcting it to more and more exactness of relation; he wanted to pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime, that delicate poise and transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness." [3]

The last long sentence of this quotation seems explicitly Physicalist: the 'invisibility' of the thoroughfares in which minute processes 'lurk' suggests that the 'delicate poise and transition which determines human consciousness' will be individualistically specified and ultimately physical. But the previous sentence belies that thought. It is the *imagination* which reveals 'subtle actions *inaccessible by any sort of lens'*(my italics, of course). The comparison between the method for piercing the obscurity of 'the minute processes which prepare human misery and joy' and the scientific method becomes suggestive and metaphorical rather than literal. It is however, impossible to make sense of the revivification episode in *The Lifted Veil* without making an unnaturally strong commitment to a queer form of Realist Materialism.[4]

* * *

---

[3]*Middlemarch* Penguin Classics (P. 194)

4Eliot's idea is somewhat reminiscent of Plato's idea in the *Phaedo*, that the soul is like the 'attunement' or harmony of a harp. But the materialism of the *Phaedo* would not be sympathetic to the idea of life being something over and above the 'attunement' of the harp. The objection there is precisely against thinking of the soul as something which could survive the destruction of the body. So there would be no temptation to think that life could be reintroduced to reveal the nature of the 'attunement'.

Section III: Strong Realism about the Future

A commitment to a second form of strong Realism emerges when we consider Latimer's visions of the future. Latimer is not just a man with natural abilities, raised to an abnormally high degree. Far from there being a suggestion that he is simply wiser, in having more foresight than most, on the contrary, he is intended to be viewed as morally and intellectually impoverished. His ability is entirely supernatural: he has *visions* of the future. But unless we think of 'the future' as something which is only as a matter of empirical fact hidden from us, we cannot make sense of such prescience.

The problem emerges when we consider the way Latimer's visions are shown to be visions of the future, rather than simply 'diseased' notions. Latimer does not initially recognise his first glimpse of the future as such. He merely has an intense experience. What it means, whether it is a vision or a dream, and whether it truly presents something to him, he cannot tell.

> "Was this a dream --this wonderfully distinct vision-- minute in its distinctness down to a patch of rainbow light on the pavement, transmitted through a coloured lamp in the shape of a star-- of a strange city, quite unfamiliar to my imagination?" (P. 12)

Indeed he hopes it was the product of a newly liberated creative genius. But the Prague image is confirmed as an image of the future. Latimer experiences an 'overpowering impulse' to determine whether the vision of Prague was veridical, or merely a product of his own mind. Leaving his family group, he goes alone to find his vision,

> "I had no sooner passed from under the archway of the grand old gate leading on to the bridge, than a trembling seized me, and I turned cold under the mid-day sun; yet I went on; I was in search of something --a small detail which I remembered with special intensity as part of my vision. There it was --the patch of rainbow light on the pavement transmitted through a lamp in the shape of a star." (P. 34)

The reasoning behind Latimer's sudden conviction that this is confirmation of his powers presumably is that it would be just too much of a coincidence that this little star-shaped split prism of light be both here and part of Latimer's dream, unless his 'dream' was in fact a

vision of this scene. It is similar with his vision of his first meeting with Bertha. This is his account

> "Suddenly I was conscious that my father was in the room, but not alone: there were two persons with him. Strange! I had heard no footstep.....I saw my father, and at his right hand our neighbour Mrs.Filmore.....; but the lady on the left of my father was not more than twenty, a tall slim willowy figure, with luxuriant blonde hair, arranged in cunning braids and folds that looked almost too massive for the slight figure and the small-featured, thin lipped face they crowned...."(P. 15-6)

This vision is 'confirmed' on the following page, when he does indeed meet her, in just the way he had envisioned, and each detail is the same, right down to his father's trivial opening phrase, "Well, Latimer, you thought me long...." Again, the precise coincidence of detail is taken to be confirmation of this as a vision 'of' the future.

Of course it seems obvious that if his visions correspond with the way things turn out, he *must* be seeing the future. But what reason is there to take this as confirmation? In querying that confirmation is guarantied by the correspondence in details of his vision and things as they turned I am to some extent taking issue with A.J.Ayer's remarks in *The Problem of Knowledge*. I agree with part of his discussion. It is folly to confuse the timelessness of truth with fatalism, and indeed the parallels he draws between the future and the past are convincing. But I cannot agree that the argument against precognition is "not logical but empirical". He says,

> "Yet there is no *a priori* reason why people should not succeed in making true statements about the future in the same spontaneous way as they succeed, by what is called the exercise of memory, in making true statements about the past. In neither case is their state of mind important; all that matters is that they get the answers right without having had to work them out. Some people do claim that they can achieve this with respect to certain future events, just as we all can with respect to certain past events, but their achievements, so far as I have been able to learn, are not particularly impressive. The argument against precognition is, therefore, not logical but empirical; the evidence in favour of its occurrence is still very weak."

Clearly if Ayer were right, there would be nothing incoherent about George Eliot creating a character who can do things that as a matter of prosaic fact we cannot do.

A vision of the future would be, following Ayer, presumably analogous to a memory of the past. But whereas Ayer claims that all we demand of a memory, in order to treat it as such, is that the person be able to say true things 'without having to work them out', the fact is that our demand of a genuine memory is much stronger than this. We demand that it be related *in the right way* to the event or image it claims to be a memory of. Imagine a case where a dispute arises between a man who claims to remember a scene, and another who claims this is merely a phantasm, a seeming memory. Even if the details of the man's seeming memory precisely coincided with the scene as it in fact was, it would only begin to look like confirmation if we thought the details of his story were appropriately dependent on details of the scene itself. If, for example, we learned that he had studied a photograph of the scene, or that the scene had been chemically induced in him, or he had been hypnotised, the precision of his 'memory' would not look at all like confirmation that this was indeed a memory. We demand the right kind of relationship between the seeming memory and the scene or event of which it is seemingly a memory.

It is of course notoriously difficult to state the nature of the relationship; a *causal* relationship pure and simple is much too weak. There may be, even in the case of a seeming memory, a *deviant* causal chain linking the memory impression with reality. But two things are plain. First, once a doubt is entertained about the status of a memory, precision in the 'memory' would not serve to distinguish it from a seeming memory unless we believed the precision was generated in the right way; when we take precisely corresponding detail as evidence, it is on the assumption that the details of memory 'track the fact' of details of the scene itself.[5] Second if one is inclined to give causation *any* role to play in establishing the appropriate connection, in the case of true statements about the future, unless one believes in backwards causation, it is entirely unclear how precision

---

[5] For further argument that to distinguish memory from seeming memory requires more than coincidence between seeming memory and fact, see B. A. O. Williams 'Personal Identity and Individuation' in *Essays in Philosophical Psychology*.

could be generated in the right way. There is correspondingly no reason to think that precision indicates that correctness is to be attributed to a genuine prescience.

Whatever the detail of Latimer's vision, if we refuse to accept a strongly Realist conception of the future as something pre-existing, then, although we may be beggared for an explanation of why Latimer has this vision, there is little temptation to see it as a vision 'of' the future. Without the dubiously coherent conception of a 'future' which already exists, the precise correlation does not drive us to explain it by seeing it as a vision of the future. It is true, as Ayer claims, that facts are timeless, but since there is no possible mechanism which would allow the memory/vision of the future to track the appropriate (timeless) facts, it cannot be an explanation of Latimer's ability to 'make true statements without working them out' that he has had a vision of the future, at least certainly not on the analogy with a memory of the past. If we became convinced he had the ability, that would indeed demand an explanation. But the explanation could not proceed in terms of his being in touch with future facts, and so would scarcely count as precognition.

There is also the niggling fact that there is something incoherent about *changing* a glimpsed future. But in *The Lifted Veil* both of these visions actually causally affect the future. It is *because* he has the vision that he complains of his father's tardiness. That is why his father's opening phrase is, "Well Latimer, you thought me long..." And it is only *because* he wishes to confirm the veridicality of his vision that he goes to visit the old bridge he had seen in his vision. In both cases had he not had a vision of that future, *that* future would not have taken place. Causality seems to be running uphill, as it were, as if the weather forecast brought about the weather. When we talk about a 'self-fulfilling prophecy' it is to distinguish it from a genuine prophecy.[6]

* * *

---

[6]If, for example, you 'foretell' that someone will not succeed, you may not be congratulated on your prescience when they fail!

Section IV: Realism about mental states and processes

Without a very strange conception of the future, the fantasy of supernatural precognition is incoherent. But it is not a conception which affected Geo.Eliot's realistic writing profoundly.[7] The third supernatural element, the idea that Latimer can perceive the minds of others demands a conception which has much more interest. Again, as with his precognition, Latimer does not simply have natural powers, raised beyond a realistic level. He is not just hypersensitive to the unspoken thoughts of others. We might all have experienced that ability from time to time, and indeed after a particularly bruising encounter, we sometimes feel someone fortunate to be what we might call 'thick skinned'. And a novel could presumably be written exploring the idea that a person who was particularly gifted in understanding unspoken thoughts would experience more pain than others.[8] But this is not Latimer's ability. He is quite literally given a supernatural perception of what lies behind the veil of ignorance. For example, he was aware of his brother's

> "thoughts and emotions ....seen not in the ordinary indications of intonation and phrase and slight action, which an acute and suspicious mind is on the watch for, but in all their naked skinless complication." (P. 21)

George Eliot's conception of what this gift could be is extremely interesting, and betrays a Realism about mental facts which is unacceptably strong.

As with the case of precognition, it is not simply that it is hard to suspend disbelief in this supernatural ability. Presumably, in a fantasy, impossible things are possible. It is rather, again, that we are owed an account of what the ability consists in. In *Alice in Wonderland*, Alice can shrink and grow, varying in size between the size of a house and the size of a caterpillar. One doesn't have to believe little girls could shrink and grow when they consumed magic cakes and drinks and mushrooms in order to suspend our disbelief.

---

[7]Interesting that in *P.I.* part II page 223 Wittgenstein makes an explicit comparison between knowledge of the future and knowledge of other minds.

[8] The character of Little Father Time, the little boy in *Jude the Obscure* who hangs himself and his siblings because he perceives only too plainly how dismal their lives are, is similar to but not precisely what I mean.

But with Latimer's magic powers, his ability to 'see into' the mind of another, the suspension of disbelief is not so simple. My suggestion will be that Latimer's ability is not genuinely imaginable.

This is Latimer's account of his first intimation of his power to discern what lies beyond the veil.

> "I began to be aware of a phase in my abnormal sensibility, to which, from the languid and slight nature of my intercourse with others since my illness, I had not been alive before. This was the obtrusion on my mind of the mental process going forward in first one person, and then another, with whom I happened to be in contact: the vagrant, frivolous ideas and emotions of some uninteresting acquaintance --Mrs.Filmore, for example-- would force themselves on my consciousness like an importunate, ill-played musical instrument, or the loud activity of an imprisoned insect....."(P. 18-9)

And again

> "..my diseased participation in other people's consciousness continued to torment me; now it was my father, and now my brother, now Mrs Filmore or her husband, and now our German courier, whose stream of thought rushed upon me like a ringing in the ears which was not to be got rid of, although it allowed my own impulses and ideas to continue their uninterrupted course. It was like a preternaturally heightened sense of hearing, making audible to one a roar of sound where others find perfect stillness."[9]

Notice that Latimer's own thought is able to go on uninterruptedly. It is easy to see why this had to be part of the picture. Otherwise there would simply be a cacophony of jangling thoughts in Latimer's mind, rather as if half a dozen radios, all tuned to different frequencies, were playing simultaneously. To order the din, Latimer's own 'impulses and ideas' have to be a continuous thread throughout. Rather than simply being one more set of thoughts, Latimer's stream of consciousness is dominant and persistent, and an element of it is his awareness of the content of the thought of others which he knows to be, precisely, part of others' streams of consciousness.

---

[9]*The Lifted Veil* P 26
Interesting to note the similarity between that image and this one, from Chapter 20 of *Middlemarch*, "If we had a keen vision of all ordinary human life it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence."

In order to make sense of this power, we have to be committed to a very strong Realism about mental states and processes. My arguments against this form of Realism are mainly reserved for the next chapter, the aim here being to state Eliot's position. However, the difficulty we will encounter here in trying to make a coherent diagnosis of Eliot's position will begin to show how puzzling her conception is. The characterisation should ultimately of course be of a piece, but there are several strands to it which need to be disentangled in so far as they can be.

Latimer's gift (or affliction) is to know what lies behind the veil of deceitful gestures and remarks. He knows what others think because he is beset by thoughts which are not his own. He knows his companions are deceitful because the thoughts he is privy to are at odds with their expressed views. The first question is why does he take them to be thoughts of another person at all, rather than just surprising and disturbing thoughts, or feelings, or ideas of his own? Of course, in announcing that it is so, Eliot *qua* author can rule out schizophrenia as the explanation here *for the reader*. But it is harder to imagine how Latimer could have been certain. He does of course consider and reject madness as a hypothesis for his thoughts.

> "I might have believed this importunate insight to be merely a diseased activity of the imagination, but that my prevision of incalculable words and actions proved it to have a fixed relation to the mental process in other minds" (P. 19)

But his rejection rests on inferences which themselves demand prior assurances. In order to observe a 'fixed relation' between the mental processes of other minds, and their 'incalculable words and actions', Latimer must have some way of distinguishing between the mental processes of different individuals. How does Latimer so easily identify the *ownership* of the thoughts? A natural thought is that the thoughts would be expressed in the *voice* of the thinker. So he might recognise them, as we recognise voices on the radio or the telephone. It might seem the simplest matter. Imagine, for example, listening to Douglas Hurd's views on Ceaucescu, when suddenly, simultaneously, one hears a snippet

of an old radio broadcast in which he unguardedly extolled the Rumanian president's virtues as a friend of the West. The thoughts expressed might easily be identified as Hurd's by our recognition of his voice. One might be inclined to think that similar disparities might be revealed if only, like Latimer, one could overhear unspoken thoughts. But unless unspoken thoughts go on silently in our heads, in sentences, or at the least fragments of sentences, it is not obvious why they should be instantly recognisable in that way.

A second worry leads on from this. When he becomes aware of what others are thinking, what Latimer is actually afflicted with is

> "the obtrusion of the mental process going forward in first one person then another.... the vagrant, frivolous ideas and emotions of some uninteresting acquaintance..." (P. 19)

Not only does one wonder how he would know whose thought was coming in over the mind-waves; one also wonders, *what*, precisely, would obtrude? It is hard to imagine what kind of internal representation Latimer could have which would seem indubitably to be a representation of a particular idea. Think of the expression of an uncomplicated thought. For example, I might say, "I'm not concentrating any more. It's time I went to get something to eat." It seems uncontroversial to say that expresses an idea. Not a very deep one, but recognisably an idea. (It might be the best idea I've had all day!) If I'm on my own, and have that idea, I would normally have it without saying anything, even to myself. I'd just get up and go. But in *The Lifted Veil,* the picture seems to be this. If Latimer were with me, he could be aware of that idea, without my having revealed it by speech, or even yawning, or staring into space, or whatever, simply because my idea obtruded itself upon him. There seems to be nothing wrong with that, until we ask just what would 'obtrude' itself. What indeed does having just that thought consist in? It certainly isn't a complex idea but unless I report it, it seems to be nothing more distinctive than my mind wandering, my stomach rumbling, nothing seeming to me to come out right etc. It is just not right to say the thought was precisely that one. I might, after all, continue to work. My idea might then turn out to be "I'm not concentrating any more. But I should not go to get something to eat until this thought becomes clear."

There are two points, each of which in her conception of what it is to read the mind of another, Eliot has to either deny or somehow accommodate. First, there are background facts which could help determine which thought it was right to say I was having. There are facts about how long I had been working, how imminent was my deadline, how far away was the nearest coffee shop, how much money I had, etc. Many of these are not mental in character, and none would be obvious candidates for 'obtrusion'. Second, and this is a matter to be developed in Chapter 3, it is arguable that avowals play a determinative, not simply a descriptive role: the expression of the idea may not simply be a *report*, but may rather be by way of a decision which in part *determines* which idea I was having. Ideas and emotions are not precisely identifiable mental processes which may or may not be accompanied by speech. Clearly, in order to believe that there is something determinative which, were it to 'obtrude', would determinatively pin down a precise idea, Eliot's conception has to deny both these points.

One might suppose that we can avoid worries about ownership and identity of the thought if we think of Latimer's ability as simply the ability to pick up on precise, but unspoken, inwardly avowed thoughts. To avoid the first problem we would have to imagine that the thoughts Latimer was privy to were in fact inwardly avowed in a recognizable 'voice'. To avoid the second problem, about determinacy, is trickier. We would have to simply assume that the overheard thoughts were unambiguous enough to be considered determinate. Think of the scene depicted in the film *Annie Hall*, where the characters played by Woody Allen and Diane Keaton are chatting, in stilted sentences, asking polite cautious questions. Meanwhile there are subtitles which tell a different story. She wants to know a certain thing, but censors the question, feeling it is too pushy. He makes a certain assumption, but censors it, feeling it will sound aggressive. So they ask unchallenging questions, and the subtitles give us their real queries. One might imagine a fantasy in which Latimer was able, supernaturally, to pick up on the subtitles.

That gift would be striking but perhaps not all that useful: conversation is rarely disjointed enough for thoughts to be formulated and rejected between the spoken sentences. But in any case this is not the idea Eliot has in mind. Latimer's gift is not the simple ability to read complete, but censored, thoughts. If we were to interpret his 'gift' thus, we would not be able to account for the reliability and scope of Latimer's supernaturally acquired knowledge.

The first problem is that in order to think that access to the interior of someone's mental states could lead to disillusion on the scale of Latimer's sudden penetration of Bertha's 'adytum', we have to entertain a very radical scepticism about others' minds. We have to accept that what people do and say can, even over the long term, gives us no very reliable clue as to their thoughts and feelings, or indeed their personality. If we entertain the possibility of radical scepticism of this sort, seeing words and deeds as mere evidence for states of mind, we have to be radically sceptical about our ability to understand and interpret what people say and do. If this picture were plausible, epistemological access to unspoken thoughts would furnish no better guarantee that our interpretation of others was any more soundly based.

In other words, if all that Latimer is privy to is complete unspoken thoughts, I would want to push scepticism back one place, and resurrect it behind the veil. Look at what is going on in this passage.

> "..my brother himself appeared at the door, florid, broad-chested, and self-complacent, feeling what a goodnatured fellow he was not to behave insolently to us all on the strength of his advantages.
>
> 'Latimer, old boy,' he said to me in a tone of compassionate cordiality, 'what a pity it is you don't have a run with the hounds now and then! The finest thing in the world for low spirits'." (P. 37)

Certainly Alfred's speech and manner seem patronising, and it is understandable that a young sickly brother should resent it. But what could there be that could accompany this speech said in a tone of 'compassionate cordiality' which could enable Latimer to know precisely his brother's state of mind. Suppose Alfred inwardly utters thoughts which make

it seem that he *is* feeling particularly pleased with himself that morning. Suppose he inwardly utters thoughts that make it seem that he *is* terribly aware of his physical and emotional superiority. That could hardly be interpreted as definitely amounting to a complacent feeling that he was a goodnatured fellow not to behave insolently on the strength of his advantages. He might conceivably, rather implausibly, have inwardly articulated the unspoken thought "I must be a good-natured fellow because I am not insulting these people who are obviously weaker than I". But even that would not prove he was 'feeling' that he was a goodnatured fellow.

There are two points. The first is that the grounds for entertaining radical scepticism about other minds can be paralleled 'within'. The sceptical thought is presumably that people can often deceive. That seems to show that there is no necessary connection between what is said and what is thought. But what is to prevent a parallel scepticism behind the veil? People are often *self*-deceived. A man who sincerely says to himself "I really don't care if I never see her again!" may in fact be desperately distressed. But, if that can happen, and surely it can, what guarantee is there, even with inwardly articulated thoughts, that the state of mind seemingly reported is veridical. Someone might argue that 'overheard' thoughts are less likely to be deceptive. But that is not a good argument to suppose that any particular thought is veridical. Against the sceptic, it leaves one no better armed (within, as it were) than we were armed by the undeniable unlikelihood of our radically misunderstanding one another all the time.

The second point, and this is a question to be discussed at more length in the next chapter, is that overheard thoughts would have to be interpreted. Placed in a history of which Latimer was ignorant, however explicit Alfred's thought, it could be interpreted differently. Suppose for example he had just been accused of being a bully who never passed up the opportunity for being insolent to those he considered inferior. His feeling might be relief that his impulses were not always base. Suppose he had a history of indulging in bouts of senseless sadism. In that context he might have been trying to

persuade himself that he could reform. The point is that to understand what someone is thinking 'in their heart of hearts' we have to know the history in which their thought occurs as well as what they actually thought. If Latimer's gift were simply to have supernatural access to his brother's unspoken thoughts, he would have to *interpret* them to come up with his description of them. And 'interpretation' of the inner is just as likely to be mistaken as interpretation of the 'words and deeds' of someone we don't understand.

It is in any case clear that Eliot's conception of Latimer's gift is much more complete than the simple ability to 'overhear' unspoken thoughts. Strange as that would be, that Latimer's ability is much stranger is clear from this striking, and rather unpleasant image.

> "...the rational talk, the graceful attentions, the wittily turned phrases, and the kindly deeds, which used to make the web of their characters, were seen as if thrust asunder by a microscopic vision, that showed all the intermediate frivolities, all the suppressed egoism, all the struggling chaos of puerilities, meanness, vague capricious memories, and indolent makeshift thoughts, from which human words and deeds emerge like leaflets covering a fermenting heap."

A minor puzzling feature is that 'rational talk', 'graceful attentions', 'wittily turned phrases' and 'kindly deeds' are all complex and in part mental. That puzzle is partially removed by supposing that the talk seemed rational but wasn't, the deeds seemed kindly but weren't, and so on. But clearly they must have been fairly graceful and witty, or they couldn't have seemed so. The much more puzzling problem is it is hard to think what determinate shape struggling chaos and inchoate thoughts could take which would allow the obtrusion of *that* to be recognisably, say, his brother's 'struggling chaos of puerility' (and definitely not his father's vague regret that his youth was so far away and misspent). And once one tries to think of one, one is beggared for an example of an unspoken thought which is determinately 'indolent and makeshift', as opposed to incomplete and abandoned. And so on. It is clear that what lies behind the veil is *not* simply unspoken avowable states. Lying 'behind the veil', it seems, are precisely the kinds of physical/mental 'thoroughfares'

Lydgate's research sought to penetrate.[10] And it is to this seething mass of confusion and pettiness that Latimer's gift gives him access.

The idea of 'overheard' thoughts is much too crude to capture Eliot's conception. So could we think of Latimer as experiencing, who knows how, precisely the same phenomenological 'feel' as those around him? Latimer's gift, on this reading would be to be privy to the precise quality of feel as those around him. I want to suggest that this would leave us no better placed. Think, for example, about this piece of insight.

> "But then again my exasperating insight into Alfred's self complacent soul, his freedom from all the doubts and fears, the unsatisfied yearnings, the exquisite tortures of sensitiveness, that had made the web of my life, seemed to absolve me from all bonds towards him. This man needed no pity, no love; those fine influences would have been as little felt by him as the delicate white mist is felt by the rock it caresses." (P. 37-8)

Even allowing that Latimer is wholly linked to his brother's phenomenological state his knowledge is puzzling. We will assume solved the problem of the ownership of the thoughts. So we can suppose that he, *per impossibile*, feels his brothers feels, knowing whose they are. But again there is the worry about interpretation. Latimer is a sickly, egotistical, self absorbed young man, who is unlikely to empathise much with the words and deeds of people unlike himself. Alfred's feelings are clearly going to be unfamiliar; he doesn't feel as Latimer does. And this is a morning when Alfred is feeling good about himself. We could imagine that Latimer might get some insight into Alfred's particular way of feeling pleased with himself. But what could warrant the assumption that Alfred is immune to pain? Somehow, Latimer's supernatural gift of insight must be able to insulate him from radically misinterpreting other people's inner experiences.

Eliot's conception involves much more than the simple ability to 'overhear' unspoken thoughts, or even experience others' mental experience. It is interesting to look at just what *is* revealed to Latimer, and what, by implication, we are to believe is strictly

---

[10]Ch 65 *Middlemarch* , quoted on P 8, above.

knowable, although in real life hidden.The most striking moment is perhaps the moment when the final veil is torn away, and Bertha's mind too becomes open to him. This is the account Latimer gives.

> "I remember...that evening the veil which had shrouded Bertha's soul from me--had made me find in her alone among my fellow-beings the blessed possibility of mystery, and doubt, and expectation--was first withdrawn... ...I joined Bertha in her private sitting-room. She was seated in a leaning posture on a settee, with her back towards the door; the great rich coils of her pale blond hair surmounting her small neck, visible above the back of the settee. I remember, as I closed the door behind me, a cold tremulousness seizing me, and a vague sense of being hated and lonely--vague and strong, like a presentiment. I know how I looked at that moment, for I saw myself in Bertha's thought as she lifted her cutting grey eyes, and looked at me: a miserable ghost-seer, surrounded by phantoms in the noon-day, trembling under a breeze when the leaves were still, without appetite for the common objects of human desire, but pining after the moon beams." (P. 47-8)

It is hard to imagine precisely how all of those thoughts were conveyed 'at that moment'. Is it likely that these phrases actually ran through Bertha's mind as she looked at him? But if they didn't, presumably they are Latimer's own phrases, so to that extent *his* thoughts. Even supposing he is sincere, can we, or he, be sure how much of the content was projection on his part, rather than an accurate representation of her thought? Queer as it is, the conception has to be that the content of Bertha's thought could be unmistakably 'read off' by Latimer.

The revelations become queerer. Latimer is not only able to read off the precise content of any one of Bertha's thoughts, he is also able to see her entire nature.

> "We were front to front with each other, and judged each other. The terrible moment of complete illumination had come to me, and I saw that the darkness had hidden no landscape from me, but only a blank prosaic wall: from that evening forth, through the sickening years which followed, I saw all round the narrow room of this woman's soul..." (P. 48-9)

There are two points here which deserve disentangling. The first is raised by considering this thought of Gilbert and Gubar, which concludes an argument to suggest Eliot's indebtedness to Charlotte Bronte's mad Bertha.

> "If we wrench ourselves free from Latimer's perspective to consider Bertha's point of view therefore it becomes clear how he must represent to her the impoverishment of desire and the renunciation of vitality.... Bertha's terror is the product of her realization that she has been playing out his

> plots, that even her resentment of him has been foreseen and created for her by his vision of her as the fatal-eyed Lamia."[11]

Surely in the context of this fantasy Gilbert and Gubar's thought makes no sense? Why should we 'wrench ourselves free'? If we think there may be more to Bertha than Latimer is able to see, we have to find his report on her soul unsatisfactory and incomplete. Latimer's privileged position gives us Bertha's point of view, does it not? In order to raise this thought, Gilbert and Gubar are, understandably but unknowingly, taking issue with Eliot's conception of Latimer's gift. It is part of Eliot's conception that Latimer's view of Bertha's soul as a 'narrow room' is a 'terrible moment of *complete* illumination'. Odd as it seems, ignorant, uncaring Latimer *can* see all round and understand Bertha's soul.

The second point is independent of Latimer's particular failings. In order for it to make sense that anyone, even the wisest and best, could see all round someone's soul, we have to think of a soul as a scannable entity. It is seductive (in a masochistic sort of way) to think that there is a 'veil' of some sort which makes our souls opaque to others. Certainly this seductive picture has some explaining to do. No-one has more access to a soul than its subject, and yet no individual can give a precise account of his own soul, so even with total interior access, the simplest mind is not something which is reliably scannable. But presumably that failure is to be explained by thoughts of repression born of fear and shame. Latimer, with total access to another's mind, is not similarly impeded and so his view of Bertha's spiritual nature can be complete and reliable.

The conception of the mind which emerges from considering Latimer's powers is highly Realist and extremely odd. Firstly, the thoughts he is privy to are too subtle and inchoate to be merely unspoken but inwardly articulated sentences. Nevertheless the ownership of the thoughts is obvious. The conception has to be to think that unspoken thoughts, even if not expressed in words, have a distinctive *timbre* which identifies their thinker. Secondly thoughts can obtrude in a form which enables them to be precisely

---

[11] *The Madwoman in the Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar 1979 Yale University Press (P. 464)

identified without any knowledge of the context or history in which they occur. So thoughts must have a distinctive identity which is something more determinate than could emerge from 'overhearing' words, and indeed something more determinate than could emerge from experiencing the subject's feels. Thirdly, not only are particular thoughts determinate and specifiable by 'access', also the mind, or 'soul', of another is something determinate whose nature could be made transparent to us if only we had access to it. Thoughts, emotions, and psychological natures seem to be a simple 'somethings' which can wear their essence on their face. In the next chapter this conception will be characterised more fully, and the worries and problems which have begun to emerge here will be explored with more depth and rigour.

* * *

Section V: One strand in the critical reception of *The Lifted Veil*

My interest in *The Lifted Veil* is primarily that it gives focus to my discussion. In this novella Geo.Eliot is prepared to show us what she thinks would be needed for one person to have perfect access to another. Thereby it enables us, in a dramatic way, to see more clearly the kinds of epistemological and metaphysical problems she feels beset us in real life where we have to struggle through without Latimer's eerie and unwelcome powers. But leaving aside for the moment my diagnostic purposes, *The Lifted Veil* is interesting in its own right. Although its critical reception has been largely non-existent, references to it have become somewhat more frequent in the last ten years or so, and some attempt has been made to 'place' it in the Eliot canon.

There have been three thoughts raised by this recent critical discussion. While my interest in Eliot's implicit philosophical commitments engages none head on, I do want, at least obliquely, to question the assurance with which they are put forward. Some have suggested that it is important to see the way in which *The Lifted Veil* is thematically continuous with the rest of Eliot's writing. The thought is that this genre allowed Eliot to

approach, from a rather curious angle, moral issues and themes which are of crucial importance in all her fiction. The second suggestion, which by no means excludes the first, is that this queer horror story sheds a new light on her realistic fiction by allowing us more of a glimpse of the pain and ambivalence Eliot felt with regard to her own artistic gifts than we are usually granted by her more controlled narrators. Thirdly, it is thought that the adoption of the first person as the narrative convention enabled Eliot to question philosophical assumptions implicit in her customary narrative voice.

In her useful biography Jennifer Uglow, for example, suggests the first. Uglow's thought is that in her more realistic fiction, Eliot is concerned to show her characters making choices, often it seems making foolish choices simply from unavoidable ignorance of the future and of one another. She says,

> "In *Adam Bede* Arthur and Hetty are swept into a destructive and self-destructive current because they cannot, or will not, see the results of their actions, preferring to live in a fantasy present and a dream future. Adam, on the other hand, makes what seem quite realistic plans for the future only to be continually tripped up by his inaccurate readings of personality--of Arthur, Hetty, even Dinah. In a similar way in *The Mill on the Floss*, Maggie's misfortunes were to be largely due to her inability to see the end of any story or the consequences of any decision. In *The Lifted Veil* George Eliot pauses and asks, 'But *is* it really just a question of accurate vision? What would happen to individual choice if people actually could see the future? Would it change their actions? Would it be a blessing, a curse, or a mere irrelevancy?"[12]

It is surely right that questions about the relation between knowledge, insight and wisdom are raised by the fiction of *The Lifted Veil*. But ultimately, it seems to me, the issue of the supernatural tends to cloud, rather than shed a new light on, the serious questions, and in the end they get very little by way of an answer.

Uglow's question is raised fairly explicitly. The thought that the novella was meant to express a general thesis concerning the relation between insight and compassion, or knowledge and wisdom, is encouraged both by the 'motto' or epigraph to the novel, and

---

[12]Jennifer Uglow, *George Eliot*, Virago Pantheon Pioneers. P116

by remarks in the narrative commentary on the fiction. The epigraph, appended fourteen years later, runs

> "Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns
> To energy of human fellowship;
> No powers beyond the growing heritage
> That makes completer manhood."

And the abstract comments include 'There is no short cut, no patent tram-road, to wisdom....'; 'We try to believe that the egoism within us would have easily been melted, and that it was only the narrowness of our knowledge....'; '...if the whole future were laid bare to us beyond today, the interest of all mankind would be bent on the hours that lie between' etc. And in the fiction itself, supernatural insight operates in spite of, seemingly almost because of, what would normally seem to be *deficiencies* in natural vision, and natural understanding of others.

Sometimes there is a literal contrast between sight and supernatural 'second sight'. For example, there is a striking image early in the novel. Latimer is becoming troublesome to his family, and they call in a phrenologist to diagnose his character.

> "[He] took my small head between his large hands, and pressed it here and there in an exploratory, suspicious manner--then placed each of his great thumbs on my temples, and pushed me a little way from him, and stared at me with glittering spectacles." (P. 6)

Uncanny and hateful, his eyes hidden, with his 'great thumbs' Mr.Letherall draws out the secrets of Latimer's soul. Also Latimer, in his babyhood, had 'a complaint of the eyes that made [him] blind for a little while', and this loss of his sight seems, even in infancy, to have made his other senses preternaturally sensitive.

> "I was certainly a very sensitive child. I remember still the mingled trepidation and delicious excitement with which I was affected by the tramping of the horses on the pavement in the echoing stables, by the loud resonance of the grooms' voices, by the booming bark of the dogs as my father's carriage thundered under the archway of the courtyard, by the din of the gong as it gave notice of luncheon and dinner." (P. 4-5)

And his supernatural powers first assail him during the 'languid monotony of convalescence' which follows a severe illness 'which was partly a blank' for him. There is of course the natural phenomenon that if one sense is deprived, other senses become

heightened, but the point which emerges most clearly is that blindness and unnatural insight can co-exist.

The possibility of supernatural insight coexisting with a lack of normal psychological perceptiveness is also striking. In the paragraph which precedes one discussion of Latimer's uncanny insight into the minds of others, Bertha amuses herself with a piece of sexually suggestive coquetry. Latimer has bought her an opal ring for her birthday. She seems not to be wearing it, despite 'wearing conspicuously all the birthday presents except mine'. This provokes a predictable response from Latimer, and he accuses her of despising his poor opal.

> "Do I despise it?" she answered, taking hold of a delicate gold chain which she always wore round her neck and drawing out the end from her bosom with my ring hanging to it; "it hurts me a little, I can tell you," she said, with her usual dubious smile, "to wear it in that secret place; and since your poetical nature is so stupid as to prefer a more public position, I shall not endure the pain any longer."
>
> She took off the ring from the chain and put it on her finger, smiling still, while the blood rushed to my cheeks, and I could not trust myself to say a word of entreaty that she would keep the ring where it was before." (P. 25-6)

That she, with her 'usual dubious smile' has contrived a situation in which she could put him out of countenance by coy references to her breasts is obvious to the reader, but Latimer goes on,

> "I was completely fooled by this, and for two days shut myself up in my own room whenever Bertha was absent, that I might intoxicate myself afresh with the thought of this scene and all it implied." (P. 26)

Clearly, the scene implied little apart from Bertha's slightly unsavoury enjoyment of his scarcely more than adolescent infatuation. It is a sign of Latimer's naivety that he should have been so easily 'fooled'. Certainly a perceptive man would have known how to understand this vain self-regarding young woman's flirtation. The placing of this incident directly before another revelation of Latimer's extraordinary gift of insight into the minds of others throws into the sharpest possible relief the contrast between Latimer's supernatural gifts of insight and those of someone who might be naturally, if unusually, gifted with perceptiveness.

In making so marked a contrast between knowledge gained through intelligence and forethought, and that which comes without wisdom, the novel seems to address Uglow's question directly. And there is a moral point to be made. Accuracy of vision and wisdom seem to be at odds with one another, rather than natural corollaries. The gift of insight in the phrenologist Letherall, for example, is seen to be of dubious worth, as it is cut off from good judgement. He was right when he said 'so very decidedly' that Latimer was not 'fit to encounter the rough experience of a public school', but the disastrously unsuitable turn Latimer's education thereafter took was not a wise response to this knowledge. So without the wisdom and humanity to know how to act and feel, the gift of insight is useless. For all his knowledge, Letherall in fact inspires the boy with his first hatred. Similarly, it is plain to us that a man with as little interest or understanding of others, on the ordinary level, as Latimer displays will be unable to make much use of his clairvoyance.

But although it is true that Latimer's life is not improved by his glimpses of the future, or into the minds of others, this fiction hardly forwards the abstract discussion. In the context of this novel, the chief point of the contrasts and comparisons is not moral or philosophical. Rather it is simply to establish the fantastical parameters of the fiction. It has to be made abundantly plain that Latimer does not have insight into the future or into the minds of others because he is wiser or more sensitive than others; rather he has them from some supernatural source. And this necessity of the fiction clouds the moral point. The specific warning which emerges from Latimer's story is that we should not seek clairvoyant knowledge, because insight which comes unnaturally leads to misery and alienation. And this is not pertinent to any danger in ordinary life. It might have seemed so to the young Mary Ann Evans who flirted with phrenology and mesmerism, but it could not have done to the mature Eliot, whose interest in these topics had much diminished even before she wrote this story. Beryl Gray suggests that Latimer's experiences in large part evolved from details of cases of mesmerism and clairvoyance which she discussed in a long professional correspondence with the phrenologist George Coombe. This

correspondence ended when she shocked him with what he called the 'morbid mental aberration' of her liason with Lewes, which began in 1856.

More importantly, the abstract idea itself loses focus in this novella. If it is true that knowledge doesn't bring wisdom, it is interesting to speculate why not. It seems undeniable that there are certain psychological, or emotional 'truths' which one cannot take in by ear, but that claim is ambiguous between the thought that knowledge can be acquired without bringing attendant wisdom, and the thought that wisdom is a precondition for the acquisition of certain kinds of knowledge. *Middlemarch* raises the same question, but in a way which does justice to the complexity of the issue. There we see 'stupidity in a man of genius if you take him unawares on the wrong subject'. Fatal ignorance and folly sit alongside different kinds of knowledge: in Casaubon 'knowing classical passages'; in the young Bulstrode, 'fluent in speech and fond of theological definition', with 'conviction of sin, and sense of pardon'; and in Lydgate with his 'intellectual passion' and 'professional enthusiasm'. But do these men have the relevant knowledge, and lack only a 'strength of human fellowship', or does their lack of compassion, honesty and humility actually blind them to the knowledge they need?

The fiction of *Middlemarch* offers no easy answers, and sometimes it makes it seem as if knowledge of the future and knowledge of other minds *cannot* be separated from wisdom. Mary Garth, for example, needs to be able to see into the future when she decides to protect her affection for Fred. Seeing how difficult it would be to resist falling in love with Farebrother, were she to be with him constantly, she felt glad 'to have a reason for going home the next day'. The narrator comments, 'we can set a watch over our affections and our constancy as we can over other treasures'[13]. Clearly foresight of this kind is not a mere irrelevancy, and the ability to know herself well enough to see the danger her affection and constancy might be in, is not divorced from the wisdom to take steps to avoid

---

[13] Eliot, George, *Middlemarch* (P. 625)

the danger. Similarly, in the following small incident, when Farebrother has keen insight into Lydgate's feelings, his perceptiveness is of a piece with his intelligence and kindliness.

> "He answered in a tone of good-humoured admission--
> 'Ah, there's enormous patience wanted with the way of the world. But it is easier for a man to wait patiently when he has friends who love him, and ask for nothing better than to help him through, so far as it lies in their power.'
> 'Oh yes,' said Lydgate, in a careless tone, changing his attitude and looking at his watch. 'People make much more of their difficulties than they need to do.'
> He knew as distinctly as possible that this was an offer of help to himself from Mr.Farebrother, and he could not bear it....
> Mr.Farebrother was too keen a man to know the meaning of that reply, and there was a certain massiveness in Lydgate's manner and tone, corresponding with his physique, which if he repelled your advances in the first instance seemed to put persuasive devices out of question."[14]

Farebrother's knowledge that a 'certain massiveness in Lydgate's manner and tone' implies that he will not be helped, is not divorced from the sensitivity which makes him find the rejection wounding, or the delicacy with which he drops the subject.

Mary Garth and Farebrother are characters with more self knowledge than most. Does it make sense to try to separate their uncompromising self-knowledge from their forethought, or from their compassion for others' weakness? In real life (and in realistic fiction) neither the ability to foresee the consequences of our actions nor the ability to understand others is divorced from wisdom, nor from intelligent reading of present clues. If it is sensible to separate these issues, it is not obvious why or how.

It might seem that this is precisely the question answered by the fiction of *The Lifted Veil*. Latimer *is* given knowledge, but because it is divorced from 'human fellowship' it doesn't bring him wisdom. But in making the source of Latimer's knowledge supernatural, *The Lifted Veil* begs the interesting question in such a way that the answer it gives is not convincing. First of all, although the narrative commentary insists that having more or other facts is not the issue--when the narrator has 'bitter regret that if he had

---

[14] ibid (P. 696)

foreseen something more or something different' things might have been different, we are assured that that is just a 'vain thought with which we men flatter ourselves'. But the claim, while crucial to the point, is not wholly convincing. It seems hard to swallow without an argument that if one had accurate predictions of the future, or accurate knowledge of another's mind, one would not be better placed to make plans. Of course if one only *thinks* one is in possession of the interesting facts, while destiny stands by sarcastic with dirty tricks up its sleeve, one won't be better placed. But then of course one doesn't know what one needs to know. On the other hand, if it can be assumed *a priori* that people are always foolish or self-deceived enough to misread what seem to be 'the facts', one won't be better placed either. But that again inclines us towards the thought that one *cannot* know the facts.

Those questions are not forwarded by this story. When Latimer 'knows' Bertha's mind, but does not know that she is planning to murder him

> "For a moment I thought this fulfilment of my vision at Vienna marked some dreadful crisis in my fate, but I saw nothing in Bertha's mind, as she stood before me, except scorn for the look of overwhelming misery with which I sat before her..."Fool, idiot, why don't you kill yourself, then?" -- that was her thought." (P. 53)

Is there a stress on 'yourself' which he is too insensitive to catch? Or is his marvellous gift simply failing to deliver on the crucial issue? It's not clear. Either way, he doesn't have the knowledge he needs: he *doesn't* know that Bertha is planning to kill him. Similarly, when in a moment of supernatural foresight he foresees this savage moment, why does he decline to heed the warning? What he doesn't 'know' is that there will never be anything better in between his present yearning misery and his future miserable possession of Bertha. The phrases 'pitiless soul', 'barren worldliness', 'scorching hate', 'barren soul' and 'mean thoughts' make his lack of knowledge puzzling, but it is clear that whatever he thinks he knows, it is consistent with his hope for some intervening period of joy.

More importantly, at least with regard to knowledge of the future, there is something incoherent about the idea of separating knowledge and wisdom to show that we need wisdom to use knowledge of the future to our advantage. Uglow says

> "In this Faustian story the hero chooses what he wants now, even though he knows the price will be later misery; for his visions are not of some absolutely determined future, but the future set in motion by the choices he makes.... It is not what we can foresee which is important, but how we live the intervening hours in the light of that knowledge."[15]

Clearly, if Eliot were to be making a solid conceptual claim something like this would have to be true, but one doesn't have to have read Sophocles to feel that the idea of *changing* a glimpsed future is one of only very dubious coherence. Obviously, if we believe in causation, the future is always something 'set in motion by the choices we make', but presumably if one has glimpsed it, it *is* determined. Uglow's thought is that there is thematic continuity between this novella and Eliot's realistic fiction because the supernatural elements of the story allow Eliot to develop her abstract ideas. On closer inspection, in the novella itself, the serious question about the contrast between knowledge and wisdom becomes obscured.

Certainly, Beryl Gray's remark seems too confident. She says,

> "George Eliot's own use of supernatural elements and psuedo-scientific inquiry undeniably makes *The Lifted Veil* a horror story born of its time. It is the serious end to which she puts these elements that makes it also properly representative of her work." (P. 88)

If *The Lifted Veil* is 'properly representative' of Eliot's work, it is hard to explain the difficulty its categorisation seems to have presented to its author. As Beryl Gray herself points out, in describing it to John Blackwood, before its initial publication, Eliot called it "a slight story of an outré kind--not a *jeu d'esprit*, but a *jeu de melacholie*".[16] This deprecating judgement was not perhaps quite candid: that she thought it more weighty than a *jeu* of any kind is clear from the correspondence, some fourteen years later, concerning its republication. At that time she spoke of the idea it embodies as 'justifying' its 'painfulness'; she also composed the 'motto' which, in the slightly modified version quoted above, subsequently accompanied it; and she expressed a desire to "harness it with

---

[15] Jennifer Uglow *George Eliot* Virago Pantheon Pioneers 1987 (P. 117)

[16] Gordon Haight (ed) Collected Letters, vol III. (Quoted in Beryl Gray's Afterword)

some other productions of mine, and not send it forth in its dismal loneliness". Its eventual republication after nineteen years, in an edition with *Silas Marner* and *Brother Jacob,* seems to indicate that that was a wish she was unable to fulfil: certainly, it has little in common with either. But then, one is hard pressed to think of apter yoke-fellows. In writing this fiction, Eliot was exploring territory she never explored again, in a medium which cut across the grain of her normal intellectual and literary preoccupations.

* * *

Section VI: A second strand: first person narration

The second strand in the current critical discussion of *The Lifted Veil* suggests that *The Lifted Veil* is continuous with Eliot's serious fiction not chiefly because she was self-consciously approaching and extending her customary themes and preoccupations, but rather because the novella reveals something about Eliot which doesn't find expression in any other novel. This is not the place to try to do justice to this approach, but perhaps an indication of the line of thought is possible. Gillian Beer says,

> "*The Lifted Veil*....interrupts and delays a major enterprise... Such interruption is a phenomenon that many writers experience, and figures itself as a passionate and secret infatuation with an alternative imagination, which works under cover of a major project, delaying it, or, very occasionally, ousting it entirely. Its writing is complicit with dream."[17]

The suggestion is that *The Lifted Veil* explores Eliot's pain and ambivalence both about her gender and about her art. Gillian Beer continues,

> "[The figure of Latimer] is burdened with the novelist's double power of authoritative analysis and prediction; he cannot escape his own insight, nor give it any issue.
>
> He manifests the dilemma that, however much the writer may eschew omniscience, it is not possible to be rid of prevision."[18]

Similarly, Jennifer Uglow says that a remark of Latimer's

---

[17]*George Eliot* Gillian Beer. Key Women Writers Series ed. Sue Roe Harvester Press P 79

[18]ibid (P 80)

> "..brilliantly evokes the perpetual preoccupation of an artist, and perhaps of her own imagination and vocation."[19]

The argument that Eliot may have been able to express more, and differently by using Latimer as a narrator is developed at greater length by Gilbert and Gubar, in 'Made Keen by Loss'. They suggest that

> "Latimer's powerlessness, his silence, his secondary status, his weak body and his wounded soul significantly illuminate her own attitudes toward her art and her gender."[20]

The conclusion to their long, lively and ingenious argument is that

> "Although until quite recently she has been viewed almost exclusively in terms of male literary history, Eliot shows in *The Lifted Veil* that she is part of a strong female tradition: her self-conscious relatedness to other women writers, her critique of male literary conventions, her interest in clairvoyance and telepathy, her imagery of confinement, her schizophrenic sense of fragmentation, her self-hatred, and what Emily Dickinson might have called her 'Covered Vision' place Eliot in a tradition that still survives today. Like Sylvia Plath, Louise Brogan, and May Sarton, Eliot looked at the female monster only to find herself."[21]

It is true that first person narration was unusual for Eliot, but the claim that this novel is a 'critique of male literary conventions' is not warranted by this point.[22] Firstly, the dominant literary convention was to entrust the narrative to an omniscient narrator, and as Eliot herself played so large a role in developing this convention it seems unhappy to suggest it is 'male'. Secondly, she seems to show little interest in first person narration as a technical device; her use of it lacks sureness and control, and after this brief 'rejection' she returned to her customary narrative voice. Third, I want to suggest there is an internal motivation for Eliot's choice, on this occasion, of first person narration.

---

[19]Jennifer Uglow, *George Eliot.* Virago Pantheon Pioneers (P 120)

[20] Gilbert and Gubar *The Madwoman in the Attic* (P. 449)

[21] ibid (P. 476)

[22]The other two occasions in which she used this device are also minor works:
From the Notebook of an Eccentric (1846) and *The Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879)

Even if we are not going to call it 'rejection' there is, on the face of it, a puzzle about why Eliot should have adopted the first person stance in this novella. It isn't obviously demanded by the fiction. There is a conventional fictional pretext for Latimer's giving us the account of his life

> "It is only that the story of my life will perhaps win a little more sympathy from strangers when I am dead, than I ever believed it would obtain from friends while I was living" (P. 4)

but that is hardly compelling. But it is not a satisfactory solution to the puzzle to think of *The Lifted Veil* as a 'critique' of 'male convention'. One would expect a critique of a literary convention to display more interest in first person narration as a literary device than Eliot does here. She is not, in fact, greatly concerned even to keep the narrative voice constant throughout. Often, for example, her control simply falters. When there are abstract points to be made, Latimer's narration slips out of focus. A couple of examples will suffice. Latimer is not himself either perceptive or morally profound. However grisly his experience, he has not learned enough from it to have become wise. It is not easy to think of Latimer expressing this thought,

> "It is an old story, that men sell themselves to the tempter, and sign a bond with their blood, because it is only to take effect at a distant day; then rush on to snatch the cup their souls thirst after with an impulse not the less savage because there is a dark shadow beside them for ever more. There is no short cut, no patent tram-road, to wisdom: after all the centuries of invention, the soul's path lies through the thorny wilderness which must be still be trodden in solitude, with bleeding feet, with sobs for help, as it was trodden by them of old time." (P. 31)

That is George Eliot, not Latimer. Still less is it possible to imagine Latimer saying this

> "We try to believe that the egoism within us would have easily been melted, and that it was only the narrowness of our knowledge which hemmed in our generosity, our awe, our human piety, and hindered them from submerging our hard indifference to the sensations and emotions of our fellows. Our tenderness and self-renunciation seem strong when our egoism has had its day--when, after our mean striving for a triumph that is to be another's loss, the triumph comes suddenly, and we shudder at it, because it is held out by the chill hand of death." (P. 32)

Latimer's gifts of fey sensitivity are only such as are consistent with a character who is ill-educated, egotistical, and less than ordinarily perceptive in natural ways. Even to the end, during his last month of bitter regret, we cannot think of him as a man given to abstract reflection. Eliot's abstract thoughts are perforce expressed in Latimer's voice, as his is the

only one admitted by this restrictive device, but they are not Latimer's own thoughts, and consequently they leadenly punctuate, rather than naturally flow from, his account of his life.

There is an unaccustomed lack of narrative sureness, out of which Gilbert and Gubar, and indeed Uglow and Gillian Beer are eager to make psychological capital, but I am persuaded that there is a less engaging but simpler explanation. Eliot was tempted by first person narration on this occasion in order to solve a problem posed by the nature of the ideas explored in *The Lifted Veil*. In 1852 she wrote to the phrenologist George Coombe, in reply to a letter of Coombe's which deplored what he understood to be the *Westminster Review's* uncompromisingly aggressive policy with regard to articles which made respectful reference to mesmerism or phrenology. Eliot defended the periodical, not on the grounds that mesmerism and phrenology deserved disparagement, but on the grounds that

> "the great majority of 'investigators' of mesmerism are anything but 'scientific'. The reason for excluding that or any other subject of moment from the Review, would be the difficulty of getting it adequately treated. An ordinary pilot will do for plain sailing, but we want clear vision and long experience when we set out on voyages of discovery"[23]

Seven years later, in writing *The Lifted Veil*, she herself was sailing well into discovery territory, but clearly did not want to be constrained by the lack of scientific proof that the supernatural elements she was playing with have some basis in fact. There is no reason, of course, why a fiction writer should feel so constrained, but *The Lifted Veil* marks a departure from the stringent research whose stamp Eliot's writing customarily bears.[24] Without scientific proof, there might have been some rigorous reluctance on her part to put the account of Latimer's clairvoyance in the omniscient mouth of her customary narrator, and so seem to make claims for its veridicality.

---

[23] Gordon Haight (ed) Collected Letters, Vol VIII (Quoted in the *Afterword* to the Virago edition)

[24] For example, *The Middlemarch Quarry* is a collection of detailed research notes Eliot made about medical and scientific history of the period.

One attractive way out of this dilemma was to put the account of the story into the mouth of a narrator whose veracity is not beyond question. In restricting us to the claustrophobic narrowness of Latimer's uneasy, almost diseased, preternatural vision, Eliot denies us a stable island in the shifting sands of Latimer's perceptions, which an omniscient authorial voice would have provided. In most of Eliot's fiction, a single narrative voice presents the fiction, unobtrusively arbitrating between the many different visions and perceptions which, circling round it, seem to triangulate upon the truth.

The assertion that Eliot's customary narrator provides a stable objective standpoint needs some justification. It is somewhat at odds with the position adopted by David Lodge. In an excellent article, mistakenly in my view, he 'defends' Eliot as a producer of an open-ended text.[25] The position he is attacking is expressed in a quotation,

> "The text outside the area of inverted commas claims to be the product of no articulation, it claims to be unwritten. This unwritten text can then attempt to staunch the haemorrhage of interpretations threatened by the material of language. Whereas other discourses within the text are considered as materials which are open to reinterpretation, the narrative discourse functions simply as a window on reality."[26]

Give or take a rhetorical flourish, and leaving aside the puzzling references to 'unwritten' texts, McCabe's thought is similar to mine. He is claiming that the veracity of the omniscient narrator is given a special status in the novel. Lodge disagrees. Lodge's detailed analysis of passages in the novel certainly demonstrates, as it was intended to, that it is inappropriate to claim that Eliot's language ever tries to appear 'unwritten', or indeed functions 'simply' as anything. Her writing, as he shows, is often complex and is clearly meant to be.

His conclusion, however, is unjustified. He says,

---

[25]Lodge, D., *Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text'. Presented at the George Eliot Centenary Conference Leicester 1980 published in Arnold Kettle (ed) *The Nineteenth Century Novel*

[26]Colin McCabe, *James Joyce and the Revolution of the Word* (1979) quoted in *Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text.

> "To sum up, the authorial commentary, so far from telling the reader what to think, or putting him in a position of dominance in relation to the discourse of the characters, constantly forces him to think for himself, and constantly implicates him in the moral judgements being formulated."[27]

There is a conflation here of the idea that the authorial commentary constantly forces the reader to think for himself, and constantly implicates him in the moral judgements being formulated (which Eliot's commentary undoubtedly does), with the idea that Eliot's authorial commentary does not hold an epistemically privileged position in the novel (which is false).

I would want to argue that Eliot's customary narrator does occupy an epistemically privileged position; and that her narrative does indeed put the attentive reader in a 'position of dominance' in relation to the discourse of the characters. One example among many of the tightness and subtlety of her narrative control is Chapter 45 of *Middlemarch*, where the right conclusion on Lydgate is to be reached. It opens,

> "That opposition to the New Fever Hospital which Lydgate had sketched to Dorothea was, like other oppositions, to be viewed in many different lights. He regarded it as a mixture of jealousy and dunder-headed prejudice" [28]

And indeed it is, and so too is the growing opposition to Lydgate himself. Like the opinion of the hospital, it is subject to the jealousy of Gambits and Wrenches, and the dunder-headed prejudices of Mawmseys and Dollops. But in not recognising the strength of this growing opposition, Lydgate's opinion of himself is also at fault. His medical opinion is solid enough, but he too is prejudiced and dunder-headed. The way in which the narrator brings us to see this is characteristic. Late in the chapter, the narrator's voice seems completely commendatory.

> "Many thoughts cheered him at this time--and justly. A man conscious of enthusiasm for worthy aims is sustained under petty hostilities by the memory of great workers who had to fight their way not without wounds, and who hover in his mind as patron saints, invisibly helping...

---

[27] Lodge, D., *Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text' (P 232)

[28] *Middlemarch* (P. 481)

> There was something very fine in Lydgate's look just then, and any one might have been encouraged to bet on his achievement."[29]

But the commendation is subtly shot through with doubts raised earlier in the chapter about whether Lydgate really did *have to* 'fight his way not without wounds'.

The last sentence quoted is the voice of that uninformed 'one' whose opinion Eliot often invokes. This confident opinion supposedly *might* have been formed by 'any one' who did not know (as we do: it has been telegraphed often enough in the fiction that Lydgate's is a story of tragic failure) that to bet on Lydgate would be ill-advised. But that uninformed 'one' is not one of the Middlemarchers: they would not bet on Lydgate, and even Farebrother has his doubts. It means presumably not that this is what was thought by most, but rather that one would be *forgiven* for betting on his achievement. So whom are we to forgive for this other than Lydgate himself? His is the self-indulgent romanticising which makes the comparison with Vesalius, and refuses to be other than complacent about his reputation. This is Lydgate's self-image. Even the mild criticism, that he is an 'emotional elephant', recalls his flirtatious claim, in Chapter 16, to be a 'bear' apt to be taught by Rosamund's 'exquisite bird'. And the sting of the criticism is mainly directed against the tinkling Rosamund whose tunes he doesn't distinguish.

But earlier in the chapter, when the emotional elephant tramps on all his colleagues' toes, the epithet could have been applied without indulgence. For example,

> "Lydgate did not dispense drugs. This was offensive both to the physicians whose exclusive distinction seemed infringed upon, and to the surgeon apothecaries with whom he ranged himself; and only a little while before they might have counted on having the law on their side against a man who without calling himself a London-made M.D. dared to ask for pay except as a charge on drugs."[30]

---

[29] ibid (P. 496)

[30] ibid (P. 483)

Eliot's narrator does not of course endorse this opinion. The last charge is the expostulation of an outraged colleague, but it is one which Lydgate having foreseen as dunderheadedness ought to have tried to forestall. And worse follows.

> "But Lydgate had not been experienced enough to foresee that his new course would be even more offensive to the laity; and...he was injudicious enough to give a hasty popular explanation of his reasons..."[31]

Because his patients are ignorant, he treats them as if they were also idiots. When Mawmsey says that some people pretend to tell him things, when they might as well say, "Mawmsey, you're a fool", one feels the justice of the remark. Lydgate chooses to see all opposition as martyrdom at the hands of the jealous. When that model of sagacity Rosamund warns him that he has enemies enough, he cheerily tells her

> "So had Vesalius, Rosy. No wonder the medical fogies of Middlemarch are jealous, when some of the greatest doctors living were fierce upon Vesalius because they had believed in Galen, and he showed that Galen was wrong. They called him a liar and a poisonous monster. But the facts of the human frame were on his side; and so he got the better of them."[32]

But it is not heroic, rather it is *impolitic* in Lydgate to gratuitously offend if he wishes his solid medical opinion to become influential. So although we are to take the commendation at the end seriously (Lydgate *is* admirable) it is indulgent, not disinterested, and needs to be tempered by the grains of truth expressed by jealous, prejudiced dunderheads.

To understand how to regard Lydgate we have to listen carefully to the Rosamunds, the Mawmseys and the Dollops. But the narrator's discourse is in 'total interpretive control of them'. There is certainly subtlety in the judgement we are to reach. But subtlety and openendedness are not the same thing. Lodge's conclusion seems to tacitly accept that novels which are 'open-ended' in the sense that the authorial commentary holds no claim to objective truth, are superior to those which are, in this sense 'closed'. In his conclusion he says,

---

[31] ibid (P. 483)

[32] ibid (P. 497)

> "..it is precisely because the narrator's discourse is never entirely unambiguous, predictable, and in total interpretative control of the other discourses in *Middlemarch* that the novel survives, to be read and re-read, without ever being finally closed or exhausted."[33]

Unless one shares McCabe's theoretical stance, it is hard to see why it seems necessary to defend Eliot's narrative voice. Which is just as well as I remain entirely unconvinced that the narrator of *Middlemarch* is not in possession of all the relevant facts about her characters and their situation.

In *The Lifted Veil* the narrator occupies a very different position. Latimer is a sincere narrator whose reliability there are nevertheless grounds to doubt. In using this narrative voice, Eliot is able to distance herself, both morally and intellectually, from the claims Latimer makes. Eliot is at some pains to emphasise this distance. After his mother's death Latimer's strongest affections are for Meunier and for Bertha. The former he says was stimulated by 'sympathetic resentment' (P. 10), rather than anything more generous. And his explanation of his obsession with a woman whom he knows to be devoid of what he thinks to be 'the highest element of character' does him no more credit. He says

> "there is no tyranny more complete than that which a self-centred negative nature exercises over a morbidly sensitive nature perpetually craving sympathy and support." (P. 22)

And it comes as a jolt that he is so cold towards everyone else. Poor old Mrs Filmore, his near neighbour from boyhood 'whom he remembered very well', is written off as an 'uninteresting acquaintance', and his 'involuntary intrusion into the souls of others' causes him only 'weariness and disgust'. He is a man seemingly without any of the compassion and human fellowship which Eliot explicitly values so highly.

Similarly, she could not have endorsed this stubbornly unintelligent response to science

> "I had no desire to be this improved man; I was glad of the running water; I could watch it and listen to it gurgling among the pebbles, and bathing the bright green water-plants, by the hour together. I did not want to know *why*

---

[33] 'Lodge, D., *Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text' (P. 236)

> it ran; I had perfect confidence that there were good reasons for what was so very beautiful." (P. 8)

George Eliot certainly didn't think science was dull. Nor did she think that it was right to divorce the imagination from science. Indeed, as Uglow perceptively remarks in a slightly different context,

> "...by a nice twist of the plot, George Eliot shows that they were wrong to see science as devoid of imagination, for in the end, through the activity of Meunier, it will be used to break the barriers of normal reality in the most terrifying way."[34]

And there must be wry humour when Latimer, reflecting on his visions of Prague, speculates

> "No, it was not a dream; --was it the poet's sensibility, now manifesting itself suddenly as spontaneous creation? Surely it was in this way that Homer saw the plain of Troy, that Dante saw the abodes of the departed, that Milton saw the earthward flight of the Tempter. (P. 13)

Surely it was not! [35] Lest there should be any doubt that the humour cuts against Latimer, his thought continues

> "When my mind had dwelt for some time on this blissful idea it seemed to me that I might perhaps test it..... It was all prosaic effort, not rapt passivity, such as I had experienced half an hour before. I was discouraged; but I remembered that inspiration was fitful" (P. 14)

---

[34]Uglow *George Eliot* (P. 118)

[35]One is reminded of the humour directed at Ladislaw, when he defines a poet in terms of sensibility rather than poetry. Gilbert and Gubar take Latimer's poetic pretensions more seriously than I do, and they see the link with *Middlemarch* in different terms.

> "Granted poetic abilities but denied the power to create, Latimer lives out the classic role of women who are denied the status of artist because they are supposed somehow to become works of art themselves. ("You are a poem," Will informs Dorothea in *Middlemarch.*)"

But this is an unwonted dip into po-faced ideology on their part. To make that interpretation stick, there has to be a very bleak subtext to the exchange between Dorothea and Ladislaw. It may be that Dorothea's second marriage confirms, rather than redeems, her tragedy. But that is not because Ladislaw is a conventional repressive male. He may be insubstantial, but there is no ironic reversal in Dorothea's judgement that "...he was a creature who entered into every one's feelings, and could take the pressure of their thought instead of urging his own with iron resistance." Nor is there good reason to think that Dorothea is a poet manqué. When she says she is sure she 'could never produce a poem' I do not think that is an expression of unfulfilled yearning which Ladislaw is crushing. The gently deflating remark,

> "But you leave out the poems, said Dorothea. "I think they are wanted to complete the poet."[35]

is rather of a piece with Eliot's indulgent disapproval of Ladislaw's *belles lettrisme*.

There is no doubt about Latimer's sincerity; we believe *him*, but Eliot has dissociated herself from him, both intellectually and morally, so we are not obliged to believe what he *says*. The account comes to us with the freshness, but the fallibility, of a primary source.

* * *

Section VII: A third strand: narrative stance and objectivity of judgement

Presumably precisely this thought prompts the third suggested line of critical discussion. The third suggestion was that the narrative device adopted in *The Lifted Veil* allows Eliot to question the assumptions implicit in her customary narrative voice. In novels like *Middlemarch* Eliot is clearly convinced that no one individual can have access to the Truth about any particular situation. Her novels are peppered with self deceived characters who 'see by strangely coloured lamps'. Nevertheless, one feels that the narrator would endorse Dorothea's thought

> "I am often unable to decide. But that is from ignorance. The right conclusion is there all the same, though I am unable to see it."[36]

And the presentation of the 'right conclusion', unquestionable objective truth, seems to be the aim of her subtle ventriloquist narrative voice. What is believed, for example, of Lydgate by any or all of the Middlemarchers is decided by whim, self interest, accident, and stupidity. But that thought is not to be mistaken for the thought that there is nothing determinate to be believed about Lydgate. The truth is not uncomplicated, and it is an elusive truth. In order to perceive it, the reader must listen to all the confused, confusing voices, in which there are subtle cross currents of positive and negative. But the truth is nevertheless determinate, and firmly grasped by the narrator of *Middlemarch*.

But Uglow suggests that *The Lifted Veil* questions this assurance.

---

[36] *Middlemarch* (P. 53)

> "And could there ever be such a thing as perfect insight or would it always be somehow coloured by the medium of perception--the individual personality?"[37]

But if these questions about subjectivity are raised by *The Lifted Veil*, they are not sharp, not developed, and not given a satisfactory answer. Why Uglow thinks they arise is plain enough. A general question about the possibility of perfect perception emerges naturally from the particular thought that the veridicality of this account of Latimer's life can be called into question by putting it into his own mouth. If one takes that worry seriously, doubts seem to be raised about the possibility of an 'omniscient narrator'. To frame the question as Uglow does, why should Eliot's customary narrator have perfect insight? Why would the medium of *that* individual personality not somehow colour it? The temptation, to which Uglow obviously succumbed, is to push the question further back. The question then seems to be whether, if one cannot conceive of a perfectly objective narrator, is it possible to conceive of such a thing as an objective view of reality? Is it necessarily true that there will even be, about any kind of judgement, an objective fact of the matter to be presented?

But although the direction of these questions is natural enough, I don't think Eliot was inclined to succumb to the temptation to push the question further back. This was not a line of thought she found intellectually congenial. She makes no attempt, in her realistic fiction, to reconcile her lack of belief in the power of any individual to see things as they really are with her certainty that there is a single 'right conclusion'. The lack of reconciliation between her lack of faith in any of her characters and her faith in her narrator is not usually problematic. We are not called upon to question the reliability of the narrator. Impersonal, virtually genderless[38], the narrator presents us with (fictional) reality as it is. The characters of the drama cannot grasp reality in all its complexity, and the relationship established between Eliot's characters and her customary omniscient narrator mirrors the

---

[37]Uglow *George Eliot* (P. 116)

[38] The subject of the gender of Eliot's narrator is a subject upon which I shall not enter here; it has been the subject of much discussion.

relation between individuals and the reality they are trying to perceive. The Truth is there in the narrator's account, unadorned, just as it is in reality itself.

Furthermore, my diagnostic discussion of *The Lifted Veil* has argued that in order to find its three supernatural elements so much as coherent we have to be tacitly committed to strong Realism in three separate areas of philosophy. If that claim is convincing, it becomes even less plausible that *The Lifted Veil* could self consciously have explored or developed ideas which call into question the very idea of the possibility of objective truth. Latimer's view of the truth is questioned, and with it the ability of any individual to perceive the truth. But it is highly implausible to think that Eliot is questioning the much more fundamental question about whether the truth itself is determinate.

This chapter has two purposes. *The Lifted Veil* is an almost invisible work, and the secondary aim has been to give some account of Eliot's intentions with regard to it, and to explore some of its recent critical reception. The primary aim has been to use Eliot's appealing fantasy of lifting a veil on the minds of others in order better to understand the picture of the mind which informs it. The novella explores the idea that as well as our ordinary, everyday ability to understand one another, which often seems unsatisfactory and incomplete, there could be a supernatural ability which could give us direct insight into the mind of another. The idea that minds could, by supernatural powers, be 'read' is both attractive and terrifying (presumably in proportion to the degree to which we have been frustrated or relieved by the difficulties). Latimer's narrative seems to give a coherent, if implausible, account of just what such powers would be like. In order to be seduced by it we have to make assumptions about what the mind is like. We have to have a picture of what *is*, in the ordinary circumstances in which we struggle for mutual comprehension, hidden from view. The primary aim of this chapter has been to show that there is something unsatisfactory about George Eliot's notion of what is hidden.

The idea in the novella is rather like this: in the first person case, I have complete access to my own internal mental happenings, whereas in the third person case, our natural ability seems to have to work inferentially from piecemeal evidence. Latimer's insight was direct and complete, as if he had an analogue of first personal insight into others' minds. This chapter has tried to suggest that when we put pressure on the idea of the revelation of thoughts and emotions taking place 'behind a veil' it is difficult to know just what would be 'in the mind' to be revealed. The fantasy seems to make good sense, but only because we are prepared, for the sake of the fiction, to imagine thoughts and feelings to be recognisable mental entities which would wear their nature and form on their faces.

So far I have brought largely intuitive pressure to bear on the idea that thoughts and feelings are mental facts, which are in reality hidden, but could conceivably be revealed. I have challenged the reader to imagine what kinds of 'intrusion' into Latimer's own mind could give him the authority which, as readers, we have to accord his insights. Chapter Three will go beyond the appeal to intuitions to outline largely Wittgensteinian considerations in the philosophy of mind which show the incoherence of the kind of Realism about the mind which informs both the fantasy of *The Lifted Veil,* and the creation of the moral psychology of the characters of *Middlemarch.*

Chapter Three

The Philosophical Investigations

Constraints on the Fictional Depiction of the Mental

The Lifted Veil is of course a minor novel, one in which realism is eschewed. My claim is that the ideas about the mind to which George Eliot there betrays a commitment also pervasively affect the way she feels at liberty to write in the attempt to depict character realistically, in a major novel like *Middlemarch.* The supernatural possibility of looking into the mind of another, played out explicitly in the fiction of *The Lifted Veil,* is still implicitly in play in *Middlemarch* : this time it is we as readers who are purportedly given glimpses 'behind the veil' directly into the minds of characters. George Eliot's conception of mental states as making up a reality which can be hidden behind a veil, or revealed, shapes her conception of character. And the descriptions she gives of the minds of the characters in *Middlemarch* are, at times, just as incoherent as the descriptions she gives of the minds into which Latimer is given insight.

George Eliot conceives of emotions and motivations as part of the complex stuff of consciousness. Once we begin to question that conception, passages in her novels which look like exploration and description of the mental realm have to be understood differently. What, at first sight, seems to be realistic (if unrealistically privileged) description of what is taking place 'behind the veil' in the minds of characters is, on closer inspection, seen to be tendentious and schematic, even if, at times the language is rhetorically persuasive and morally convincing. Making good that claim is primarily a task for Chapter Four.

The aim of this chapter is to go beyond the intuitions appealed to in Chapter Two. The largely Wittgensteinian considerations in the philosophy of mind which I will outline in this chapter will show that the nature of the mind could not be the way it would have to be in order for much of Eliot's psychological writing to make descriptive sense. There are philosophical

constraints bearing as much upon the depiction of fictional mental states as on the description of real ones. It might be asked why there should be constraints on the *fictional* depiction of the mental. Surely an author is free to depict as she pleases? I shall argue that depiction of mental states, in fiction as in real life, is *conceptually* constrained. To the extent that *Middlemarch* persistently violates those constraints, its status as realist fiction is compromised, and the proper appraisal of its achievement must accordingly proceed in other terms.

The Wittgensteinian considerations I shall be arguing for are largely taken from the discussion of privacy in sections #242-318 of *Philosophical Investigations* . The target, in those sections, is not a single philosophical conception, but rather a cluster of misunderstandings into which Wittgenstein believes we are apt to fall from a tendency to misconstrue the 'grammar'[1] of ordinary psychological remarks. In *Philosophical Investigations* #309, the question "What is your aim in philosophy?", is famously answered, "To shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle." This sets the tone of Wittgenstein's strategy. His aim is deflationary: not to give a metaphysical account which will solve persistent philosophical and epistemological problems, but to show that the problems themselves only seem perplexing when one labours with the false picture spawned by the cluster of misunderstandings. I shall argue that many things George Eliot feels at liberty to say in describing the mental states of her characters are rooted in such misunderstandings. Her writing is almost instinctively, dominated by the thought that between different individuals' mental lives lies a gap which is metaphysical and intractable. It is correspondingly hard for the reader not to receive much of the careful psychological language of *Middlemarch* as if it were, precisely, descriptive of the sort of

---

1Grammar: one of Wittgenstein's central theses is the idea that the rules of grammar are not imposed by metaphysical facts. Rather the rules of grammar determine what it is possible to think. As Hacker puts it "Grammar is autonomous, not answerable to, but presupposed by, factual propositions."
Hacker, P.,*Wittgenstein, Meaning and Mind* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1990) (P. 148)

mysteriously inaccessible mental realm which, in Wittgenstein's view, is nothing but the projection of a spurious metaphysical picture.

Unless the psychological language of the novel can be freed from this picture, it will emerge as little but the noise of the buzzing fly. My eventual suggestion will be that much of what looks like psychological characterisation in Middlemarch serves instead as an extremely subtle mode of manipulation of the readers' responses. But that will be a contention for the next chapter. This chapter will be chiefly exegesis of Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind. The interpretation of the relevant parts of the *Investigations* which will follow makes little claim to originality; it is informed and influenced by the substantial literature which now exists on the later Wittgenstein. My hope is that it will do two things. Firstly, I want to make those of Wittgenstein's insights which are most relevant to my project engaging and accessible to a non-philosophical audience. Secondly, it seems to me that I have, along the way, made some contribution to understanding the significance of some of Wittgenstein's remarks.

* * *

Section I: Phenomenological Realism

The theoretical conception of the mind which conditions the way George Eliot feels free to develop her characters is, as I have implied, broadly Cartesian, but it is a somewhat baroque offshoot of the rather austere conception proposed by Descartes and Locke. Her implicit position might, more informatively, be called Phenomenological Realism[2]. Phenomenological Realism is a fairly complex position to define. It has several strands which collectively include most of the misunderstandings the *Investigations* sets out to disentangle.

2This apt term is owed to a conversation with Neil Cooper, professor of philosophy at the University of Dundee.

First, sensations are conceived of as interior items. When we experience our own sensations, it is as if we *perceive* an inner mental object, or state of affairs. This 'perception' is conceived of on much the same model as perception of the external world. A major difference is, of course, that the inner is private, 'viewable' only by one person. But phenomenological realism does not regard that as an important disanalogy; rather, it is merely that we have to think of these interior items as inhabiting a kind of seclusion.

Second, all psychological states are understood on this model. Not only sensation, but understanding, remembering, worrying, wanting etc. are all conceived of as inner psychological states, with a particular phenomenology, which the subject can 'perceive'.

Third, the perceptual model encourages us to think that there may be inner detail which simply eludes our attention. Just as a subject may not take in all that is in his visual field, so there may be introspectible detail in his inner landscape which escapes him. He might, from causes all the way from distraction to self deception, simply not fully 'tune in' to the reality of his own mental life. It is certainly true that some people are more self aware than others. They seem to know more often than most people the real character of their feelings, what they are expecting of other people, what they are hoping for in the situations in which they find themselves, and so on. Phenomenological Realism seems to provide a natural account of this. If one thinks of feelings and events as processes on some inner stage, then it is easy to suppose that some people may not choose to look too carefully into the dark corners, as it were, but keep their attention firmly fixed on the part of the action with which they are most comfortable.

Fourth, not only may there be introspectible detail which eludes the subject's attention; there may also be detail which eludes one's conceptual resources. Again the model of perception seems apt. Suppose a subject sees a mixed woodland out of his window. He doesn't know much about trees, or much about the ecosystem which supports them. But his

visual impression can presumably accurately depict what is there, and is quite independent of whether he understands it or not. So, it seems, with my sensations. There is a phenomenological inner reality which exists independently of any understanding I may have of it.

The fifth and final strand of this characterisation of Phenomenological Realism is a kind of mechanism: the idea that the mental state of affairs exists in an inner realm which is governed by quasi-mechanical laws. There is an internal tension in the Phenomenological Realist picture: on the first two strands, the truth conditions for the applicability of certain mental descriptions are fixed internally, with privileged access by the subject; but the third and fourth strands suggest that the subject cannot always be a reliable judge of whether or not the truth conditions obtain. A natural extension of this is the suggestion that an informative theoretical account of what is going on could be given of which the subject had no conception. Freudian theory, for instance, is, of course, an attempt at just such a theoretical account. One interpretation, although perhaps not the most generous one, of Freud's conception is to see it as remaining faithful in spirit to the Cartesian picture, and accounting for fallibility by pushing the phenomenological 'inner' deeper into the mind of the subject.[3] That interpretation fits with a fairly literal interpretation of some of Freud's metaphors: the mind itself is imagined rather as a complicated nineteenth century steam engine, with psychic pulleys and pistons, and emotional heads of steam building up here, and being released there, etc. The more pictures like that seem to have an apt content, the more appealing is the thought that a description might be given of those mechanisms which would be much more informative than is made possible by our

---

3Note incidentally that understanding Freud to be making a manoeuvre of this sort compounds rather than dissolves the tension between first person privilege and fallibility. A theoretical description of the internal truth conditions necessarily plays down the idea of privileged access. That is, it seems on this picture as if first person reports about what is going on mentally can be over-ridden. But some conceptual connection has to be made between theoretical claims about mental events (which over-ride their subject's sincere report) and the public facts on which they are made. Otherwise, the entire theoretical edifice which accounts for fallibility is left without verification procedures: there would be no controls at all on what is the correct account.

ordinary psychological concepts. Eliot's descriptions do not rest on a full bloodedly Freudian account[4], but sometimes she accounts for aspects of her characters' mental lives in terms of mechanistic metaphors which only seem informative if we conceive of the mental as governed by psychic mechanisms.

These strands together make up the position I am calling Phenomenological Realism. There is a twofold overarching thought: first, the facts which make particular psychological descriptions apt are exclusively accessible to the subject; other people can only make more or less informed *conjectures* about them. Second, the relevant facts are purely phenomenological in character. I want to draw from Wittgenstein considerations which argue that, natural as it is, this conception is mistaken on both counts. It is wrong to think there is always a purely internal truth condition which gives meaning to talk about the mental. And, our conception of mental states derives, at least in part, from public facts which are not mental in character. To be in possession of all the phenomenological data is not necessarily to be in a position to describe the psychological state of the subject.

One idea to be undermined is that the meaning of psychological language should be understood on, roughly, a simple truth conditional account. A sentence like 'The cat sat on the mat' gets its meaning from a determination of what kinds of states of affairs make it true; and in such a simple case, if I understand the sentence, then I am likely to be in position to recognise that a relevant state of affairs obtains, or doesn't. But, of course, whether I understand the sentence has no bearing on whether the state of affairs actually does obtain, nor indeed does

---

4It is arguable that Freud's own metaphors can be cashed out in a way which preserves Freud's insights without saddling him with a hopeless mental ontology. If that is persuasive that of course makes Freud more philosophically interesting. But it makes it even less possible to think of Eliot's mental descriptions as pre-Freudian analysis of the Unconscious, in the way that MacIntyre, for example, suggests we should. Her descriptions would indeed be more compelling if they could be theoretically tied to analysis of her characters' remarks and behaviour.

my understanding guarantee the veridicality of my beliefs. Construed on this model, a sentence like 'She is afraid of responsibility' would derive its meaning by reference to a species of internal, solely privately accessible, purely mental state of affairs. If I understand it, I know what kind of state of affairs that is. But my understanding does not of course guarantee my veridicality. When I ascribe a state of affairs to others, I am fallible because I have no direct access to the internal truth condition. As to myself, fallibility is accounted for by the fact that the internal state of affairs can in some way be (partially) hidden from me.

This simple truth conditional picture of the meaning of psychological language is to be rejected. But the question of what, if any, positive account can replace this model abuts on major issues in the theory of meaning. If we accept a truth conditional theory, we seem to owe an account of the *kinds* of facts which make claims about the psychological true or false. The traditional Cartesian line says that first person remarks about the mental are reports of a purely psychological, immaterial state of affairs: the reports are true if and only if the relevant state of affairs obtains; otherwise they are false. There have been several familiar broadly 'Wittgensteinian' responses to this.[5] One, behaviourist, suggestion is that talk about the mental is indeed truth conditional, but the truth conditions which make the ascriptions true or false are external rather than private facts. The scare quotes placed around Wittgenstein's name are most appropriate here. It is neither plausible nor Wittgensteinian to suppose that a reduction of the mental to public behavioural facts could be successfully carried out. Another, quite different suggestion is that not all meaningful declarative discourse is apt for truth or falsity: the idea is that first person psychological remarks are not genuinely assertoric. There are one or two occasions when Wittgenstein seems explicitly to favour this response[6], but it sits ill with the claim that his philosophy is to be non-revisionary. For, as Hacker points out, the behaviour of

---

5And of course there are several which are not in the least Wittgensteinian, which I won't discuss at all.

6 See Section IV of this chapter for further discussion of this issue.

first person psychological claims seems to be truth conditional: there are truth value links between first and third person psychological claims; first person psychological remarks can be embedded in conditionals, etc.[7] It is hard to see why first person psychological remarks should behave in this way if they do not bear truth values. A third suggestion favours the rejection of a truth conditional theory of meaning altogether, in favour of grounding talk about the mental in a 'criterial' theory of meaning. But there are serious problems with trying to get the various strands of a criterial theory to yield a coherent account.[8] One further interesting theoretical question is whether reference to a publicly accessible state of affairs really is the paradigm of a truth conditional account.[9] There are major issues surrounding all these positive proposals which are largely beyond the scope of my discussion. My main aim is modest and deflationary: to reject that simple truth conditional account we need in order to make literal sense of many of the psychological descriptions in *Middlemarch*. The picture to be rejected is the one which accounts for the meaning of psychological language solely by reference to privately accessible, *phenomenal* states of affairs.

There are many ways of rejecting that picture; many of them are realist in spirit. The *Wittgensteinian* rejection is fuelled, in the broadest terms, by the surely ungainsayable intuition that no theory of meaning can be complete which ignores the fact that the *meaning* of psychological descriptions is *publicly* grounded. The public facts to which remarks about mental states are conceptually linked fall into roughly two sorts: firstly, the psychological language which enables a subject to describe her own mental states is conceptually linked to

---

7 Hacker, P., *Insight and Illusion*, first edition (London: Oxford, 1972)

8 See Crispin Wright 'Second Thoughts about Criteria' in *Realism Meaning and Truth* Basil Blackwell 1987

9Crispin Wright suggests that a development of Wiggins' notion of the 'marks' of assertibility provides the 'prospect of a way of harmonizing the negative strictures of anti-realism with an approach to meaning which is, in effect, truth conditional.' 'Davidsonian Meaning-Theory and Assertibility' *Realism Meaning and Truth.*

behaviour and context; secondly, a subject's avowals have a determinative, rather than a descriptive role to play in talk about the mental.

The separate strands of Phenomenological Realism are tightly woven together. It is impossible to discuss them entirely separately. I will, however, make some kind of separation. The first two strands will be the subject of the next three sections of this chapter. Section II will show why it is misleading, even in the case of perfectly standard sensations, to think that the *meaning* of psychological language could derive from reference to a purely inner item of some sort, a purely phenomenological state of affairs. Section III will focus on *avowals*. Phenomenological Realism accounts for the subject's ability to avow mental states reliably in terms of the subject's privileged access to the phenomenological states of affairs which make avowals true. Section III will show why the strictures of Section II makes nonsense of that account. Section IV will, a little nervously, propose an alternative account of the authority of avowals without recourse to the idea of privileged access. In Sections II, III and IV, the mental states most under discussion are sensations. Obviously the *negative* thrust of Wittgenstein's remarks tells against the Phenomenological Realist's view of all mental states, but in Section V the intricacies of discussing mental states other than sensations will be explicitly raised. In learning to resist the temptation to see sensations as in some sense the *paradigm* mental state, we can begin to see the determinative role which context plays in psychological ascription. From this will emerge the beginnings of an account of how mental states like propositional attitudes have content. In the final section, attention will shift to discuss more fully the problem of unconscious mental states raised, at least negatively, in the last three strands of Phenomenological Realism. There I shall sketch an account of how, in the light of first person authority about mental states, we can begin to make sense of unconscious mental states.

* * *

Section II: Mental States as interior objects to which we have privileged access.

I characterised the first strand of Phenomenological Realism as the thought that sensations are conceived of as interior items. The idea I want to reject is natural enough. Statements like 'That man has a hat' and 'That man has a headache' have a surface similarity. In both cases it looks as if I am asserting some relationship between the man and some kind of object. In the latter, we are talking about an inner object, of course, and that gives rise to certain differences and problems, but, on this model, in both cases I am saying the same *kind* of thing.

The 'differences and problems' are of course profound. They centre round the asymmetry, in the case of inner items, between first and third person evidence for the truth of the statements. It looks as if, in the first person case, I directly inspect the state of affairs which makes the statement true, and of course third parties have no (comparable) access. This makes remarks about others' mental states and events seem only precariously verifiable. Although I can see simply enough whether the man has a hat, I seem to have to rely on a very chancy inference to know if he has a headache. And worse follows. Even if he tells the truth as he sees it, and I believe him, there is now a doubt about whether he means the same as I do when he says he has a headache. Do his headaches *feel* the same as mine? Is the mental item he introspects of the kind I take it to be when we both claim that he has a headache?

A form of scepticism thus flows very naturally from the conception of mental states as a sort of interior item. Wittgenstein's strategy, here as elsewhere, is not to try to solve the sceptical problem on its own terms, but rather to show that it is impossible to get the premises of the sceptical argument off the ground. In so doing he exposes the incoherence of the conception which generates it. The sceptical argument concerns knowability. The argument is roughly this: we know what words like 'pain' mean in our own case by introspection. We can

never introspect the sensations of others. So, it seems, we can never *know* that others have feelings just like ours. It looks as if in order to *believe* they do, we have to make the appealing, but unjustified assumption that their speech and behaviour fits their thought in much the same way as ours does. Unanswerable questions seem to be generated naturally enough; 'Can I be sure your internal feelings are just the same as mine?'; 'Is my experience of joy, or fear, exactly the same as yours?'; 'Is the internal mental "feel" he introspects of exactly the kind we assume he introspects?' etc. The Wittgensteinian strategy is to doubt whether these unanswerable questions are even intelligible.

In order to understand questions like 'Is the internal mental 'feel' he introspects of exactly the kind we assume he introspects?' we have to think of the mental experience as one with a particular *identity*, with qualities which may make us feel it is apt to be the same as others, or not. But with what right do we assume this? It seems easy enough, on the face of it. There seems to be no problem understanding "Is what he feels the same as this?", where an act of internal ostension picks out the whole phenomenon. As Wittgenstein's interlocutor asks at #215

> "But isn't the same at least the same?
> We seem to have an infallible paradigm of identity in the identity of a thing with itself....."

Wittgenstein's reply casts doubt on the seeming simplicity.

> "Then are two things the same when they are what one thing is? And how am I to apply what the one thing shews me to the case of two things?"

Clearly, we can't. Numerical identity is not the notion to shed much light on qualitative identity; it cannot be the 'infallible' paradigm case.[10] We want to know what it is for one

---

10 For discussion of the unfittedness of numerical identity to illuminate qualitative identity in the case of sensations, see Hacker, *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Truth* (P.50)

person's inner feelings to be the same as another's, so we need an idea of what it is for two numerically *different* things to be 'the same'.

To see the nature of the problem, we should think about a public case, where there is no such problem. There is a variety of things we can mean when we say two triangles, say, are 'the same'. We might mean 'similar' or 'congruent' or 'the very same', as when for example you cut out the first triangle and put it on to the new page. But which of these we mean is quite specific, and turns on making a comparison between distinguishable features of the triangles. If they are similar, for example, we are saying the angles are equal. If they are congruent, we are saying the angles and the length of the sides are equal. And if we cut out the triangle and put it on another page, then the triangle is made up of the very same lines and paper. In each case there are objective criteria for sameness. At #225, Wittgenstein says,

> "The use of the word 'rule' and the use of the word 'same' are interwoven."

In the context in which this occurs, Wittgenstein's primary point is that if I do not understand how to follow a rule, it will be no explanation to be told that I must 'go on in the same way'. For what counts as 'going on in the same way' depends on what rule I'm trying to follow. If, for example, I am given the series 3,6,9,12..., and asked to 'go on in the same way', 13,14, 15 or 16 will all be possible next numbers if I understand the rule to be 'say a number which is a bit bigger'. And 16 will be the only possible number if I understand the rule to be 'add 3 three times, then add 4 four times'.

But the dependence between 'rule' and 'same' is symmetric. It is not possible to say one thing is 'the same' or 'not the same' as another, unless there is some possible *rule* or *criterion* for sameness. When such a criterion is determined, we may then, of course, go on to wonder if my *mental* representation of a triangle is 'the same' as yours. For instance: 'Mine is a right angled triangle, with sides three, four and five inches long. Is that the same as yours?' or

'When asked to make a mental representation of a triangle, I immediately made a representation of that triangle there. Did you?' Those questions are perfectly intelligible, and can be answered unproblematically. Their intelligibility is parasitic on what such questions would mean in the case of external public representations of triangles, and the answers are unproblematic to the extent that they were understood as such. If a further question is asked about whether my mental representation of the triangle is, after all *exactly* the same as yours, or only the same in the ways it is possible to specify, it is not clear what the question can amount to. Which features would *count* as making the mental object 'the same' as another? What conceivable rule or criterion would determine the matter?

The question we began with, of course, concerned a mental object which is, in the nature of the case, always private. Conceiving of feelings as privately ostended states of affairs, the question was 'Is the internal mental 'feel' he introspects of exactly the kind we assume he introspects?'As in the case of mental representations of triangles, there are some features which would seem to count. 'My pain is sharp, and it hurts here, and it's quite intense, but not in general unbearable, and its worse when I walk. It is unbearable if I poke it, and if I stand on my toes it disappears.....etc....' There is no problem knowing whether one's own pain is 'the same' as another's if those features count as criteria. And after all a doctor *can* know whether someone's symptoms are the same as those suffered by people with appendicitis, or a duodenal ulcer, or a stitch.[11] On those kinds of criteria, the question "Is this feeling the same as yours?" is unproblematic to answer.

So the 'real' sceptical problem seems only to arise when our ability to formulate the question intelligibly runs out. But what, then, is it that we can, according to the sceptic, never

---

11The residual problem, that we cannot know in this case if the other person is telling the truth is not germane. We can at least know if our pain is the same as the pain another claims to have. On the traditional sceptical picture, we cannot even know that.

know? What features does the pain in my foot have which could, if only we knew them, serve as a criterion for the judgement that, after all, the pain was indeed the same, or alternatively, the judgement that, after all, in spite of the many similarities, the pains were in fact different. The 'really problematic' question keeps eluding us, because so long as we keep in view the features which look as if they could be criteria for sameness, we do not encounter any problem. The impossibility of making the 'really problematic' question sharp should alert us to the fact that we don't have an unanswerable question. Rather, running in the wrong direction, we have run into an *unaskable* (contentless) question.

We started with the idea that psychological terms are defined by internal ostensive definition: they pick out (privately) a purely mental state of affairs. We quickly found ourselves in trouble about even so much as understanding what it would be to feel the same as another. And notice that this was not simply a verificationist point about how we could verify that one person's mental state was the same as another's. The point was rather that the *intelligibility* of the whole notion of one thing's being the same as another rests on there being a rule, or criterion, for sameness. Once we see that in order to keep sceptical difficulties alive, we had to keep steadily rejecting any possible rule or criterion for sameness that we could come up with, it becomes clear that radical sceptical doubt about whether one person's feelings are the same as another's is self defeating. If we reject all the criteria which might settle genuine doubts about whether my feeling is the same as yours, the casualty is not our right to be sure about the affinity between our states, but the very idea of sameness. But unless we can be clear what it would *mean* for one person's feelings to be *the same* as another's, it seems impossible even to formulate the sceptic's worry.

We must go back to the starting point, and proceed in another direction. The first premise in the sceptic's argument was that psychological terms are inwardly ostensively defined. The sceptic's problem concerned knowledge of others. In our own case, with such

ostensive definitions behind us, there is supposedly no problem deciding whether or not we are experiencing the same sensation as we did before; the problem only arises when I try to get other people to understand what I mean. Wittgenstein wants to question this. At #244 he asks,

> "How do words refer to sensations?
> There doesn't seem to be a problem here; don't we talk about sensations every day and give them names? But how is the connection between the name and the thing set up? This question is the same as how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? -of the word 'pain' for example."

On the picture to be scrutinised, my words refer, via an ostensively established connection, to a privately accessible purely mental item.. How is this connection made? The natural thought is that I simply *label* my sensations. My sensations occur within my consciousness, and I simply give them names and descriptions. Very crudely, the picture would be something like, at the onset of a particular feeling, I might say "I will call this very distinctive feeling 'gollow frusion' if ever it occurs again". And on this account the labelling is of course accomplished privately; indeed it must be carried out privately as no-one else can feel my sensations and do it for me.

The idea that this private act of ostension could be the basis of a genuine concept comes under direct attack in the so-called Private Language Argument[12].

> #258 "Let us imagine the following case. I want to keep a diary about the recurrence of a certain sensation. To this end I associate it with the sign 'S' and write this sign in a calendar for every day on which I have the sensation.--I will remark first of all that a definition of the sign cannot be formulated."

It's obvious enough why not: if I, for example, *define* 'gollow frusion' as 'that feeling of being entirely gobsmacked, where one's insides feel hollow, and any ideas which have not fled altogether have frozen and fused', then that public definition is what the words mean, even if I

---

[12]Hacker suggests that 'Private Language Argument' is a misnomer, in view of the many 'different but closely interwoven themes' which are investigated in sections #242-318. *(Wittgenstein, Meaning and Mind* P. 15) There is something in that. He also says 'it would be futile by now to advocate abandoning this name'. There is something in that too, and I will not follow his lead in pluralising the term.

never explain it to anyone else. So the term doesn't get its meaning from an act of private ostension.[13]

> "But still I can give myself a kind of ostensive definition.--How? Can I point to the sensation? Not in the ordinary sense. But I speak, or write the sign down, and at the same time I concentrate my attention on the sensation -and so, as it were, point to it inwardly. -But what is this ceremony for? for that is all it seems to be! A definition surely serves to establish the meaning of a sign -Well, that is done precisely by the concentration of my attention; for in this way I impress on myself the connection between the sign and the sensation.--But 'I impress it on myself' can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'."

'Ceremony' is deliberately abusive, but what exactly *is* wrong with this baptism ceremony? It is tempting to think that private ostension is just like public ostension in all essential respects. But the act of public ostension is not simply a ceremony. It picks out a public object with public features, some of which will serve as criteria for its identity, and some of which will not. The bare act of matching an object, either private or public, to a word could not serve as a definition; the matching has to be done in accordance with some *concept*, and the concept is fixed by standards which can be publicly assessed. An ostensive definition, when it works, gives a concept in virtue of the fact that certain paradigmatic characteristics are salient. And, when it doesn't, the act of ostension has at least picked out an object on the basis of which mistakes can later be recognised and corrected. Children are, in fact, remarkably good at picking up concepts, but there is a stage during which they tend to class things too generally: calling all men 'Daddy', for example, or all drinks 'juice', or all small furry quadrupeds 'cat'.

---

[13]Similarly, once a concept is in place there is no difficulty. Once a concept is in place, individuals do *not* fix the definition privately. Suppose someone says "Now I know what 'migraine' means. I have recently been getting headaches, and I suspect they are *migraine* headaches, although I've never had them before." They may seem to be in position to ostensively define the word 'migraine', although they never had been previously. But notice that here the criteria for applying the concept 'migraine' are publicly *describable* (intensity and location of pain, visual disturbances of various kinds etc). It is important to recognise that it is a necessary condition of our being counted as having grasped a public concept, like migraine, that we are able to make ourselves intelligible to others, and use the concept in the same way as everyone else. The idea to be rejected is the idea that it is possible, say in baptising 'gollow frusion', to impose similarly constraining conditions on my grasp of a private concept, and so make a meaningful baptism.

We are able to correct their concept formation by pointing out that some of the features which are necessary for the concept in question are missing, or there are some disqualifying features present. Defining an object ostensively is not simply a 'ceremony'; the act works in a context in which there are public constraints on the use of the concept. But in the case of private ostension, that context is missing. All we have left is the 'ceremony'.

Suppose a child was trying to learn the names of the birds in her garden. She might hit upon the following strategy. In order to fix the concept under which any bird falls, she would concentrate her attention on it and name the bird. Then, consulting the bird-spotter's book, a mere exchange of *name* would be all that was required. The *concept*, it might seem, would already be in place, ostensively defined. Suppose she were to perform this ceremony, and later came upon a picture which seemed absolutely right to her. The child thinks "Ah, yes. The name of the bird fixed by my private ostension is House Wren". Would that necessarily fix the name as the right one? Surely not. Suppose, further, that on turning the page, she came across the Carolina Wren, the Bewick Wren and the Marsh Wren. Although they all look a little different to one another, and to the House Wren, they all seemed equally right. Indeed it might have been a Gnatcatcher, and not a Wren at all. She would be inclined to feel despondent, and to think that so far she was just not very sensitive to the kinds of features which distinguish birds from one another. The ostending ceremony would be empty, except insofar as it worked as a heuristic device for calling the bird's features to mind. And in that case, the ceremony itself, qua baptism, would drop out of the picture as irrelevant.

It might be thought that the ceremony might still have created *some* sort of concept. Perhaps the concept which covers all five birds is not one which ornithologists find useful, but it might be a genuine concept for all that. It is instructive to think about when such a claim would seem plausible. If this 'private linguist', presented with many birds, unerringly divided them into F and not-F birds, we might agree that there was a concept, but if the division was

done chaotically we would not even grant that she had a concept. But how would we decide the division was 'unerring'? Well, first, if we could give a public definition, even if the child couldn't articulate it, that would suffice. The House Wren, the Carolina Wren, the Bewick Wren, the Marsh Wren and the Gnatcatcher all, for example, have a throatless, turned-up-nose kind of look. A child who could distinguish those from the titmouse, the robin, and the sparrow would have made quite a lot of progress. But in that case our acceptance of the 'private' concept as genuine rests on its conformity with a *public* concept. Second, if there was enough consistency to establish a *practice* which we could cotton on to, that too would suffice. But suppose, for example, the child were confidently to class a bird as F at one time, and when presented with the same, or what seemed to us to be an exactly similar bird she (again confidently) were to claim it was not-F; meanwhile, when presented with, by any normal standards, two very different birds she unhesitatingly were to say they were both F. We might try different hypotheses to make sense of his concept: if she classed a Thrasher and a Shrike as F, say, we might wonder if the singing abilities of the bird, rather than their appearance were important. But that hypothesis could be dashed by the inclusion of a Grackle and the exclusion of the Lark. We would judge whether or not the child was making progress with her bird spotting by whether or not she had learned to make the same discriminations as ourselves (and the book). If the child could give no account of her 'concept', *and* we could not articulate one for her, *and* no matter how long the process went on we could never establish a practice to join in, we would not believe she had a genuine concept (supposing there is no joke here of the 'when is a raven like a writing desk?' variety). We would think she was making no progress at all.

And her mere confidence that she was right would be no guarantee at all that there was a genuine concept. As well as confidence we demand objective correction. When she suddenly realised on turning the page that the term House Wren was too narrow to fix her bird, her certainty that she had formed a concept was subject to objective constraints. What are the

parallel constraints on her present impression that she always gets it right? It is clear that in the case of someone (privately) ostensively defining a public object, if there are no such constraints, we would have no reason to think we were confronted with an unerring practice. Consequently, we would not be inclined to think we were confronted with a case of genuine concept-formation.

The position of the private linguist who is trying ostensively to set up connections between words and sensations is no better. In the case of private ostension of a private state of affairs, there is no way to draw a distinction between unerring and chaotic practice. And if no distinction can be made between unerring and chaotic practice, there should be no temptation to assume that the ceremony of 'private ostension' is a case of genuine concept formation.[14] But, if there is no distinguishing between unerring and chaotic practice in ostensive definitions of words which describe my own sensations, how are the constraints to be conjured? We cannot bring the private state of affairs out into the open, so it seems as if the conclusion of worries about private labelling must be that we cannot conceptualise 'inner' material.

But obviously we *can* talk meaningfully about, for example, our own sensations. So, to continue the question raised at #244, how *is* the connection between the name and the thing set up? How does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations?

> "Here is one possibility : words are connected with the primitive, the natural expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him

---

[14]Another strand in the private language argument is plainly stated at #257. Wittgenstein says "When one says 'He gave a name to his sensation' one forgets that a great deal of stage-setting in the language is presupposed if the mere act of naming is to make sense. And when we speak of someone's having given a name to pain, what is presupposed is the existence of the grammar of the word 'pain'; it shews the post where the new word is stationed."
The issue here is that ostensive definitions can only function as part of a *practice*. I will return to this briefly. This strand in Wittgenstein's thought is discussed by Malcolm Budd.
Budd, M., *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1989) (P 58-61)

> exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain behaviour."

The passage is cryptic.[15] Clearly, we don't learn all mental concepts in precisely this way, and the significance of this 'possibility' is not spelt out. In one sense what Wittgenstein describes is very straightforward; the question is, what does it show? The example, then, is of a small child playing under the table, say. He jumps up suddenly, bangs his head, and cries lustily. His mother picks him up, and 'murmurs kindly in his ear soft words of comfort and of cheer.' "Oh dear! That *was* sore."... and so forth. In so doing, from a position of authority she *tells* him how to think of his sensations. In exchanges of this sort, the child is being taught a more complex response to his plight than simple crying; he is *being given a label and a concept for his sensations.*

So, despite what we seemed to say in 'the natural thought', we don't label our own sensations. Children are *taught* to talk about their sensations on the basis of their natural expressions. The interlocutor interjects,

> "So you are saying that the word 'pain' really means crying?"

Wittgenstein replies

> "On the contrary: the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it."

Wittgenstein says the label (the verbal expression of pain) 'replaces' crying (the natural expression of pain). Could this mean the child learns the *concept* 'pain' from his internal feel, in response to which he cries, and learns the *label* publicly? Clearly not. That suggestion

---

[15]Earlier, I adverted to the idea that the meaning of first person psychological ascriptions is not truth conditional. On this view, known as the non-assertoric thesis, avowals should be seen as expressions, rather than assertions. Because of the reference to the 'connection' of words with the 'natural expressions' in whose place they are used, this passage has been standardly taken to be a point about the non-assertoric thesis . See Malcolm, N., 'Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations'* in Pitcher, G., (ed)*Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations, A collection of Critical Essays* In Sections III and IV, in the discussion of avowals, I will say more about why I think this is a misinterpretation of Wittgenstein, and why I think the emphasis here is in fact different.

simply misses the point of the Private Language Argument. The denial that the word 'pain' really means crying is followed, at #245, by this,

> "For how can I go so far as to try to use language to get between pain and its expression?"

The idea that the child learns the concept by internal ostension would involve the child's making an *inference* from his state of mind to the appropriateness of, say, crying as a response. The child would have to think something like, "Ah! here is sensation P. Yelling is an appropriate response to *this* (internally ostended) sensation." His mother would then tell him, 'No. Don't respond like that. Respond like this instead.' But crying is not a conceptual response; awareness of pain and the expression of pain, at the primitive level, come together.

Learning 'new pain behaviour' is just 'one possibility'. It might be instructive to think about other ways in which we learn to use language to describe our own sensations.[16] After his bath, a mother runs her finger down her baby's plump back and when he wiggles, she says "It's tickly"; she takes his mittens off the radiator and, putting them on his hands, she says "They feel nice and warm." She laughs at his expression of astonishment on first eating ice-cream, and says "It's cold!" And so he learns how to talk about his sensations. Notice that correction is authoritative and uncomplicated. A mother puts her toddler in the bath, and as she does so she apologises, saying ' Oh I'm sorry, it's tepid!'. Finding there is no hot water, she whips the baby quickly out, dries him and puts him to bed. The baby likes the new word, 'Bath tepid!' he says several times. How would we decide whether he had indeed got a new

---

[16] When we think about acquiring new psychological concepts we tend to think in terms of learning to describe very subtle nuances of feeling, or struggles with painful repressed feelings. Most often when we learn to use psychological descriptions about ourselves, there is no distinctive behaviour, like crying and rubbing a bumped head, which alerts the teacher to the appropriateness of the psychological description. But this should not blind us to the fact that language acquisition in this area proceeds by learning criteria for application which are just as public as those in any other: Sometimes the appropriateness of the response will seem obvious because of the context; sometimes the new concept will seem appropriate because of what the subject can avow. Most often the criteria will be mixed. I will return to more complex mental states in Sections III and IV. At this point my focus is the mass of uncomplicated language children learn in order to describe their own sensations.

concept? Presumably by observing whether or not he used it in accordance with the practice for that word. If the next night he himself indignantly claims 'Bath tepid', when the water is quite hot, the question would merely be 'what mistake is being made here?'. Has he come to think that 'tepid' means roughly 'the wrong temperature' or even more generally 'not a good time for a bath'? It would be absurd to wonder whether the child's experience tonight, of a bath verging on too hot, was similar to the experience he had last night when he got into a bath which was verging on too cold.

The child, in learning to talk about pain, or feelings of warmth, or tickly sensations acquires concepts. And the point of the Private Language Argument was to show that without a context in which there is a distinction between a sensation corresponding to the paradigm, and a sensation's simply *seeming* to correspond to the paradigm, there can be no such thing as concept formation. The *practice* which enables us correctly to use expressions like 'sore head', 'a nasty bump', 'tepid bath' and so on provides just such a context. But, without the practice, to give a child a new label for its sensations would be to give it nothing more than the equipment for an empty ostension ceremony. The authoritative practice imposes the constraint necessary for concept formation, and in learning to take part in this practice, the child learns both a label and a concept.

It might be wondered why the stress is on acquisition. The stress on learning is meant to make clear what *counts as* having a grasp on the concepts in question. Learning the language to describe an inner reality for any individual proceeds through the evidence a third person, the teacher of language, might have for that inner reality. Thinking about what it is to acquire psychological language makes it clear that learning to think about one's self by using psychological language is learning to take part in a *practice* of talking about oneself. Part of being competent is being intelligible to others. But if we were able to learn the meanings of

psychological terms *because* we have privileged access to ostendable mental facts, it is entirely unclear *why* part of being competent is being publicly intelligible.

This aim of this section has been to undermine some of the assumptions from which radical Cartesian scepticism proceeds. On such assumptions we can fix the meaning of sensation words privately. The suggestion has been that we should resist the temptation to think that the *meaning* of the words we use to talk about sensations is individuated purely by something which is both internal to, and solely accessible to, the subject.[17] To rehearse: Cartesian scepticism sees introspection on the model of perception; the naming and conceptualisation of mental states is done ostensively and internally; and the problem with other minds arises because, whereas in introspection I can perceive my own mental states, I can never inspect another's mental states in any way which is seriously analogous. So, it seems, I can never be sure that they mean the same as I do by their words. It has emerged from the preceding discussion that it is not possible for an individual to have radical doubt about whether she 'means the same' as others by the words she uses to describe her inner experiences. If she herself is able to mean anything, it is only by becoming a competent user of a public language. Only by becoming able to attach the *right* meanings, that is the *same* meanings as everyone else, to the words she uses, does she become able to form mental concepts at all. But once we have *this* perspective on first person psychological ascriptions, it is clear that it is wrong to think that any doubt there might be about whether others mean the same as I do rests on a contrast between direct and inferential access to an exemplar. Doubts about meaning can arise. People can be unsure about how to use certain psychological

---

17 Nagel doesn't resist the temptation. He gives in to the full blown fantasy of a new language to describe the (to us) unimaginable 'batty' inner in precise phenomenological terms. A whole new language to describe the bat's beetles!
Nagel. T., 'What's it like to be a Bat?' in *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979)

concepts, but the doubts can be resolved, and there is no such thing as having a purely private meaning.

The bearing on George Eliot's writing of the defusing of radical Cartesian scepticism should be clear. *The Lifted Veil* presents what should be, for the person smitten with Cartesian doubt, a supernatural solution to the 'other minds' problem. *The Lifted Veil* casts sceptical doubt in a slightly different shape. Even prescinding from doubts about meaning, the worry is that we have to make inferences about others' feelings and beliefs on the basis of incomplete and sometimes deliberately misleading words and behaviour. The sceptical worry is that we can never be sure our impressions of others are right, as we can never get direct access to the mind of another. The 'obvious' solution, the solution of *The Lifted Veil,* is to give us what we supposedly have in our own case: direct access.

The first problem with the 'obvious' solution is independent of the cogency of the Wittgensteinian perspective I have been recommending. The supernatural 'solution' is unstable. How would it be possible for someone like Latimer to become sure that he was able to check the reports of his companions against the phenomenological reality they were experiencing?[18] Let the fantasy be very simple and limited, involving only sensations. Latimer finds that there is a reliable correlation between his suddenly becoming smitten with feelings of, say, heat, and X's announcing 'I'm much too hot'; or he notices that he feels a terrible pain in his side, which he (for some reason) associates with Y, and on phoning Y he discovers that Y has appendicitis. However intense his feelings, and however reliable his gift, this is not *direct* access. The sensations he had would always be *his own.* He must make an *inference*

---

[18]Latimer, interestingly, goes through virtually no period of doubt, and absolutely no effort to assess the reliability of his gift. This is not accidental. It stems from Eliot's conviction that there is a sharp distinction between direct access and inferential evidence. If there were such a distinction, 'directness' would somehow make itself manifest. Thus Latimer (and the reader) can concentrate on the amazing discrepancies between what is avowed and what is felt.

from his feelings to the feelings of another. And that is true no matter how little the feelings resemble feelings he himself is accustomed to. (And also true even if we could make sense of Latimer feeling pain in, say, Bertha's left foot. The foot might not be 'his', but the pain certainly would be.[19]) Even more seriously, the only evidence Latimer could have to convince himself that his feelings were (in some sense, perhaps causally?) related to another's feelings, is that the other says and does things which make it plain that they are inclined to describe as 'theirs' the feelings Latimer is experiencing. But why, if the feelings he associated with them began to diverge from the things they said, should that not be evidence that his gift was unreliable? Presumably, the answer could only be that other (also inferential) evidence tended to back up the inference he made from his own feelings rather than to back up the inference from the verbal evidence. There is nothing more 'direct' about feeling sensations than there is in careful listening and watching.

But if Wittgenstein's insights are compelling, there are more important problems with Latimer's fantasy. It is undeniable that, with respect to the description of mental states and processes, their subject has a special authority. The question is, how we are to understand that authority? If first person authority flows from privileged access to the truth conferrers for psychological ascriptions, that allows us to play with the idea of being able, supernaturally, to gain access to another's inner reality, and so to the truth conferrers for propositions about their mental states. But if private ostensive definitions are impossible we cannot make sense of *privately* learning to conceptualise and describe our own inner mental states. We are then driven to recognise the importance of behaviour and context in language acquisition. And while

---

[19]Wittgenstein talking of the problem of feeling another's pain:
"The grammatical difficulty which we are in we shall only see clearly if we get familiar with the idea of feeling pain in another person's body. For otherwise, in puzzling about this problem, we shall be liable to confuse our metaphysical proposition 'I can't feel his pain' with the experiential proposition 'We can't have (haven't as a rule) pains in another person's tooth.' "
Wittgenstein, Ludwig *Blue Book* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972) (P. 49)

there is no threat to the possibility of acquiring psychological concepts and language in a community in which people *occasionally* misrepresent their feelings, it is incoherent to think that someone who was immersed in a chaotic practice of habitual lying could ever become competent to describe their own mental states.

Consequently there are three problems with Eliot's fantasy. First, the very idea of a practice of talking about our feelings is only intelligible against the background of a community of people who are, by and large, reliable about their feelings. It does not even make sense to think that, once it has been established in a competent language user, the practice of talking about feelings could suddenly float free, to create space for radical and persistent mistakes. Increasing sophistication in using psychological language is intimately bound up with increasing sophistication in understanding behaviour and context. The model of an impenetrable veil is not a useful way to think of persistent misunderstandings between individuals. The second problem is that once we have broken free of the idea that the truth conditions for psychological claims are given by private phenomenological states, we can no longer be beguiled into the belief that psychological claims based on privileged access to those states can over-ride the kind of behavioural and contextual grounding we have in ordinary life. Not only is the veil an unhelpful image, but the idea of penetrating it, in the case of others, or transcending it in one's own case makes no sense either. Third: we cannot understand the lifting of the veil on the model of generalising the first-person situation.

This section has outlined arguments to suggest that the meaning of talk about the mental cannot derive from reference to mental 'states of affairs' conceived as private to the subject. The arguments so far are reasonably familiar. They centre round the *acquisition* of mental concepts. In brief, the point is that in learning to talk about our own mental states we learn to use concepts. We can only acquire concepts by learning to make ourselves intelligible to others. We can only make ourselves intelligible to others if the grounds for the application of

those concepts are publicly accesssible to those from whom we learn them. There are no 'private' concepts, and we cannot acquire public concepts privately. Cartesian scepticism, on this account, is avoided by recognising that part of acquiring a grasp of the meaning of language which describes mental states is grasping which behavioural and contextual facts make such language appropriate.

These contentions may seem in danger of collapsing into behaviourism. But the fact that behavioural and other public circumstances give language a grip on feelings is a *complex* fact. Talk *about the mental* is just that; it is not simply complicated talk about contexts and behaviour. The Wittgensteinian point is not that the truth conditions are simply external to the subject, or that mental concepts can simply be analysed as 'the way the subject behaves'. Public evidence for a sensation (the context, the way the subject behaves etc.) is the *route* through which feelings are given conceptual shape: raw 'feels' have no conceptual structure. But nevertheless it is *feelings,* and not circumstances and behaviour, which a subject then has the conceptual resources to describe.

The basic insight of behaviourism, it seems to me, is that in order to teach a subject to use the concepts which describe his feelings, the teacher has to be able to 'see' in the behaviour what the subject is feeling. So that behaviour is authoritative. But of course by 'authoritative' we do *not* mean that the subject is better placed than anyone else to see which pre-linguistic response is appropriate. Rather, that behaviour expresses (non-assertorically) the emotion to which he can be taught a complex, linguistic response. This is important. The subject's own behaviour, *both before and after that behaviour becomes linguistic and conceptual*, is authoritative and determinative. The next section will try to explain more fully what that cryptic claim amounts to, and an account of first person authority will emerge which is not based in privileged access. But any account of the authority of first person psychological claims must simultaneously explain why first person authority is not limitless: subjects are quite frequently

mistaken about their own psychological states. The final two sections of the chapter will examine the nature of the limits there are on a subject's authority to give an account of his own psychological states.

* * *

Section III: Rejection of the traditional account of first person authority for avowals

It will be unsurprising that Wittgenstein's remarks about avowals are more negative than positive. He says more to undermine the traditional picture of avowals than he says by way of a positive thesis. Much of what follows will be correspondingly negative in character. But ideas about the function of avowals play a crucial part in Wittgenstein's account of the meaning of descriptions of psychological states. Something of that positive picture will emerge in due course.

Some preliminary definitions. Avowals are first person psychological claims which have a special authority. Not all first person psychological claims are avowals, of course. A subject is not particularly well placed to make claims like 'I am brave' or 'I am clever'. These are first person psychological claims, but they are not avowals. They are *dispositional* in character, and the subject's word carries no special authority.

The authority of an avowal is not a guarantee of its truth. If someone says "I feel enervated" or "I am delighted" or "I am relieved", they may be none of these things. They may not understand their own words, for example they may think 'enervated' means energised, or they may be insincere, or more interesting, the claim may be self-deceived, for example they may sincerely and comprehendingly claim to be relieved when they are in fact

bitterly disappointed.[20] But in order to begin to understand the *nature* of the authority we do grant the subject, *even* in cases where he turns out to be mistaken, it is useful at this point to focus on claims like 'I'm hungry', 'That hurts', 'I feel cold', 'I feel sick', and so on. I shall call these *paradigmatic* avowals.[21] Roughly, avowals which report sensations will be the paradigm. Unlike avowals of propositional attitudes it seems that their honest and comprehending assertion guarantees their truth.

The first point to notice is that the authority of paradigmatic avowals seems to rest on no inferential basis or grounds. If a subject makes a paradigmatic avowal, it is usually quite out of place to ask 'How do you know?' Can we give an adequate account of authority and lack of inferential basis which doesn't land us with the unacceptable epistemology the first section argued against? The pull towards a Cartesian philosophy of mind is very easily understood: how can we construe the fact that I am authoritative in my use of avowals except as an indication that my knowledge of the states of affairs they describe has some sort of superior basis? And how is that superior basis to be explained if not in Cartesian terms? In other words, must my non-inferential authority be explained in terms of my immediate access to a domain of states of affairs which is private? How else can we explain that others are *not* authoritative about my avowable states?

The traditional picture

Consider the case of the avowal of sensations. It is almost irresistible to think of such avowals as a kind of observational *report*. It seems a perfectly innocent thought that, as Hacker puts it

---

20The connection between self-deceived avowals and unconscious mental states is plain. If I am thought to be in a mental state which I understand but am unable to avow, I am said to be in an *unconscious* mental state. I will discuss unconscious mental states in the final section of this chapter.

21 In so doing I am following Andrew Hamilton. See his Ph.D thesis *The First Person*, St.Andrews 1987

> "All sentient creatures can suffer pain, want or enjoy things. Only self-conscious creatures, capable of ascribing experiences to themselves, know that they are in pain, that they want such-and such, that they are enjoying this or that."[22]

The picture here is roughly this: sensations are 'qualia' of which there are many *types* , any of which may in principle be *tokened* in any conscious subject. Learning to describe one's sensations is learning what the different types are; and when we experience a token of any particular quale, this is something we can recognise, and report on. So the occurrence of a token of a particular type of sensation does not require that the type be recognised by the subject. Hence, even among subjects who have the conceptual resources to describe their sensations, knowing which sensation one is currently experiencing is a matter of *responding* to something whose determinate character is independent of the subject's response, a modest but genuine classification.

But we need now to explain the linguistic data. Why is it that paradigmatic avowals guarantee their own truth? We may be mistaken when we make certain avowals, but in the base class of cases I seem not to be able to get it wrong. And why is a third person in a relatively *dis*advantageous position to talk about my sensations? Once we have accepted the foregoing picture, it's not clear there is any alternative but to think, following Descartes, that the reason my judgements about my sensations are *infallible* is that, unlike most other things I might want to describe, my sensations are immediately accessible to me and transparently displayed; and they are *not,* in that way, accessible to a third person. But we have remarked on the familiar problem with the Cartesian explanation of my immunity to error. If infallibility about avowable states arises from immediacy, irremediable sceptical doubt about each others' mental states apparently follows. And there seems to be no successful strategy, on the traditional picture, to solve the sceptical problem. We can never actually feel the internal feelings of another animal or

---

[22] Hacker, P., *Insight and Illusion* 1972 [Ch.9]

human. We merely *believe* others have feelings, and *think* we are reasonably justified in thinking that whatever they are feeling is sufficiently like our own feelings to warrant being called by the same name.

The previous section began to show that this traditional picture is seriously flawed. What is missing so far is a detailed examination of the traditional account of avowals. I want to discuss three distinct strands in the traditional picture. On the traditional picture avowals are descriptions of interior states of affairs; the meaning of an avowal is conferred by reference to a private exemplar; and an avowal seems to be a cognitive achievement. The overall strategy is twofold: to further undercut the sceptical challenge; and to show that the function of avowals is not simply descriptive.

(a) The first strand in the traditional picture is the thought that avowals are descriptions of interior states of affairs. Wittgenstein suggests that, if talk about sensations is conceived of as talk about some sort of inner object, then, when we examine the rules and uses of language, it looks as if the sensations themselves -the inner qualia- drop out of the picture. The most forceful statement of this point comes in *Investigations* #293.

> "If I say of myself that it is only from my own case that I know what the word "pain" means -must I not say the same of other people too? And how can I generalise the *one* case so irresponsibly?
> Now someone tells me that *he* knows what pain is only from his own case! ---Suppose everyone had a box with something in it: we call it a "beetle". No one can look into anyone else's box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at his beetle. ----Here it would be quite possible for everyone to have something quite different in his box. One might even imagine such a thing constantly changing. But suppose the word 'beetle' had a use in these people's language? ---If so it would not be used as the name of a thing. The thing in the box has no place in the language game at all; not even as a *something*: for the box might even be empty.
> No, one can 'divide through' by the thing in the box; it cancels out, whatever it is.
> That is to say: if we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation' the object drops out of consideration as irrelevant."

On the traditional picture, when individuals talk about their mental states they are talking about internal states of affairs to which only they have access. If this were an illuminating picture, talk about mental states would be analogous to talk about an actual object to which (for some reason) only one subject had access.[23] Wittgenstein asks us to imagine that the word 'beetle' has a use in the language. So, for example, one person might ask another to imagine there is a 'beetle' somewhere, or ask him to put a 'beetle' somewhere (still of course in the sealed box). It is clear that people could obey instructions, and make reports, and (provided the boxes remained sealed) there would be no extra problems in doing so caused by the fact that the beetle was irretrievably 'private'. People would understand each other very well. But if someone were to try to refer directly to the *contents* of his beetle-box, without saying which box it was in, no-one could follow his instruction or understand his reports. There is no use we could give to the word 'beetle' which would enable a person to be simultaneously making sense to another person and actually talking about the object in the box. When we make use of the word 'beetle' intelligibly, we can 'divide through' by the object itself.

Note the conditional in Wittgenstein's final sentence: IF we construe the grammar of the expression of sensation on the model of 'object and designation', then the best sort of picture we could come up with would be rather like the sealed beetle box, in which case there is of course an object (hidden to all but one person). IF we so construe the grammar, then in any intelligible use we could give the word 'beetle', the object (hidden to all but one person) drops

---

[23]Notice that in Wittgenstein's analogy, just as in the meaning of sensation words, ostensive definitions cannot proceed by display of the teacher's beetle; each person ostensively defines the word 'beetle' by means of looking at his own. We ought not, then, to be distracted by irrelevant features of the example. We don't, for example, have public *sensation-like* objects outside the mind, as we might imagine ourselves having beetle-like objects outside the box. So questions like 'has your beetle got four legs?' would not have an analogue. We would not *(pace* Nagel) have much use for a purely phenomenal language to describe our sensations. When we try to describe the inner, we do so in descriptions like 'sharp pain', 'dull pain', 'stabbing' pain, 'burning' pain...etc. In other words, we describe typical *outsides* of 'boxes' (the pain which would typically be caused by a stab...); or we use metaphors which compare the pain to something non-sensational (like a knife or a fist or a fire).

out of consideration as irrelevant. But Wittgenstein is *not* making the absurd, unconditional, claim that in ordinary talk about the mental we can 'divide through' by experience.

It might seem that if one denies that an avowal is a description of something which is going on privately, behaviourism is the only alternative. As the interlocutor asks,

> #307" 'Are you not really a behaviourist in disguise? Aren't you at bottom really saying that everything except human behaviour is a fiction?' "[24]

Wittgenstein's reply is

> " If I do speak of a fiction, then it is of a *grammatical* fiction."

The 'fiction' is the thought that we have an (admittedly dim) understanding of facts in virtue of which the grammar of first person reports on mental states and processes is as it is. The facts we seem to (dimly) understand are that there are states and processes taking place in a mental medium, and we can make authoritative reports on these, because we have observational access to them. This is the account of avowals which is to be completely rejected. But that is not to say that all that is of importance is the behaviour.

Wittgenstein's intention is not behaviourist. The point is rather that it is important not to think of the grammar of avowals as if it flowed from privileged access to interior mental states and processes. But it is a misunderstanding to think of that as a denial that there are internal states and processes.

> #305 " 'But you surely cannot deny that, for example, in remembering, an inner process takes place.'--What gives the impression that we want to deny anything? When one says 'Still an inner process does take place here'--one wants to go on: 'After all, you see it.' And it is this inner process that one means by the word 'remembering'.--The impression

---

[24]And behaviourism, I am taking it, is clearly false. When we avow particular mental states, for example, 'I am tired', 'I am afraid', 'I feel dizzy', 'I am in pain' etc., we do so directly and non-inferentially. However I may have learned to use the word 'pain', I do not have to notice certain aspects of my behaviour and situation before saying, with complete confidence, that I am in pain. Behaviourism can offer no account of the distinctive features of avowals, their groundlessness and the authority carried by the subject.

> that we wanted to deny something arises from our setting our faces against the picture of the 'inner process'. What we deny is that the picture of the inner process gives us the correct idea of the use of the word 'to remember'. We say that this picture with its ramifications stands in the way of our seeing the use of the word as it is."

The thought taken exception to is not the idea that there are inner processes, but rather the idea that when someone sincerely says 'I have just remembered....' they do so on the basis of their *observation* of an internal process which is itself the 'remembering'. It is wrong, then, to think of 'I have just remembered...' as a description of an inner 'something'. At #304, the interlocutor asks,

> "But you will surely admit that there is a difference between pain-behaviour accompanied by pain and pain-behaviour without any pain?" ---Admit it? What greater difference could there be? ---"And yet you again and again reach the conclusion that the sensation itself is a nothing." ---Not at all. It is not a *something*, but it is not a *nothing* either! The conclusion was only that a nothing would serve just as well as a something about which nothing could be said. We have only rejected the grammar which tries to force itself on us here."
>
> The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts -which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please."

The idea of the impenetrable privacy of mental states is a consequence of an erroneous picture of the way that language functions. A further consequence of that erroneous picture is that the object itself is irrelevant. First person psychological claims cannot be a description of an internal state of affairs in the same way as a description of a house is an expression of a thought about an object. Talk about the mental must function differently.

(b) The second strand of the traditional picture is the idea that the meaning of an avowal is conferred by reference to a private exemplar. We learn *roughly* what such a sentence means from others, but only learn what it *really* means by looking within. In Section II, some pressure was put on the idea that an individual could privately ostensively define words to describe sensations. What I want to explore further now is whether there could so much as *be* public meanings if the traditional picture were correct.

This strand continues the deflationary line of argument of my first section, and develops further the direct connection between scepticism and meaning. If we think that each individual knows precisely, and only, what he himself means when he talks about his private mental life, our only way of making sense of public meanings is to make non-negotiable assumptions about other people's use. If the private exemplar gives the meaning, the belief that we are all talking the same language is reduced to the merest dogma. Wittgenstein discusses this thought in *Investigations* #272

> "The essential thing about private experience is really not that each person possesses his own exemplar, but that nobody knows whether other people also have this or something else. The assumption would thus be possible - though unverifiable - that one section of mankind had one sensation of red and another section another."

The 'essential thing', is to alert us to the impossibility of language working in the way it seems to. It *seems* as if everybody has his own exemplar, fixing his own concept, but in fact the *essential* thing is that, on this model, we have no access to others' exemplars. At first, it looks as if we could just bite the bullet, and assume that it is possible that we all have different 'sensations' from one another when we think we are talking about the same thing. But this is not only an improbable and unattractive assumption; the very meaning we ourselves attach to words to describe our own sensations would also be undermined if we took this 'private exemplar' story seriously. It makes it look as if a word like 'red' is ambiguous. At #273, Wittgenstein asks

> " What am I to say about the word 'red'? -that it means something 'confronting us all' and that everyone should really have another word besides this one, to mean his own sensation of red? Or is it like this: the word 'red' means something known to everyone; and in addition, for each person, it means something only known to him? (Or perhaps it *refers* to something known only to him.)"

And at #274 he says,

> "Of course, saying that the word 'red' 'refers to' instead of 'means' something private does not help us in the least to grasp its function; but it is the more psychologically apt expression for a particular experience in doing philosophy. It is as if when I uttered the word I cast a sidelong

> glance at the private sensation, as it were in order to say to myself: I know all right what I mean by it."

These passages ask us to think about the word 'red' rather than a pure sensation word, to make as plain as possible the oddness of the picture that each of us has his own private exemplar to provide the meanings of words to describe private experience. On that picture, the word 'red' seems to assume a dual aspect. Certainly 'red' means something which 'confronts us all'. The redness of red things is as much 'out there' as any other quality they have, and yet the word seems to have a private component too. We each experience redness privately, as it were. Wittgenstein counters that that idea, of two such aspects to our meaning, the public and the private, doesn't begin to make sense of what we mean in ordinary talk about colours. At #275, he says,

> "Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself 'How blue the sky is!' -When you do it spontaneously -without philosophical intentions- the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of blue belongs only to you. And you have no hesitation in exclaiming that to someone else. And if you point at anything as you say the words you point at the sky. I am saying: you have not the feeling of pointing-into-yourself, which often accompanies 'naming the sensation' when one is thinking about 'private language'. Nor do you think that really you ought not to point to the colour with your hand, but with your attention. (Consider what it means to 'point to something with the attention'.)"

We don't really think that, when we say 'The sky is blue' , or 'Look at the man in the red jumper', we are reporting on some private correspondence as well as remarking on something everyday and public, or using the word 'red' as an identification.

Of course it might still seem that colour words have a dual aspect, but just that we ignore the 'private' aspect when talking to each other. After all, as the interlocutor suggests at #276

> "But don't we at least mean something quite definite when we look at a colour and name our colour impression? It is as if we detached the colour-impression from the object, like a membrane. (This ought to arouse our suspicions.)"

We should feel suspicious because normally when we look at a coloured object there is no colour *impression* which seems to be separable. But we *can* concentrate our attention on the

colour impression, and the consequent temptation is to feel that the ability to concentrate on our own private experience of the colour is implicit in every use of colour vocabulary. Wittgenstein denies this. Of course there *are* uses of colour language which makes the 'private exemplar' primary. But rather than taking those uses of colour vocabulary as an indication that there is a fully fledged concept in the 'private exemplar', Wittgenstein at #271 suggests that these uses of colour language are different, and, arguably, in no way primary.

> "But how is it even possible for us to be tempted to think that we use a word to mean at one time the colour known to everyone -and at another the 'visual impression' which *I* am getting *now*? How can there be so much as a temptation here? -------I don't turn the same kind of attention on the colour in the two cases. When I mean the colour impression that (as I should like to say) belongs to me alone I immerse myself in the colour -rather like when 'I cannot get my fill of a colour'. Hence it is easier to produce this experience when one is looking at a bright colour, or at an impressive colour-scheme."

The sense of 'colour impression' when we talk of the experience of a colour being a 'private' experience, is a very different use of colour vocabulary. It is something we might *do* with colour, *wallow* in it. But that kind of experience isn't there all the time, hovering beside sentences like 'This desk is brown' and giving the real meaning of 'brown'. In the normal case we are describing the colour of the desk itself. The suggestion is that uses of colour vocabulary which rely on the private, 'wallowing' kind of experience of colour seem now to be parasitic on the public concept.

> But the interlocutor is not to be seen off so easily. At #278 he retorts
>
> " 'I know how the colour green looks to me.' --- surely that makes sense! ----Certainly: what use of the proposition are you thinking of?"

Wittgenstein's reply is that there are some uses of "I know how the colour green looks to me", which make good sense. (One could imagine a row with a superior interior decorator ending on such a note.) But the use the interlocutor seems to be envisaging, where the sentence is supposed to say something about what the colour 'really' looks like, as opposed to all the public (discriminative, comparative, relational) uses, is illegitimate. At #279 Wittgenstein says,

> " Imagine someone saying: 'But I know how tall I am!' and laying his hand on the top of his head to prove it."

Saying 'I know how the colour green looks to me', in the interlocutor's sense, is comparable to the performance of the man who proves he knows how tall he is by laying his hand on the top of his head. It isn't that we could show that what he says is *false*. He is, of course, in a useless kind of way, precisely that height. But as a proof that he knows how tall he is, his gesture is nonsensical. Measures of height have all sorts of uses, and there are all sorts of scales and measurements, but none of the uses include the use of 'At least I know how tall it is' where no information is given about how the height of the object compared to other things. That's not how the concept 'height' works.

And the point of the analogy is that that's not how the concept 'colour' works either. To learn how to use colour vocabulary is to learn to make certain discriminations. Basically a child is said to be able to use the word "green" when it can discriminate green objects from non-green objects. Clearly, before the child learns this ability, the sensory apparatus is already in place. But it would be wrong to think that the child has some sort of private ostensive portion of the concept. We would not be inclined to say, "At least she knows what the colour green looks like to her." The concept comes with the ability to discriminate. In order to talk about one's experience of colour one has to grasp public discriminatory vocabulary.

If the traditional picture of the role of avowals were the right one, and avowals were descriptions of ineluctable private mental states of affairs, any public meaning we seem to attach to talk about the mental breaks down.

(c) I want to discuss one further strand in the traditional picture of the function of avowals. On the traditional picture, in order to be able to report our sensations, we have to find out something about ourselves. Avowals seem to be a cognitive achievement. 'How is your

head now?', we ask the patient...(moment's introspection)...'Much better, thanks'. Avowals seem very easy, to be sure, but it seems as if they are a modest cognitive achievement for all that. Think again about the seemingly unexceptional thought raised by Peter Hacker,

> "All sentient creatures can suffer pain, want or enjoy things. Only self-conscious creatures, capable of ascribing experiences to themselves, know that they are in pain, that they want such-and such, that they are enjoying this or that."

My question, following Hacker, is: 'how unexceptional is this thought?'

This question turns on the familiar Wittgensteinian problem raised for the private linguist, the problem of distinguishing between correctly identifying a token 'quale' and its merely seeming to me that I have done so. The point is put to slightly different use here. We start, in #288, from the fact that, at least in basic cases, avowals seem to be immune from error.

> " I turn to stone and my pain goes on. -Suppose I were in error and it was no longer pain? ----But I can't be in error here; it means nothing to doubt whether I am in pain! -That means: if anyone said 'I don't know if what I have got is a pain or something else', we should think something like, he does not know what the English word pain means; and we should explain it to him.--How? perhaps by means of gestures, or by pricking him with a pin and saying: 'See that's what pain is!' This explanation, like any other, he might understand right, wrong, or not at all. And he will shew which he does by his use of the word in this as in other cases.
>
> If he now said for example: 'Oh, I know what 'pain' means; what I don't know is whether this, that I have now, is pain' ----we should merely shake our heads and be forced to regard his words as a queer reaction which we have no idea what to do with. (It would be rather as if we heard someone say seriously 'I distinctly remember that some time before I was born I believed....')"

Here Wittgenstein is not calling 'queer' the sort of thing we might say about neuralgia, eg, when one feels something akin to pain in a fairly widespread area which has the peculiar feature that if you try to pin it down it disappears. It is, one might feel inclined to say, perhaps not intense enough for pain, but it is certainly too unpleasant to count as tingling. There, one might legitimately try to dissuade the enthusiastic vocabulary teacher with the pin, by saying 'Oh, I know what 'pain' means; what I don't know is whether *this*, that I have now, is pain.'

The case he is calling 'queer' is not the normal (but unusual case) where one might have difficulty knowing what to call something, but rather a situation where we are trying to imagine that there is no indeterminacy, but the speaker merely persists in saying he isn't sure what he's feeling.

A case which seems to be parallel: someone speaking on the telephone says, 'I think I see a Junko out of my window, but I'm not sure.' He could be expressing two different kinds of doubt: he might be saying he's not quite sure what a Junko looks like. The person on the other end of the line might describe one. But the speaker might say that that wasn't the kind of doubt he felt. He might say, 'Oh, I know what a Junko looks like, but I can't see the bird clearly enough to know if that is what is in front of me now.' The difference from sensations is marked. My own sensations can't just lurk 'out of focus'. Something like neuralgia, which might be described as 'pain which is lurking out of focus' is not precisely the same sensation as normal feelings of pain, only we can't quite feel it (like a Junko hiding in the leaves). Rather it is a different sensation perhaps aptly (but metaphorically) described as 'pain which is lurking out of focus'. What Wittgenstein is saying is 'queer' if we are talking about sensations, rather than public objects, is the latter kind of expression of doubt, the doubt about what *this* (determinate sensation) is. And, he suggests, this is a doubt which *ought* to make sense on the 'modest cognitive achievement' view. #288 continues:

> "That expression of doubt has no place in the language game; but if we cut out human behaviour which is the expression of sensation, it looks as if I might legitimately begin to doubt afresh. My temptation to say that one might take a sensation for something other than what it is arises from this: if I assume the abrogation of the normal language-game with the expression of a sensation, I need a criterion of identity for the sensation; and then the possibility of error also exists."

An avowal does not express a guarantied, if modest, cognitive achievement. Rather than our being *immune* to error in avowals of sensation, error about sensations makes no sense. If and only if one abrogates (abandons; repeals) the normal language game in which the primitive expression of a sensation plays a role in determining its application, does radical doubt seem

possible. If doubt *were* possible, then getting it right would of course be an achievement. But if doubt were possible we would need criteria to make out the seems right/is right distinction; otherwise, we could make no distinction between successes and failures of cognitive achievement. Whatever that criterion was, if it were a genuine criterion, and not just a shuffle, it would have to open up the possibility of error. (i.e., the possibility of being on the wrong side of the distinction.) But if we try to establish such a distinction, we are beggared for any kind of criterion or standard of correctness. Expression of doubt makes no more sense in the case of a sincere avowal than it does with a genuine scream of pain.

The temptation dies hard to think that although it might be difficult, or impossible, to convince *others*, at least I would be able to convince *myself* that my avowals were error-free. At #289, the dialogue with the interlocutor continues,

> "When I say 'I am in pain' I am at any rate justified *before myself*." --- What does that mean? Does it mean : "If someone else could know what I am calling 'pain', he would admit that I was using the word correctly"?

Here the interlocutor is still playing with the idea of there being a possible doubt about the use of sensation words, and is claiming that in the first person case at least, I can justify my own use to myself. Let us go back to the ornithologically interested telephoner. He might now claim to see a lesser spotted woodpecker. That bird is rare, and his friend might say that he thought that was unlikely. The first man might look at his bird book and look at the bird, and say 'Well I am justified in my own mind that I have seen a lesser spotted woodpecker'. Now what that would mean would be something like 'If someone else could see what I am calling a lesser spotted woodpecker, he would admit I was using the word correctly'. But of course in the case of sensation talk, that possibility doesn't make sense. It is written into the nature of what we call sensations, that *nothing* counts as feeling another's pain (as the discussion of this issue in the Blue Book suggests, even feeling pain in another's body would only be my feeling my pain in his body). So what can my claiming to be 'at least justified before myself' really mean?

There doesn't seem to be anything for us to mean. The feeling of justification is just that: a feeling.

Investigations #271 begins with what might look as if it were a way that the private linguist could make out, at least for himself, a sound distinction between seeming to have had the same sensation, and actually having had the same sensation again.

> "Let us imagine a use for the entry of the sign "S" in my diary. I discover that whenever I have a particular sensation a manometer shews that my blood-pressure rises. So I shall be able to say that my blood-pressure is rising without using any apparatus. This is a useful result. And now it seems quite indifferent whether I have remembered the sensation right or not. Let us suppose I regularly identify it wrong, it does not matter in the least. And that alone shews that the hypothesis that I make a mistake is mere show. (We as it were turned a knob which looked as if it could be used to turn on some part of the machine; but it was a mere ornament, not connected with the mechanism at all.)....."

He keeps writing "S" in his diary, whenever he judges that sensation S crops up. We tease him, after our reading of the Private Language Argument. We argue that notwithstanding his confidence that he is right, he may be misremembering, or applying different rules, for all he knows. Now one day it occurs to him that, as well as his conviction that he is right, he might also use a manometer to check the correctness of his response; and, sure enough, whenever he judges that sensation S occurs, his blood pressure does indeed rise. So now he says triumphantly, 'You see, I was right. Whenever I wrote 'S' in my diary I did indeed have sensation S. The manometer proves it.'

But evidently this is not the demonstration the private linguist needed. What the private linguist needed was something which would help him to make a distinction between it seeming to him that he remembered correctly, and used the same rule, and so on, and its actually being so. Whereas the manometer *might* rise every time he *believed* he had sensation S, even if the sensations he felt on each occasion were quite different. There is no necessary connection between the 'feel' of his sensation and his blood pressure rising. The manometer reading

certainly gives us a use for his *conviction* that he is recognising sensation S, but it is a use which is quite indifferent to whether, when he is convinced he 'recognises' S, he is right or wrong. If we regard the manometer reading as an objective criterion for his correctly identifying 'whatever it is he happens to feel when his blood pressure rises', enabling him to call it 'S', then that 'objectivity' makes no play with the idea of his independently getting it right or wrong, and indeed makes no play with the idea that there is one particular sensation, rather than a cluster of very different sensations which he, mistakenly, believes to be the same. So what looked like an objective criterion to give us a grip on the distinction between it seeming to him that this is S, and its actually being the case, turns out rather to make it seem that, for the private linguist, the play with that distinction is mere show. Entertaining the possibility that he is wrong is just a pretence.

But is it so clear? Surely he still either *recognises* it correctly or not. Can we not concede that the manometer is no objective test of his getting it right or wrong, but still hang on to the (verification transcendent, perhaps) distinction between being correct and seeming to himself to be correct? In #272 the interlocutor introduces this case: a person who behaves just as we all do, but who doesn't remember from one time to the next what pain feels like.

> "Imagine a person whose memory could not retain *what* the word 'pain' meant -so that he constantly called different things by that name- but nevertheless used the word in a way fitting in with the usual symptoms and presuppositions of pain - in short he uses it as we all do. Here I should like to say: a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it is not part of the mechanism."

The interlocutor says he "could not retain *what* the word 'pain' meant". So his case is parallel to the situation we have imagined in the case of the man with the manometer. We imagined him getting the prediction right, but getting the sensation recognition wrong. In this case, rather than the *manometer* giving us a use for the man's conviction, the fact that the person uses the word 'as we all do' gives us a use for his (perhaps wildly differing) private uses of the word.

But: he *uses the word as we all do*. In other words, he uses it correctly. The further question about what the word 'means' to him privately is a gratuitous twiddle on an unconnected knob.

Wittgenstein's persistent suggestion is that it is misleading to think that we are bound to get it right. Rather, the way we use the language of sensation rules out certain possibilities for getting it wrong. Nothing that happens would count as *misrecognition*: not because the objects in question are somehow luminous, but because the only possibilities the *grammar* of sensation-talk allows for getting it wrong are *misunderstanding* and *insincerity*. So avowals cannot be a cognitive achievement. A substantial cognitive activity can only take place against the background of a genuine distinction between successful and unsuccessful examples of it, between correct and incorrect (but sincere and comprehending) judgment. And no such distinction is expressed in the 'language-game' of sensations.

* * *

Section IV:Wittgenstein's Positive Picture of Avowals

Having rejected the misleading picture, what do we put in its place? We have been rejecting the idea that an avowal is an infallible description of a private mental state of affairs. How *do* avowals function? How do we account for first person authority? These questions begin to be answered at #270.

> "And what is our reason for calling 'S' the name of a sensation here? Perhaps the kind of way this sign is employed in this language-game. - And why a 'particular sensation', that is, the same one every time? Well aren't we supposing that we write 'S' every time?'

Why do we think the subject is right, given the problems we have faced in giving him a reason to believe that he is correctly identifying S each time? In the case of the man with the blood pressure problem, there seem to be several lines one could take:

(1) 'S' is the name of a sensation and sensations are individuated by phenomenological facts which are internal to the subject.

(2) 'S' seems to be the name of something internal to the subject, but really when it comes down to it, the meaning of 'S' can only be cashed out in public ways to which we all have access. So 'S', contrary to what we might think, is actually a description of what happens publicly, either in behaviour, or in this case what happens to the manometer.

(3)The meaning of 'S' is fixed functionally. It is 'whatever performs the functional role of giving the man the feeling he can tell the manometer will rise'. That way it doesn't matter if he recognises it correctly or not.

(4) Avowals cannot be assertions; they should be understood to be *expressions*.

The sceptical problems with the first suggestion are by now familiar: meaning cannot be fixed privately and internally. The second suggestion, the behaviourist account, has little going for it either. It has little initial plausibility; worse, it is not faithful to important facts about the grammar of avowals. The possibility of public meaning has been bought at the expense of an explanation of first person non-inferential authority. The third suggestion seems to put the emphasis in the wrong place. The subject says 'There is S again.' On the functionalist account, that is correct, if and only if the manometer rises. Note, though, not because he was necessarily right about the feel of the sensation, but because the sensation is now to be defined as 'whatever, under certain conditions, causes the manometer to rise'. So to count as having correctly identified the sensation it is enough for his judgement to be externally confirmed. This account is superior to the purely 'behaviourist' account; at least we seem to be talking about a sensation, rather than a manometer. But we still seem to take no account of how it actually feels to him. In particular his belief that the sensation which warns him that his blood pressure is rising is always that same one now seems to be an empty belief.

The argument that avowals cannot be assertions is much more interesting. It goes as follows. An assertion depicts a state of affairs. But if an avowal is an assertion, there seems to be a dilemma: either the state of affairs which makes it true is 'internal to the subject', a mental state of affairs, or it is external to the subject, a behavioural or physical state of affairs. As will by now be plain, this dilemma is too crude, and the suggestion here is that Wittgenstein avoids it by denying that avowals are assertions. This suggestion follows from a particular reading of certain passages in the *Blue Book* and *Philosophical Investigations*. In both passages Wittgenstein discusses the use of the word "I" as subject. In the *Blue Book*,

> "....it is as impossible that in making the statement 'I have a toothache', I should have mistaken another person for myself, as it is to moan with pain by mistake, having mistaken someone else for me....
> 'I have pain' is no more a statement about a particular person than moaning is."[25]

And the key passage of *Philosophical Investigations* is #244.[26] Recall that Wittgenstein asks

> "How do words refer to sensations?
> There doesn't seem to be a problem here; don't we talk about sensations every day and give them names? But how is the connection between the name and the things set up? This question is the same as how does a human being learn the meaning of the names of sensations? -of the word 'pain' for example. Here is one possibility : words are connected with the primitive, the natural expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences. They teach the child new pain behaviour."

The traditional interpretation of these passages goes back to Norman Malcolm. In the 1972 version of *Insight and Illusion*, Hacker quotes him as saying,

> "my sentences about my present sensations have the same logical status as my outcries and facial expressions.'

But as Hacker points out, the *Blue Book* passage is ambiguous. Is Wittgenstein claiming that

---

[25] Ludwig Wittgenstein *The Blue and Brown Books* Basil Blackwell 1958 (P. 67)

[26] This passage has already been quoted and discussed on P. 96 and ff.

(1) 'I am in pain' is not an assertion about a particular person. or that (2) 'I am in pain' is not an assertion at all? In other words, should we take these passages together, as Malcolm does, as the 'expressive' - or 'non-assertoric' - thesis, or should we see them as separate arguments directed at different issues? I believe that the passage in the *Blue Book* has nothing to say about avowals as such. The argument there is directed against the idea that "I" is a referring expression. So it denies that "I am in pain" *refers* to an individual any more than a groan does. It does not claim that "I am in pain" has no more assertoric content than a groan.

And I do not believe either that #244 should be understood to propose the non-assertoric thesis. In Section II, I outlined a different interpretation. Section II stressed the role that public behavioural and contextual criteria play in language acquisition: learning language marks the child's coming to grasp certain concepts. The target at #244 is the thought that a pre-linguistic sensation is a fully fledged concept waiting for a label. Think of this example of language acquisition. The small baby eats baby rice, and scrambled eggs and chocolate pudding. He certainly responds differently to these flavours and textures (some he spits out and some he swallows). But it is only in learning to use ordinary public words to talk about his sensations that the child learns to *think* about them. Spitting out baby rice is not a conceptual response, and in order to have a conceptual response to his food, the child has to learn to talk about different flavours and textures. The phenomenological feel of baby rice is not something an infant can use in an ostensive definition except under public controls. He can learn to use words like 'yucky' or 'slimy and unpleasantly bland' to talk about his sensations, but only in the context of a public practice in which 'the post' at which 'the sign is to be stationed' is clear.[27] Genuine thought about sensations is thus conditioned by constraints of public intelligibility from the outset. But this is not to say that 'I think this is disgusting' has no more content than spitting out.

---

[27] See #257, and again Budd's discussion, P 58-61 of *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology*.

The non-assertoric thesis was a response to a crude dilemma. The question seemed to be: if an avowal is a truth conditional assertion, where is the truth conferring state of affairs? We seemed to have to say it was either 'outside' or 'inside' the subject. So should we

(1) deny that avowals are assertions?

(2) say that they are assertions, and somehow give an account of the state of affairs 'going on' inside the subject, which makes a true avowal true?

(3) say that they are assertions, but the state of affairs which makes them true is a kind of behavioural state of affairs?

(4) sidestep the issue about where the truth conferrers are?

The line Wittgenstein intends is to sidestep. Avowals are assertions all right; they are apt for truth and falsity, but their truth or falsity is not conferred by a state of affairs existing 'somewhere or other' if the alternatives are only the Cartesian mental or things which because behavioural or physical are not *mental* at all. The question about where the state of affairs is, in a private box or on a public stage, is part of the paradox the grammar seems to want to force us into. And that is the paradox we can only avoid 'if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way'.

In Section II, the focus was the acquisition of very basic psychological language. A child is taught that he has a *sore* leg if he bumps it and cries. He is taught that he is *tired* when he is bad-tempered and it is past his bedtime. Acquiring the ability to avow is not simply acquiring, like the fledgling ornithologist, the capacity to discriminate between particular items. The temptation to be resisted is to think that language functions the same way in all contexts. If one did, one would think, on the model of the ornithological phonecall (in which one person might make suggestions about something that is in another's visual field), that the 'teacher' of sensation language is merely making an educated guess about the child's mental state. One would then be inclined to think that whereas the teacher is

competent with regard to what concepts there are to work with, the learner is competent to see what is actually happening internally (just as the fledgling ornithologist was competent to say what was in front of him).

What we acquire when we learn how to avow is not simply an inward looking discriminative capacity, but rather a linguistic competence. At #247, Wittgenstein remarks

> " 'Only you can know if you had that intention'
> One might tell someone this when one was explaining the meaning of the word 'intention' to him. For then it means: *that* is how we use it. (and here 'know' means that the expression of uncertainty is senseless.)"

And at #248,

> " The proposition 'Sensations are Private' is comparable to: 'One plays patience by oneself.' "

Wittgenstein's intention here is to deflate the apparent meaning of certain seemingly metaphysical claims. 'Sensations are private' and 'Only you can know if you had that intention' seem to be *philosophical* remarks. But taken so, they seem to say that there are certain features of the metaphysics of intentions and sensations which explain first/third person asymmetry in terms of the subject's privileged access. And that, as we have seen, is nonsense. But on the other hand, if we use the phrases 'as they are normally used (and how else are we to use them)' they are simply false. We *can* broadcast our feelings as publicly as we wish, and others often *do* know of our intentions.

Wittgenstein says remarks like these are *grammatical* rather than metaphysical. If one learns to play patience, one learns a game which can only be played alone: playing with another involves changing the game, not improving one's skills. Similarly, in acquiring the ability to think about one's own sensations it is a constraint on the concepts we thereby acquire that we can only think in just that way about *our own* sensations. Improving one's skills (even magically) could not result in being able to talk about someone else's sensations

in the way we talk about our own. We do not learn what sensations are, and then realise that they are things that people can only infallibly know about themselves. Rather, as we learn how to talk about sensations, so we learn how to think about them. And part of being competent in the use of avowals is learning the grammar which governs their use, and part of that grammar is the impossibility of entertaining doubt about the authority of the subject. No-one would fail to take seriously the cry of an animal caught in a trap. But this is not because we think it cannot be mistaken about how much pain it is in. We take the cry to be a primitive expression of its pain. Similarly, when a child cries in pain, or rubs his eyes, he is not performing an action, or at least there is a base class of cases in which his response is involuntary. No *intentional* explanation is appropriate: he does not cry because he *believes* he is in pain; he does not rub his eyes because he *believes* they feel prickly. Those actions are primitive expressions of what he is feeling.

'S' is the name of a particular sensation in just the case in which we are inclined to write 'S' each time we experience a particular sensation, *not* because we have good reason to think that our use of 'S' is infallible, but rather because, without the question of fallibility entering into the case, a speaker's/writer's inclinations play a *determinative* role in mental ascriptions. That (leaving questions of honesty to one side) is simply how we use avowals. The mistake is to think that what comes first, as it were, is a grip on the ontology of intentions and sensations, and that that ontology generates certain features in the way we talk about them. The mental does not have an ontological and epistemological nature which underlies those features of its 'grammar' which seem to suggest the Cartesian view. These features are primitive and constitutive. Wittgenstein wants us to see that the linguistic competence we acquire in order to talk about our own intentions and sensations sets limits on the way we can think.

* * *

Section V: Complexity, Competence and Avowability

I have begun to examine the nature of the linguistic competence we acquire when we become sophisticated enough to talk about our own and others' mental states. It has become clear that it is unhelpful to think of mental states and processes as if they were just like publicly observable states and processes in all but the interesting fact that they are observable only by the subject. First/third person asymmetry in our ability to talk about mental states is not a consequence of subjects' privileged access; rather it is part of the grammar of the language we must master in order to talk about them at all. If Wittgenstein's arguments are well taken, these philosophical considerations have profound implications for the ways in which it is possible to depict mental states.

This section will examine more closely the kinds of competence which are involved in mastering psychological language. The implications of Wittgenstein's position will cut deeper, partly as more is said about the mastery of sensation language, but more importantly as the discussion widens to include psychological states other than sensations. Phenomenological Realism is at its most attractive when thinking about descriptions of sensations, and thus far it is on sensations that the focus of the discussion has chiefly been fixed. The mental states into which Latimer had insight, in *The Lifted Veil,* were of course *not,* in the main, simple sensations. But had they been we might redescribe his gift in roughly the following way: Latimer has many queer sensations which he has reason to doubt are causally connected with anything which is happening to his own body. This 'gift' has become so entrenched that he comes to treat his own feelings (somehow associated with another person) as more reliable than the individual's own claims. X claims 'I'm much too hot' and Latimer, concentrating his attention on X, is able to conclude, on the basis of what he himself would be inclined to avow

on X's behalf, that X's avowal is insincere. Not a *very* interesting gift, but so far not incoherent, and not demanding a bizarre philosophy of mind.[28]

But suppose we now elaborate the fantasy in the following way: M is complaining bitterly about the lack of news from N, and X tries to say something soothing. He says 'I expect he'll be able to give you some good news tomorrow'. Can we make sense of a fiction in which Latimer is able concentrate on X and check whether that remark truly reported his thoughts? Is it conceivable that there is something presently occurring, from which Latimer might be able reliably to infer whether the remark was sincere? When X says 'I expect he'll be able to give you some good news tomorrow', in virtue of what is that a true report of his thought on the matter? If Latimer's gift is to make any sense, it has to turn out that X's remark, if it is true, is accompanied by one introspectible (or in Latimer's case inspectable) mental state, and false if it is accompanied by another. Let us suppose that X's remark was sympathetic, but unconsidered. He had in fact no view about whether there would be news tomorrow, and what's more, if there were news, then on balance X probably wouldn't want it to be good news as far as M is concerned, as that would conflict with the interests of L, whose interests are actually closer to X's heart.

Hopes and expectations, unlike sensations, are not necessarily presently occurring mental states. It is entirely possible that X's presently occurring thoughts could be almost the same when the remark actually represents his hopes as when it represents them falsely. (He might, for example, in both cases be preoccupied with concern for M. He might, for another example, in both cases be preoccupied with thinking that M was a self-pitying wretch, etc.) If someone thinks that it is possible fully to apprehend another's hopes, expectations, desires, etc

---

[28]Although the point still stands that people must *in general* have been sincere in order for Latimer to have acquired the vocabulary to talk about sensations.

merely on the basis of any thing presently occurring, they would have slipped into thinking that all mental states may be seen on the model of sensations.

It is (with care)[29] harmless and true to say that what makes an avowal of a sensation true or false is something presently occurring. The subject's *present* inclination sincerely to avow S, for example, plays a determinative role in truly ascribing the sensation S to him. But what governs the application of other mental descriptions? What kind of thing determines whether someone is disappointed, or distressed, or delighted? I have rejected the simple truth-conditional account of the meaning of these words according to which the truth conditions are thought of as pertaining wholly to phenomenological facts which are internal to the subject. In order to understand better what it means to say that someone is disappointed, or distressed, or delighted, we need to grasp more clearly the kinds of constraints which govern our use of those terms.

* * * *

The strategy of this section will be to try to pay attention to what kinds of consideration our ordinary use of psychological language is responsible to. I will make several claims.
(a) The degree of complexity we can build into the description of mental states is limited to the degree of complexity which can be expressed by its subject.
(b) Certain degrees of complexity cannot be expressed by a pre-or non-linguistic creature.
(c) Beyond a certain point, the degree of linguistic competence required to licence the application of complex mental states includes the mastery of the language of avowals.

29The 'care' is of course to note that the meaning of the avowal is fixed publicly. And the avowal is not made *on the basis of* an internal 'something', rather what is 'internal' is (partially) determined by the avowal.

(d) There must be constraints exerted by the subject's conception of his surroundings in order for certain propositional attitudes to be a correct report of his mental state.
The conclusion will be that what the subject is able to avow plays a central role in constraining the applicability of *certain* psychological ascriptions.

The first and second claims ought, I think, to be uncontentious. Many abstract claims are possible: (i) there are some mental states which are sufficiently simple to be permissibly ascribed to a child, even if the child were too unsophisticated to avow them directly, but which could not be ascribed to, say, a mouse; (ii) there are other mental states which are too sophisticated to be ascribed to a prelinguistic child, but could be ascribed to an adult, and so on. Hacker asks,

> "Does it make sense to say of a mouse that it has tingling sensations, feels nauseous, has a nagging ache in its shoulder?"[30]

These parenthetical (seemingly rhetorical?) questions seem to inhabit a borderline, along with many others. I don't, for example, know enough about the social behaviour of mice to hazard a guess as to whether they could feel lonely. (I suspect not, and if we substitute 'ladybird' for 'mouse' the suspicion becomes a certainty.) Some feelings are well this side of the border (mice certainly feel alarm when being chased by cats) and some are clearly the other side of it (it doesn't make sense to ask if mice ever feel nostalgic). So what is the nature of these distinctions, and in cases where there is doubt, what is the nature of the doubt?

The Phenomenological Realist's view would be that what makes it possible (or not) to ascribe mental states to children, mice and ladybirds, are facts about the interior discriminative capacities, or the phenomenological apparatus of the subject. We have to resist that line of thought if we are to understand the meaning of psychological language. The constraints which

---

[30] Hacker *Wittgenstein: Meaning and Mind* (P. 193)

govern their applicability are, of course, *public* constraints rather than ones relating to private internal facts about the creature in question. A mouse can certainly express its pain, but how might it express loneliness? In any case, the sorts of thing which would resolve the doubt in favour of the mouse would have to be facts about the social interaction of mice. A child, on the other hand, even one who had never heard the word 'lonely', might nevertheless *feel* lonely if, say, his big brother had recently started school. If the right surroundings obtained (the absence of his brother; his unwonted quietness; his delight when the boy returned, etc.) it would seem appropriate to say he felt lonely when his big brother was away. Children's social behaviour, and its context, are complex enough to sustain this psychological ascription.

The second claim was that certain degrees of complexity *cannot* be expressed by a pre- or non-linguistic creature, even one who is potentially a language user. If, for example, a mother were to say that her toddler felt *nostalgia* for the games he and his brother used to play, that would be fanciful. The difference between an emotional response to an existing situation of deprivation of some sort, and an emotional response which explicitly takes into account a previous situation in which there was no deprivation is too subtle to be ascribed to a subject who has not yet grasped tenses. In a *pre-linguistic* ascription, what grounds the applicability of the concept is behaviour and context. If we want to insist, and we surely do, that a pre-linguistic child can feel lonely, the only sense to be made of that is the thought that a feeling of loneliness is sufficiently unsophisticated to be expressed externally. The use of the concept which enables us to *talk* about a pre-linguistic child's loneliness is grounded in behaviour and context. By contrast, behaviour and context aren't rich enough to ground a claim about nostalgia except against a background of linguistic competence.

But the third proposition seems more contentious. Why should the degree of linguistic competence required to licence the application of complex mental states include mastery of the language of avowals? In what ways do avowals 'determine' mental states? The question is,

how would a child learn to avow loneliness? And the first thing to notice is the importance of the surroundings. In coming to see that 'I feel lonely' is an apt avowal, the competence the child acquires is not a discriminative capacity which enables him to recognise the existence of a preconceptual inner 'something'; rather he recognises that his misery is *made sense of* by his brother's absence. Children *learn* to say that they feel 'lonely' or 'frightened' or 'resentful' or 'disappointed'. Children *learn* the difference between feelings of anticipation and feelings of gratitude. A mother wouldn't wonder if, on the way home from his friend's party, the feeling her child described as 'anticipation' was (oddly inappropriately) correctly so described. She could tell him he didn't feel anticipation, as that is something you feel *before* something happens. Maybe he feels pleased he was asked? glad he enjoyed it? relieved it's over? A child evinces a feeling, and the language teacher teaches him how to conceptualise and talk about it. The child does so by behaving in a certain way or by making certain avowals, and this will happen in particular circumstances. On the basis of this they are *taught the character* of their feelings. And notice that such learning of words and concepts doesn't proceed by cross-questioning on the part of learner or teacher about shades of phenomenology and nuances of the interior. Major determinants of the meaning of psychological concepts other than the simplest sensations are the surroundings, the context in which they occur.

The process can be subtle. A child may be taught, of his feelings towards his baby sibling, that it is normal to feel jealous and put out when a new baby arrives. In this way his feelings become less frightening and amorphous to him. But, to put it paradoxically, what individuates the feeling is not a particular 'feel'. What might be the phenomenology of a young child's jealousy of a new baby ? - thoughts of bashing the offender on the head - inexplicable desires to do things he hasn't done for years, like suckle - more physical things like a quickened pulse, dry mouth, a feeling of being permanently on the verge of tears. The point is that a close description of the phenomenology would neither help them to understand their feelings, nor pin the feelings down as sibling rivalry. Two children might be going through the

same experience without having a very similar phenomenology; and a mother may fear her child is jealous when in fact he has 'flu. What would make the emotional turmoil count as 'jealousy' is a complex matter. The mother might say, 'It's hard that the baby is taking so much time, isn't it?', or 'Would you like it if we left the baby with granny for the afternoon? We could go to the zoo'. In asking these questions, she isn't asking if the child had formulated that thought or expressed to itself the desire to spend time alone with his mother. She is making suggestions which she thinks may help. If she is right, the child will feel better, and will be able to make more sense of his feelings. If she is wrong, the suggestions won't help (if, for example, this was the child with flu, he would rather go to bed with a hot drink than trail round the zoo with his mother.) The mother who does understand better than her child how he is feeling is giving him a context to help make sense of his feelings, and he can only learn to think about his feelings by understanding the ways in which that context does make sense of his feeling. The child does not simply attach a word or phrase (jealousy, fear of loss of love, sibling rivalry) to a pre-defined inner state.

But there is a worry in the offing. Surely it is is a truism that if the child *does* learn to avow his jealousy or his loneliness in circumstances like these, he is learning to apply precisely the same concept to himself as *we* were willing to ascribe to him pre-linguistically? But if that is granted, are we not committed to the thought that just that feeling must have been 'there', as a 'something' pre-linguistically? Mice and babies feel some sensations, like pain and hunger. When we say they do, are we saying they feel the same sensations as we do, despite their inability to avow, and despite their inability to conceptualise their feelings? If so, are we not, willy nilly, back with the preconceptual inner, the beetle in the box? And if not, this seems to leave Wittgenstein in the highly revisionary position of claiming that mice and men cannot both feel the same sensations.

I want to suggest that this dichotomy is too simple. Learning to talk about, and so to think about one's feelings is not like learning to think about objects. I take it that that is John McDowell's point when he says

> "..when an external object figures in one's thought, it is there for one's thinking anyway, independently of the specific predication one's thought makes concerning it, and this is exactly not so with a sensation."[31]

Certainly, the subject did not bring his loneliness into being by conceptualising it, and of course the quality of the 'inner feeling' also has a role to play. But that point does not militate against the fact that in making distinctions between different mental states we are not discriminating between qualities of the 'inner feeling'. Rather, we frequently talk about the *same* feeling giving rise to different inner experiences; and conversely, if the circumstances which gave rise to the inner experience are different in quality, we will talk about different emotions. We might call two people 'depressed', for example, although one was insomniac and anorexic, and the other lethargic and fat. And, on the other hand, suppose, for example, someone is trying to formulate a thought, and after many attempts, it still proves elusive. The phenomenology is familiar, although difficult enough to describe. As one paces about, or makes tea, or sighs heavily, what does one feel? - restlessness? - a dryness in the mouth? - a heaviness in the stomach? - an urge to kick something? A word like 'frustration' would be appropriate, possibly edging into 'boredom', or 'despondency'. Suppose instead you are waiting for an important message, and it is now so late that you begin to wonder if you will have to leave without it. The phenomenology might be similar (restlessness, dryness in the mouth, heaviness in the stomach, the urge to kick something) but here the words 'undecided', 'impatient', 'angry' and 'resentful' become appropriate, and words like 'discouraged' are out of place. Not because there is a distinctive sinking quality to the feeling in the first case, which is missing in the second, but rather because 'discouragement' is a feeling associated with

---

[31] John McDowell, 'One Strand in the Private Language Argument' Grazer Philosophische Studien Internationale Zeitschrift Für Analytische Philosophie Vol 33/4 1989 (P. 300)

disappointment with oneself, rather than in the face of disappointments meted out by tardy postmen. Whether this particular example seems convincing is unimportant. Think about feelings like anticipation and dread; anger and shame; guilt and remorse; reminiscence and fantasy. There would often, from the point of simply analysing the phenomenology, be no way of knowing which psychological description was appropriate.

But, of course, loneliness and nostalgia and anger and shame are *not* simple sensations. They do not, on that account, present the 'truism' I feel in danger of flouting quite so starkly. Although it is simple enough to be expressed non-linguistically, the word 'lonely' is not going to be among the child's first words. A child who was ready to learn 'lonely' probably *did* express his feelings verbally, only in other words, ('Will he be home soon?' 'When will I go to school?' etc). But what of the case when we ascribe simple sensations to animals and babies? My thought is that our concept of, say, pain is so closely tied to physical manifestations, in terms of injury, illness, bodily reactions and our knowledge of biology, that it would be inconsistent in us to reserve the concept 'pain' only for those things when they happen to and in human bodies of linguistically competent people. Babies and animals do feel pain: and indeed they express it non-verbally. The concepts involved in talking about the feelings animals have are publicly grounded.

The crunch comes with this question: when children learn to avow, it seems as if they learn the ability to say truly, of themselves, just what others truly said of them before they learned to talk. We don't want to wind up saying that the sensation I ascribe to a mouse or a three month old baby is covered by a different concept to the one I ascribe to the same baby when he has learned to avow his own sensations. Still, I hope that "it is not impossible to keep one's head here."[32] Consider the case of hunger. It is a fairly simple concept, but it is also

---

32 ibid (P. 301)

fairly comprehensive. It covers many states, from peckishness verging on boredom, to the ravenous craving for food of someone who has, with little sustenance, laboured physically hard and long, to the state of deprivation suffered by the chronically starved. The phenomenology of all these states is of course very different, but it is not a pun to suggest that they are all 'hunger'. Consider the hunger experienced by two small children. Daniel is three months old, Isaac is two. Daniel feels hunger frequently. He expresses this in unmistakable ways: he cries, he stuffs his fists in his mouth, he roots for the nipple, he sucks, etc. Isaac too feels hunger. Sometimes he expresses it directly, sometimes he expresses it obliquely, by being crotchety; but I think he too expresses hunger in unmistakable ways. The question at issue is, as Isaac learns to avow his hunger, is he merely learning to say, truly of himself, what others can say, truly, of Daniel at 4:00 am? I want to suggest that that is too simplistic. Take a day when Isaac expresses his hunger obliquely, by being crotchety. If his mother were to say, "Would you like some lunch?", and Isaac were to treat this as a revelation, and perk up with cries of "Soup! Crisps! Cookies!", I think it would be philosophically innocuous to say that while he was, of course, hungry throughout, what was going on for him, mentally, after he has learned the appropriateness of the avowal, is subtly different. It is not that he thinks, "Ah yes! That is what that feeling was" and the avowal simply enables him to report it; it is rather that the mental state involved in being able to conceptualise his current feeling *as* something which would be assuaged by food is subtly different to the discomfort simply caused by the fact that he needed to be fed. I want to suggest that Isaac sometimes experiences the mental state of hunger, simpliciter, and sometimes experiences avowable hunger, whereas Daniel only ever experiences hunger. And of course our readiness to think that Isaac is able to conceptualise his hunger, and our knowledge that Daniel never does, rests on Isaac's mastery of the language of avowals.

The fourth claim, that there are constraints exerted by the subject's conception of his surroundings in order for the ascription of certain propositional attitudes, is more complicated to argue for. Before we can understand the way in which ascriptions of propositional attitudes have content, explicit attention has to be given to what I characterised as the second strand of Phenomenological Realism, namely the thought that all psychological states are seen on the model of sensations.

Sensations have several features which ill fit them to be the paradigm mental state. First, they are, necessarily, occurrent states. If one becomes so distracted that one is no longer aware of pain, then one is no longer in pain. But clearly if X is distracted from the consideration of his own beliefs and desires by M's distress, they are still his beliefs and desires. If someone were to decide to make a list of their beliefs and desires, however conscientiously they carried out the project, there would be many beliefs and desires left out which they currently have. If Latimer were, somehow or other, to have a set of thoughts and feelings which he believed represented X's stream of consciousness, it is true that it might give him reason to believe that X was sincere (or insincere) about his sensations, but no set of thoughts and feelings could either confirm or deny X's avowals of propositional attitudes. For they are not reports of presently occurring mental states and processes, and the information X's stream of consciousness could supply would radically underdetermine the correct mental ascription. To question whether someone has a particular propositional attitude is not to ask whether there is something introspectible (or fantastically inspectable) currently taking place.

A second reason why sensations are ill-fitted as the paradigm mental state is related. Because a sensation is present when and only when it is available to consciousness, one is able to date its onset and departure. If we feel inclined to say that a headache came on gradually, or a fluey feeling developed throughout the day, we are talking about an increase in intensity. Of course, we *can* speak of suddenly conceiving a desire for something, coming to understand,

beginning to hope, or expect; and one can as suddenly stop wanting that thing, lose one's grip, lose all hope, and cease to expect. But this *need* not be a feature of hopes, fears, desires and beliefs; we might often find it impossible to say when a particular belief or desire began. And when we cannot date the onset of a belief or desire, there is no necessary play with intensity. At time t_1 one did not believe a particular proposition, or desire a certain outcome. Now one does. The truth conditions for ascription of beliefs and desires are a much more complex and subtle matter than anything determined purely by changes in the consciousness of the subject.

The third point may seem to pull in the opposite direction. Sensations are easily introspectible, but they are not necessarily conceptualisable by the subject. We think that animals and babies can feel hunger or pain, or too hot, or too cold. But in saying this we say nothing about their ability to think about their experience. Sensations have a particular feel, and we can often give a qualitative description of that feel above the head of the subject. When a cat gets up and moves a few feet away from the fire, we can say the cat moved away from the fire because it was feeling too hot, but it would be wrong to think it must have made a *judgement* about its temperature, or in any way *conceptualised* its sensations; and when the vet says, 'O'Malley will be feeling a certain amount of discomfort,' she doesn't think that the cat has concepts like 'discomfort', still less 'a certain amount'. We use *our* concepts to give a description of the cat's sensations. A claim about a cat's sensations is conceptually constrained by behavioural and contextual facts, including theoretical facts both about the degree of injury, and about the behaviour we take to be expressive of degrees of intensity of pain. But the claim does not have to be true to the cat's conceptualisation of those feelings.

If we think that propositional attitudes are like sensations in this respect, we are inclined to underestimate the degree to which our freedom to read content into a propositional attitude is circumscribed. When we claim 'He believes that P', 'He hopes that Q', 'He suspects that R', etc, those ascriptions cannot completely disregard the subject's conceptual resources.

To say that is not to say that the propositional content must always be *present* to the subject; that, of course, was precisely the point of comparison in the first two points. The content of the proposition is *not*, somehow, currently 'in the mind' of the subject, so there may be a lack of introspectible propositional content. For example, while it is true that I believe that the earth is round, and I suspect it will be windy tomorrow, and true that I had those propositional attitudes early this morning, the content of those propositions was not present to me until a moment ago.

So how, on this picture, does talk about propositional attitudes have content at all? It is not crudely that if we are justified in making a claim about a subject's propositional attitudes then the subject must have the concepts with which we make the ascription. We do, for example, at the limiting case, sometimes want to ascribe propositional attitudes (as well as sensations) to animals. It is instructive to think both about the extent to which we are seriously ascribing content, and about the conditions under which this makes sense. Consider Wittgenstein's example, at #650.

> "We say a dog is afraid his master will beat him; but not, he is afraid his master will beat him tomorrow. Why not?"

The answer is, of course, that the concept of 'tomorrow' is not one we have any right to ascribe to a dog: it is a concept which it is impossible to get a grip on without some linguistic competence. But it is a subtle matter to spell out what that means. After all, when we say the dog is afraid his master will beat him, it would be equally implausible to think that in doing so we claim that the dog has a specific conception of a beating, or even of a master. We use *our* concepts to describe the dog's fear, and indeed *our* concepts to pick out the object of his fear.[33]

---

[33]For a more extended discussion of the proper ascription of propositional attitudes to the dog, see Crispin Wright's discussion. He has rather different philosophical fish to fry; his intention is to show the degree to which we *are* entitled to ascribe propositional attitudes above the head of the subject; mine is to set the limit on the degree to which that is possible. The common ground is the insistence that propositional attitude in this case is fixed by context and behaviour. 'Theories of Meaning and Speakers' Knowledge', in *Realism Meaning and Truth.*

The temptation is to think that what makes it true that the dog is afraid his master will beat him is something like the fact that there is a representation of the proposition my master will beat me somewhere in the dog's mind, surrounded by a nimbus of fear. If that is entirely wrong, what is going on? Is it not true, then, that that is the content of the attitude? First, the negative claim: what makes that the right description is not simply facts about the dog's current mental state. What makes that the right description is the fact that the dog feels fear *in a particular context*. The context would presumably be quite rich. The dog's fear would have to have a particular causal history. Someone would presumably have had to beat him. Had he always been treated with kindness, and never observed any beatings, the dog could not have that fear. There is a limit to a dog's, if not a human's, capacity for neurosis. And even if we wanted to say something like 'That dog is the most neurotic dog I've ever met. It has never been treated with anything but kindness and yet it cowers and cringes whenever it sees its master', even that description of its behaviour, if it were cut off from an appropriate causal history, would radically underdetermine 'He is afraid his master will beat him' as the correct mental ascription. He might, for example, sense some occult evil about his master, or dislike the smell of his galoshes.[34] In order for the content to be fixed, there would have to be facts about the dog's history which would fix on that ascription as the most appropriate one. Similarly, future facts would have to bear out the ascription. In particular, facts about how the animal responds to his master in the future are pertinent. The remark would be false, made of a dog which bounced up with a wagging tail when its master came home. (There is a limit to a

---

[34]Even if we were to suppose that the dog only responded with cowering and cringing when his master had a stick in his hand, without the appropriate context we would not be justified in claiming that it feared its master would beat it. Apparently some small rodents have a pre-wired, *not* a learned, response to a hawk shaped shadow. If it falls upon them, they respond by fleeing. In a context in which a dog had a similar response to an upraised stick, it would be wrong to say it feared its master would beat it.

dog's, if not a human's, capacity for dissembling.)[35] The only kind of propositional content we can ascribe to an animal's attitudes is content which is established by context and which does not demand linguistic expression. We can say a dog is afraid his master will beat him, because the content of that propositional attitude can be established by context and does not demand linguistic expression; we cannot say a dog is afraid his master will beat him tomorrow, because there is no conceivable context into which we could put his fear, which would not radically underdetermine my master will beat me tomorrow as the correct description of the content of the dog's fear.

The point about animals is important. It sets an upper limit on the degree of content we can ascribe without linguistic competence: without linguistic competence, there is no possibility of ascribing certain sorts of content. It also highlights the importance of context in fixing the content of mental ascriptions. We may now be better placed to address the question what, in the case of content which is too complex to be expressed without language, makes it the case that a propositional attitude has a particular content.

How, for example, in someone's hope that Margaret Thatcher would not be re-elected for the second time, and his dismay when she was, was the content of his hope and dismay represented in his thought? Whatever the answer to this question, it is certainly not the case, any more than with the dog, that the proposition, Thatcher will be re-elected, needs somehow to have been represented in his mind, with a negative marker next to it, so that his state of mind could have been read off by Latimer, or God, or his author. So what

---

35 And note that these remarks about the limits of dogs' inability to be neurotic or deceitful, are not remarks about their honesty and mental health. Wittgenstein's remark at #250 is surely completely convincing. "Why can't a dog simulate pain? Is he too honest?.....the surroundings which are necessary for this behaviour to be real simulation are missing."

was true of him, during the weeks before the election, as his hopes burned steadily dimmer, in virtue of which it was true to say he hoped she would not be re-elected?

It is tempting to think that there would be presently occurring thoughts which would necessarily determine the content of his propositional attitude. He would presumably have had reactions to facts pertaining to the election. Suppose, for example, the latest opinion poll were on the front page of the newspaper: Conservatives 42% Labour 36% etc. He might have seen it and groaned. But even if we had been able (who knows how, electronically?) to monitor his thoughts during an episode like this, we should not expect to have found anything to represent unequivocally the content of his hope. We might be able to read off the occurrent thought "Oh no!". Let's suppose we can even detect a plunge in mood. But first, he needn't say the figures over to himself in order for it to be true that it was precisely to the numbers in the opinion poll that he was reacting. I am not convinced there need be anything in his thought, as well as in the newspaper, to represent the poll to which he was reacting.

We might suppose that if he took the numbers in they *must* have run through his mind (very quickly!), so the second point is stronger. Just as with the dog's propositional attitude, not only *behaviour,* but also *context*, and *surroundings,* have a determinative role to play. His behaviour with the opinion poll does make it true that he hoped that Thatcher would not be re-elected. But, cut off from surroundings in which elections are run the way they are, and opinion polls have the predictive (and possibly manipulative) status that they have, this episode would bear no necessary relation to the hopes which they manifest. If it were true, in politics as in tennis, that the Great British Public like an underdog, his manifest misery at seeing the Conservatives ahead at that point might mean that he thought that this would provoke a swing against them. Moreover, if it were the case that he later gave a cheer when Thatcher was re-elected, while there would have to be a story to be told

about why he reacted the way he did to that particular opinion poll, it is not difficult to envisage one. (Maybe he misunderstood, and thought that in order to have a mandate Thatcher would have to get at least half the country's votes, or whatever.)

So the propositional content of his hopes, and that they were *hopes*, was fixed in part by the surroundings, by facts about the British electoral system, facts about the British Press, and sociological facts about the role of Public Opinion Polls in the run-up to elections, etc. So, even in the case of a propositional attitude with a fairly sophisticated content, surroundings, context, and behaviour have a determinative role to play in fixing the content of propositional attitudes. Sometimes even with subjects who are linguistically competent propositional attitudes will be of the sort which can be ascribed purely on these grounds. But clearly there is no non-linguistic behaviour which could determine the content of this attitude. And there need not be any particular linguistic behaviour in any given instance (a groan, or throwing a newspaper down in disgust, is not linguistic behaviour). I want to suggest that in cases like these, *negative* constraints on giving an account of a propositional attitude will be exerted by the subject's understanding. In the ascription of more sophisticated attitudes, the subject's own conception of the context and the surroundings will play a determinative role. In this example, had he not known the election was on; had he not known Margaret Thatcher was the present Prime Minister; had he not known what the Conservative Party was; had he not known what a public opinion poll was etc etc etc, he *could* not have had a propositional attitude with that content. And that is irrespective of his phenomenological apparatus, and his affective capabilities.

The ascription of complex propositional attitudes does not demand only that the subject be *capable* of certain kinds of competence and mastery; it demands that the content under which the subject is said to have a preference, a hope, a suspicion, or whatever be

informed by a description under which the subject would recognise it. That is, unless certain avowals would be *possible,* the ascription would collapse.

Consequently, there are constraints on the ascription of mental states above the head of a subject. And the implications of this for the reading of *Middlemarch* are profound. An author can of course tell us her character believed something to be the case without telling us what propositions they entertained. But what she cannot do is tell us her characters believed something to be the case despite the fact that they *could not have* entertained any propositions in virtue of which it would be true. She cannot tell us her characters 'sensed' that things were a certain way, if there are no discriminations they could make, or that they 'suspected' certain things, or 'brooded' over certain things in a fiction which rules out, either explicitly or implicitly, the *possibility* of their making the kinds of avowals which could ground those propositional attitudes. She can leave out evidence whenever she likes, but she cannot create an intelligible fiction in which those mental events take place *in the absence of* any of the surroundings which constrain the meanings of the words she uses.

* * *

Section VI: Unconscious Mental States

The contention of the preceding five sections has been that the meaning of words which enable us to talk about mental states is not grounded by reference to states of affairs which are private, purely mental, and internal to the subject. The arguments of the second section are reasonably familiar. They suggested that if mastery of psychological language is to be possible at all, there must be conceptual, and not merely evidential links with public facts which ground them. Perhaps less familiar are the considerations of the third and fourth sections. They urged

that in order to give an account of the asymmetry between first and third person ascriptions, we have to understand the *determinative* character of the subject's avowals. Once this line of argument was broadened to give a positive picture of the constraints which govern the ascription of complicated psychological states, it emerged that what a subject is able to *avow* plays a central role in grounding the meaning of psychological language.

Our conclusion is that there are many things wrong with the picture of the mind the Phenomenological Realist finds congenial: firstly, it conceives of sensations as purely interior items of some sort; secondly, avowals are merely (more or less) infallible descriptions; thirdly, all mental states are conceived of as if they were, like sensations, occurrent; lastly, the correct ascription of mental states can float free of anything presently avowable on the part of the subject.

I have suggested that George Eliot is committed to the view of mental ascriptions which has thereby been discredited. So far, this suggestion has rested on the analysis of a minor novel. In the fourth chapter, I will extend my analysis to discuss in detail the ways in which she manifests her implicit commitment in psychological passages of *Middlemarch*. But this much, so far, is clear: the account of psychological ascriptions I have given sets limits on the attractive and commonplace thought that novels are the perfectly apt place to chart problematic areas of our mental lives by giving us insight directly into what a character is feeling. Novels are indeed able to explore thoughts and fears 'from the inside', so they can give us access past the sometimes blank unreflective surface of ordinary social exchanges. Furthermore, they can depict a character's thoughts and feelings even when they themselves may have been unaware of them, so they can indeed explore what we are inclined to regard, metaphorically, as a subterranean level where our complex thoughts and emotions take place without our being able to understand them. But by setting conceptual constraints on the applicability of psychological descriptions, my arguments suggest that there are limits to this ability. If novelists stray beyond

them, they become merely incoherent and fanciful, and not at all insightful. And often it is precisely in the passages which explore the unconscious motivation of her characters that I find George Eliot's language philosophically unsound. My worry, put bluntly, is that her characters' thoughts are too subtle to be grounded in their behaviour, but certainly cannot be grounded in their avowals either.

A *prima facie* response is that we can't expect subtle thoughts and emotions to be grounded behaviourally; and that some states of mind cannot be grounded in avowals simply because they are *unconscious*. One way to make that response speak directly to my unease with George Eliot's psychological language would be to understand it as a restatement of Phenomenological Realism. It is clear that if that is embraced, an unconscious mental state, like a conscious one, will be understood to be an inner mental item of some sort. It would be one whose nature the subject did not understand, and/or to whose phenomenological 'feel', he was, for one reason or another insensitive. On this picture, the description of the mental object need not be constrained by anything in particular in the subject's behaviour *or* consciousness. And an omniscient author would have unconstrained ability to show us not only the contrast between appearances and the inner reality for any individual, but also to reveal, indeed create, the inner reality for that person in spite of what he himself might, in the overt fiction, believe. But I locate the source of this thought precisely in the misapprehensions about the mind we have been setting right. The novelist's authority in this matter *seems* unquestionable, just as does her authority to tell us what is inside the cupboards as well as what's on the open shelves of her fictional houses. There is a label on a cupboard door which says 'Office Supplies', and she can tell us it contains whisky. But, I have argued, this is not how it is with unconscious mental states. If the picture of a mental state as a private mental item is rejected, and with it the idea of a fully realised, but inaccessible mental realm, then even an author cannot stipulate (let alone be perceptive) about it, unless she observes the relevant conceptual constraints. A fictional description of non-existent mental facts can no more explore the intricate possibilities

open to the psychological than fiction about time-machines can provide reason for believing in the conceptual feasibility of travelling through time.

But if the force of those conceptual limits is to be felt, this account of the mental which puts such determinative weight on avowability, has to be defended in the face of the fact that people *are* often mistaken when they avow their mental states. I do not wish to deny that feelings, desires, thoughts, hopes and fears can be very complex. Not only may other people be going through complicated emotional experiences without our having any inkling of them; also our own mental lives may indeed sometimes be too painful or baffling for us to understand. Thus far, naively interpreted, the account of mental states which sees avowals as determinative seems to deny that people are ever confused or self-deceived. The aim of this section is to show why that would indeed be a naive interpretation: the suggestion will be that the felt 'problem' of accounting for unconscious mental states *arises* from misunderstanding the role of consciousness in the ascription of mental states. The problem disappears once two things are grasped: the first is the *nature* of the determinative role of avowals; the second is the way in which the meaning of ascriptions of mental states is fixed by the relation which avowable states bear to behaviour and context.

The *prima facie* problem is that it looks as if in order for a person to be unconsciously fearful, or still hopeful unbeknownst to himself, or suspicious without acknowledging it, he must be in a state of mind which consists in his feeling a certain way, but without currently *feeling* that way. Either he does feel that way (angry or fearful or hopeful or suspicious) in which case in what sense is it unconscious? Or he doesn't, currently, feel that way, in which case why should that particular state of mind be ascribed at all? Despite the many philosophical stratagems to account for self-deception, I suspect that once one has in place the assumption that the truth condition for the ascription of fear or hope or suspicion is purely private, mental

and internal to the subject, not only does the problem of unconscious mental states seem unavoidable, it is also intractable.

Talk about unconscious mental states falls easily into metaphors. We talk of being too 'blind' or 'blocked' to see what is going on. These metaphors are congenial to the perceptual model. It sounds as if 'something' is going on which we cannot see. And metaphors like 'I think I knew, deep down' and so on, encourage us to think that reactions, feelings, and expectations which conflict with what a subject is able to avow take place at a *deep* level, below the level of lucid consciousness. Similarly, some kind of subsystemic account seems a plausible way of interpreting the thought that an unconscious state seems to casts a shadow over, or add a texture to, or deepen the shade of the conscious state it 'underlies'. Of course the perceptual and subsystemic models are not exclusive. Both take seriously the idea that the truth condition for psychological claims about a subject is a state of affairs which currently exists within that subject's mind. Introspection is seen on the perceptual model, and the subsystemic model takes over in cases where the subject's inability to introspect their own mental states seems particularly obdurate.

The perceptual model is an obviously seductive starting point. Unlike the account I am proposing, which sees avowals as, in an interesting way yet to be made fully explicit, *determinative* of the mental state which can truly be ascribed to the subject, the perceptual model gives a straightforward distinction between a subject's being *in* a state of mind and his being aware of it. Basically, the difference between being in a mental state, and being aware of it, is like the difference between having something in your visual field, and noticing it. The perceptual model does not have to have recourse to a subsystemic model. It can make reductive moves. The aim of a reductive move, in debates about the paradoxes of self-deception, is to try to account for the psychological phenomena we call self deception, or akrasia, or the Unconscious, in ways which allow us simply to deny that there is a real conflict between the

states of mind which a subject seemingly feels at any given moment.[36] Even more simply, one could try, for example, to embrace the second horn of the dilemma, and see the states of mind as succeeding one another, rather than coexisting. So the idea would be that an individual might feel fear, or hope or suspicion at t_1 without inspecting it too closely. Then, at t_2, trying to report his feeling, he misremembers and misdescribes it. On this account we would call a fear 'unconscious' if a subject was unable to report it, but the truth condition could still be something private and mental. The obvious problem with accounts like these is that although they give an account of some kinds of self-deception, they fail to account for the full range of relevant psychological phenomena. In particular, they leave no space for the occasions when the conscious state of mind is, as we might say, reverting again to metaphor, *subtly shot through with* the unconscious state.

But the perceptual model has other reductive resources: it might look simply as if a state of mind which is present to consciousness can be complex, and subjects are sometimes just not conceptually sophisticated enough to make the right categorization of their own mental state. On this picture, what we would call 'unconscious' states of mind would be subtle and intricate states of mind, which the subject is apt to confuse for other simpler ones. There are two things wrong with that picture. First, like other reductive accounts, it doesn't do justice to the psychological facts. The air of paradox is not so easily dispersed. *Sometimes*, in cases of self-deception, we feel that more rigorous or thoughtful introspection would have changed what we felt inclined to say, but even in that case it doesn't seem simply like a conceptual error of introspection. We do not feel we were simply mistaking one feeling for another. Particularly in

---

[36]Mele, A. has written a book and many articles on self deception. His central project is to solve the paradoxes in ways which would allow us to hold on to the idea that the applicability of mental ascriptions rests on something currently introspectably true of the subject.
eg, Mele, Alfred R. *Irrationality: an essay on Akrasia, Self-deception and Self Control* (1987)
Mele, Alfred R., 'Pears on Akrasia and Defeated Intentions' in *Philosophical* (Israel) vol 14 pp145-152
Mele, Alfred R., 'Self-deception' *The Philosophical Quarterly* vol 33 pp366-377

emotionally loaded situations, our conviction that we are *not* feeling anything other than what we claim to feel can be pretty firm, and yet on reflection we have to revise our assessment of our own feelings. To revert to metaphor again, sometimes it seems as if the unconscious state is on a pretty deep level, and its effect on the conscious state minimal. It might be philosophically hygienic to insist that the mental state of, say, genuinely *thinking* oneself reconciled to a disappointment when in fact one is still angry, is one which it is easy to confuse with the mental state of genuinely *being* purely reconciled to a disappointment . But it doesn't do justice to the intuition that the subject is, at least in one sense, only aware of being reconciled to the disappointment.

It is at this point that a subsystemic account can seem a natural supplement to the perceptual model. David Pears tries to give a philosophical account of the Freudian picture. He says,

> "There is then one centre of activity in the subject's contemporary consciousness and another in the reservoir....
> Freud pictures the reservoir as a single pool of ideas and affects, or, more strictly as two pools, the preconscious and the unconscious, standing behind the stream of consciousness and feeding it in a carefully controlled way."[37]

Of course in the case that Pears is interested in, the separate 'centre of activity' actually initiates action, whereas in the case I am interested in it need not. It may be merely one of the pool of affects with no behavioural aspect. But the picture might be roughly the same. The fears, hopes, suspicions etc. could be in one or other pool, either preconscious or unconscious, and the continuous stream of consciousness could flow over them quite unawares.

I have some problems in taking this account seriously. Throughout this chapter, I have been rehearsing reasons to doubt that the truth conditions for the applicability of certain

---

[37] Pears, D. *Motivated Irrationality* (London: Duckworth, 1978)

psychological predicates relate to purely interior mental items. This poses some difficulty for seeing the initial problem, for akrasia as well as for unconscious purely mental states. I will return to those difficulties. But, even if for the moment I grant that it is sensible so to conceive the mental states in question, and so to find the problem, it is hard to see how a separate 'centre of activity' could help to resolve it. The separate centre must itself be a feeling thing, a centre of consciousness, or how could it have affective mental states? The suggestion is not that mental states like fear and hope have a conscious and a non-conscious component. It is that the subject is *presently experiencing* the mental state in question at another level. If the subject is, without realising it, resentful as well as disappointed, he really is now feeling resentful. So it seems the subsystem can itself feel resentment or fear, experience hope, be suspicious, relieved or whatever. In which case it isn't altogether certain what the relation is between this subsystem and the dominant consciousness. The metaphor of the subsystem 'feeding' the main system is wholly unclear. One presumably is invited to ignore the aspect of the metaphor which makes the subsystem seem like a separate individual, with plans and designs. So questions like, Who is being 'careful'? Who is in 'control'? The sub-system? (Who is this guy?) are presumably out of order. But if we do ignore that, it is not obvious there's much left to the metaphor. And in that case, it is not obvious what the connection between the two systems is. In the case of akrasia, at least the subject in question *does* something. He does something he feels is against his best interests, so the link between the two systems is in one sense clear enough- they belong to the same body, a body which does things: things which sometimes the subject can rationalise, according to beliefs and desires he knows himself to have; and which, at other times, lead him and others to suspect the machinations of the subsystem. But as an *explanation* of anything the idea of a subsystem seems to raise (far) more problems than it solves. What we started with was the problem of trying to see how it could be that a person could be in a certain mental state, and yet on introspection be unable to report on the existence of the mental state in question. What we ended up with was the much worse problem of trying to make sense of a virtual homunculus, with a very rich and varied mental life: in particular with, apparently, the

courage to face up to feelings which its subject would normally disavow; and, presumably, quasi theoretical ideas about how much the main system can take, on the basis of which it 'carefully feeds' the main system with the feelings and thoughts it thinks it is strong enough to cope with.

This suggestion certainly gives *some* kind of account of why consciousness is not able to introspect all mental states with equal ease, but it only does so by throwing us a highly metaphorical picture, and without further explication the metaphor explains nothing. Moreover, in the case where what we want to explain is not irrational *action* but a purely mental unconscious state of affairs, the suggestion that there is a subsystem in a certain mental state seems even *prima facie* quite unhelpful. Without an explanation of what the relationship is between the dominant consciousness and the subsystem, which makes it sensible to see the subsystem as another layer of the subject's personality (rather than an unconnected person who eerily seems to live like a ghost in his head) it is not at all clear with what reason the subsystem's mental states are regarded as anything to do with the subject.

* * *

Section VII: An alternative account

Very sketchily, these are the *kinds* of difficulties I think the perceptual and subsystemic models run into: clearly much more would need to be said. As is clear from the arguments of the previous sections, the most significant problem is that both models flow from a bad account of what a mental state is. What is still wanting, however, is a positive account of how it can be that subjects can make sincere, but false, avowals; an account which does not call into question insights about the nature of avowals and their centrality in the characterisation of mental states, but still has the resources to explain the existence of unconscious mental states. We need to explain the psychological facts without resort to a subsystem; or to construing sincere, but

false, avowals as due either to failure, on the part of the subject, to introspect carefully or honestly enough, or to an inability to understand her internal private mental states of affairs.

The key is not to allow a radical split between unconscious and conscious intentions. Rather we should consider more closely just how much 'consciousness' is involved in ordinary mental attributions. The answer to that question will make space for an account of the unconscious which does not differ structurally from standard cases of psychological ascription. In rejecting an attractive but misleading picture of what psychological ascriptions are like, we can avoid the necessity for providing the very radical kind of explanation *unconscious* mental attributions seem to demand. What is traditionally taken to be evidence that there must be mental states which are unconscious only seems to point that way because it is looked at in the light of a very tendentious model.

In most ordinary attributions of intention, the intention of the subject is not conscious to the subject at all times. Suppose, for example, an individual is intentionally driving to the shops. If, at any point on his journey, the contents of his consciousness were laid out, the intention to go to the shops need not figure in the inventory. He might be thinking of the traffic, thinking about the film he saw last night, planning the next chapter of his thesis or wondering how long it would take him to lose ten pounds. But if asked what he was doing, at any point on the journey, this person would unhesitatingly say that he was going to the shops. In such a case, that perfectly ordinary intention is not fully *present* to consciousness, although it is certainly available to consciousness. And there are of course many ordinary mental states which are not even available to consciousness, except inferentially. If, after coming home from the shops, the individual were asked if he had *noticed* that the roadworks on a particular junction were finished, the fact that he was able to give a correct and fairly confident response would strongly suggest that he had, even if he didn't remember paying any attention to the matter on the way.

Consider one further example: There has been an accident, and the police want an account of what happened. There were two witnesses. Tom, who claims to have seen it all, and Ann, who is not sure if she saw enough to be of much help. Under questioning, Tom turns out not to know whether the red car started moving before the blue car came round the corner, or whether it was signalling, if the bicycle arrived just before or just after the crash itself, and so on.... Ann, on the other hand, despite her feeling that she didn't really pay all that much attention, in fact remembers all these things. We now want to describe the mental state that Tom and Ann were in at the time the accident happened. Leaving to one side the possibility that Tom forgot what happened just after he saw it, and the possibility that Ann is making it up as she goes along, we would be inclined to say that Ann noticed much more of what was happening at the time of the accident than Tom did, despite Tom's confidence that at the time of the accident he was taking a great interest in the event. The difference between 'seeing what happened', and 'watching something happen without taking anything in' just is being able, when asked, to say what happened (*modulo* causal constraints). Conscious noticing is often, but not necessarily, a part of that. The important fact to grasp is that our confidence that Ann saw more than she realised is not inferential. It arises directly from her ability to say what actually happened, because what we mean by 'having seen what happened' just *is* that ability, appropriately causally linked to the fact that the accident happened while she was watching. Noticing what happened isn't a mental process for which her ability is evidence.

Incidentally, the defeasibility of Ann's assertions, canvassed in the possibility that she is lying, does not show that her assertions only give us evidence for a state of mind which may or may not obtain, any more than the fact that it is possible that my belief that there is a book on this table is caused by a hologram means that I don't really see a book in the case where there really is a book on the table. I may be wrong, but in the case where I am right I really do see that there is a book on the table. I don't merely have good evidence for there being a book. So

Ann may be lying, or making it up as she goes along, but in the case where she is not lying, her ability to say what happened enjoins that she saw what happened.

The possibility of Tom's merely forgetting, in the heat of the moment, or whatever, raises another issue. Of course it is possible that someone could forget. He might see what was going on and, for a moment or two, be able to say what happened. Perhaps if, counterfactully, he had been asked in a way which didn't chase away all his thoughts he would have displayed that ability. I suspect we would be unsure, in the case where Tom was *unable* to say what happened, whether there had been genuine perception or not. It would probably be unclear, even in one's own case, whether to say, "Yes, I did actually see what happened, but forgot when the policeman started cross-questioning me in that belligerent way." or, "No, my feeling that I was taking it all in was quite spurious, as the policeman's questioning made abundantly clear." The kind of evidence we might bring forward to support the first claim over the second, would be something like the subsequent return of the memory of what happened. And, significantly, *not* Tom's assertions that that is how it was. The point is that the applicability of certain mental predicates has very little to do with consciousness of their applicability on the part of the subject. We need not be puzzled by a lack of consciousness of it on the part of the subject, nor need we be overly impressed by the subject's conviction that it does indeed apply.

Clearly there are many instances of this sort, of more or less complexity. That is an innocuous claim if all it means is that a subject's believing or intending or noticing is not necessarily present to consciousness. But it is a false claim if it is meant to show that these mental states differ from *paradigm* beliefs and intentions, in *not* being present to consciousness. That thought implicitly smuggles in the assumption that beliefs and intentions are paradigmatically present to consciousness. It is precisely the oddness of that assumption I am concerned to point out. Rather than showing that there is something atypical about these beliefs and intentions, reflection on how talk about the mental is grounded in such cases serves

to show the inadequacy of any philosophy of mind which sees the subject's current state of consciousness as the central meaning-conferring element of all mental concepts. We know what a subject believes because of how he understands what is before him, *not* because how he understands what is before him gives us evidence in the light of which we *infer* to his beliefs, conceived as ulterior conscious states. To the extent that we can indeed know what someone believes on the basis of how he interprets what he perceives, understanding, perception and belief form a holistic network which we understand together. There is no reason to believe that there is a standard, but missing, element of consciousness. The subject's *intention* to go to the shops is constituted by his decision to go to the shops, his going there freely, the fact that if he were asked he would agree that that was what he was doing, and so on. The intention is not a non-conscious mental state which hovers, mentally, beside his actions. To say that someone *noticed* what happened means they will be able, truly, to report what was in his visual field; his ability so to do is not something from which we infer that there was an episode of 'noticing'.

The drift of this may seem to be heading counter to the Wittgensteinian intuition about the centrality of the avowable state of the subject. But I think it is precisely at this point that conceptual space opens up. I have contended that in ordinary everyday mental ascriptions - such as intentions to do ordinary things, and observations of everyday matters - the subject's consciousness *that* certain mental terms are appropriately used to describe him is not necessarily central. But although consciousness *of* the applicability of the particular envisaged mental descriptions need not be important, that does not imply that for many mental states, aspects of the consciousness of the subject - in other words what, among other things, he could, under whatever conditions, *avow* - are not still absolutely central. And it is a tendency to conflate the subject's thoughts *about his state of mind* (in particular his consciousness of the applicability of certain psychological descriptions) with the thoughts and feelings which *constitute* the state of mind itself which leads us to think that unconscious states of mind are far more paradoxical than they really are.

The temptation is to think that what makes psychological predicates applicable is something which is going on within the consciousness of the subject. One is then inclined to think that if we could take a slice of a subject's consciousness, there, in various strata, would be his beliefs and attitudes and fears and hopes, all somehow fixed there albeit in a way that is admittedly puzzling. And we are inclined to excuse our bewilderment by some kind of play with the complexity and subtlety of the subject matter. This view is too simplistic. It mislocates the difficulty in understanding and ascribing psychological concepts. And indeed it leads us right into the original paradox about the unconscious. [38]

Section V showed how much more complex the ascription of most psychological states is than can be accounted for on the model of simply description of the consciousness of the subject, cut off from its history and its future. Take my uncomplicated, more or less fully conscious fear of dogs. Suppose there is a particularly ugly brute bearing down on me, and that my fear is consequently especially intense. This fear is occurrent now, if at any time. But my consciousness at that moment might be effectively contentless. It need not be that, were we to take a slice of the 'stuff of my consciousness', there would have to be, at some level or other, despite a temporary blank terror, something to identify the fear. There will of course be sensations of the moment when I am confronted with a dog: raised pulse rate, sweaty palms, dry mouth etc., and they will of course have been *caused* by the dog. But that consideration

---

38 For a discussion of the Unconscious which has some affinity with mine see Ilham Dilman 'Intentions and the Unconscious'. He says,
"I am suggesting that it is both the idea of consciousness and that of what is mental that we misapprehend, as Descartes did, when we identify the two and think of an unconscious emotion or inclination as a contradiction in terms...
"Now if fear, for instance, were a sensation, if it were a mental state constituted by the here and now of consciousness, as Descartes thought, then indeed a person could not be afraid and not know that he was, nor could he think he was afraid when he was not."

need not be part of my consciousness, and everything conscious may simply underdetermine terror of dogs as the correct description of my state of mind. With a different history, for example, one in which I liked dogs a lot, say, but feared and loathed this particular dog's owner, my feeling would not be fear of dogs. The correct mental ascription would be in large part fixed by my history, how I have thought about dogs, what I think they might do, what I think I should do to avoid them etc. And none of that is occurrent. The general point, then, is that my feeling will be constituted by many things: for example, the history which precedes it, the degree of rationality it displays, other things which may be true of me, etc.

Fear of dogs, leaving to one side the phobic undertones we might feel inclined to read in, is not, of course, an unconscious fear. In the case of a fear of this kind, it is likely that the subject's willingness to accept the applicability of the psychological ascription 'frightened of dogs' will more or less coincide with the ascription's applicability. And, in particular, the subject will be able to report accurately whether it was the dog, or the dog's owner, which inspired terror. It seems, in this case at least, not to cause a problem to say that what the subject avows as the object of her fear plays a determinative role in fixing the correct mental ascription. But what, then, in the case of *unconscious* mental states, is the grounding of psychological ascriptions? To show the direction in which my account tends, I want to look at three examples of sincere, but false avowals. The first two are simple, one dimensional examples, which I hope will make plain the structure of the account I want to suggest. The last is a more interesting fictional example.

First, then, take the avowal of a loudmouthed racist pub bully. He is shouting about how much he despises people of races other than his own, and sincerely avows only feelings of dislike and disgust. *We* might be able to say that what he really feels, without realising it, is fear, or insecurity, or inferiority. How can avowals be determinative, when he sincerely would not, and indeed cannot, avow the mental state we feel inclined to ascribe? On the rejected

model, the thought would be that, if only he were to inspect his occurrent phenomenology more carefully and honestly, and with more understanding of the difference between feelings of fear and feelings of dislike and disgust, he would be able to see for himself; and if he couldn't, this would be because the feelings were operating at some 'deep' level, that the events within were coloured with fear which his consciousness had no access to. The truth, by contrast, is that he might introspect honestly and carefully till way past closing time, and not find anything other than dislike and disgust, and this is not because his feelings are mentally subterranean. Our authority to say that he doesn't understand his own feelings does not flow from our superior understanding of the content of his consciousness, nor does it flow from access we have to unconscious feelings of his. Rather it flows from the fact that the grounding for his mental state is not solely in his mind. We do not suppose that we know better than he does how he *feels*. His behaviour is authoritative and definitional for how he feels. We are alerted to his lack of self-awareness by the inappropriate violence and irrationality of the emotions we know he *does* feel, in the context in which he is in a position to acknowledge that these people have done him no wrong, are by any rational standards as clean and decent and intelligent as he, have as much right to live where they do, etc. etc. We speak of a lack of *self*-awareness, and certainly some of what he is unaware of are facts about his own psychology, but these will be theoretical rather than introspectible facts, and much of what he is unaware of are much wider issues, for example sociological issues to do with his position in society, which certainly don't currently (or ever) feature in his mind (he may not understand them). If there were a magic 'centre of consciousness' which could go inside his head, it would be no better placed than we are to tell what he is thinking. And we don't *need* his private stream of consciousness.

Consider, second, a man who, seemingly honestly, but falsely, avows, 'I am not jealous'. If we believe him to be sincere we would say he is unconsciously jealous. Once again, it is tempting to think that the claim, that he can be jealous without knowing it, is

equivalent to saying that jealousy is a mental state of affairs which can float free of the subject's consciousness. And my suggestion that a claim about an unconscious mental state has to be grounded in the subject's consciousness may seem tantamount to the absurd suggestion that the subject must be conscious *that* he is in the mental state in question. But that is not my suggestion. Rather it is that jealousy is not simply a set of *feelings* about his wife, however subtly described, which he can either notice in himself or not; nor is it something which can somehow operate below the level of consciousness. He cannot avow his jealousy, but he can and does behave in certain ways, and avows other things which collectively constitute his jealousy. He can avow his displeasure when his wife wants to spend time away from him; he is inclined to become very quiet and watch her intently if she speaks to another man; he can avow his unhappiness if she wants to look pretty to please someone else, etc.etc. When he claims not to be jealous, his mistake lies not in misrecognising interior feelings, but in not understanding the lack of 'fit' between the self-deceived avowal, 'I am not jealous', and his other avowable states which show that he is self-deceived. When the responses to his wife and her behaviour which *constitute* his feeling, are *themselves* the 'object of his consciousness', he is inclined to misapprehend them.

The complex interaction of context, behaviour, and avowable mental states is, of course, a subtle matter to describe adequately. In order to hint at some of the interesting complexities, I want to examine a fairly complex example from fiction. Anthony Trollope is less subtle in his depiction of unconscious mental states than is George Eliot. (He is also less bold, and on that account, I want to suggest, less frequently foists upon us unsound psychological ascriptions[39].) The example is from *Can You Forgive Her?*, and the state of mind at issue is Lady Glencora's. It is important to stress that I am not relying in any way on

---

39Less frequently, but he too--when his imaginative powers fail him--sometimes sinks to manipulative, ungrounded description of the inner.

Trollope's *analysis* of Glencora's state of mind. The fiction merely provides what seems a plausible and interesting example of how the abstract point plays itself out in detail.

For a substantial part of the novel, Glencora seems on the verge of abandoning respectability, and her marriage to dull, virtuous Plantagenet Palliser, in order to run off with wild, dissolute, beautiful Burgo Fitzgerald. She consciously entertains plans to; and, to her dearest friend, sincerely declares herself to be in danger of so doing. The novel gives us reason to believe that in her sincere avowals, she misunderstands herself. She does not consciously see that the idea of Burgo is for her a psychological bolthole of fantasy; nor does she consciously recognise that, like many avowals of intended suicide, her avowals of her desire to run off with Burgo express the depth of her desperation rather than any genuine intention; least of all does she consciously acknowledge the way in which she uses her largely factitious feelings for Burgo to try to establish a more intense emotional relationship with Palliser. The question is, can one give an account of what it means to say this? How is it possible to be in a mental state which one cannot, even with honest introspection avow? How does Trollope show us that these unconscious feelings underlie what Glencora avows?

The Phenomenological Realist thought would be, presumably, that Trollope could have done so by describing, with precision and clarity, Glencora's *feelings*, at the time when she was unable to understand herself. Moreover, had he done so exhaustively, he could, on this view, have revealed to us to what extent absconding was a real temptation. But this is certainly not how Trollope, in the main, works. His psychological perceptiveness lies in his talent for observation and imagination; he is little given to reflection, interpretation and speculation. He places Glencora's avowals in contexts which show their function. She avows a desire to leave her husband. Because we see her sincere avowals as part of a wider pattern of behaviour which reveals her unconscious motivation, we can understand something of her mental state that she cannot.

My first claim, that she is unconsciously using fantasies of Burgo to comfort herself, rather than actually thinking about Burgo himself, is grounded in three things. First, there are the avowals themselves. She retires to her room, to reflect on her husband's lecture on the British Constitution,

> "The British Constitution indeed! Had she married Burgo they would have been in sunny Italy, and he would have told her some other tale than that as they sat together under the pale moonlight..... She might have sat in marble balconies, while the vines clustered over her head, and he would have been at her knee, hardly speaking to her.... happy, without trouble, lapped in the delight of loving.... etc"[40]

This sounds plausibly like Glencora's own avowable thought. Note that she employs the perfect subjunctive rather than the future tense to express queasily romantic desires: this is not the stuff of intelligent realistic plans (and Glencora is both intelligent and realistic). Second, the surroundings in which her thoughts take place show them to be generated by feelings of rejection rather than inspired by Burgo himself: this, the most romantic and indulgent of her fantasies of life with Burgo, follows a critical incident. It is preceded by this passage in her thought:

> "Then she sat herself down to think,--to think especially about the cruelty of husbands. She had been told over and over again, in the days before her marriage, that Burgo would ill-use her if he became her husband. The Marquis of Auld Reekie had gone so far as to suggest that Burgo might probably beat her. But what hard treatment, even what beating, could be so unendurable as this total want of sympathy, as this deadness in life, which her present lot entailed upon her? As for that matter of the beating, she ridiculed the idea in her very soul. She sat smiling at the absurdity of the thing as she thought of the beauty of Burgo's eye, of the softness of his touch, of the loving, almost worshipping, tones of his voice. Would it not even be better to be beaten by him than to have politics explained to her at one o'clock at night by such a husband as Plantagenet Palliser? The British Constitution indeed![41]

---

[40]Anthony Trollope *Can You Forgive Her?* World's Classics OUP 1982 Vol II (P. 20)

[41] ibid (P. 20)

There is a painful veiled 'joke' at Palliser's expense, throughout a large part of the novel. He is distressed at the want of an heir. But Trollope pointedly tells us that Palliser works long into the night, every night, and when he greets his pretty young wife, whom he has not seen for weeks, and who has stayed up till 1:00 a.m. to see him, with a lecture on the British Constitution, we are hardly surprised either that they are childless, or that she resorts to romantic fantasies in the privacy of her own room. The third fact in which to ground my claim is behavioural. My claim is that Glencora's sincere avowals express her unconscious unavowable desires, rather than what they seem to avow read literally and superficially. Her sincere avowal is that she wants to run away with Burgo. But her behaviour shows her fleeing *to* Palliser, *away* from the importunate Burgo. She has come to London, against Palliser's proposal that she stay at Matching, *because* Fitzgerald is hanging round smuggling letters to her.

My second claim, that Glencora's sincere avowals are an expression of desperation rather than intention, is again not grounded in purely mental facts, which (mysteriously) she cannot avow. First, this claim too is grounded in the nature of her avowals. The avowals she makes about her love for Fitzgerald are often couched in words of desperation, and accompanied by words of self denigration. Speaking of her marriage to Palliser, she says,

> "I did it like a beast that is driven as its owner chooses. I know it. I was a beast. Oh, Alice, if you knew how I hate myself!" [42]

and of her desire to run away, she cries

> "I know what I am, and what I am like to become, I loathe myself, and I loathe the thing that I am thinking of..."[43]

And in her silent reflection, she speaks of it as

---

[42] ibid Vol I (P. 267)

[43] ibid Vol I (P.286)

> "abandoning her husband and all her duties, and making herself vile in the eyes of all women... What though if she were ruined? What though Burgo were false, mean and untrustworthy? She loved him, and he was the only man she ever had loved!"[44]

Secondly, my claim is grounded in the behavioural fact that she canvasses her plans *before* they can be put into effect, to a friend whom she knows would deeply disapprove. And thirdly, when she finally tells Palliser all, she says this

> "What matters it whether I drown myself, or throw myself away by going with such a one as him, so that you might marry again, and have a child? I'd die:- I'd die willingly. How I wish I could die! Plantagenet, I would kill myself if I dared."[45]

The desperate tone of this 'confession' is hardly that which would be adopted by someone whose only interest was in making her intentions clear.

And that is also, of course, the basis of my third claim, that when Glencora sincerely avows her love for Burgo, she is unconsciously telling her husband, in the only way she can, that their relationship is unsatisfactory to her. Palliser is a dull dog. Trollope has this to say

> "So he married Lady Glencora and was satisfied. The story of Burgo Fitzgerald was told to him, and he supposed that most girls had some such story to tell. He thought little about it, and by no means understood her when she said to him, with all the impressiveness which she could throw into the words, 'You must know that I have really loved him.' 'You must love me now', he had replied with a smile; and then, as regarded his mind, the thing was over."[46]

He is cold, and distantly kind, and Glencora's avowals of love for Burgo get wilder and wilder. She is finally driven to waltz 'recklessly' with Fitzgerald, in the absence of her husband, at Lady Monk's ball, and Palliser has to be sent for to take her home. The final behavioural grounding for the claim that her psychological state is one of appeal to Palliser,

---

[44]ibid Vol II (P. 182)

[45]ibid Vol II (p.189)

[46]ibid Vol I (P. 249)

rather than, as Glencora herself supposes, a declaration of love for Fitzgerald himself, is the fact that on the following morning, when Palliser would just as soon not mention the affair, Glencora goads him into confrontation, and finally in the face of his implacable refusal to suspect she might be unfaithful, blurts out,

> "Let me speak now, Plantagenet. It is better that I should tell you everything; and I will. I will tell you everything; -everything! I do love Burgo Fitzgerald. I do! I do! I do! How can I help loving him? Have I not loved him from the first, -before I had seen you? Did you not know that it was so? I do love Burgo Fitzgerald, and when I went to Lady Monk's last night, I had almost made up my mind that I must tell him so, and that I must go away with him and hide myself..."[47]

The sincerity of this avowal is undoubted, but her words cannot be taken at their face value. Her unconscious purpose, in making it, is to force Palliser to see the gravity of her misery.

Glencora's unsconscious, rather complex, psychological state, a mix of misery, desperation, and frustration, is as much grounded in her avowals as would be an avowal of physical pain. The avowals, in this case, are self-deceived. That they are so is communicated not by detail of what other mental events are taking place, of which she is unaware, but rather from Trollope's account of the surroundings in which they are made, and the behaviour of which they form a part. Glencora is not self-deceived because there are things going on in her consciousness of which she is unaware. She is self-deceived because she doesn't understand the context which makes sense of her feelings.

My contention, in this final section, has been that an unconscious mental state should not be conceived of as an interior state of affairs which happens to obtain without, or beneath, the subject's cognisance. That claim is built upon the arguments of the previous sections. In Section II, I argued that mental states are not best conceived of on the model of sensations, and

---

[47] ibid Vol II (P. 189)

that even sensations should not be conceived of as mental objects accessible only to the subject's 'observation'. In Sections III and IV I argued that the traditional picture of the role of avowals is misplaced: avowals are not first person descriptions of a mental inner to which none but the subject has access. First person authority should rather be seen as a grammatical fact about the function of avowals.The fifth section began to give an account of why avowals, and possible avowals, have a central role to play in the understanding of many of our mental terms. But in this final section I hope I have shown that the role I see for avowals is not a simplistic one: an account of avowals has emerged which recognises both the possibility of avowals which are mistaken, and the possibility of the existence of mental states which the subject is unable to avow.

There may be, at this point, a reaction to the effect that even if the arguments of this chapter are convincing, the content of Eliot's descriptions could surely be prised apart from anything infelicitous about the philosophical conception I see her to be committed to: that her language could surely be recovered as a metaphorically rich, but ultimately philosophically coherent description of those mental states which her characters find too baffling or painful to understand. The next chapter will examine in detail certain overtly psychological passages which play a crucial role in the development of plot in *Middlemarch*. My aim will be to show that those 'descriptions' actually give us little or no understanding of the mental states of their subjects; and that their metaphorical force, rather than giving us insight, actually provides convincing cover to contentless value judgements, and works as a smokescreen to hide tendentious plot manipulation.

Chapter Four: *Middlemarch*

The third chapter argues that the philosophy of mind which underpins *Middlemarch* is flawed. That is a bold claim to make about a novel which is, on the face of it, a sensitive and perceptive treatment of the relationships between realistically conceived characters. It may seem that the discussion of *The Lifted Veil* and the discussion of *Middlemarch* are of a quite different order. Whereas in a fantasy about mind reading, the philosophy of mind which informs it is central, it may seem that in *Middlemarch* the philosophy of mind is peripheral. Many critics would feel inclined to say that George Eliot understands and explores the complexity of the mind perceptively and fairly, and the characters of *Middlemarch* and their story tower above whatever dry reservations there may be about their philosophical credentials. In this chapter I want to oppose any idea that it is possible to put the philosophical problems to one side and read the novel unproblematically as if it presented realistically conceived characters.

George Eliot's conception of the nature of the mind is no more peripheral to *Middlemarch*, than it is to *The Lifted Veil*. Firstly, and this is one issue to be discussed in the fourth section of this chapter, the 'other minds' problem is in fact one of the many philosophical themes of this novel. Peter Jones has argued convincingly that Eliot was perplexed by the thought that whereas what he calls 'epistemological egoism' is inescapable, we are morally enjoined not to be egoists.[1] Our metaphysical natures seem to present us with an insuperable moral problem. This problem, and Eliot's solution to it, is

---

1*Philosophy and the Novel* Peter Jones OUP 1975. The problem is outlined on P.10
" 'All conceit is not the same conceit' (Ch 15) because it varies in its dimensions and its aetiology; but one may be an egoist, apparently, in either or both of two senses. On the one hand, egoism is deemed to be logically unavoidable because it is held that each man's knowledge is founded, ultimately, on his sensory - experience alone.... I shall call this egoism 'epistemological egoism'....secondly, however, there is moral egoism: selfishness and self-centredness at the expense of others...we may infer from *Middlemarch* the view that moral egoism is rooted in epistemological egoism..."

central to her location of her characters' moral struggles. Chapter Three has, *inter alia*, argued that this is a pseudo-problem, born of misconceptions about the nature of the mind. Consequently, as I shall show in the fourth section of this chapter, Eliot's ideas lead her awry in her depiction of her characters' mental lives and moral relations.

Secondly, while no character in *Middlemarch* is 'gifted' with supernatural insight, the idea that knowledge (or ignorance) of another's mental state is a matter of access to something interior to the subject is still very much in play. One of the central concerns of *Middlemarch* is the extent to which, without supernatural insight, others' minds are unknown. Right from the opening chapter, when 'rural opinion' (P.31)[2] of Celia and Dorothea is seen to be mistaken, appearance and prejudice seem to form the greater part of what passes for understanding of others. Dorothea misunderstands Sir James, and for that matter Casaubon. Sir James misunderstands Dorothea. So, when we meet him, does Lydgate. He also misunderstands Rosamund and Mary Garth. And so on. But the gap between what seems and what is goes to a deeper level. The characters are not only deceived about each other, and the parts they play in one another's lives, but also massively deceived about themselves. They blunder round, knowing little of their own emotions, motives and prejudices. The resolution of some of the misunderstanding, deceit and self deceit forms the plot of the novel. But the resolution within the novel is only local and partial; the Finale redraws the complex web of interlocking deceits and misconceptions (and rural opinion is as far as ever from understanding Dorothea). But outside the fiction, George Eliot establishes a dialogue with us through which we see past the misleading appearances, the misleading behaviour, even the misleading thoughts. Although no single character has a complete grasp of the truth, through the author, the reader has. The author,

---

[2] All page references in this chapter, unless otherwise stated, are to *Middlemarch* Penguin Modern Classics 1985

disguised as a commentator, but ostensibly *not* a creator, is able to disentangle the misunderstandings and misconceptions to reveal the true picture behind the appearances because the author has privileged access to the interior of her characters' minds.

This idea is deeply rooted in Phenomenological Realism. From that position, it is natural to think that a novel's ability to see through the disguises of social intercourse flows from the author's ability to see through a veil of appearance to the mental facts which lie behind. The *prima facie* tension we saw in the last chapter between thinking that mental ascriptions refer to mental private facts, and thinking that individuals can be mistaken about their own mental states has its corollary here. If the novel's ability to let us see past misleading appearances flows from the author's ability to penetrate what is, in real life, impenetrable privacy, it is hard to see how that ability allows her also to reveal what the inner reality is for that person irrespective of what he himself might believe. After all, on the face of it, the subject surely has access behind the veil if anyone has. Again, for the Phenomenological Realist the tension is dispelled by thinking of a subject's mental states as a very complex inner state or process. The subject stands in some kind of relation to his inner happenings; crudely he 'has' them. But that does not guarantee that he will know he has them, or that he will be best placed to understand them.

This is precisely the picture to be questioned. It is obviously seductive: the idea is that there is an inner reality about which I learn by introspection, and about which others learn by inference. On occasion they misread the evidence, so my inner reality is hidden from them; and on occasion I simply don't introspect carefully or honestly enough, or fail to understand, and so my inner reality can be hidden from me too. The ideally placed person (an author, or a God) would be able to see what is there even if no-one else can. The arguments of Chapter Three established that that is a bad picture. It makes unnecessary commitments to mental facts; it opens the way to unacceptable radical scepticism about

other minds; and it mislocates the real difficulties there are in understanding ourselves and other people.

There were several strands to the characterisation, in Chapter Three, of the position George Eliot is implicitly committed to. The overall strategy was to reject the appealing picture of the mind which conceives of the meaning of talk about the mental as being given by reference to internal private mental facts. The facts which give meaning to mental ascriptions, as argued for in Chapter Three, are complicated and subtle, and easy generalisation is impossible. The only generalisation possible is that coming to learn the meaning of psychological language is coming to recognise the circumstances in which such ascriptions are appropriate, in terms of a complicated interplay between the subject's behaviour, history, situation and possible avowals. The last imposes the constraint that ascriptions of feelings of any complexity to a subject must be informed by the subject's own conception, although, as is clear from the discussion of self deception in Chapter Three, the way in which the subject's own conception must come into play is not necessarily direct. The purpose of this chapter is to show that objections to Phenomenological Realism are not purely abstract. One can only read *Middlemarch* as a realistic novel if one accepts the discredited picture.

The degree to which the implicit commitment to Phenomenological Realism affects the way George Eliot writes is brought out most forcibly by exposing the tendentiousness both of her creation of her characters, and of her development of crucial incidents in the plot. The conventional view is that although her portrayal of Casaubon is occasionally a little dry at his expense, it is compassionate as well as crushingly perceptive. Leavis, for example, says,

> "It is not only an intellectual, it is a spirit profoundly noble, one believing profoundly in a possible nobility to be aimed at by men, that can make us, with her, realize such a situation fully as one for compassion....

> "..I want to insist that what we have in the treatment of Casaubon is wholly strong."[3]

He is equally impressed with the character of Bulstrode. He says,

> "The treatment of Bulstrode himself is a triumph in which the part of a magnificent intelligence in the novelist's art is manifested in some of the finest analysis any novel can show."[4]

The 'analysis' is of the coexistence of Bulstrode's wickedness and his religious scrupulousness. This chapter will show that Casaubon is never given the slightest chance of gaining our compassion and that the description of Busltrode's hypocrisy can not be truly explanatory as it rests too heavily on George Eliot's mistaken conception of the mind as some sort of mental mechanism.

The conventional view of Dorothea is less straightforward. So too, then, is my intention with regard to her. Dorothea is considered to be the central moral figure in the novel. W.J. Harvey says,

> "..the most complex exemplars of moral self-education are, of course, Lydgate and, above all, Dorothea." (P. 15)[5]

But opinion is divided as to the success of the characterisation. In the early chapters of the novel, it is agreed that Eliot allows us to see Dorothea's weakness and vulnerability as well as her goodness. But as Dorothea's self-education progresses, and Eliot's attitude to her becomes less critical, her characterisation is thought to be less wholly admirable. Whereas the critical reception of Dorothea's relationship with Rosamund has been favourable, the relationship between Dorothea and Ladislaw is pretty universally deplored. Leavis' view, that 'the weakness of the book.....is in Dorothea'[6], is perhaps too strong to be thought the received wisdom, but there is some uneasiness about the moral status Eliot accords her.

---

3 F.R. Leavis *The Great Tradition* (P. 80)

4 ibid (P. 85)

5 W.J. Harvey in the Introduction to Penguin Modern Classics 1965 edition of *Middlemarch.*
6 Leavis, F.R., *The Great Tradition* (P. 89)

Leavis says 'George Eliot tends to identify herself with Dorothea.'[7], and he says her characterisation has 'the aspect of self-indulgence'.[8] And again,

> "Aren't we here, we wonder, in sight of an unqualified self-identification? Isn't there something dangerous in the way the irony seems to be reserved for the provincial background and circumstances, leaving the heroine immune?"[9]

He also quotes possibly the only embarrassingly bad passage in the novel, and remarks, 'Such a failure in touch in so intelligent a novelist....betrays a radical disorder'[10]. These critical comments fail to point out the nature of the 'radical disorder'; Leavis diagnoses it in terms of Eliot's 'need to soar above the indocile facts and conditions of the real world'.[11] My intention, with regard to Dorothea, is not to take issue with the conventional assessment of Eliot's success. Rather I think I can offer a rather better diagnosis than Leavis of the problem critics sense with regard to Dorothea's characterisation.

This chapter will show that to diagnose Eliot's failure we do not need to guess at her needs and intentions. Rather we can demonstrate where her commitment to an inadequate Philosophy of Mind leads her to infelicity in the characterisation of Bulstrode, Casaubon *and* Dorothea. Her commitment to an unsatisfactory philosophy of mind affects the language with which she describes her characters' mental lives. In analysing this, we can see how at crucial moments our moral response is coerced at the same time as we are prevented from forming a clear picture of what is actually happening. Close examination of key passages and incidents, bearing in mind strictures about the philosophy of mind argued for in the previous chapter, will show that some of Eliot's apparently most persuasive psychological narrative has very little descriptive content, and that some crucial moral

---

7 ibid (P 81)
8 ibid (P. 94)
9 ibid (P. 91)
10 The passage in question is Lydgate's rhapsody in which he compares Dorothea to the Virgin Mary. (P. 826) (Leavis' discussion is on P.94-5 ibid)
11 ibid (P.95)

judgements are made in response to mythical mental events and processes. Remarks which appear to give a revealing and perceptive picture of characters' mental states, and passages which seem to be disinterested narration, can be shown to serve a very different function in the novel.

* * *

Section I: Ungrounded Descriptions

The focus of this section is the mental ascriptions which are a central technique of George Eliot's creation of character. The omniscient narrator of *Middlemarch* is not restricted to an external view of her characters. Often we come to understand characters by gaining insight into their innermost feelings. Casaubon, for example, says and does very little, and his character emerges chiefly through our insights into his private inner qualms. If this is to be regarded as a device of realism, the language in which she deals with Casaubon's states of mind must have genuine psychological content.

There certainly seems to be psychological content. As we read, we feel that we rather despise Casaubon. We feel he is absurd and morally unsound. We believe he is self-absorbed and self-blind, priggish and selfish. But nonetheless we feel we pity him. And that combination of beliefs and attitudes is precisely what we are meant to feel. We are inclined to think that our moral and emotional response to him is generated by the subtlety with which George Eliot's characterisation mirrors Casaubon's state of mind. The suggestion here is that the language shapes our attitudes very differently: the passages are not realistic description, and her use of language shapes our response to Casaubon at the expense of her development of his character. Some of the crucial developments in the account of Casaubon's character seem to depict feelings which, while they are much too

subtle and precise to be sufficiently grounded in his behaviour, are in no way grounded in his own consciousness either.

First, by way of contrast, look at the economical, and legitimate, introduction to Lydgate's callow response to women. Lydgate does not of course realise that his response is callow. His attitude is indeed unconscious. But in this case, as in the case of Lady Glencora, in *Can you forgive her?*, the unconscious mental state is not revealed to us by detailed description of the stuff of Lydgate's consciousness.[12] The ascription of an unconscious mental state to Lydgate is informed by his own consciousness; there is a subtle interaction between public facts and avowable states. Into the context of our good opinion of Dorothea, built up carefully over the previous chapters, George Eliot simply drops Lydgate's remark,

> "She is a good creature - that fine girl- but a little too earnest. It is troublesome to talk to such women." (P119)

It is not spoken aloud, of course. But it might easily have been. It is certainly avowable, certainly available to consciousness. It is dispiriting. He has simply not seen in her what we had hoped he might. His unconscious feelings about women are further explored in this passage.

> "To a man under such circumstances, taking a wife is something more than a question of adornment, however highly he may rate this; and Lydgate was disposed to give it the first place among wifely functions.To his taste, guided by a single conversation, here was the point on which Miss Brooke would be found wanting, notwithstanding her undeniable beauty. She did not look at things from the proper feminine angle." (p121-2)

The glimpse into Lydate's unconscious chauvinism is not a description of an inaccessible private inner experience which lies behind a deceptive surface. We do not need to unpack what this thought feels like from the inside. We don't need to know what meaning he

---

[12]Lady Glencora's unconscious mental states are discussed at some length in the final section of Chapter Three.

privately attaches to the words 'proper feminine angle'. In fact we can't. There is nothing *to* know; the insight here is embedded in the knowledge we share with the author that it is an empty cliché, the cliché of a man whose attitude to women is not so far removed from Mr.Chicheley's. Both Chicheley and Lydgate are inclined to think that women in general are in some sense at the disposal of men, to be chosen with an eye to how well they will fulfil wifely functions. Insight depends on our understanding the significance of his conscious avowable thoughts in a way which Lydgate himself does not, but it does not float free of his avowals.

The 'insight' does *not* work by exploring mental facts which are simply unnoticed by Lydgate; it does *not* work in a way which is only possible in a novel. It works by setting Lydgate's avowable thoughts in a public context which makes plain their absurdity. And these insights are equally available to the more perceptive of his companions. Notice how closely *our* reaction to Lydgate is echoed a few chapters later by Farebrother's. Farebrother is curious to know how Mary Garth has struck Lydgate. He asks,

> "Do you know the Garths? I think they were not Peacock's patients."
> "No; but there is a Miss Garth at old Featherstone's, at Lowick."
> "Their daughter: an excellent girl."
> "She is very quiet--I have hardly noticed her."
> "She has taken notice of you, though, depend upon it."
> "I don't understand," said Lydgate; he could hardly say "Of course."
> "Oh she gauges everybody. I prepared her for confirmation--she is a favourite of mine."
> Mr. Farebrother puffed a few moments in silence, Lydgate not caring to know more about the Garths. At last the Vicar laid down his pipe, stretched out his legs, and turned his bright eyes with a smile towards Lydgate..." (P205)

Lydgate is as dismissive of Mary Garth as he was of Dorothea. Unlike Dorothea, Mary is not likely even to be able to fulfil the first of wifely functions. Farebrother knows enough of Mary to feel disappointed in Lydgate's failure of perception. Farebrother too has learned something about Lydgate's mental and emotional shortcomings, in just the way that we did. There is no veil between Farebrother and Lydgate. Lydgate casually *reveals* his

attitudes to Farebrother without understanding them himself. But note that, even though the subject doesn't understand his own mind as well as we do, if thoughts are to be attributed to him they must be apt to play some role in his own consciousness. The insight has to be grounded in Lydgate's actual thoughts about women. Imagine, for example, if we suspected that Lydgate was *not* disposed to think that a woman should look pretty for her husband, and did *not* believe that women should have feminine intuitions and leave intellectual matters to men. If we suspected that those thoughts would grate on his sensibilities as much as on ours, we could no longer accept that Eliot's chilling clichés about 'adornment' and 'proper feminine angles' had any insight to offer. But in fact, the thoughts are plausibly Lydgate's own, and indeed he is punished for them.

This is in stark contrast to the passages in which George Eliot's purpose is to give us insight into Casaubon's feelings. For example, look at this sentence, taken from the passage where, for the first time, we are given some insight into Casaubon's view of his impending marriage.

> "Mr. Casaubon did not find his spirits rising; nor did the contemplation of that matrimonial garden-scene, where, as all experience showed, the path was to be bordered with flowers, prove persistently more enchanting to him than the accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand." (P 111)

The thoughts here are too subtle and the language too specific to be grounded purely in context and behaviour. The question is whether there are thoughts we can plausibly believe Casaubon has which could make it true that the expressions Eliot uses are apt mental ascriptions. Those expressions shape our response to his character; the question is whether that response can plausibly be thought of as a response to the mental state she describes.

The language here seems to function in just the way that the passage about Lydgate's attitude towards women functions. With a few well chosen words and phrases we seem to have insight right into Casaubon's unease as his marriage to Dorothea

approaches. It seems, to be sure, to give us a picture which is much more informative than Casaubon himself could have given, but then so did the passage explaining Lydgate's disappointingly blank response both to Dorothea and to Rosamund. But we have an explanation of how the insight into Lydgate functions: Lydgate's avowals are informative because they show how limited is his judgment of women in general, and how inadequate his perception of these two young women in particular. To understand Lydgate's thought we need a sense of both, and of course Lydgate has neither. But he *is* aware of the judgements which the insight centres round; he simply doesn't understand how they reveal his unconscious attitudes.

The remark about Casaubon functions very differently. It looks as if it describes Casaubon's innermost feelings. His spirits did not rise, and he did not find the contemplation of certain things enchanting. Of course, what those 'certain things' are is told in George Eliot's language, but it is tempting to think that when something is an object of thought, it can be described entirely independently of the subject. But this is clearly a temptation to avoid. Even if the object of thought is an external object, there are problems of cognitive significance to worry about. If we say that the old lamp seller preferred a dirty old lamp to a nice shiny new one, then unless we know that he prefers it under the description 'magic lamp', we are likely, like Aladdin's wife, to misunderstand his motives. At least, though, we know which lamp the vendor will choose, but when the objects of contemplation are purely mental, unless the subject's own conception of the objects can be reconstructed, it is not clear we have learned anything at all about his preferences. We are told Casaubon did not find something persistently more enchanting than something else. The descriptions George Eliot chooses have the effect of simultaneously giving us the impression that we now have a firmer grasp on what kind of character he is while stifling our curiosity about Casaubon's motives. Our judgement about his moral and spiritual

worth is paradoxically made firmer, while our understanding of his moral and spiritual worth is no richer than before.

The sentence is interesting, its irony works in many directions. Casaubon's attitudes are attacked on all sides, but we seem to have little or no insight into what they might be. First, 'that matrimonial garden scene' scoffs at the idea that marriage is a state of unconfined joy. It is naive and absurd to think that marriage will necessarily bring happiness as its natural corollary. But however common and absurd the fantasy that marriage will be the solution to all problems, it is clearly not one that Casaubon suffers from. He does *not* find his spirits rising. And we can conjecture good reasons why he shouldn't. His relationship with Dorothea is almost wholly based on her idolisation of him, which, whether justified or not, is no basis for marriage. And he knows well enough that it is *not* justified. He may have been beginning to realise that beneath all her intense questions about God and morality and goodness is a very strong need for him to know all the answers her meagre education has failed to supply. That should make anyone quail. But that is just conjecture. All George Eliot gives us by way of insight into Casaubon's unease is a sneering reference to rejection of a fantasy of marriage which cannot be relevant to Casaubon's feelings. Casaubon's own perception of marriage, and the ways in which he is finding he has to revise that perception, are left untouched.

Second, his feelings about his *magnum opus* are not entered into. The 'accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand' leaves us in no doubt about the narrator's opinion of its status. If Casaubon ever sheds light on anything, it will be a feeble light and it will be shed on something far removed from life itself. But how does *Casaubon* regard it? How does *he* picture it to himself? He presumably doesn't actually believe his multitudinous scribbles are leading anywhere. But why then the reluctance to relinquish it? Might it be that it has a deep symbolic value for him? Might he be sustained, buried in the outskirts of

Middlemarch, by the illusion that he still has intellectual contact with Oxford? Is that the source of his reluctance? If it is, it seems that if we were to understand Casaubon's unconscious desires better than he does himself, we would need more than purely sneering ironic commentary.

Third, we do not know why the thought of remaining a bachelor seems more comfortable to him. Marriage did not seem 'more enchanting to him than the accustomed vaults where he walked taper in hand', she says. This may be true, but this form of words only mocks Casaubon. To prefer the vaults to the fresh air indicates a morbid unhealthy mind. But that is not *his* comparison: he does not, *under that description*, prefer the accustomed vaults, he does not see his studious bachelorhood as 'vaults'. So under what description does he prefer his studious bachelorhood? We can construct plausible reasons for his preference. He *may* fear that marriage will not only force him to see that he is no longer part of the Oxford milieu he is still rather pathetically clinging to; he *may* feel that as Dorothea's husband he will suddenly be forced into a role in which his failings and failures will suddenly become public. Also, as Kerry MacSweeney suggests[13], there is evidence that his failure to 'rise' is not purely spiritual, and that *may* be a source of shame and fear. The conjecture here, and in the preceding paragraphs is only a sketch at a fleshing out of Casaubon's frame of mind. But slight as it is, it goes much further than anything that is suggested by Eliot's description of his feelings. Her description gives us no information to help us see what Casaubon's own doubts and fears about marriage are.

Thus, in spite of its seeming precision, and undoubted vividness, this passage only criticises and derides Casaubon's doubts and fears. It achieves its purpose, which is to make us respond to the character in a certain way, and to give us the illusion that we

---

13 MacSweeney, K., *Middlemarch* Unwin Critical Library 1984 (P. 106)

understand him. The imagery is vivid and witty, and it differs so markedly from the more obviously superficial judgements of Mrs.Cadwallader, Celia, Sir James and Mr.Brooke, that we do indeed seem to have gained a genuine insight. But it is not what it seems to be. The passage is not a description of an unconscious mental state. We *don't* get insight into what Casaubon's fears are. Any idea that we now know better how he feels is an illusion.

The second example works in a very similar way. It comes from much later in the novel, from Chapter 42. Look at the following description of Casaubon's 'central ambition', and compare the richness of the response it engenders in us with the lack of constraint exerted on it by Casaubon's own self conception.

> "Their -[his labours] - most characteristic result was not the 'Key to all Mythologies' - [the title of his project] - , but a morbid sense that others did not give him the place he had not demonstrably merited -a perpetual suspicious conjecture that the views entertained of him were not to his advantage -a melancholy absence of passion in his efforts at achievement, and a passionate resistance to the confession that he had achieved nothing." (P 454-5)

Casaubon is conscious, apparently, that 'he had not demonstrably merited' the place he craves, but he is, it seems, not to be given any credit for this fairly uncompromising piece of self knowledge, as his consciousness of it is 'morbid'. Well, how does it present itself to him? That balanced sardonic phrase is George Eliot's, not Casaubon's, so what are *his* thoughts on the matter? It is easy to get us to despise a man who wishes to be thought better than he knows he deserves to be, but no easier perhaps than it might have been to give us insight into the personal misery which might have mitigated our contempt. Similarly, there is a splendid swingeing tone of rhetorical disgust in 'a melancholy absence of passion in his efforts at achievement, and a passionate resistance to the confession that he had achieved nothing', yet who *could* feel a passionate need to draw together the threads of a research project which had lost direction years before, and at the same time, how easy it is to understand the reluctance to admit that twenty years of boring work which have served both as the reason for doing little else (even making love on honeymoon had to take

second place to the archives) and as grounds for a meagre self-respect, were, in fact, futile and spurious.

Remember, the conventional critical wisdom on this passage, and those like it, is that it gives us insight into how Casaubon is feeling. My suggestion, on the contrary is that while we get the *impression* that we know how he feels, we are actually manipulated into judging him adversely, while learning very little about how he feels. Certainly, Casaubon could not have recognised that passage as a description of how he felt. Or at least, if he could recognise this heavily ironical description of his feelings about his work, he would have to have a pretty wry sense of humour, and the harshness of the description would be mitigated by his recognition of its validity. But if he couldn't recognise the description, what *is* its status? Remember it's meant to be a description of what he is *conscious* of. Think of simpler items of consciousness, like 'He had a morbid sense that he was the smallest man in the room.' or 'She had a perpetual suspicious conjecture that her husband left the toothpaste cap off because he knew she hated it.' In these cases it is obvious that, irrespective of how, specifically, they would have expressed themselves, there must be something in the consciousness of the subjects which makes these ascriptions apt, and if we are to have any insight into the nature of the morbid sensing and suspicion, we must be able to reconstruct the content of the propositional attitude, as it seems to the subject.

What is Casaubon's self-conception? What makes that mental ascription apt? Just how self- aware is he? Total blindness won't do. He has 'a sense', however 'morbid', that he is not as good as he needs to be. So how does that feel? Does he think his project is hopeless? Or does he think that if he could only get himself to concentrate fully for a couple of years he could finish *The Key to all Mythologies*, and show Carp and Ladislaw their judgement was ill founded? Should we, in other words put the emphasis on 'demonstrably', or on 'merited'? We're not told. Does he think, like Dorothea, that all

academic research is really a pretty paltry thing? and if so how does that make him feel, twenty years down the line? Or does he think Dorothea's views of this matter shallow and silly? In which case does he, like Lydgate, feel sorry that his wife is not in position to understand his frustrations? We cannot know how Casaubon feels without knowing how Casaubon thinks he feels! We need our knowledge to be informed by his own self conception.

It is difficult to think of any thought which could play a role in Casaubon's consciousness which could make it true that he had a 'morbid sense' that he was unworthy of the status he desired which would not be self-deprecating; it is difficult to think of anything which could play a role in his consciousness which could make it true that he has 'perpetual suspicious conjectures that the views entertained of him were not to his advantage' which would not make him seem lonely and terrified. At the very least, we should want to know how Casaubon regards himself. But the balanced precision of this description of what seem like mental facts militates against any curiosity we might feel about his pain.

Neither of these passages is a simple description of his thoughts.[14] If they were, we would presumably have gained some insight into how things seemed *to Casaubon*, as he looked forward to his marriage; and we would presumably have gained some insight into how it seemed to him as he glanced down the years in which he did not demonstrably

---

14I don't want to be misunderstood to be saying something terribly crude, viz that the feelings must be expressed in language the subject himself might have used. Later, I will compare George Eliot with Henry James. I hope to make it plainer that what Eliot is doing is very queer. James always uses precisely the *same* voice to tell us how his characters feel (namely his own). I think, in the comparison, I can show that what he says always nevertheless gives us a precise enough 'fix' on what his characters thought. James is a good comparison because his writing demonstrates that its not just in the complexity of the language that the problem lies.

merit a place in the sun. There is nothing very inspiriting about the possible lines of thought along which we might try to reconstruct his state of mind. But there is a marked contrast between the ways we might try to speculate about a state of mind for him, and Eliot's 'authoritative' description. Because she leaves out of the picture how his plight presents itself to Casaubon, her description never engages any emotion towards him other than grudging despising pity. But, again, the point is not that her account is 'unfair'. It is rather that while it poses as a description of what Casaubon is aware of (albeit 'morbidly') and what he is conjecturing (albeit 'suspiciously') it is, in truth, nothing of the sort. It is in fact a piece of rhetorical writing which may show some moral sense, but is not, even so, the analysis it seems to be.

* * *

Section II: Mechanistic Minds

Another suggestion of Chapter Three was that we should be wary of accepting metaphors about mental mechanisms as if they were explanations. George Eliot's use of mechanical images to describe the mind is widespread. By using the idea of the mind as a place, or a device, she seems to inform us not only of her characters' mental processes, but also the precise degree to which they themselves are aware of them. Often, however, when we try to see exactly what her metaphors claim, we find that although they seem to tell us facts about what's happening in her characters' mental lives, what they do instead is give George Eliot a means of controlling our moral evaluation of her characters.

(a) Bulstrode

One of the most delicate moral evaluations demanded of us is our response to Bulstrode. Bulstrode is a subtle creation. Reared in a commercial charity school, where God's dispensations were presumably taught with as much authority and as little emotion as mathematics and geography, he has acquired the belief that his intense intellectual

understanding of the Bible gives him a more direct contact with God than have any of his more casually kind neighbours. He is a bad man. But he is not a simple hypocrite. He is genuinely convinced that he is interpreting Scripture accurately. When he seeks to justify his actions he approaches the law of God rather like a lawyer, searching for precedents and interpretations. This is how the narrator describes his need to exculpate himself.

> "The spiritual kind of rescue was a genuine need with him. There may be coarse hypocrites, who consciously affect beliefs and emotions for the sake of gulling the world, but Bulstrode was not one of them. He was a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and he had gradually explained the gratification of those desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs" (P 667)

George Eliot, in the story of Bulstrode, wants to make the point that no *system* of mere belief is strong enough to over-rule our own evil desires. As she puts it,

> "There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men." (P. 668)

This is a very substantial claim. It avers that any set of moral rules, however detailed and precise, can always be interpreted waywardly in order to justify wicked behaviour unless they are interpreted in the light of deeply rooted moral sympathies. A coarse hypocrite, a wicked man *pretending* to follow a 'general doctrine', would not of itself discredit a bloodless morality. Nor would an unlucky man who meant well, but whose actions turned out worse than he had reason to expect. The point can only be demonstrated by a man who genuinely believes himself to be morally justified before the Lord, when he is in fact deeply immoral.

For a large part of the novel, the depiction of Bulstrode's subtle form of hypocrisy presents few problems. Nothing much more is known against him than his liking to manipulate people. He enjoys making other people's conduct cohere with his extremely vivid conception of God's will. He is a sanctimonious, rich, powerful man, who enjoys his power, and dispenses money and spiritual guidance in such a way that it is clear that the

former has to be earned by obedience to the latter. There is an undeveloped suggestion that he is involved in some nefarious practices in relation to cheap dyes: Vincy, whose silks are being rotted by them, has this rather cutting remark,

> "It may be for the glory of God, but it is not for the glory of the Middlemarch trade, that Plymdale's house uses those blue and green dyes it gets from the Brassing manufactory; they rot the silk, that's all I know about it. Perhaps if other people knew so much of the profit went to the glory of God, they might like it better. But I don't mind so much about that. I could get up a pretty row, if I chose." (P. 158)

But how much of this is Vincy bluster, and how deeply Bulstrode is involved is unclear, and the worst we seem to *know* is that his Godliness has a nasty feel to it. And the narrator is at least partially distanced from even this impression. Vincy's phrases seem apt,

> "I suppose you don't conduct business on what you call unworldly principles. The only difference I see is that one worldliness is a little bit honester than another.... (P 157)

> "If you mean to hinder everybody from having money but saints and evangelists, you must give up some very profitable partnerships.... (P. 158)

> "[Y]ou could turn over your capital just as fast with cursing and swearing: - plenty of fellows do. You like to be master, there's no denying that; you must be first chop in heaven else you won't like it much." (P. 159)

But with the image of a distorting mirror,

> 'the coarse unflattering mirror which that manufacturer's mind presented to the subtler lights and shadows of his fellow-men' (P. 159)

we are cautioned to distrust them. Of course, as with Sir James' views on Casaubon's legs, and Celia's on his moles, disavowed in Book 1 with the same image, it is hard to believe the image in the unflattering mirror is entirely distorted, but there is no inherent absurdity at least in the idea of someone being morally scrupulous and simultaneously being insensitive, overbearing and unpleasant.

Even when we learn of his virtually criminal past, and come to suspect the depth of his past duplicity, the problem of making Bulstrode's hypocrisy seem genuinely interesting is not insuperable, although there is some difficulty in believing his moral wriggling to

have been sincere. Bulstrode's life as a wealthy man, and indeed as a wicked man, was originally begun by an advantageous involvement with a high-class pawnbroker's, the profitability of which was much increased by its willingness to accept stolen goods. When he discovered the nature of the business, the struggle to make this cohere with his adopted creed cost Bulstrode much internal wrangling.

> "Metaphors and precedents were not wanting; peculiar spiritual experiences were not wanting which at last made the retention of his position seem a service demanded of him: the vista of fortune had already opened itself..." (P. 665)

It was possible for Bulstrode to argue that these operations would have gone on with or without him, and that others would have used the profits for further evil. So the question

> 'Was it not even God's way of saving his chosen?' (P. 664)

although it ought to have demanded the answer 'no', could just conceivably have been made out to be answered 'perhaps' (God moving in mysterious ways as we all know). When the possibility of further wealth was opened in the shape of marriage to the proprietor's widow, a further moral obstacle had to be deemed superable: the marriage could only take place if the widow's daughter could not inherit. Bulstrode's new problem, to make it seem right that he should, by deceit, inherit another's money was rather trickier to handle, but not impossible.

> "It was easy for him to settle what was due from him to others by inquiring what were God's intentions with regard to himself. Could it be for God's service that this fortune should in any considerable proportion go to a young woman and her husband who were given up to the lightest pursuits, and might scatter it abroad in triviality?" (P. 666)

And so it is done.

> "Efforts to find her must be made before Mrs Dunkirk would marry again. Bulstrode concurred; but after advertisement as well as other modes of inquiry had been tried, the mother believed her daughter was not to be found, and consented to marry without reservation of property.
>
> The daughter had been found; but only one man besides Bulstrode knew it, and he was paid for keeping silence and carrying himself away." (P. 665-6)

The paid man was of course Raffles.[15] Given the pain this period of his life causes him in retrospect, it is clear that Bulstrode does not really believe his moral justification was sound. In his past, he has dipped dangerously close to coarse hypocrisy, and his present belief in his own moral rectitude has to rest on his conviction that he has risen above his past.

The sincerity of that present belief is crucial to George Eliot's claim. It is at precisely the point that Bulstrode's story shifts from the past to the present that the abstract claim should come into focus. Her claim, recall, is that

> "there is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men." (P. 668)

What would back up that claim would be a plausible account of Bulstrode's wayward justification of his behaviour in strict accordance with Biblical principles. Her point would have been well taken if he *had* 'gradually explained the gratification of [his] desires into satisfactory agreement with [his] beliefs'. At some points in the narration, this seems to be what is provided. At the same time as we learn his history, the narration lightly picks up Vincy's remark about Bulstrode's sleeping partnership in Plymdale's rotten dye-works, and other presumably equally shady enterprises are hinted at. Bulstrode justifies this behaviour by thinking that

> "profitable investments in trades where the power of the Prince of this world showed its most active devices, became sanctified by a right application of the profits in the hands of God's servant" (P. 667-8)

and contents himself with the 'prayer'

> "Thou knowest how loose my soul sits from these things -how I view them all as implements for tilling Thy garden rescued here and there from the wilderness."

---

15 It is one of the 'ironies of events' that Bulstrode's involvement with this florid nemesis was entirely superfluous. The daughter was Ladislaw's mother who, precisely to keep away from her father's tainted money, had run away from home. Even if reunited with her mother she would certainly not have come between Bulstrode and his new 'vista of fortune'.

(P. 664)

and quiets the gnawing of conscience by the thought,

> "I am sinful and nought -a vessel to be consecrated by use- but use me!" (P. 668)

It does indeed begin to seem that Biblical phrases are no ballast against temptation. Of course, in Bulstrode's mouth these words take on a hollow, almost blasphemous ring: it is clear, to us at least, that his behaviour has been a travesty of whatever feats of instrumentality and self-abnegation such thoughts are meant to encourage.

The question is, is it possible to believe that it may not be clear to Bulstrode himself? Unfortunately, Eliot's focus is somewhat blurred: it is unclear whether it is on moral justification, as the remark about 'general doctrines' implies; or whether it is actually on the degree to which Bulstrode in particular is capable of self-deception. The narrative subtly shifts from Bulstrode's ability to interpret general doctrines to suit himself, to Bulstrode's ability to believe what he wants to believe. In order to show that Bulstrode is not simply a 'coarse hypocrite', George Eliot must give us reason to abandon the obvious thought that his wickedness is a very straightforward kind of wickedness which no doctrines and dogmas, honestly and scrupulously followed (however waywardly), could be used to justify. The objection is twofold. Firstly, if Bulstrode is primarily an object in self deception this hardly forwards the central claim. It is hard to see, without further argument, that someone who honestly endeavours to live by general doctrines, say a Kantian, is more prone to self-deception than someone who is primarily guided by 'direct fellow feeling with individual fellow men'. Secondly, there are in any case problems with Eliot's account of Bulstrode's self-deception.

The notion of coarse hypocrisy distinguishes the liar who merely lies to others, from the man who also successfully deceives himself. As the net of his past closes round

him, Bulstrode has to be shown to have been the latter. In Chapter 53, Eliot remarks in general that

> "The memory has as many moods as the temper, and shifts its scenery like a diorama." (P.566)

And about Bulstrode's own particular confrontation with his past, she says,

> "Five minutes before, the expanse of his life had been submerged in its evening sunshine which shone backward to its remembered morning: sin seemed to be a question of doctrine and inward penitence, humiliation an exercise of the closet, the bearing of his deeds a matter of private vision adjusted solely by spiritual relations and conceptions of the divine purposes. And now, as if by some hideous magic, this loud red figure -[Raffles]- had risen before him in unmanageable solidity --an incorporate past which had not entered into his imagination of chastisements." (P. 567)

In chapter 61, Bulstrode's fear that he will not be able to keep hidden for ever 'certain facts of his past life' intensifies. Raffles' insolent chat with Harriet seems to show that he is motivated more by the complex pleasures of torment than the simple profit of blackmail. Bulstrode's power over him is thereby weakened, and his fear of him proportionately the greater. Eliot has this to say,

> "The terror of being judged sharpens the memory: it sends an inevitable glare over that long unvisited past which has been habitually recalled only in general phrases. Even without memory, the life is bound into one by a zone of dependence in growth and decay; but intense memory forces a man to own his blameworthy past. With memory set smarting like a reopened wound, a man's past is not simply a dead history, an outworn preparation of the present; it is not a repented error shaken loose from the life; it is a still quivering part of himself, bringing shudders and bitter flavours and the tinglings of a merited shame." (P. 663)

These remarks are in some ways extremely perceptive. It is persuasive that there is a profound difference in quality between the shame and remorse we might feel about a long past sin which has remained private, and the intensity of the added feelings we would suffer from public exposure. I find it less persuasive that this is necessarily a sign that Bulstrode's remorse was merely formal and cosy, and I find myself totally unpersuaded that these thoughts give us ground to feel confident that Bulstrode believes, any more than we do, that he has 'gradually explained the gratification of [his] desires into satisfactory agreement with [his] beliefs'.

The real problems begin as we try to enter into Bulstrode's mind as he deals with Raffles, his 'incorporate past'. In this episode we are to believe that in his determination to avoid the disgrace which he fears Raffles may bring him to, Bulstrode is able to reconcile himself to taking steps which almost certainly lead to Raffles' death. Certainly, Bulstrode maintains a strictly correct internal dialogue with his God. He inwardly acknowledges

> "..the duty he himself was under to submit to the punishment divinely appointed for him rather than to wish for evil to another." (P. 757)

and while desiring Raffles death, as a deliverance for himself, he

> "set himself to keep his intention separate from his desire." (P. 758)

The question is whether it is possible for Eliot to specify Busltrode's unconscious intentions without infecting his overtly righteous conscious state of mind. In her attempt to do so, she resorts to analogies and metaphors which are beguiling rather than illuminating.

The effect of the metaphors and analogies is to make us feel that we know something of the workings of Bulstrode's mind which he himself is unable to fathom. But they work by treating the mind as if it were a mechanism the complexities of whose workings can be described independently of the subject's consciousness. Think of this analogy,

> "Bulstrode shrank from a direct lie with an intensity disproportionate to the number of his more indirect misdeeds. But many of these misdeeds were like the subtle muscular movements which are not taken account of in the consciousness, though they bring about the end that we fix our mind on and desire. And it is only what we are vividly conscious of that we can vividly imagine to be seen by omniscience." (P.739-40)

As a general remark the truth of which would be useful for her purposes, the last sentence is rather unconvincing, in fact. It is much more plausible to suppose that the fact that we can vividly imagine 'omniscience' to have the ability to see into the murky depths of our unconscious thoughts is precisely what makes it unnerving. But the important point is to see the force of the analogy. When I pick up a pencil, or a teacup, I am only conscious of

making fairly gross movements in my arm and hand. But if I concentrate I am aware of all sorts of subtle muscular movements taking place in my arm and wrist, and I suppose there must be many even more subtle movements I am unable, even with concentration, to detect. So I can make subtle (necessary) movements in my triceps while only consciously moving my fingers. And, as one may reflect, a doctor may tell you that movement of the muscles of your shoulder will cause acute pain, but it is only when you start to write that you realise that you use shoulder muscles as well as arms and fingers in order to move your pen. In normal circumstances, although those muscular movements are necessary and part of the action of writing, one is quite unaware of them. Eliot's thought is that Bulstrode's indirect misdeeds may have played as little role in his conscious mind as these subtle muscular movements play in physical action.

It is an interesting analogy. Neurophysiology is certainly complex, and in pretty well all ordinary everyday bodily movements there will be some subtle muscular movement which bypasses the consciousness of the subject. But interesting as the analogy is, the point at which it breaks down is just the point where we need it to explain. The idea here is that the relationship between the workings of the mind and the consciousness are illuminatingly similar. So, Bulstrode's misdeeds, although they played an instrumental part in achieving the ends he sought, are something he can be as unaware of as I am of the movements of my shoulder muscles as I type. But it is not that Bulstrode is *unaware* that Ladislaw's mother will be disinherited when he hides her existence from her mother; or that he does not *realise* that the Dunkirk business is to receive stolen goods; or that he does not *know* that the brassy greens of Plymdale's will rot Vincy's silk. On the contrary. It is only that afterwards he gives those aspects of his activities little consideration. But in what sense then are his indirect misdeeds like the subtle muscular movements of which we are unaware? The analogy is striking, but it gives us no real clue as to how, without an act of

will, Bulstrode's misdeeds could stay out of his thoughts. Here such an act of will would itself be a misdeed in need of exculpation.

Consider also a metaphor Eliot uses in Chapter 68, which is intended to give us insight into how Bulstrode can act on a motive of which he is unaware. Raffles is alcoholic, and on their first meeting after an interval of twenty years, Bulstrode gives him two hundred pounds, in the unrobust hope that he will go away for good. Raffles of course comes back, and it is clear that he has spent a large part of the money on drink. On this occasion, Bulstrode gives him a further hundred pounds.

> "Various motives urged Bulstrode to this open-handedness, but he did not himself inquire too closely into all of them. As he had stood watching Raffles in his uneasy sleep it had certainly entered his mind that the man had been much shattered since the first gift of two hundred pounds." (P. 741)

The implication of this is clear enough. Bulstrode is hoping that he is furnishing Raffles with the means to drink himself to death. Eliot absolves him of the need to justify this wicked deed in the light of his own demanding moral code, by putting the motive at an unconscious level. There, the motive can do its causal work (motivating the open-handedness) without interfering with Bulstrode's righteous dialogue with God.

But how plausible is that as an account of unconscious motivation? Of course people can act on motives of which they are not fully aware, but a claim that they are doing so is a matter of *interpretation*. Usually an unconscious intention, or motive, will be demanded in the case where the best explanation the subject offers is inadequate. But Eliot does not offer this as a better explanation of Bulstrode's action than Bulstrode himself can offer. She doesn't even give us his own account. We are told that he had 'various motives', but apart from the thin blackmail motive it is hard to see what they were. We know he wants Raffles dead. That desire, in conjunction with a belief that a hundred pounds will bring him closer to death, looks, to us at least, pretty damning. In order not to

be forced into damning himself, Bulstrode has to be satisfied, without enquiring too closely, that this is not the belief and desire pair which motivates him. With the metaphor of a thought (the thought that Raffles is much shattered) 'entering his mind', Eliot keeps a sharp control on the content of Bulstrode's consciousness. My contention is that such sharp control plays fast and loose with what it means to say that someone had motives 'into which they did not inquire closely'. Either Bulstrode has no idea that a large amount of money may be a death sentence in the hands of a drunk, in which case it is not clear what it means to say that the thought 'entered his mind'; or he does know that, in which case, irrespective of his other 'motives', that ought to have induced him *not* to have given Raffles the money. The contention is that our response to Bulstrode is achieved by illegitimate use of metaphors and analogies which purport to *explain* a crucial and controversial thesis, when they only encourage its unthinking adoption.

(b) Casaubon

The overall suggestion of this section is that the narrative controls our reactions by leaning heavily on metaphors which suggest that the mind is a complex mechanism. Another example of this technique is taken from Chapter 42, where it seems the novel takes us deeper into Casaubon's jealousy of Ladislaw. Casaubon cannot bear the idea of Ladislaw marrying Dorothea after he dies. (We later discover that he decides to write it into his will that Dorothea will forfeit all his wealth if she does.) The narrator accounts for his misery in the following way:

> "If the truth should be that some undermining disease was at work within him, there might be large opportunity for some people to be the happier when he was gone; and if one of those people should be Will Ladislaw, Mr.Casaubon objected so strongly that it seemed as if the annoyance would make part of his disembodied existence." (P. 457)

But she seems to retract that as a complete explanation of Casaubon's motives. At the close of three pages in which, with derisive contempt, she describes Casaubon's mental anguish, she seems to relent. She says:

> "This is a very bare and therefore a very incomplete way of putting the case. The human soul moves in many channels, and Mr.Casaubon, we know, had a sense of rectitude and an honourable pride in satisfying the requirements of honour..." (P. 457-8)

The claim that her way of putting the case might fail to capture its subject because the account is 'very bare' must surely be disingenuous, but no matter. The important point is that the use of the phrase 'the human soul moves in many channels' encourages us to believe we will now explore *another*, indeed the best, aspect of Casaubon's convoluted psyche. We expect an account of Casaubon's sense of rectitude going at full steam in the best channels he has. But the Casaubon soliloquy that follows doesn't begin to fit that description. It certainly doesn't fulfil the implicit promise that we will see a less despicable side to Casaubon's 'soul'. Eliot claims that Casaubon's sense of rectitude and honourable pride

> "compelled him to find other reasons for his conduct than jealousy and vindictiveness." (P. 458)

There is first a general point. It is difficult to think there might be straightforward facts of the matter if one tries to divide motives into those on which one acted, and those which were there, but didn't actually do any work. There seems to be a deal of indeterminacy about. But this much is clear: if one has to cast about for 'other reasons' to justify conduct which was actually motivated by jealousy and vindictiveness, then jealousy and vindictiveness are the dispositions which precipitated the action, pretty well irrespective of how virtuous and reasonable the 'other reasons' turn out to be.[16] So, whatever drives one to find those other reasons will be much closer to hypocrisy than honour. So, under the guise of giving us another, more honourable side to the story, she tells us that he is not only vindictive and jealous, but hypocritical too.

---

16 Donald Davidson argues that there is a determinate, if often unknowable, answer to the question of what precisely motivated a subject. The primary reason for an action is its cause. If that seems convincing, an author could simply inform us of the *cause* of, and therefore the primary reason for, an action. But this is *not* Casaubon's motivation for his action. This is simply craven moral wriggling. Davidson, D., 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' in *Essays on Actions and Events* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980)

It *is* possible to imagine cases in which an honourable person might feel compelled to find reasons to justify their behaviour, even if they had other, more pressing reasons for action, so the general point might not quite clinch it, but in Casaubon's case it is clear that there is no possibility that his search for other reasons might have been fuelled by his sense of rectitude and honourable pride because the putative 'other reasons' which follow are nothing other than an expression of the jealousy and vindictiveness itself.[17]

> "The way in which Mr. Casaubon put the case was this:-
> "In marrying Dorothea Brooke I had to care for her wellbeing in case of my death. But wellbeing is not to be secured by ample, independent possession of property; on the contrary, occasions might arise in which such possession might expose her to the more danger. She is ready prey to any man who knows how to play adroitly either on her affectionate ardour or on her quixotic enthusiasm; and a man stands by with that very intention in his mind--a man with no other principle than transient caprice, and who has a personal animosity towards me--I am sure of it--an animosity which is fed by the consciousness of his ingratitude, and which he has constantly vented in ridicule of which I am as well assured as if I had heard it. Even if I live I shall not be without uneasiness as to what he may attempt through indirect influence. This man has gained Dorothea's ear: he has fascinated her attention; he has evidently tried to impress her mind with the notion that he has claims beyond anything I have done for him. If I die--and he is waiting here on the watch for that--he will persuade her to marry him. That would be a calamity for her and a success for him. She would not think it a calamity: he would make her believe anything; she has a tendency to immoderate attachment which she inwardly reproaches me for not responding to, and already her mind is occupied with his fortunes. He thinks of an easy conquest and of entering my nest. That I will hinder! Such a marriage would be fatal to Dorothea. Has he ever persisted in anything except from contradiction? In knowledge he has always tried to be showy at small cost. In religion he could be as long as it suited him, the facile echo of Dorothea's vagaries. When was sciolism ever dissociated from laxity? I utterly distrust his morals, and it is my duty to hinder to the utmost the fulfilment of his designs." (p. 458)

---

17 Somewhat irrelevant, but this is the sort of thing I have is mind. In concentration camps like, for example, 'Sorbibo', some Jews -in order to survive- had to participate, at some level or other in the process of extermination. Their choice was to do so or be killed. The ethos of the camps was that they must stay alive in order that they could, at some later point, avenge the slaughter. I think that the primitive desire to stay alive must almost certainly in some cases have overridden the 'higher' motive. This would be an example where the need to find a higher motive would not be hypocrisy, but a demand of sanity or something.

This is *not* Casaubon at his best, putting his own side of the case. This is Casaubon unwittingly exposing his very worst side, on a topic upon which he is totally unbalanced. His assessment of Ladislaw's character is quite out of line with anything he has good reason to believe of him. Ladislaw is 'a bit of a gypsy' perhaps, as Lydgate remarks, and he is not bound by such rigid conventions as Casaubon himself, but he is not 'a man with no other principle than transient caprice', whose morals Casaubon should 'utterly distrust'. And his suspicions about Ladislaw's intentions are quite unbalanced. Ladislaw is certainly not 'standing by with the intention in his mind' of 'preying' on Dorothea; he is not 'on the watch for' Casaubon's death. There is even perhaps some projection in the thought that Dorothea is 'ready prey to any man who knows how to play adroitly on her affectionate ardour or her Quixotic enthusiasm'. And the sentence 'He thinks of an easy conquest and of entering my nest' doesn't express concern over Dorothea's future, it expresses naked suspicion and sexual possessiveness. Casaubon's closing remark, 'it is my duty to hinder to the utmost the fulfilment of his designs', could fool no-one, except perhaps Casaubon himself.[18] So, in the place where she has encouraged us to believe she will tell us the best of Casaubon, by revealing the working of morally honourable mechanisms within his mind, Eliot reveals only what is at best self-deception, and at worst hypocrisy.

It might be thought that the force of my point is undercut by the fact that there is no temptation to see this passage as anything *other* than heavily ironic. It might seem that while it is certainly true that we learn nothing to Casaubon's advantage, we do not for a moment feel that we have, so why should George Eliot be criticised for not presenting us with a good side of Casaubon? But that objection misses the point. The claim here is that it is important to notice how our responses are manipulated. This passage

---

[18] This could, at best, be seen as a sincere avowal, which (as suggested in the final section of the third chapter) when understood in its history and context, can be seen to be self-deceived.

follows three pages of exploration of Casaubon's misery, told to us in a way which repels rather than invites our sympathy for Casaubon's fear that his wife loves another man. And so when Eliot says,

> "This is a very bare and therefore a very incomplete way of putting the case. The human soul moves in many channels, and Mr.Casaubon, we know had a sense of rectitude and an honourable pride in satisfying the requirements of honour..." (P. 457-8)

it seems she feels some remorse for that sustained attack. There is seeming lenity towards Casaubon in the suggestion that the account so far has been a ' very incomplete way of putting the case'; and the quasi-mechanical image of 'the human soul's moving in many channels' encourages us to think that we will now explore a better aspect of Casaubon. But of course what follows gives us no further insight into how Casaubon's anguish presents itself to him. All that we find grounded in his consciousness is the most objectionable aspect of his unconscious jealousy. We are lulled into thinking that even the most compassionate exploration of the inner recesses of Casaubon's soul can only make him seem more unpleasant.

* * *

Section III: Dorothea and Isabel Archer

The peculiarity of Eliot's conception of her characters' moral psychology may become clearer in a comparison between the way George Eliot reveals her characters' thoughts and the way Henry James does. I will compare Chapter 42 of *Portrait of a Lady* with Chapter 20 of *Middlemarch*. The main point of contrast is the extent to which each novelist feels constrained by the consciousness of their subject. It will become clear that, however deeply we enter into his labyrinthine extended metaphors, James is giving us a description of Isabel Archer's thought which she herself could recognise as her own. Isabel's dawning understanding of her relationship with Osmond is complex, and the

complexity is mirrored in James' words rather than Isabel's. But at no point are we expected to feel that her thoughts have a complexity which we, but not she, fully appreciate. In marked contrast with the 'insight' Eliot gives us into Dorothea's pain and disillusion, James' account is informed by Isabel's painfully awakening consciousness.

James was, of course, deeply influenced by Eliot, and that too is quite striking in the comparison. In simple terms of the situation which is being described, there are close parallels. Chapter 42 of *Portrait of a Lady* and Chapter 20 of *Middlemarch* are both set in Rome, and both describe the bitter disillusion of a young wife with her husband: Chapter 42 of *Portrait of a Lady* focusses on Isabel Archer, as she sits late into the night trying to confront the full dreariness of her relationship with Osmond; Chapter 20 of *Middlemarch* centres on Dorothea, observing her developing relationship with Casaubon, and analysing her attempts to rise above the misery it seems to inflict upon her. Both women married, in the face of protests and disapproval they felt superior to, at least partly, in order to do something splendid and generous. And in so doing both were exploited, more or less consciously, by older men (Osmond more, Casaubon less). And both men were also deluded. Their wives, before marriage, seemed to be less substantial creatures than they turned out to be. Had Dorothea understood Casaubon's ire when he rounded upon his young wife,

> "..who, instead of observing his abundant pen-scratches and amplitude of paper with the uncritical awe of an elegant minded canary bird, seemed to present herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference....He had formerly observed with approbation her capacity for worshipping the right object; he now foresaw with sudden terror that this capacity might be replaced by presumption..."(P. 232-3)

she might, like Isabel, have 'ultimately perceived' that the

> "..real offence.... was her having a mind of her own at all. Her mind was to be his --attached to his own like a small garden-plot to a deer-park. He would rake the soil gently and water the flowers; he would weed the beds and gather an occasional nosegay....He didn't wish her to be stupid... But he expected her intelligence to operate altogether in his favour, and so far

> from desiring her mind to be a blank he had flattered himself that it would be richly perceptive."[19]

James indebtedness to Eliot is also clear in the language used to describe the women's feelings. Both make similar use of nightmarish images of sudden unexpected enclosure to mark the contrast between expectation and reality. This passage, for example, from *Portrait of a Lady*

> "Instead of leading to the high places of happiness, from which the world would seem to lie below one, so that one could look down with a sense of exaltation and advantage, and judge and choose and pity, it led rather downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression where the sound of other lives, easier and freer, was heard as from above, where it served to deepen the feeling of failure."[20]

is heavily reminiscent of these from *Middlemarch.*

> ".. thinking that hereafter she should see this subject which touched him so nearly from the same high ground whence doubtless it had become so important to him." (P. 228)

> "Dorothea had not distinctly observed, but felt with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by ante-rooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither." (P. 227-8)

> "Once the doorsill of marriage is crossed it is impossible not to be aware that you make no way and that the sea is not within sight --that, in fact, you are exploring an enclosed basin." (P. 228)

But close examination of the language reveals very fundamental differences in the effect produced by each chapter. Despite the similarities in the situations in which these two young women find themselves, despite the seemingly similar responses they have, despite the preference of both authors for *oratio obliqua,* the contrast between the status of Isabel's and Dorothea's thoughts is very marked.

---

[19] Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* The World's Classics edition, Oxford University Press 1981 (P. 469)

[20] ibid (P. 461)

The differences between the techniques and effects of the two chapters centres round the point of view from which the characters' distress is explored. *Portrait of a Lady* reveals Isabel's thoughts to us by showing us precisely how Isabel herself understands her own situation. When Isabel is confronted, in Osmond's cynical aesthetic, with a culture she feels unable to understand, we hear about her feelings in James' voice, and not Isabel's own. But at all points what James says could plausibly be grounded in Isabel's own consciousness. The narrator remarks,

> "A mind more ingenious, more pliant, more cultivated, more trained to admirable exercises, she had not encountered; and it was this exquisite instrument she had now to reckon with."[21]

James and not Isabel calls Osmond's mind 'ingenious', 'pliant' and 'exquisite'; James and not Isabel talks of 'admirable exercises'. But the substance of the judgement, that Isabel feels herself to be in opposition to a man who is clever, cleverer than she, could easily have been put in the first person. She feels her opposition to be muddled and intellectually inconsequential. More important than her sense of her intellectual inferiority, though, is her awareness that, for all the sharpness of his mind, his moral sensibilities are blunter than hers. When James says,

> "She was not a daughter of the Puritans, but for all that she believed in such a thing as chastity and even as decency. It would appear that Osmond was far from doing anything of the sort; some of his traditions made her push back her skirts."[22]

again, she might not have expressed her disdain in the image of pushing back her skirts, but the thought that she felt Osmond's morals to be a mire could have been expressed in the first person. And when he goes on,

---

[21] ibid (P. 465)

[22] ibid (P. 469)

> "It was very simple; he despised her; she had no traditions and the moral horizons of a Unitarian minister. Poor Isabel, who had never been able to understand Unitarianism"[23]

that final 'Poor Isabel' expresses *her* exasperation in the face of that irony. We hear only James' voice, only James' language, and yet we are given insight into *Isabel's* feelings because we can imagine plausible candidates for thoughts which would be apt to play a role in her consciousness of her situation.

That Eliot's purpose is different is heralded by the verse which heads Chapter 20 of *Middlemarch.*

> "A child forsaken, waking suddenly,
> Whose gaze afeard on all things round doth rove,
> And seeth only that it cannot see
> The meeting eyes of love." (P. 224)

Eliot's description of Dorothea's feelings is to be regarded, apparently, as the kind of explanation we would give of someone whose feelings we understand better than they can themselves. In explaining a child's grief, for example, one often has to express it in terms the child himself has no access to. A child has no understanding of concepts like abandonment, unrequited love, jealousy, sibling rivalry and so on, but those are just the terms we use to explain why they behave the way they do, and how they feel. So it seems with Dorothea. Chapter 20 opens thus.

> "Two hours later, Dorothea was seated in an inner room or boudoir of a handsome apartment of the Via Sistina.
>
> I am sorry to add that she was sobbing bitterly, with such an abandonment to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled by pride on her own account and thoughtfulness of others will sometimes allow herself when she feels securely alone. And Mr.Casaubon was certain to remain away for some time at the Vatican." (P.224)

---

[23] ibid (P. 470)

Dorothea is in the grip of powerful emotions. The promise of the epigraph is that Eliot will tease out the complex elements of Dorothea's distress, so that we can understand it in a way that Dorothea herself is unable to.

After two pages of complicated explanation of Dorothea's 'oppressed heart', George Eliot disingenuously remarks,

> "Dorothea was crying, and if she had been required to state the cause, she could only have done so in some such general words as I have already used." (P. 226)

'Required to state the cause' is an odd way to put it, but it is possible that Dorothea could have been coaxed into some confession of her misery. But had she felt able 'to state its cause', it is very unlikely that 'some such words' as the narrator used would have sprung to her lips. She couldn't, for example, have described herself as 'the product of English and Swiss puritanism', without having matured enough, emotionally and intellectually, not to suffer so keenly from the limitations that upbringing imposed on her. And some of the words Eliot uses not only *explain* Dorothea's misery, but also give it a moral status which Dorothea herself could not have claimed. She was, for example, 'a girl whose ardent nature turns all her small allowance of knowledge into principles.' These words, because they express a disposition, and because they make a moral evaluation, are not words Dorothea herself would be particularly well placed to choose. The point is not just that, like James, Eliot has access to more complex language than the heroine. It is rather that whereas James' descriptions of Isabel's feelings make sense of Isabel's own thoughts, Eliot's about Dorothea do not.

A pressing question may now seem to arise. These words may not be Dorothea's, but if it is legitimate to talk of children's emotions above their heads, it is presumably legitimate to do so of adults under certain circumstances. As Eliot has explicitly drawn this parallel, what rules out these circumstances as unfavourable? Chapter Three discussed the

circumstances in which we can read propositional content into the mental states of those who could not themselves frame that content. We sometimes have the right to ascribe propositional attitudes because certain behaviour, in particular circumstances, with a specified history, demands that ascription. There is an internal connection between behaviour of that sort in that sort of context, and the applicability of a psychological ascription. There, the lower limit was exemplified by Wittgenstein's remark that we can say, on the basis of certain behaviour, in a particular context, that a dog fears its master will beat it. Although of a dog we can ascribe little above that lower limit, because they lack linguistic competence, we can and do ascribe more complex psychological states to people. So the question is, why can we not simply regard what Eliot is doing here in that light?

Sometimes we can. The point is that often we are encouraged to regard remarks in this light when they in fact work rather differently. Consider this

> "(C)onceive one more historical contrast: the gigantic broken revelations of that Imperial and Papal city thrust abruptly on the notions of a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss puritanism, fed on meagre histories and on art chiefly of the handscreen sort; a girl whose ardent nature turned all her small allowance of knowledge into principles, fusing her actions into their mould, and whose quick emotions gave the most abstract things the quality of a pleasure or a pain; a girl who had lately become a wife, and from the enthusiastic acceptance of untried duty found herself plunged in tumultuous preoccupation with her personal lot." (p. 225)

This sentence seems to fulfil the promise of the chapter's epigraph. Supposedly addressed to the reader who is puzzled by Dorothea's misery, it seems to pull back the focus to describe her in general terms which should dispel the puzzle. The first clause does just this. By making a generalisation Dorothea would not be in position to make, this remark gives us legitimate insight into Dorothea's feelings which Dorothea could not have. George Eliot can make us understand far better than Dorothea could that some of her misery and confusion arises because of her narrow education and upbringing. This description of her feelings does not have to be grounded in her own consciousness. But note that we don't get insight by examining the 'feel' of her emotions; there is no analysis of her

phenomenology. Rather, Eliot simply encourages us to make plausible generalisations about the kind of girl Dorothea would be after the kind of upbringinging and education she had. Such a girl would fear and dislike Catholicism. Certainly, *contra* Eliot's own disingenuous remark, Dorothea would not have chosen some such words as these to describe her disquiet, but it seems plausible that she might have deplored 'the deep degeneracy of superstition divorced from reverence', and felt distaste for the curious and uneasy mix of tourism and religion that exists in magnificently decorated churches. And of course, she would have learned nothing of the art itself. We do learn something about Dorothea's feelings which she could herself have known, because we accept quasi-theoretical generalisations about feelings.

But as the sentence continues, it becomes less clear what the basis of the generalisation is, and it becomes more difficult to find it informative. Dorothea is also

> "a girl whose ardent nature turned all her small allowance of knowledge into principles, fusing her actions into their mould, and whose quick emotions gave the most abstract things the quality of a pleasure or a pain;" (P. 225)

I feel some resistance to the moral coercion I sense here. The rhetoric hides what is in fact a shift from sympathetic detachment to morally loaded appeal. The repetition of the phrase 'a girl' suggests this clause has the same status as the first. But I don't know that we do understand 'ardent natures' in the way that we understand the principles for educating English middle-class young ladies in the early nineteenth century. To support the claim for sympathy in the previous clause, Eliot adverted to facts about the sort of background and education Dorothea had, and facts about Rome's history and culture. These support plausible generalisations. But the facts and generalisations about Dorothea's psychology are less persuasive. The measured irony directed at the stunting education Dorothea has received has been completely abandoned. The authorial tone now demands moral approval as well as sympathy. But the only sense I can make of 'all her small allowance of knowledge' being turned 'into principles, fusing her actions into their mould' is to think of

Dorothea as someone who always acts according to principle, but who is inclined to be opinionated about things she knows nothing about. This seems to be consonant with what we know of Dorothea, and it would indeed add to her pain. But it hardly justifies the laudatory tone. And the tone of the remark that her 'quick emotions gave the most abstract things the quality of a pleasure or a pain' suggests that Dorothea's pain is heightened because she occupies the moral high ground. But the only sense I can make of it suggests an emotionality which is more morally complex.

The final clause is slightly different again. There is again the surreptitious presumption of generality (again Dorothea is described as 'a girl who...'). This time she is

> "a girl who had lately become a wife, and from the enthusiastic acceptance of untried duty found herself plunged in tumultuous preoccupation with her personal lot." (P. 225)

Here the generality appealed to is plain. We have moved out of the realm of Dorothea's psychology, back into the realm of public facts. But generalisations about brides are less informative than generalisations about girls brought up in English and Swiss puritanism. The precise *kind* of post-nuptial misery Dorothea suffers could only be made plain if we knew what her preoccupation was with. There are many plausible miseries (she has no-one of her own age to talk to; she is suddenly aware of being horribly ignorant; she is bored by Casaubon's boring little lectures; romantic fantasy and Mr.Brooke's avuncular ramblings will have been a poor preparation for Casaubon's bed, etc). But these miseries would cause a tumult which would be sufficiently veined with self-pity, resentment and disgust to make the high moral tone carried over from 'enthusiastic acceptance of untried duty' inappropriate. With Casaubon's distress, discussed in the section called 'Ungrounded Descriptions', we were deflected, by a mocking ironic tone, from realistic speculation about Casaubon's misery which might make us more sympathetic to him than suits Eliot's purpose. Here, because of the morally inflated language, we are deflected from realistic speculation which might make us understand Dorothea better, but admire her less than Eliot

wants us to. The epigraph to the chapter promises us insight on the grounds of our theoretically privileged position. What we get is in fact moral evaluation without the appropriate insight to justify it.

The problem emerges more clearly if we look carefully at the uncomfortable *feelings* Dorothea experiences as she begins to suffer from her unfulfilled expectations. Consider this:

> "Dorothea had not distinctly observed, but *felt* with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by ante-rooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither." (P. 227-8) (my italics)

There are two phenomenologically realist thoughts, both wrong, which would encourage us to find Eliot's account informative as it stands. The first mistaken idea is that we can conceive of a subject's 'having' a particular sensation as the subject standing-in-some-relation-*to* a sensation which is independently specifiable. The second misleading idea is to think of sensations as the paradigm mental state. So, running those thoughts together, it is tempting to think that *feeling* warm and *feeling* claustrophobic-panic-because-one's-husband-is-not-a fit-subject-for-hero-worship are states of mind which are comparable rather as different shades of colour are comparable. Chapter Three argued that talk about mental states must be grounded in context, in behaviour, or in thoughts which the subject could plausibly entertain. If we accept such a constraint, if this description of Dorothea's feeling is to be informative, it ought to tell us what Dorothea herself is thinking.

But, the passage is curiously elusive on this point. When Dorothea is 'feeling' that, has she begun to *suspect* it too? On the one hand, it would seem not. Certainly, the following passage seems to suggest that Dorothea has no new information on Casaubon.

> "But was not Mr.Casaubon just as learned as before? Had his forms of expression changed, or his sentiments become less laudable? O waywardness of womanhood! did his chronology fail him, or his ability to state not only a theory but the names of those who held it; or his provision

> for giving the heads of any subject on demand? And was not Rome the place in all the world to give free play to such accomplishments? Besides had not Dorothea's enthusiasm especially dwelt on the prospect of relieving the weight and sadness with which great tasks lie on him who has to achieve them? -And that such weight pressed on Mr.Casaubon was only plainer than before." (P. 227)

The heavy irony here is George Eliot's not Dorothea's, and it seems that (unlike Isabel's) Dorothea's sorrow is not accompanied by any change in her cognitive state with regard to Casaubon. It seems then that Dorothea is made bitterly unhappy by her marriage, but her 'sense' that Casaubon is not the man she had taken him to be is completely unspecific.

But on the other hand, it is difficult to make sense of Dorothea's 'feeling' about Casaubon if it is not accompanied by some thought, however vague. The idea seems to be that Dorothea is now responding to Casaubon as he really is, rather than to her own notion of him. And this confrontation with his limitations is necessarily painful. But how has this change come about? and in what does it consist? Casaubon's thoughts and feelings had been equally 'embalmed' before marriage, and everyone but Dorothea was able to see it. So it's not a sufficient explanation of her changed reaction to him that he *is* what she now (inchoately) senses him to be. We need an account of a change in her. In order to feel this is a genuine picture of disillusion there are two things we would want to know. First, we need to know why she should now see past her idealisation of him; second, in order to know how she feels about seeing past her idealisation, we would need to know what her thoughts are now when she thinks about him.

As some kind of explanation of the first, Eliot makes this general remark,

> "(A) fellow mortal with whose nature you are acquainted solely through the brief entrances and exits called courtship, may, when seen in the continuity of married companionship, be disclosed as something better or worse than what you have preconceived, but will certainly not appear the same." (P. 227)

This is of course true. But as an explanation, this is at too high a level of generality to help us out of the present difficulty. It is not that once one is married, one is given magical

access to the essence of one's spouse. It is simply that in constant companionship, one has simply much more information on which to base judgements, and less misinformation in the shape of deliberate or accidental deceit on their part, and projection on one's own. So what, in particular, is it that constant exposure to Casaubon has revealed that the brief entrances and exits of courtship managed to hide?

More importantly, if Eliot were to make sense of the idea that Dorothea has begun to *feel* that Casaubon is not the fountain of wisdom she had thought he was, she would have had to give us clearer insight into Dorothea's own sense of her illusions crumbling. What thoughts play a role in Dorothea's consciousness? Does Dorothea find him repetitive, or dull? Does she suspect, from the fact that he never relates what he has discovered to his central idea that he mindlessly collects data and in fact has no overarching project? We are not told. Beguiled by Phenomenological Realism we are encouraged to think that Dorothea is the victim of non-propositional uncomfortable sensations. The facts which cause those sensations, and in whose light we can accurately assess precisely what Casaubon amounts to, come to us from Eliot rather than from Dorothea. Dorothea is caused pain by just those facts, but she still believes in Casaubon.

But, as has been argued for in Chapter Three, the sensations and the intellect do not operate independently of one another. As George Eliot says herself when talking of Rosamund, towards whom she is somewhat less indulgent,

> "Our passions do not live apart in locked chambers, but dressed in their small wardrobe of notions, bring their provisions to a common table and mess together, feeding out of the common store according to their appetite." (P. 196)

What is missing is an account of the notions in which Dorothea's passions are dressed. She, as it were, *barely* responds to Casaubon. But Casaubon's faults, whatever they are, cannot simply causally impinge upon Dorothea, unmediated by any thought. And if we

imagine plausible candidates for Dorothea's disillusion actually playing a role in her own thought, our view of her would necessarily be more morally clouded than the view Eliot's psychological ascription warrants. These judgements that he is dull, repetitive, etc. might be accurate, but they are not kind. It is clear that whereas, at least in these passages, we can think of James's psychological ascriptions as well grounded, because the ascriptions he makes *are* apt to play a role in the mental life of his heroine, Eliot's, on the other hand, float free of Dorothea's own thoughts.

One final comparison with *Portrait of a Lady* is appropriate. Both Eliot and James have complex conflicting feelings about the self-sacrificial element in their heroines' marriages. It has been a recurring theme of the portrayal of Dorothea. In the early chapters of *Middlemarch*, a tone of heavy, if sympathetic, irony pervades the discussion of Dorothea's desire for self-abnegation. There is also some muted pity for her refusal to recognise that she is a sensuous woman: her mixed feelings about horse-riding make it very clear that Dorothea isn't comfortable with her own pleasures unless she can give them some kind of spiritual basis; similarly, when she is surprised by the pleasure she takes in the beauty of her mother's jewels,

> "All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy." (P. 36)

Now, in Chapter 20, we see the uselessness of this innocent timidity and lack of self knowledge in guiding her choice of marriage partner. Isabel's innocence and vulnerability were less complex than Dorothea's; and her selflessness is more specific. Overburdened by her wealth, she wanted to find a justification for her riches. Osmond was sophisticated, poor, not at all abject, and clearly in want of a wealthy wife. In Chapter 42 we see her coming to terms with the folly of believing that that could have provided the justification she sought.

My contention is that whereas we are given little genuine insight into Dorothea's disillusion, we do understand Isabel's. The final contrast emerges from comparing Isabel's and Dorothea's views on their former selves. Isabel herself feels shame when she remembers her previous intentions.

> "Isabel's cheek burned when she asked herself if she had really married on a factitious theory, in order to do something finely appreciable with her money."[24]

And her memory that she was also, in marrying Osmond, very much pleasing herself is presented as a defence,

> "But she was able to answer quickly enough that this was only half the story. It was because a certain ardour took possession of her--a sense of the earnestness of his affection and a delight in his personal qualities. He was better than anyone else."[25]

Dorothea, on the other hand, and perhaps Eliot herself, does not face up to the full shaming 'factitiousness' of Dorothea's theories about marriage. The pain of marriage to Casaubon is beautifully depicted. We see Dorothea trying to express her affection for Casaubon physically, only to be rebuffed (with unfailing propriety). But it is not just sexual reticence[26] which stops Eliot from telling us how *Dorothea* feels, as she learns day after day that her belief in marriage, and in marriage to Casaubon in particular, was wildly misplaced. She shirks expressing Dorothea's thoughts in words Dorothea herself might have used, because there *are* no words which could both express the highminded spiritual process Dorothea is supposedly undergoing, and also express her pain and disillusion. Eliot says,

---

[24] ibid (P. 464)

[25] ibid (P. 464)

26Although there *is* sexual reticence. The Cabeiri are Samothracian fertility gods. There is presumably a neat parallel between the thought in one sentence that "in bitter manuscript remarks about the solar deities, he had become indifferent to the sunlight", and the thought in the previous sentence about his "agitated dimness about the Cabeiri".

> "But now, since they had been in Rome, with all the depths of her emotion roused to tumultuous activity, and with life made a new problem by new elements, she had been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger or repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness." (P. 228)

'Fits of anger and repulsion' is a very strong phrase. But a discreet veil is drawn over their content. Instead of telling us the shape of those 'inward fits', Eliot suddenly changes the tone. She essays a mild little joke, saying,

> "how far the judicious Hooker or any other hero of erudition would have been the same at Mr.Casaubon's time of life, she had no means of knowing, so that he could not have the advantage of comparison,..." (P. 228)

This very abrupt change of mood is queer. But it effectively deflects us. At a point when we might have been entering into Dorothea's understandably *self*-centred anger, we are suddenly reminded of her absurd, Quixotic hopes in marriage. We are reminded of the remark in Chapter 1, in which it was said that Dorothea

> "...felt sure that she would have married the judicious Hooker, if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony; or John Milton when his blindness had come on; or any of the other great men whose odd habits it would have been glorious piety to endure.."(P.4)

The irony in Chapter 1 is plain, but the tone of the reprise in Chapter 20 is not harsh. Rather it is sympathetic, and its chief effect is to stop us from wondering just what thoughts are in Dorothea's mind when she is repelled by her thin, middle-aged, unresponsive husband, and just what about his behaviour makes her angry, and just what form her anger takes. The thought returns to Dorothea's present feelings,

> "...but her husband's way of commenting on the strangely impressive objects around them had begun to affect her with a sort of mental shiver." (P. 228)

With 'a sort of mental shiver' we are fobbed off with a *sensation,* which, while it still makes non-specific reference to her fits of anger and repulsion, has no propositional content. The paragraph continues with George Eliot's condemnation of Casaubon. It has a

comparative perspective on Dorothea and Casaubon which suggests Dorothea herself could not make this judgement.

> "What was fresh to her mind was worn out to his; and such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long ago shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalmment of knowledge." (P.228-9)

Consider how different the impression created would be if that thought had been expressed by Dorothea. We would have been inclined to think that although her fierceness was understandable, it was harsh and cruel. Here though, it is *we*, and not the ignorant unhappy wife, who think the harsh thoughts. She seems to have only uncomfortable, contentless sensations which are caused by, and not judgements on, his flaws of character.

The contrast with *Portrait of a Lady* is sharp. The judgements passed on Osmond in Chapter 42 are all judgements Isabel herself could own. Isabel, unlike Dorothea, is not too genteel to recognise her own and her husband's comparative moral status. Isabel is struggling to understand Osmond's disillusion and dislike. James says,

> "It was her scorn of his assumptions, it was this that made him draw himself up. He had plenty of contempt, and it was proper his wife should be as well furnished; but that she should turn the hot light of her disdain upon his own conception of things--this was a danger he had not allowed for. He believed he should have regulated her emotions before she came to it; and Isabel could easily imagine how his ears had scorched on his discovering he had been too confident."[27]

In that last image, one can almost hear Isabel's snort of contempt. But we also sense her real fear that

> "When one had a wife who gave one that sensation there was nothing left but to hate her."[28]

---

[27] James *Portrait of a Lady* (P. 470)

[28] ibid (P. 470)

At the centre of this chapter of *Portrait of a Lady* is Isabel's own dawning awareness of her position. She begins to sense how great the gap is between what she and Osmond each expected of the other. She begins to see that she is trapped in a marriage which is demanding without being rewarding. And she acknowledges that, despite her contempt for him, she is still sufficiently in his thrall to try in vain to please him. This section has sought to show, by contrast, that, for all the detail and subtlety of Eliot's language, and the subtlety of the response demanded of us, the particularity of Dorothea's own consciousness of her situation eludes us.

* * *

Section IV: Dorothea's Altruism

It may be tempting to think that any contrast there is can be set down simply to the fact that Isabel is more daring, more assertive. She is a more modern woman than Dorothea, so her awareness of her own situation would be more complete. Isabel is conscious of her feelings in a way Dorothea cannot be. So whereas *Portrait of a Lady* depicts Isabel's *conscious* thought, *Middlemarch* is concerned with Dorothea's *unconscious* feelings. This section will briefly address that question, but my main point will be to suggest that Eliot fails appropriately to ground her descriptions of her characters' thoughts and feelings because her interest in her character's psychology was less pressing than her concern to analyse a particular form of altruism. Despite her tears, Dorothea's moral problem is conceived of and 'solved' at a level of abstraction which allows Eliot to give an unrealistic schematic account of her conflict. Eliot's solution to Dorothea's problem relies on mental ascriptions which could be grounded only in mental facts which do not exist, (and it is inconsistent with mental ascriptions for which her text gives legitimate grounding).

Eliot took as her subject the distress and moral turmoil a highly idealistic well motivated woman like Dorothea would be caused by her inability to understand her husband. And she believed the impasse to be the result of a metaphysical problem, the problem of 'Other Minds', discussed in Chapter Three. This problem, and the possibility of its solution, is one of the central themes in the novel.[29]

> "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she would devote herself to Mr.Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is no longer reflection but feeling --an idea wrought back to the directness of sense, like the solidity of objects-- that he had an equivalent centre of self whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain difference." (P. 243)

Eliot's interest is to show us that Dorothea *does* manage to transcend her metaphysical limitations. In spite of the limits imposed on her by inescapable facts about the privacy of our mental states, Dorothea demonstrates that *moral* egoism is not an unavoidable corollary of epistemological egoism. While the 'other minds' problem is epistemologically intractable, its pernicious moral effects can be overcome by supererogatory acts of the imagination.

The focus of this section will be two incidents in the novel. Each describes a crisis in Dorothea's and Casaubon's marriage, a crisis caused, on both occasions, by a misunderstanding which is only resolved by Dorothea's ability to transcend her own egoism to imagine her husband's 'centre of self'. In each, in order for the narrative to give Eliot's preferred account, both the misunderstanding and its resolution are tendentiously

---

29 Peter Jones is again interesting for a detailed discussion of the nature of Eliot's solution to the problem of epistemological egoism. He says,
"We can infer from *Middlemarch* the view that imagination functions in three related but distinguishable ways: firstly as a presupposition of all perception; secondly, as a constructive agency; thirdly, as a foundation of sympathetic understanding and thus, of morality." (p17 *Philosophy and the Novel)*

described and analysed. And of course my suggestion is that the wheels of the preferred account are oiled by the lubricant of Phenomenological Realism.

* * * *

IV(a) The Honeymoon

Dorothea and Casaubon's first open disagreement comes at the end of Chapter 20. In marrying Casaubon, Dorothea has been foolish and absurdly idealistic. But the focus of Chapter 20 is not her folly, but her misery, her righteous indignation, and her eventual altruistic response to her misery and anger. The incidents in Rome are a crisis in her moral development. They are also a crisis in her relationship with Casaubon. She begins to learn that he cannot give her what she hoped for, and begins to see that his need of her is greater and different to any need her self sacrificing nature had previsioned. The prophecy of the opening chapter is being fulfilled.

> "She was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom, to make retractions, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a quarter where she had not sought it." (P. 30)

The incident which closes Chapter 20 should be understood in the light of the passages we have already examined in the comparison with *Portrait of a Lady*. The focus of the earlier passages is Dorothea's misery. The focus here is her anger, her 'retraction' from martyrdom, and her acceptance of her new martyrdom.

Eliot's preferred account of the incident is as follows: Dorothea inadvertently precipitates a row when (filled only with the desire to focus on his interests) she asks Casaubon when he is actually going to make his work 'useful to the world'. His furious response to that question provokes her indignation, and when she replies with 'prompt resentment which needed no rehearsal', she has right (as well as felicity of expression) on

her side. The chapter concludes with her sorrowful remorse. She finds her own angry feelings morally unacceptable. Rather than retreating further into her own conception of the world, which would only emphasise to her her own rightness, and his unfairness, Dorothea casts about for some other kind of response which will live up to her ideal, which 'was not to claim justice, but to give tenderness'. She comes to see that he, like her, is locked in his own conception of the world, and that between them lies an epistemologically unbridgeable gulf. In order to renew her compassion for him, she prepares to transcend that gulf through an act of the imagination.

That account is tendentious to the point of incoherence. In order to find it intelligible, we have to share Eliot's commitment to a flawed philosophy of mind. I want to begin with the closing sentence of the chapter.

> "But in Dorothea's mind there was a current into which all things were apt sooner or later to flow -the reaching forward of the whole consciousness towards the fullest truth, the least partial good. There was clearly something better than anger and despondency" (P. 235)

It is not entirely clear what this means. One thing it means, roughly, is that Dorothea is dispositionally inclined to try not to be partial and selfish, and dispositionally inclined not to dwell on her anger. But that isn't all it means. It also looks a bit like a psychological explanation of Dorothea's change of mood. I have two worries: first, metaphorical descriptions of metaphorical spiritual processes are not likely to furnish good explanations unless we can work out what the metaphors are about; second, it is not clear that Eliot's account of the change in Dorothea's mood is internally coherent. I want to look beyond the metaphorical psychological explanation, at Dorothea's anger and despondency as it is made sense of by her situation and her own thoughts. It is not clear we need a spiritual mechanism to account for the fact that she stopped feeling angry and began to feel wistful and guilty.

In the final paragraph there is a moving vignette. Dorothea has been left to wander round the Vatican alone. She walks listlessly past tombs and inscriptions which we already know afford her neither spiritual nor aesthetic pleasure. Her isolation is underlined by the marked contrast between Casaubon, who ought to have accompanied her, and Ladislaw and Naumann who might, under other circumstances, have done so. Ladislaw and Naumann's seeming ability to combine a genuine passion for their surroundings with high spirits and frivolity might have served as the leaven in the lump of poor Dorothea's pious solemnity. She ought like them to be enjoying her youth and intelligence, but is excluded from an awareness of either. And our knowledge of Casaubon's physical coldness makes Naumann's admiration of her 'beauty in its breathing life' seem painfully ironic.

That Dorothea feels anything for her husband apart from an overwhelming urge to throttle him seems little short of miraculous. Instead we have this account of her thought,

> "She did not really see the streak of sunlight on the floor more than she saw the statues: she was inwardly seeing the light of years to come in her own home and over the English fields and elms and hedge-bordered highroads: and feeling that the way in which they might be filled with joyful devotedness was not so clear to her as it had been." (P. 235)

This sentence is very plain. It is, for once, informed by Dorothea's own consciousness. It simply describes her daydream. She is homesick, nostalgic for her own countryside which she knows and loves, and even more nostalgic for her romantic tremulous anticipation of her life with Casaubon. Clearly we have to go further back to find her 'anger and despondency'. Her change of mood is subtly enmeshed in the final paragraph. It had begun to take place even before she and Casaubon had parted.

> ".. she already began to feel herself guilty. However just her indignation might be, her ideal was not to claim justice, but to give tenderness." (P. 234)

Note that on this account of the matter, Dorothea feels 'guilty' despite having done nothing wrong. This is of a piece with the thought that she has extraordinary qualities of mind. Extraordinarily good people will, presumably, feel they are letting themselves slip if they

are behaving just as the ordinary run of people do. On the Phenomenological Realist picture, the narrator is of course in position to tell us just why Dorothea is feeling guilty. Dorothea's high ideals and her demand for justice will be phenomenological facts, to which the omniscient narrator is privy. From this vantage point, she can report that guilt was generated by Dorothea's awareness that receiving justice is not necessarily compatible with giving tenderness.

But, as the third chapter argued, it is a mistake to think there could be anything true about Dorothea's mind which could *by itself* fix the feeling she had as supererogatory guilt. The appropriate mental ascription is *in part* conditioned by what is going on in the subject's mind. There are thoughts which might begin to ground this ascription. If Dorothea thinks her grounds for guilt are that she has fallen short of her ideal, she must believe that there are no more pressing grounds for guilt. This is plausible. She may think that Casaubon had no right to feel provoked, and that in having been angry she was only being just. She could then plausibly think that in saying what provoked Casaubon she has nothing more to reproach herself with than failing to be tender in spite of her just indignation.

But those thoughts alone could not make it true that the reason for her feelings of guilt was her inability to forego justice in favour of tenderness. Context and history also play a role in fixing psychological ascriptions. And there seems to be some textual support for thinking that Dorothea has more to feel guilty about than those possible avowals acknowledge. (And more to feel guilty about than Eliot's account of her guilt acknowledges.) The history and context in which we have to place Dorothea's feelings is her exchange with Casaubon, and his resultant wounded feelings. That is something over which even an omniscient author has no control. That context is already fixed in the fiction, and a narrator cannot create mental fictions which do not take it into account.

In that context, do those rather priggish grounds survive as the only grounds Dorothea has for guilt? In other words, are we fair to think Casaubon's anger entirely unjust? Eliot gives us a *causal* explanation of Casaubon's irritation in the face of Dorothea's presumption, in terms which lead us to suppose that it was quite irrational.

> "Here, towards this particular point of the compass, Mr.Casaubon had a sensitiveness to match Dorothea's, and an equal quickness to imagine more than the fact." (P. 233)

But does Casaubon imagine more than the fact? This is Dorothea's question:

> "All those rows of volumes -will you not now do what you used to speak of? -will you not make up your mind what part of them you will use, and begin to write the book which will make your vast knowledge useful to the world?" (P. 232)

In the explosion which follows this we are encouraged entirely to take Dorothea's part. Casaubon's reactions and behaviour are unreasonable, and explicable only in the light of his emotional problems. He has no right to be angry with Dorothea. Her indignation is entirely justified because she had been 'repressing everything in her except the desire to enter into some fellowship with her husband's chief interests'.

But has she? The crucial question is, why does Dorothea ask that question? Let us suppose Dorothea does *not* know, as we do, that Casaubon is a 'scholastic anachronism'.[30] Her question is motivated entirely by her desire to take an intelligent interest in Casaubon's affairs. Casaubon misunderstands her to be making a facile judgement about the right time for him to give up collating and to start synthesising with a view to publication. Must we despise that anger as much as we pity it? Well, who could sympathise with a man who wanted the 'uncritical awe of an elegant minded canary bird' from his wife! But whose phrase is that? It is much sharper than Casaubon's measured tones. And *he* surely doesn't regard his work as 'abundant pen scratches and amplitude of paper'. So how does he

---

[30] She doesn't have W.J.Harvey's note in the Penguin Edition to help her. (Note 1 Chapter 21, P 903)

express that thought? It doesn't sound quite so repellent and unreasonable to excuse him for having thought, from her effusions about his wisdom, and her undoubted ignorance, that, even if other people doubt his ability, Dorothea at least thinks he is worthy of esteem. Should we not have *some* empathy with his anger and bewilderment in the face of Dorothea's very sudden change of attitude? In the space of a few weeks, she has gone from thinking his least pronouncements on obscure 'ologies proof that he is one of 'the learned men' who 'keep the only oil', to asking painfully penetrating questions about the value of his work. He might well be hurt at the speed with which she seems to have become bored with his project, without ever having had any real conception of what it was.

There are two points. First, it is not clear why this misunderstanding should have made Dorothea angry, rather than simply eager to set the misunderstanding straight. Why does she feel accused? Secondly, there are excellent reasons why we should suspect Dorothea's question was not entirely innocent. (And that the accusation was justified.) As was clear in the previous section, Dorothea cannot be ignorant enough to ask that question innocently and simultaneously be aware enough of his intellectual sterility to find him an unsatisfactory focus for her self sacrifice. If Dorothea were quite so ignorant of the role even the best of academics play in society as to ask completely innocently when his 'vast knowledge' was to be made 'useful to the world', it is unclear in what sense she had felt his work to be like 'ante-rooms and winding passages'; and it is unclear why his uselessness would have been so painful to her. But if her question was not entirely innocent, if, in other words she *had* sensed the extent of Casaubon's sterility, she need not, in order to explain her feelings of guilt, fall back on such a high ideal as to eschew the claims of justice, in favour of giving tenderness. She might have felt guilty for having been so insensitive as to ask him a question which his inability to answer must have caused him even more pain than it did her.

Seeing that Casaubon's hurt is not irrational allows us to understand what is wrong with Eliot's analysis of Dorothea's predicament. Convinced as she is that we are ultimately unable to know for sure what is going on in another's mind, Eliot believes Casaubon's feelings are inescapably private and incommunicable. She is led to suppose that a woman in Dorothea's position would have had to abandon the normal process of understanding and make an imaginative leap to feel as her husband felt. This is simply false. Imagination, sympathy and intelligence go hand in hand when we try to understand one another. Those who try harder don't do so because of some curious quirk in the cortex. Eliot does not reflect that it would have been difficult for anyone to witness Casaubon's little tirade without realising enough about his inner private world to know that he was very upset. However bewildered and angry her first reaction, had a woman as scrupulous as Dorothea mulled over Casaubon's pompous remarks, she could scarcely have failed to know two things. Firstly, he was right to say that she spoke from ignorance. Secondly, she should have realised that she couldn't possibly have been the only 'facile conjecturer' he had in mind. The context which should ground Dorothea's guilt is Casaubon's revealing response, and Dorothea's own misgivings about his academic competence. We would not be convinced by Eliot's highminded account unless we were persuaded that the author's access to Dorothea's phenomenology gave her epistemological privilege.

At this point I should address the idea that it might seem that Eliot (unlike James) is presenting Dorothea's *unconscious* thoughts. The idea would be that Dorothea cannot process Casaubon's irritation in the light of her own misgivings because she doesn't know she has them. On this account, Dorothea is ignorant enough of the facts about Casaubon's worth to be able to ask her cutting question innocently. She is caused pain by those facts, although they don't figure in her consciousness, because she is *unconsciously* aware of them. Of course people have many beliefs, fears, attitudes and emotions which, if they were asked, they would deny. And in so doing they might not necessarily be simply lying.

There are indeed unconscious beliefs, desires, fears, etc. So could George Eliot not be giving us the 'content', so to speak, of Dorothea's unconscious?

To think that the notion of the Unconscious could extricate George Eliot from the difficulty I see her to be in, and rescue Dorothea's consciousness in all its innocence, is to misunderstand the controls on talk about the Unconscious. As was pointed out in Chapter Three, claims about unconscious states of mind are also grounded. They too are grounded in context, history, behaviour and in the consciousness of the subject. The subject may not be conscious *that* they are in the mental state in question, but that doesn't mean that there is a self-contained mental state of affairs lurking below the surface, as it were,.

Freud's theory of the Unconscious did not postulate a subterranean area of the mind, sealed off from the conscious mind, spontaneously developing an awareness of the things the conscious mind finds too painful and frightening to consider for the moment. The theory is that we *actively repress* uncomfortable, unthinkable things. So, if Dorothea is 'unconscious' in this sense of the futility of Casaubon's work, and the implications of that for her conception of herself as his wife (and it implies a great deal for someone who has beliefs like Dorothea's about marriage), we can no longer see her as experiencing sensations of whose cause she is innocent. If we want to see her unconscious awareness on the model of the Freudian Unconscious, she would have to be actively *repressing* her knowledge that his work is pointless.

And it is salutary to remember the diagnostic point, that access to the Unconscious is through remarks and behaviour which betray unconscious knowledge because they do not cohere with the subject's other avowals. A Freudian analysis of Dorothea's question about the use of Casaubon's work to 'the world', would not see it as an innocent, quite unknowing question which just happened to catch him on the raw. Rather, she would seem

to be (unconsciously perhaps) needling him on just the point which she, on one level at least, understood him to be most vulnerable. On this interpretation, the question was *not* unwitting, but was rather a punishment. He is making her miserable by his neglect. And his inadequacy is shielded by his pompous obsession with his work. What more natural, and malicious, than her desire to query the value of that work? This then would be the unconsciously accurate shaft of a woman scorned. An appeal to the Unconscious cannot make sense of Dorothea's innocent, because unwitting feeling that Casaubon is an unworthy focus for her self sacrifice.

A Freudian account in fact steers us in a direction quite unsympathetic to Eliot's purpose. Eliot's purpose was to show us a crucial passage in Dorothea's moral development. To repeat, we are to see Dorothea feeling remorse for, and ultimately rising above, a kind of selfishness which is imposed on us because of our metaphysical nature. But the descriptions of Dorothea's guilt, and the mental process which led to her remorse, float free of the very facts which could make them meaningful. The account of the character of Dorothea is psychologically contentless at this crucial point in her moral development.

* * *

IV(b) The Heaven-sent Angel in the Garden

The second crucial incident occurs in Chapter 42, which also describes a crisis in Casaubon and Dorothea's relationship. In one way it is a mirror image of Chapter 20. In Chapter 20, the ground for our acceptance of Eliot's account of Dorothea's altruism is prepared for by a detailed and (I hope I have shown) bogus description of Dorothea's blameless, painful mental life. Chapter 42, on the other hand, prepares us to accept her account by a detailed and (I hope to show) bogus description of Casaubon's blame*worthy*,

painful mental life. In this chapter Casaubon learns that he will probably die soon and suddenly. It purportedly charts his feelings in the face of his discovery, and the chapter closes with a very moving account of Dorothea's struggle to respond compassionately to this unlikeable unreachable man. It is perhaps in itself an eloquent comment on George Eliot's narrative control that we feel that learning to offer compassion in the face of ingratitude is morally more interesting than learning to accept gracefully commiseration in the knowledge that one may die soon and suddenly, and that when one does, no one will mourn, and that one's work will be consigned to the obscurity it deserves.

Again an aptly chosen epigraph sets the tone for the chapter.

> "How much methinks I could despise this man,
> Were I not bound in charity against it."
> Shakespeare: *Henry VIII* (P. 454)

The epigraph is apt, but extremely misleading: charity or no, Eliot intends that we *should* despise this man. Its aptness lies in underlining her intention that we should believe she does not. She, unlike us, we are to believe, is constrained by charity. But to despise a man is not a kind of speech act directed at him; it is enough that one passes certain judgements. And Eliot certainly passes sufficiently many sufficiently disparaging judgements on Casaubon to count as despising him, so what *does* charity bind her to? The epigraph seems to say that Eliot recognises how hard it is not to despise this man, but simultaneously to exhort us to recognise that we must be compassionate. But in fact, although she pays lip service to compassion ('Poor Mr.Casaubon, with all the inward sorrows of his small hungry shivering self') she does not want us to feel compassion *is* appropriate for a man like Casaubon. For all that we seem to see to the bottom of his paltry soul, we never do feel with him, or wonder if his misery might have been less if those around him had behaved differently, or tried harder to understand him.

Casaubon's dismal fears that Dorothea does not love, or even respect him any more are expressed thus:

> "...but there had entered into the husband's mind the certainty that she judged him, and that her wifely devotedness was like a penitential expiation of unbelieving thoughts -was accompanied with a power of comparison by which himself and his doings were seen too luminously as part of things in general. His discontent passed vapour like through all her loving manifestations, and clung to that inappreciative world which she had only brought nearer to him.
>
> Poor Mr.Casaubon! This suffering was the harder to bear because it seemed like a betrayal: the young creature who had worshipped him with perfect trust had quickly turned into the critical wife; and early instances of criticism and resentment had made an impression which no tenderness afterwords could remove. To his suspicious interpretation Dorothea's silence was now a suppressed rebellion; a remark from her which he had not in any way anticipated was an assertion of conscious superiority; her gentle answers had an irritating cautiousness in them; and when she acquiesced it was a self-approved effort of forebearance.....
>
> Instead of wondering at this result of misery in Mr.Casaubon, I think it is quite ordinary. Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the blot? I know no speck as troublesome as self." (P. 455)

Casaubon is in tortured, self-inflicted misery with regard to Dorothea. Nothing that Dorothea does, however gentle and loving, can alleviate his misery. All her kindness seems to him to be in some way false and forced. But it is not easy to feel compassion for him because the unfairness of his fears is borne in on us so forcibly. 'His discontent passed vapour-like through all her loving manifestations'....'To his suspicious interpretation..'....'..which no tenderness and submission afterwards could remove'. The implication is that it would have been impossible to make this man feel loved and valued. The narrator says explicitly that his 'troublesome speck of self' has blotted out 'the glory of the world', and presumably Dorothea's love for him is part of that glory. Casaubon's misjudgement of Dorothea is the cause of his pain.

There is also the suggestion, over and above the feeling that he has projected his sense of his own inadequacy onto Dorothea, that, even if what he fears is true, and Dorothea is no longer in love with him, and is only going through the dutiful motions of

love, he ought to see that he deserves no better. The suggestion comes first with an implication, 'a power of comparison by which himself and his doings were seen too luminously as part of things in general', and then an explicit statement,

> "..there was strong reason to be added, which he had not himself taken explicitly into account -namely, that he was not unmixedly adorable. He suspected this....as he suspected other things, without confessing it, and felt, like the rest of us, how soothing it would have been to have a companion who would never find it out." (P. 456)

The phrase, 'like the rest of us', is disarming. It makes it seem that Casaubon is only being accused of the same crazy vanities and fantasies that we all have. So, it also makes it seem that all that is demanded of him is that he abandon his absurd expectations of marriage. (We all have to accept, *pace* mawkish lovesongs, that our faults are not invisible. Nor are they, for the most part, particularly loveable.) But, in reality, Casaubon has begun to fear that Dorothea is behaving *falsely* to him because she is too 'virtuous and lovely' to say what she feels. Not to be patronised in marriage is surely not such an unrealistic expectation.

To return to Eliot's emphasised and reiterated point that Casaubon has caused all this misery himself by misjudging Dorothea's 'loving manifestations' and so blotting out the glory of the world: how does that square with this heartfelt cry of Dorothea's?

> " 'It is his fault, not mine.' In the jar of her whole being, pity was overthrown. Was it her fault that she had believed in him -had believed in his worthiness? -and what exactly was he? -She was able enough to estimate him -she who waited on his glances with trembling, and shut her best soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits what she might be petty enough to please him." (P. 463-4)

It is interesting that after all the murky hidden unspoken fears in Casaubon's mind, this outright anger of Dorothea's seems innocent and bracing. We are not encouraged to notice that what she admits in her anger is that Casaubon is *right* to feel uneasy about her loving manifestations. They are her attempt to please him and they are then, on this account of the matter, her petty self. We have no warrant, I suppose, to assume that Casaubon is perceptive rather than paranoid. But it is surely at least tendentious of Eliot to assure us that

it is the fault of his ego that he cannot feel loved. If his troublesome speck of self is blotting out the world, he seems to be guessing accurately enough that there is pettiness and dissembling on the other side of it, as well as tenderness and submission.

Casaubon's fears with regard to his marriage are parallelled in his fears about his academic worth. More, the two are internally linked because he knows it was her belief in his intellect and scholarship which attracted Dorothea to him in the first place. He is a deeply uneasy and unhappy man, but we have no empathy with his misery because Eliot offers no account of how it strikes Casaubon himself. If we pick our way through a passage which seems to describe Casaubon's professional fears, it is impossible to know how, ultimately, he regards himself, or indeed what is the real source of his pain. In it, once again, George Eliot seems to advert to a general truth, as an explanation of how it is with her character.

> "(T)here are some kinds of authorship in which by far the largest result is the uneasy susceptibility accumulated in the consciousness of the author - one knows of the river by a few streaks amid the long-gathered deposit of uncomfortable mud. That was the way with Mr.Casaubon's hard intellectual labours." (P. 454)

What is the status of this generalisation? How and about whom do we in cases of just this sort learn about authorship on the model of knowing about a sludgy old river? We don't look into other people's consciousness, and authors don't, in general, know of their own authorship in this curious deductive way. All that this certainly powerful image conveys is that there is little of a creative sort going on in Casaubon's mind, only the uneasy knowledge that there ought to be some creativity going on. But then the remark is no longer a generalisation of which he is an instance; it is specifically about Casaubon. But then, if it is an informative remark--rather than another nasty joke--it should teach us something specific about how the uncomfortable mud seems to Casaubon, we should learn something of Casaubon's 'uneasy susceptibility'.

Before looking at the incident which, at the close of Chapter 42, redraws the difference in moral status between Casaubon and Dorothea, there are two further minor points to be made about the way George Eliot cajoles our responses to Casaubon in this chapter. The paragraph where she brings together Casaubon's personal and professional self-doubt to consider how each is made more acute by the fear of death illustrates the first. It is undeniable that fear of death on the part of a committed and virtuous theist with a belief in the hereafter, is, on the face of it, irrational. It is also true that there is some tension between the hope that one's work may be good enough for posterity, and bitter resentment of petty misunderstandings on the part of one's peers. And it *may* be (although it's arguable, and indeed might be said to bespeak a kind of hedonism) that whatever one's views about what happens after death, there is something mildly absurd about caring very deeply about what happens here on earth after one has gone. But if one is to criticise this absurdity and irrationality, one cannot single out Casaubon. Some of the reasons for inconsistency and irrationality are presumably cultural, some are psychological. But all of them go pretty deep, and none of them is peculiar to Casaubon. But this is how Eliot puts the point,

> "Since thus, the prevision of his own unending bliss could not nullify the bitter savours of irritated jealousy and vindictiveness, it is the less surprising that the probability of a transient earthly bliss for other persons, when he himself should have entered into glory had not a potently sweetening effect. If the truth should be that some undermining disease was at work within him, there might be some large opportunity for some people to be the happier when he was gone; and if one of those people should be Will Ladislaw, Mr.Casaubon objected so strongly that it seemed as if the annoyance would make part of his disembodied existence." (P. 457)

Certainly, when one considers eternity, and unending bliss, and entering into glory, nothing ought to matter much by comparison; and any feeling starts to seem ridiculous when it is disembodied. But considerations of eternity and infinity just do not seem to take the sting out of our present fears and doubts. In fact any consideration which seems to make *everything* we care about now seem equally absurd and existentially insignificant, if we take it seriously, poses a problem in itself, rather than making anything seem better. We

cannot infer, as it seems from the tone of the passage that we should, that had Casaubon been less egocentric and more religiously sincere, he would necessarily have been more rational about death. Eliot skilfully presents Casaubon's pain and fear and confusion so that they seem to be another flaw in his character, rather than a reason for us to sympathise with him.

The second minor point is that she uses other characters' responses to Casaubon to consolidate, and give a kind of objectivity to her judgements of him. Look at the passage in which Casaubon and Lydgate discuss Casaubon's likely life expectancy. It is really most peculiar. It has become fashionable to say that doctors should be taught some counselling skills, but Lydgate seems quite egregiously cold and lacking in perception. He opens their conversation conventionally enough,

> "I hope your wish to see me is not due to the return of unpleasant symptoms." (P. 459)

Lydgate might have hoped that Casaubon might only be wondering if his health would stand up to long nights poring over manuscripts. But it seems unlikely that he wouldn't begin to suspect that Casaubon wanted to know if he were dying. Once Casaubon begins to talk about the significance of his life, and shows he is concerned with what he will leave behind him, his intention is unmistakeable, or very nearly so. That must be one of the hardest questions a doctor has to answer. How such news should be broken is hard to say. And Lydgate might have welcomed whatever time Casaubon needed to gather the courage to speak plainly. Instead he tries to hurry him,

> "Lydgate, who had some contempt at hand for futile scholarship, felt a little amusement mingling with his pity. He was at present too ill acquainted with disaster to enter into the pathos of a lot where everything is below the level of tragedy except the passionate egoism of the sufferer. 'You refer to the possible hindrances from want of health?' he said, wishing to help forward Mr.Casaubon's purpose , which seemed to be clogged by some hesitation." (P. 460)

A physician who is ill-acquainted with disaster in the form of death is an unlikely character. The pathos of this situation would have been quite familiar to Lydgate. And yet that closing phrase seems to suggest Casaubon's purpose is obscure, and his hesitation unfathomable. There is no need for Lydgate to make mental reference to 'futile scholarship' or 'passionate egoism' or 'tragedy' in order to enter into the lot of a man who fears he may be dying. Is it especially (passionately) egoistic for a second-rate academic to fear death? Certainly Casaubon himself frames his reluctance to die in terms of his 'incomplete labours' and the 'work which he would fain leave behind him'. Perhaps to express fear of death in that way is pompous. Maybe it shows emotional repression. But surely, on reflection, it is indecent that Lydgate should find it amusing.

The passage works in a very subtle way. The narrator does not seem to make the judgements implicit in Lydgate's attitude. Indeed she associates herself rather with 'the mind largely instructed in the human destiny', to whom,

> "Hardly anything could be more interesting than the inward conflict implied in (Casaubon)'s formal measured address delivered with the usual sing-song and motion of the head. Nay, are there many situations more sublimely tragic than the struggle of the soul with the demand to renounce a work which has become all the significance of its life -a significance which is to vanish as the waters which come and go where no man has need of them? But there was nothing to strike others as sublime about Mr. Casaubon....." (P. 460)

So it seems the implied author at least does sympathise with Casaubon. But her sympathy seems to be offerred on quite extraordinary grounds, which no casual onlooker could fairly be expected to have at the forefront of his mind. This has the double edged effect of making the narrator seem extremely compassionate, and excusing anyone who isn't. The judgement that Casaubon's pain is laughable is given weight because it seems to be independent of the author. It is made by a character of whom we fundamentally approve: Lydgate was a man of 'fine instinct', as we are reminded on the next page. Once he has served his purpose as 'objective' evidence that Casaubon is absurd, he rises above his

initial reaction to know just what will be taken as a 'tribute of respect' by his patient, and to know just when he needs to be left alone in his grief. We are skilfully manipulated into having something like the reaction to him that Lydgate has, although on reflection that reaction is unforgiveable. At the same time, it seems that Eliot, or at least the implied author, is showing us how we ought to feel, by responding to him on a much more compassionate level. But Lydgate's mirth is not consistent with his fine instincts, and Eliot's compassion is curiously abstract.

So a large part of Chapter 42 of *Middlemarch* is about Casaubon. It delineates his mental distress and weakness with great specificity, building up to his fears about his probably imminent death. But for all its specificity, and the cleverness with which our responses are manipulated, Chapter 42 gives us little insight into Casaubon's own feelings. We are left in no doubt that Casaubon is afraid and distressed. But the language which, cursorily read, might seem to fill in the detail of his fear and distress, proves, on closer examination, to be thin on real psychological content. Under the guise of psychological description, Eliot draws us into a reaction which is as inappropriate to Casaubon's situation as it is ungrounded in any detail we are given concerning his consciousness.

But the chief focus in this section is the account of Dorothea's selflessness at the close of the chapter. Dorothea and Casaubon are unable to communicate about Casaubon's fears and jealousies. Eliot believes that such misunderstandings have a metaphysical cause. Her philosophical and moral interest is in analysing Dorothea's moral escape into altruism. Eliot's commentary gives this account: Dorothea generously offers Casaubon compassion.

> "Then she went towards him, and might have represented a heaven-sent angel coming with a promise that the short hours remaining should yet be filled with that faithful love which clings the closer to a comprehended grief." (P. 462)

He inexcusably rejects it.

> "... it is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are forever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made... You may ask why, in the name of manliness, Mr.Casaubon should have behaved in that way." (P. 462-3)

Dorothea is unable to understand why. She feels righteously angry, and in her anger she egoistically sees him only as part of her own drama, and his feelings are only considered to the extent that they affect her. She sees clearly for the first time that he is an unworthy object of her devotion, and her impulse is to let him know just how she perceives their relative moral positions.

> "She had never deliberately allowed her resentment to govern her in this way before, but she believed now that she could not see him again without telling him the truth about her feeling, and she must wait until she could do it without interruption." (P. 464)

In order to escape this selfish impulse, she must allow her imagination to dwell on his sorrow, until the urgency of her desire to help overcomes her anger.

> "That thought with which Dorothea had gone out to meet her husband -her conviction that he had been asking about the possible arrest of all his work, and that the answer must have wrung his heart, could not be long without rising beside the image of him, like a shadowy monitor looking at her anger with sad remonstrance. It cost her a litany of pictured sorrows and of silent cries that she might be the mercy for those sorrows -but the resolved submission did come." (P. 464)

Only thus is she able to change the selfish impulse into an impulse to offer compassion once again. In her anger, she had come very close to hurting him, but the 'noble habit of the soul' which was so much in evidence when she went to him in the garden has reasserted itself. He gently accepts her renewed offer, and she is thankful not to have hurt this already wounded man.

> "When the kind quiet melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly escaped wounding a lamed creature." (P. 465)

My contention is that this morally unambiguous account is ultimately incoherent. My focus will be the resolution of the quarrel. As with the resolution of the quarrel in Rome, my interest is in Eliot's account of Dorothea's change of mood. Again my suggestion is that

she analyses and interprets it at a high level of abstraction which relies on a bad account of Dorothea's psychology.

> "Dorothea sat almost motionless in her meditative struggle, while the evening slowly deepened into night. But the struggle changed continually, as that of a man who begins with a movement towards striking and ends with conquering his desire to strike. The energy that would animate a crime is not more than is wanted to inspire a resolved submission, when the noble habit of the soul reasserts itself."
> (P. 464)

I shall argue that this description of Dorothea's mental life is actually at odds with details in the text itself. In order to think of Dorothea's meditative struggle being merely the struggle to reassert the noble habit of the soul we have to be beguiled by descriptions of Dorothea's mental states and processes which can only be grounded in phenomenological myth.

Perhaps the best place to start to look at Dorothea's anger is in the middle, after she has been rebuffed, and before she has found it in her to go again to Casaubon. Note that there is nothing at all fishy about the claim that this is how Dorothea feels. Dorothea's remarks are wholly convincingly *expressive* of anger. She is furious. Her anger has a very familiar rhythm. She begins with an exclamation of intense bitterness,

> "What have I done -what am I that he should treat me so? He never knows what is in my mind - he never cares. What is the use of anything I do? He wishes he had never married me." (P. 463)

from which she lapses into despair about their relationship. Again her own thoughts are distinctive of despair. It is hard to know how much of the pity in the next few lines is Eliot's pity, and how much is self pity, the narrative weaves so skilfully between the two voices, but pity quickly whips itself back into reproach, and the anger is in Dorothea's voice. In her anger Dorothea says all the things she might have thought earlier, had she been less forebearing and selfless -and that we incidentally, with Eliot's permission and encouragement, have been thinking for some time.

> "Was it her fault that she had believed in him -had believed in his worthiness? -and what exactly was he? -She was able enough to estimate him -she who waited on his glances with trembling, and shut her best soul

> in prison, paying it only hidden visits that she might be petty enough to please him." (P.463-4)

Her angry thought 'it is his fault not mine' seems to her like a blinding insight, and she seethes with the frustrating knowledge that he does *not* see what she now sees so lucidly. She feels determined that, once she has sufficient time and composure, she will let him know just how things seem to her, even if he must be hurt in the process.

This pattern of anger is very familiar. Anger suddenly seems to make sense of the entire relationship. It is familiar, and familiarly irrational. Perhaps it is its very familiarity which encourages us not to wonder about its cause; perhaps also we are disarmed by Eliot's own smile at its fierceness. She says,

> "Her anger said, as anger is apt to say, that God was with her -that all heaven, though it were crowded with spirits watching them, must be on her side." (P. 464)

Whatever the reason, we have to do without an adequate account of what the row is really all about. Dorothea's anger itself is not really Eliot's concern. Her interest is in Dorothea's escape from the egoistic frame of mind into which her anger catapults her. This encourages her to give an implausible explanation of Dorothea's anger which is congenial to her abstract point, but fails to take account of the kinds of facts which do furnish genuine psychological explanations.

As in Chapter 20, for George Eliot's purposes it is best for us to think that Dorothea's anger is *righteous*. That is what makes her escape from it altruistic. So (anticipating our surprise that a failed academic should find the prospect of his own death momentous enough to make him behave thoughtlessly) she says,

> "You may ask why, in the name of manliness, Mr. Casaubon should have behaved that way." (P. 462-3)

And she goes on to give an explanation of his behaviour. There are two points, one very obvious, the other somewhat more subtle. The obvious point is that in this situation we

need no special explanation of why Casaubon doesn't want to talk to Dorothea. After bad news it is very ordinary to want to digest it alone. In view of that, she tries too hard to give us reason to believe he was wrong not to accept Dorothea's advances more gracefully. She says,

> "Consider that his was a mind which shrank from pity: have you ever watched in such a mind the effect of a suspicion that what is pressing it as a grief may be really a source of contentment, either actual or future, to the being who already offends by pitying?" (P. 463)

The more subtle point is to note that this is firmly in the fifth strand of Phenomenological Realism. The fifth strand is the belief that the mind is a place in which inscrutable things mechanically happen. If we unthinkingly accept that Casaubon's suspicion *causes* him to behave badly, we neglect to notice that this suspicion would give him *reason* to behave badly.

As is common in remarks like this, a presumption of generality is slipped in, in the question 'have you ever watched in such a mind?' It seems then to be a general remark, and the mechanistic feel of the word 'effect' seems to be a metaphor for a well known psychological fact, an effect, say, which has become quasi-theoretical in folk psychology. There probably is some psychological connection between the disposition to dislike pity, and thoughts about whether the other person is likely to benefit personally from your misfortune. Even two close friends competing for the same job, say, will have pretty complicated feelings when one of them gets it. And of course there will be additional problems if one cannot trust the proferrer of pity. But that is only to say that pity is even less pleasant when it has a flavour of hypocrisy mixed in. But that 'effect' scarcely deserves Eliot's disparaging tone.

More important, a causal account misrepresents Casaubon's feelings. The causal story is this: Casaubon doesn't like pity, and he suspects something base about Dorothea;

that suspicion acts on his mind and exacerbates his dislike of pity. But what is Casaubon's suspicion? Apparently he suspects that his wife may be thinking that the bad news for him (that he's going to die) is good news for her. This suspicion is meant to *explain* Casaubon's behaviour, but note that behaviour taken by itself could not be *constitutive* of a suspicion of this sort. So the claim about Casaubon's suspicion must be grounded in some way in his own thoughts about the matter. But that's preposterous. It is not necessarily preposterous that Casaubon should suspect that, but it is preposterous to suppose that *if* someone thought that, it would merely exacerbate their dislike of pity from that particular quarter. It's one thing to talk about the subtle effect on trust of reflexive success and failure. But on this account what Casaubon is supposed to suspect is that Dorothea wants him dead. That suspicion would in itself be reason for a much more violent rejection than Casaubon's.

> The narrator goes on, even more unfairly and simplistically,
>
> "Besides, he knew little of Dorothea's sensations, and had not reflected that on such occasions as the present, they were comparable in strength to his own sensibilities about Carp's criticisms." (P. 463)

This gives us the impression that Casaubon ought to be coolly wondering if Dorothea feels as he has done on occasion when he was distressed. Its effect in the text is to deflect us altogether, for the moment, from the fact that *this* is a moment of intense distress for Casaubon too. But if we reject the suggestion that Casaubon has done something very wrong, Dorothea's anger begins to seem a little puzzling. Lydgate had sensed that he had nothing to say which might make his presence more comforting than solitude, 'Lydgate, certain that his patient wished to be alone, soon left him'. There is no suggestion that he felt angry or personally rejected. So why does Dorothea?

I want to suggest that the text furnishes ground for a different account of Dorothea's anger and its resolution. We must go back to the beginning, in the garden.

> "Dorothea had been aware when Lydgate had ridden away, and she stepped out into the garden with the impulse to go at once to her husband. But she hesitated, fearing to offend him by obtruding herself;.....and she wandered slowly round the nearer clumps of trees until she saw him advancing. Then she went towards him. ....His glance in reply to hers was so chill that she felt her timidity increased; yet she turned and passed her hand through his arm." (P. 462)

There are two clauses missing from this quotation, but without them it makes good enough sense. Dorothea might well hesitate. She might fear that she, like Lydgate, should leave him alone. Given how little comfort this pair have been to one another, and the acute stress Casaubon is now under, Casaubon's coldness is just what she might have anticipated. But the two omitted clauses complicate the picture, and add a new aspect to Dorothea's hesitation. The first clause is this,

> "for her ardour, continually repulsed, served with her intense memory, to heighten her dread, as thwarted energy subsides into a shudder" (P. 462)

It sounds as if this clause *explains* her hesitation. But it is hard to see just what causal role her ardour is supposed to play. The second strand of Phenomenological Realism is the tendency to see all psychological states on the model of sensations, as if they were interior episodes. On this picture it looks as if George Eliot can simply tell us what state Dorothea is in and what effect this had on her feelings. But ardour is not an interior state, it is a *dispositional* state. So, on any one occasion, or even on a series of occasions, without any propositional attitude change, an ardent impulse might be thwarted, and the mechanical image of the repulsed energy 'subsiding into a shudder' could be illuminating. But the simile gives us no help to make sense of repulsion experienced in *anticipation* of a rejection. Dorothea's ardent *nature* might not have changed, but her ardour for this particular project, the project of being all in all to Casaubon, had it been affected at all by Casaubon's repulses, would have waned. Some of her attitudes towards him would have changed, perhaps affection and eagerness would have been replaced by uncertainty and timidity.

So, *in the place of* ardour would be a shuddering dread of approaching him, given her intense memory of his cold, if polite response to her affectionate warmth. It might seem merely nit-picking to say that 'for her ardour, continually repulsed.....' should be read as 'and the fact that her ardour had been continually repulsed, served with her intense memory to heighten her dread....' But the latter, inelegant as it is, makes sense, whereas the former doesn't. The first suggests that the very warmth of Dorothea's feelings could make her hesitate, whereas the second acknowledges that a dawning realisation that her previous displays of warmth have been found inappropriate would make her hesitate.

The thought which plays a role in Dorothea's consciousness is her fear that she has nothing to offer which Casaubon will welcome. And we fear she is right. George Eliot doesn't give us any reason to think Dorothea does comprehend Casaubon's grief. This passage is preceded by pages of griefs of which Dorothea has no inkling. But once our focus is on that fact, it is hard to make sense of the second omitted clause,

> "and might have represented a heaven-sent angel coming with a promise that the short hours remaining should yet be filled with that faithful love which clings the closer to a comprehended grief." (P. 462)

At least, it's hard to make the most obvious sense of it. The obvious way to understand it is to think that that is just what Dorothea is, or could be, and Casaubon is a churl for not recognising her as such. But that is scarcely plausible. And if it now turns out that Dorothea's mind is (very understandably) preoccupied with worries about how he is going to receive her, rather than compassion for what he is going through, it seems fantastic that she could have represented a heaven-sent angel.

So is it just that, Dorothea's fantasy of her role in Casaubon's grief? But giving that thought a role in Dorothea's consciousness suddenly reminds us of the context which makes sense of Dorothea's anger. Dorothea feels more strongly than Lydgate because she is his wife! That places her knowledge that she is unwelcome in a very different context,

and gives it a very different history. Casaubon is not just a man in need of comfort; he is also the man on whose terms Dorothea has chosen to define herself. She had come to him in a very vulnerable state of mind. Words like 'hesitated', 'fearing', 'continually repulsed', 'dread' and 'shudder' all give insight into what are plausibly her own thoughts. The context which gives us an apt description of those thoughts is the fact that Casaubon is an extremely powerful man on Dorothea's psychological landscape.That is why his chill look and unresponsive hardness are horrible to her. To Dorothea, he seems proud, and cruelly independent. Dorothea doesn't just feel sorry when she has nothing to offer Casaubon. She feels angry, but Eliot's suggestion that her anger is righteous anger, inspired by Casaubon's perfidy, makes no sense. What does make sense is something quite inimical to Eliot's intention: Dorothea feels angry because she feels humiliated.

This interpretation of Dorothea's feeling makes better sense in the history and context Eliot created in this fiction. Feeling humiliated is of course morally more ambiguous than feeling righteous anger, but it should still be able to engage our sympathy. But while we can sympathise with Dorothea's anger, that does not give us reason to feel that the moral oppropbrium heaped on Casaubon is appropriate. It is understandable that someone in *Dorothea's* position should judge Casaubon to be proud and cruel, but our context is less partial. *We* cannot forget either that death is at this moment 'grappling' him, or that he is afraid of Dorothea's judgement. The psychological states which are grounded by the detail revealed in the language are much more complex than George Eliot's own account allows. On closer reading, there is some ground to think that Dorothea and Casaubon are *both* deeply vulnerable and highly suspicious.

Finally, we must turn back to their reconciliation, to the simile with which Eliot describes Dorothea's feelings. Similes about mental states sometimes work simply by comparing an unfamiliar feeling with a more familiar one. (One might say to a child, for

example, 'He feels just like you did when....') But complex similes rarely work by drawing comparisons between like phenomenologies. The tendency to think otherwise arises from mistaking a description of a mental state for a description of some interior object to which the subject stands in some relation. On this picture, understanding a simile about a mental state would be an act of imaginative introspection. The final paragraph of the chapter is this,

> "When the kind quiet melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea's ears, she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we had narrowly missed hurting a lamed creature. She put her hand into her husband's, and they went along the broad corridor together." (P. 465)

If thankfulness were an interior phenomenological object which Dorothea 'had' in the way that she might have a fancy hat, then Eliot could speak with complete authority about the feeling her character had, and her simile would simply serve to pick out a similar phenomenlogical object, with which we might be familiar. But this simile clearly doesn't refer to phenomenology. To understand it we don't ourselves have to have narrowly missed hurting a lamed creature, and if we have, we don't have to remember the precise timbre of feeling we had when we did so. This simile, like most, works by adverting to circumstances which the author would like us to see as relevantly similar. Very straightforward feelings are appropriate in the circumstances we are to see as relevantly similar. Relief would be compounded of pity and tenderness. But is this situation relevantly similar? Is Dorothea's situation not morally more complex? Imagine, for example, the kind of thankfulness that might well up in us when we next encountered a lamed creature whom we had been sorely tempted to further wound. The appropriate feelings are much more subtle. There would be an element of remorse as well as relief, and the feeling towards the lamed creature less simple and patronising. Dorothea did not narrowly avoid *accidentally* hurting Casaubon. She resisted the temptation *deliberately* to wound him, and this simile distracts us from that.

There is some textual grounding for a very different kind of thankfulness. There is no explicit reference to the fact that Casaubon's response proves he is no longer feeling bitter and suspicious. In fact, George Eliot seems to take it for granted. On Eliot's account of this incident, Casaubon's feelings would of course be irrelevant. Her account is concerned to show us the physiognomy of Dorothea's altruism. Casaubon is merely the lucky recipient. But Dorothea could not have effected a reconciliation alone. Unless Casaubon's solitary contemplation in the library had also sufficiently changed the tenor of his thoughts, Dorothea would indeed have 'incurred another pang', as she feared she might. Imagine Casaubon still in the frame of mind which made him close the door of the library in Dorothea's face and made him decide he couldn't face eating with her. How would he have felt if, after waiting till he was sure the coast was clear, he had come upstairs only to find his ubiquitous spouse still hanging about with her beseeching eyes? What we are given instead is this,

> "When her husband stood opposite to her, she saw that his face was more haggard. He started slightly on seeing her, and she looked up at him beseechingly without speaking.
> 'Dorothea!' he said, with a gentle surprise in his tone, 'Were you waiting for me?'
> 'Yes, I did not like to disturb you.'
> 'Come, my dear, come. You are young, and need not extend your life by watching.' (P. 465)

Casaubon too has clearly come a long way since their bitterly distant encounter in the garden. He greets her with 'kind quiet melancholy', not with frigid distrust. On reflection, it is hard to see why her look should have seemed to him to be so unambiguous. Had Casaubon still been feeling suspicious and isolated, her presence might have seemed to him like more 'penitential expiation'. His 'discontent' does not, at least, 'pass vapour like' through this 'loving manifestation'. Casaubon responds warmly and kindly to Dorothea's beseeching look and the last phrase suggests he welcomes her physical expression of affection. Her pleasure in his acceptance is profound: his gentleness re-establishes the complicated pattern of interlocking dependencies on which the success of their marriage

depends. And that is surely a more reasonable account of poor Dorothea's thankfulness than Eliot's manipulative simile.

It would be easy to misunderstand this discussion as a disagreement with earlier critics about how we should understand Dorothea's moral struggle. While I am in such disagreement, that would be to miss the point. I have not tried to suggest that an overall coherent account can be given of Dorothea's moral ambiguity; the suggestion is rather that there is *in the fiction* adequate grounding for mental ascriptions which make nonsense of Eliot's preferred account of what is happening in both incidents. It is her commitment to a seductive, but ultimately mistaken philosophy of mind which leads her both to mislocate the moral problem of understanding others, and to flout the conceptual constraints which govern meaningful psychological ascriptions. That is why, in the end, it isn't possible to make her descriptions of Dorothea's crucial moral struggles cohere.

* * * *

This chapter has sought to show that Eliot's incautious commitment to the various elements in Phenomenological Realism conditions the way she writes, not just in a supernatural fantasy about the mind, but also in this major purportedly psychologically realistic novel. She is repeatedly led to furnish descriptions of the mental lives of her characters which have no grounding in the kinds of facts which would make sense of the non-fiction descriptions which they seem to resemble. In this chapter I have shown that her creation of the moral psychology of her characters is infelicitous in three major areas. Firstly, some crucial evaluative descriptions seem to be grounded in insight when, on closer reading, it is clear they float curiously free of the consciousness of their subject; the result is that tacit moral recommendation is made at the expense of understanding.

Secondly, in accounts of important psychological events, explanatory weight is sometimes thrown on to mechanistic metaphors. These metaphors remain stubbornly uninformative unless one subscribes to the thought that the mind is in some important way a *mechanism*. Finally, Eliot works with a false sense of freedom. The God-like perspective the implied author adopts is one which gives us 'insight' into what seems to be the very stuff of consciousness. Conceiving of psychological insight in this way discourages recognition of the conceptual constraints there are on claims about mental states; and consequently, details in the fiction ground psychological ascriptions which are at odds with those Eliot feels at liberty to offer.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

Middlemarch is the novel at the centre of this thesis. George Eliot's writing, and *Middlemarch* in particular, is the paradigm of what has come to be known as Classic Realist fiction.[1] In reading *Middlemarch*, it seems, one is introduced to a fictional world. The characters are psychologically complex, and they are presented with moral and social problems which are created and discussed with subtlety and intelligence. Until recently, critical assessment of *Middlemarch* has focussed on evaluation of Eliot's achievement in just these terms. The question with which the thesis opened was, how is it possible for a novel to depict a fiction in this way? The introductory chapter proposed a commonsense answer to this question which opened the way to a radical critical appraisal of the novel's status as a psychologically realistic novel. The language of fiction, like the language used in other contexts, is not homogeneous. There is no adequate theory which will explain how every sentence in a language is meaningful. The general terms of fictional propositions are meaningful in just the same ways as the general terms of the factual propositions they resemble. It follows from this commonplace thought that, irrespective of the imaginative experience of the reader, there are constraints on the meanings of the general terms of fiction which are every bit as demanding as those on the general terms of the language used to describe non-fictions. Constraints on language which enable us to talk meaningfully about things which do or may exist will also constrain the language of a fiction.

---

[1]W.J. Harvey literally regards *Middlemarch* as the paradigm of what he calls "normal" writing. In *Character and the Novel*, he discusses different critical approaches to art. He distinguishes what he calls 'theories of autonomy and mimesis' and says,

> "..clearly an autonomy theory will tend to prove more fruitful with an abstract painting whereas a mimetic theory is the better base of operations from which to explore *Middlemarch*." (P. 12)

Middlemarch is the ostensive definition of one extreme. And when discussing mimesis, or 'truth to life', when he wishes to discuss the different ways in which art resembles life, he says he wishes to coin 'a trope derived from geometry and speak of the *angle* of mimesis.' In explaining this notion he says,

> 'The "normal" work -a work of the *Middlemarch* family- we may metaphorically regard as lying very nearly parallel to life itself- it has a narrow mimetic angle." (P. 16)

Again, *Middlemarch* is the paradigm of mimetic art.

The scope of this thesis is in one sense very narrow. My interest is solely in the ways in which George Eliot creates the moral psychology of her characters, and the ways in which she develops and sustains our interest in their motives, their emotions and in general their mental states and processes. If the language of novels is meaningful in all and only the ways in which non-fiction language has meaning, then the language Eliot uses to create her characters' mental lives must make sense in just the ways in which talk about mental states of ordinary individuals makes sense. My suggestion has been that the language Eliot uses is deeply coloured by her commitments in the Philosophy of Mind. The argument has been that in order to take Eliot's fiction to be psychologically realistic, we are committed to sharing her unacceptable philosophical presuppostions. But the arguments to establish that seemingly narrow point have taken us deep into Wittgenstein's later Philosophy of mind; and if those arguments are thought to be convincing, the thesis has some negative implications for at least one important perennial question in the philosophy of aesthetics.

The issue in the philosophy of aesthetics is the attractive thought that a novel can depict a fiction in such a way as to say something interesting and informative about reality. This thought is perhaps best illustrated by two comments, one from George Eliot herself, the other from a modern philosopher. George Eliot says,

> "My writing is simply a set of experiments in life--an endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of--what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive--what gains from past revelations and discipline we must strive to keep hold of as something more than shifting theory. I become more and more timid--with less daring to adopt any formula which does not get itself clothed for me in some human figure and individual experience, and perhaps that is a sign that if I help others to see at all it must be through the medium of art."[2]

The philosopher is David Lewis. He writes,

> "Fiction might serve as a means for discovery of modal truth. I find it very hard to tell whether there could possibly be such a thing as a dignified beggar. If there could be, a story could prove it. The author of the story in which it is true that there is a dignified beggar would both discover and demonstrate that there does exist such a possibility. An actor or a painter might accomplish the same. Here the fiction serves the same purpose as an example in philosophy, though it

---

[2] George Eliot to Dr. Joseph Frank Payne, January 25th, 1876.
(It is the epigraph to B.J. Paris, *Experiments in Life)*

> will not work unless the story of the dignified beggar is more fully worked out than our usual examples."[3]

To Eliot and Lewis it seems clear that the novel is able to depict a fiction. Indeed it does so with such vividness that the fiction may be an 'experiment', and the existence in fiction of a particular character 'might serve', in Lewis' words, 'as a means for the discovery of a modal truth'. My aim has not been to issue a global challenge to the thesis that literature can demonstrate human possibility. But, even if we take thoughts like 'proof' and 'experiment' at their face value, the considerations of this thesis will, *inter alia*, set limits on the degree to which we should find the demonstrations of fiction conclusive.

Lewis says an author can 'both discover and demonstrate' modal truths; Eliot claims her writing was an 'endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of'. There is something right about this idea. It seems right to think that writing about fictions is a mode of intense speculation about psychological and social issues; and in reading and thinking about fictions readers too are inspired to such speculation. Trollope might have discovered, it seems, by writing *The Warden*, and readers by reading it, that a particular combination of naiveté, timidity, and dogged integrity can coexist. A reader might find Trollope's account of the Reverend Harding's dealings with Sir Abraham Haphazard, and his schoolboyish skirmishes with his son-in-law, touching and persuasive, as well as amusing. But even on the face of it, the idea is not without its problems. Another person might find it hard to believe that a man who was innocent and trusting enough to accept his son-in-law's edicts on all else would not, on his say so, have been able to nestle back down into comfortable anonymity. After all the specific attack on the Wardenship would only have been one of many such salvoes from the *Jupiter*. And it seems queer that twelve years of abstract attacks on beneficed clergy such as himself would have caused no qualms for a Warden with such a tender conscience. Someone might think that it would have been impossible for him to be so naive, so reliant on the authority of the Church to tell him what was morally right or wrong, and yet determined enough to over-rule Haphazard, Plumstead et al.

---

[3]David Lewis, Postscript C. to 'Truth in Fiction' 'Fiction in the Service of Truth' *Philosophical Papers* (O.U.P. 1983) vol.1 (P. 278)

The particular case does not matter. The problem is that the 'proofs' of fiction seem not to be entirely reliable. Lewis seems to see the problem when he says,

> "But we must beware, for also it can spread error. (1) Whatever understandings to the contrary might prevail, what is true in an author's fiction might not be true, either because the author is mistaken or because he wishes to deceive those who rely on the supposed understanding. (2) Under the method of union, several things might be true together in a fiction, but not really compossible. Then the fiction might persuade us of a modal falsehood, leading us to believe in a possibility that doesn't really exist. (3) If we have plenty of misleading evidence stored up, there may well be falsehoods that need only be stated to be believed."[4]

Of course, even in mathematics there is no reliable methodology for testing whether a proof is fallacious, but the case here seems particularly unhappy. Lewis offers no suggestion for deciding whether a persuasive piece of fiction about a dignified beggar is a proof of a modal truth or a fallacious persuasion that dignity and beggary are compossible.

One test of the persuasiveness of a fictional characterisation would be to test the fiction against reality. Indeed it seems likely that one does this just as often as one 'proves' the modal possibility of a character in real life by reference to a fiction. But this seems to lead either to an *impasse* or a vicious regress. Eliot claims that in her fiction we and she can see 'what stores of motive, actual or hinted as possible, give promise of a better after which we may strive'. Dorothea seems to be a paradigm case of a character whose motives could show just that. But rather than finding himself persuaded that such goodness is possible, Leavis, for example, pulls a face at the 'vein of winning simplicity'[5] which colours her characterisation, and finds Dorothea unconvincing and idealised. He declines to find in Dorothea a proof that such a person could exist. At this point we are in danger of collapsing into regress (by testing Leavis's view of reality against yet another fictional 'proof') or of running into a dead end, trading intuitions (with Eliot on the one hand claiming Dorothea is proof of a modal truth, and Leavis

---

[4]ibid P. 279

[5] F.R. Leavis *The Great Tradition* (P. 94)

on the other saying he thinks she is idealised, or combines actually incompossible traits). The ideas explored in this thesis would offer, at least for some disputes, a way out of this impasse.

The idea that a fiction could serve as a means of discovery of modal truth presupposes the thought that the language of a novel can straightforwardly depict a fiction. The premise of this thesis is that a novel can only represent a fiction by using language which would be appropriate to describe a non-fiction. The general terms of the language of a novel are meaningful, if at all, in just the same way as the general terms of language in a non-fiction context. If, as part of the fictional 'experiment' or 'proof', the language used to depict the fiction departs from its customary use, no fictional state of affairs has been depicted at all. And therefore no modal possibility can have been discovered or demonstrated. So the thought would be that in the case of the dispute imagined between Leavis and Eliot, we can arbitrate in favour of Leavis. The psychological ascriptions on which Eliot's proof depends *do* depart from their customary usage. They are therefore strictly meaningless, and so fail to depict, and consequently can show us nothing.

But the general application of this thought to wider questions in aesthetics is not the central focus here. The focus has rather been to establish and discuss the philosophical position to which Eliot is committed. The second chapter of the thesis was a discussion of the novella *The Lifted Veil*. This is an odd piece of fiction, both technically and in subject matter. It does not fit easily into the Eliot canon, and until recently it has received little attention. The purpose of Chapter Two was less to redress that balance than to diagnose Eliot's philosophical commitments. The eerie fantasy of unnatural mind-reading reveals Eliot's ideas in a very explicit way. The fantasy was that Latimer was granted access to the mental states and processes of those around him. The idea was not that he was simply privy to more information than we normally have. His gift was much more powerful: privileged access gave him direct and total insight into the mental states of others. My suggestion there was that in the struggle to make this fantasy coherent, a picture of the mind emerges which is both seductive and ultimately nonsensical. We have to be committed to an ontology of mental states and processes,

and indeed of entire personalities, which sees them as mental entities which are in principle knowable on the basis of perception, although they are of course in practice always hidden.

I have christened this view Phenomenological Realism. The position is, in Tyler Burge's terms, 'individualist'. That is, for the Phenomenological Realist, in order to individuate a subject's mental state, one need have no recourse to facts extrinsic to the subject. In attacking individualism in general, Burge obviously also argues against Phenomenological Realism, and in setting up his target, Tyler Burge gives an account of some of the ideas which inform Phenomenological Realism. Burge's chief target is a realist of a very different colour, and he says,

> "Individualism is the view that if one fixes those non-intentional physical and functional states and processes of a person's body whose nature is specifiable without reference to conditions beyond the person's bodily surfaces, one has thereby fixed the person's intentional mental states and processes--in the sense that they could not be different intentional states and processes from the ones that they are."[6]

But he goes on to say, more usefully for these purposes,

> "Perhaps for some in this tradition (most plausibly, Berkeley and Hume), one could alter the characterization by referring to the person's phenomenological mental phenomena instead of to the person's physical states and processes. So for them, individualism would be the thesis that a person's phenomenological qualitative mental phenomena fix all the person's mental states including those (like thoughts, desires, intentions) with intentionality or representational characteristics."[7]

But this characterization, while it provides a useful focus, makes the position seem at once more sophisticated and more absurd than it is. As Burge goes on to say, it at one and the same time credits traditional philosophers with having drawn a distinction between phenomenological and intentional aspects of the mental, *and* saddles them with the thought that both aspects of the mental are supervenient on phenomenological qualities. It is impossible, then, to attribute this view to any particular philosopher; indeed, on closer inspection, it is perhaps impossible to give a coherent account of it.

---

[6] Burge, T., 'Cartesian Error and the Objectivity of Perception'
in Pettit, P., and McDowell, J., *Subject, Thought and Context* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986) (P. 117)

[7] ibid (P. 117)

If it is dangerous, and often unhelpful, to try to reconstruct traditional philosophical views from a twentieth century perspective, it is perhaps even more dangerous to foist complicated philosophical views on the man on the Clapham Omnibus. Nevertheless, my claim is that, if there is such a thing, Phenomenological Realism is the commonsense view of mental states and processes.There is an interesting image from *Middlemarch* which may be helpful here. Dorothea says,

> "Here, Kitty, come and look at my plan; I shall think I am a great architect, if I have not got incompatible stairs and fireplaces."

Phenomenological Realism is not so much a philosophical position, it is more like a plan of the mind which combines the projection of incompatible literal interpretations of several metaphors about the mind. This picture of the mind is extremely attractive and, on the face of it, seems entirely plausible. The third chapter attempts to unravel the picture into its component incompatible staircases.

Given that aim, which sounds modest enough, it is striking that the third chapter is the longest. Phenomenological Realism is difficult to characterise, and even more difficult to refute satisfactorily. Talk about the mental, even ordinary everyday talk, is riddled with metaphor. When we talk about how we feel, we say things like, "There was a thought at the back of my mind", "My anger lay dormant for some time, but suddenly erupted", "The thought which ran through my mind", "The feeling of disappointment subsided but didn't go away". These expressions encourage the view that thoughts and feelings are interior states to which we stand in some relation. And even when we don't use metaphors, the grammar of psychological ascriptions invites the thought that mental states are objects which we have, or can be beset by, or can ignore. The fundamental insight of Wittgenstein's work on the philosophy of mind was that in order to understand how it is possible to talk meaningfully about mental states and processes, we must resist the picture seemingly imposed upon us by this grammar.

The thrust of Wittgenstein's arguments is almost entirely negative; he was concerned to expose the incoherence of an attractive philosophical myopia. In the third chapter I have outlined those arguments. The arguments centre round defusing radical scepticism about other minds. If we persist in thinking that mental ascriptions could be understood to refer to and describe mental entities, the drift towards scepticism is unavoidable. We can only ever know what our own mental ascriptions mean; after all we can only ever perceive our own mental states, by reference to which, on this account, they are meaningful. Wittgenstein's strategy is to undermine the basis on which such scepticism depends. It is only by becoming competent to use the public language that we can learn the meanings of the terms with which we talk about our own psychological states. We become competent by learning to use such language appropriately, and by learning to make ourselves understood. The idea that our meanings might be wholly private is shown to be a chimera.

I have also tried to give the beginnings at least of the positive account which emerges from a proper understanding of the meanings of mental ascriptions. My ultimate demand is that psychological ascriptions be grounded in behaviour, history, context and possible avowable thoughts of the subject. The arguments have shown that in particular the propositional content of a thought or attitude is not something which can be grounded in purely mental facts of which the subject could be innocent. Ascriptions of propositional attitudes must be grounded in thoughts which are apt to play a role in the mind of the subject. This account is in some ways extremely austere. Psychological ascriptions cannot be grounded in facts which are wholly private and interior to the subject. That might seem to leave us unable to say much about the psychological states of others. In particular it might seem to make all talk about unconscious mental states entirely impossible. The fifth section of Chapter Three shows that this seeming austerity allows us to make sense of some very complex ascriptions of unconscious thoughts, and motives and emotions.

This account imposes certain constraints on possible psychological ascriptions. Eliot's language, on occasion, seems to function as if it were simply descriptive of internal, private,

mental states. It is the central claim of this thesis that however 'natural' such an interpretation may appear, read this way, these passages are strictly meaningless. This may seem to sit ill with Wittgenstein's non-revisionist stance. I would argue not. Wittgenstein's attitude to philosophical speculation was of course highly critical and revisionary. I began by endorsing Eliot's and Lewis' thought that writing novels is an intense form of speculation. I would argue that the language of novels is in that sense not 'ordinary' at all, but rather is intensely philosophical. Speculating about the minds of others in real life, ordinary language users may take themselves to be speculating about interior purely mental facts which are unfortunately inaccessible. They may take it that facts about context, history, behaviour and possible avowals are merely evidence for their claims. Nevertheless, their claims will be constrained by just those facts. They would, for example, feel obliged to withdraw them if they came to believe that what they had taken to be facts actually failed to obtain.

In writing fiction, however, the route from unsound metaphysics to nonsense is plain. The unsound metaphysical thought is that psychological ascriptions in real life are grounded in inaccessible interior facts. In real life, the thought continues, as we have no direct access to the private facts, we have to rely on evidence for their existence. Clearly if that picture were right, an author need not feel similarly constrained. She would be free to bypass the evidence and report the private facts. This sense of freedom, I have suggested, will encourage an author to make ungrounded psychological claims. They will seem to resemble the psychological ascriptions of ordinary language, but the kinds of facts which ground the psychological ascriptions of non-fiction are missing. Consequently, I have argued, the ascriptions do not simply make false psychological claims. Rather, what meaning they have is not psychological at all.

In the fourth chapter, I have tried to make a case for taking that very bold claim seriously in the case of *Middlemarch*. *Middlemarch* is a long, complex and dense novel. It is funny, wise, witty, formidably intelligent and painstakingly researched. The plot is engrossing and intricate, and the novel could be said to be 'about' many things: politics, history, education,

philosophy, manners, morality, medicine. But my thought is that the subject, above all, is the psychology of her characters. In *Middlemarch,* the 'endeavour to see what our thought and emotion may be capable of' is conducted within the minds of her characters. Like Lydgate, Eliot sought to reveal 'that delicate poise and transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy consciousness'; her intention in this novel was to explore the 'minute processes which prepare human misery and joy.' Because of this ambitious intention, this novel, perhaps more than any other, seeks to exploit the author's privileged position to go beyond mere evidence. Eliot's unsatisfactory metaphysics of the mind has led her to describe and explore a completely fictitious realm of mental fact. In the fourth chapter I have sought to show that that claim can be made good by examining crucial passages of psychological exposition and explanation. One last image from *Middlemarch* sums up my intention in Chapter Four. Lady Chettam thinks Mrs Cadwallader knows 'all about Casaubon'. Mrs Cadwallader willingly and succinctly sums him up. "The truth? he is as bad as the wrong physic -nasty to take, and sure to disagree"
Eliot caustically remarks that Lady Chettam had "so vivid a conception of the physic that she seemed to have learned something exact about Mr Casaubon's disadvantages". My suggestion in Chapter Four is that we, like Lady Chettam, often think we have learned something exact about the mental states of the characters of *Middlemarch*, while we are merely being beguiled by the vividness of Eliot's images.

I make no apology for the fact that throughout this thesis my target has been largely, if only implicitly, the Liberal Humanist tradition in literary criticism. Over the past fifteen years or so that tradition, which had been dominant for over thirty years, has of course been roundly attacked, and attacked on philosophical grounds. It might seem that there was too little left of the tatters of my target to make my thesis important. I would disagree. The starting point of this thesis was one I shared with Liberal Humanists. But while I also believe that starting point needs to be questioned, I am far from sharing the philosophical standpoint from which Liberal Humanism has so far been attacked.

The attack, thus far, has been almost exclusively 'Continental'. Unlike continental literary theorists, I have taken the aims of Liberal Humanism very seriously. Novelists can, I believe, and ought to, examine themes of deep human significance. The larger goal of this piece of work has been to open up a line of enquiry which might examine, from within the Analytic tradition, the extent to which that task is feasible. I too have sought to raise questions which challenge some of Liberal Humanism's most fundamental assumptions, but my questions have arisen within the analytic tradition. It seemed to Liberal Humanists (and indeed to A.J. Ayer) that Nineteenth Century novels were able, in a pre-Freudian way, to create and explore unconscious motivations. That claim has to be treated with great care. This dissertation centres on the writing of George Eliot, and explores from a Wittgensteinian perspective, the way certain broadly Cartesian philosophical preconceptions shape the way Eliot feels at liberty to create characters. Thoughts in the philosophy of aesthetics which have claimed to be indebted to Wittgenstein have often tended to the oracular and cryptic. While Wittgenstein's own ideas about the methodology of aesthetic discussion are sensible and deflationary rather than sweeping and grand, 'Wittgensteinian' lines of thought in philosophical criticism have often been wide in scope and low on precision. The indebtedness of this thesis to Wittgenstein is much more modest. I have sought to establish an important connection between the creation of the moral psychology of fictional characters, and Wittgenstein's later work in the philosophy of mind. I believe that the examination I have conducted of the way issues in the philosophy of mind, especially those treated in the *Philosophical Investigations*, bear on the way Eliot writes places much of the psychological language of *Middlemarch* in a new light, and discloses certain quite general limits on what is possible in creating fictional minds.

There are three possible lines of development from this point. The thesis might be generalised to the rest of the George Eliot corpus; the thesis may have a relevance for the ways in which other novelists create their characters' moral psychology; and there may be, at a higher level of generality, parallel constraints which should be placed on novelists' exploration of issues other than the psychological. Eliot remarked,

> "I become more and more timid--with less daring to adopt any formula which does not get itself clothed for me in some human figure and individual experience, and perhaps that is a sign that if I help others to see at all it must be through the medium of art."[8]

My suspicion is that when Eliot, or any other novelist, tries to examine the validity of 'formulae' by clothing them in fiction, critical readers should always examine the philosophical presuppositions of the sempstress. But those three lines of thought are a matter for further research.

---

[8] George Eliot to Dr. Joseph Frank Payne, January 25th, 1876.

It is the epigraph to B.J. Paris, *Experiments in Life*

Bibliography

I have listed only those books and articles to which I have referred, and those which I have found directly useful in writing this dissertation.

Fiction:

ELIOT, George, *Middlemarch* first published 1871-2 (Penguin Classics ed, 1985)

ELIOT, George, *The Lifted Veil* first published 1878 (Virago Modern Classicsed ,1985)

JAMES, Henry, *Portrait of a Lady* first published 1881 (Oxford University Press ed, 1963)

TROLLOPE, A.,*Can You Forgive Her* first published 1864-5 (Oxford University Press ed, 1982)

Critical Sources:

BEER, G.,*George Eliot* Key Women Writers Series (Sussex: The Harvester Press Limited, 1986)

BELSEY, C., *Critical Practice* New Accents (London: Methuen, 1980)

GILBERT, S. and GUBAR, S., *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Massachussets, 1979)

HAIGHT, G., (ed)*The George ELiot Letters* 9 vols
(New Haven and London:Yale University Press 1954-78)

JONES, P., *Philosophy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985)

KETTLE, A., *An Introduction to the English Novel* (Vol. I: to George Eliot)
(London:Hutchison University Library, 1967)

KETTLE, A.(ed),*The Nineteenth Century Novel* (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1981)

KNOEPFLMACHER, U. C., *Religious Humanism and the Victorian Novel*
(Princeton University Press, 1965)

LEAVIS, F.R., *The Great Tradition* (Chatto and Windus, 1948)

MCSWEENEY,K., *Middlemarch* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1984)

UGLOW, J., *George Eliot* (London: Virago, 1987)

Philosophy of Aesthetics

BOOTH, Wayne C.,*The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Univeristy of Chicago Press, 1961)

CODE, L., *Epistemic Responsibility* (N.H. : University Press of New England, 1987)

HARVEY, W.J.,*The Art of George Eliot* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1961)

HARVEY, W.J., *Character and the Novel*

LAWRENCE, D.H. 'Why the Novel Matters' first published in *Phoenix*
'Morality and the Novel' first published in*Calendar of Modern Letters*
(both in KETTLE, A., *The Nineteenth Century Novel*)

LAMARQUE, P., *Philosophy and Fiction* (Aberdeen University Press, 1983)

LODGE, D., '*Middlemarch* and the Idea of the Classic Realist Text'
Paper presented at the George Eliot Centenary Conference,
Leicester University, 1980. Published in Kettle, *Nineteenth Century Novel*

PALMER, A., 'Philosophy and Literature' *Journal of Philosophy* April 1990 vol 65

PLATO *Collected Dialogues* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1980)

YOUNG, R.,*Untying the Text* (Massachussets: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981)

Philosophy of Mind

BUDD, M.,*Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1989)

BURGE, T., 'Caresian Error and the Objectivity of Perception' in MACDOWELL, J
and PETTIT, P., *Subject, Thought and Context* (Oxford University Press 1986)

DAVIDSON, D., 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes'
in Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events'* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1980)

DILMAN, I., 'Intentions and the Unconscious', in CLARK,P. and WRIGHT, C., (eds.)
Mind Psycholanalysis and Science (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988)

HACKER, P.M.S., *Insight and Illusion* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979)

HACKER, P.M.S., *Wittgenstein, Meaning and Mind* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990)

KRIPKE, S*Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1982)

PEARS, D., *Motivated Irrationality* (Londin: Duckworth, 1978)

PITCHER, G., (ed)*Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations,*
a collection of Critical Essays (New York: Doubleday, 1966)

WILLIAMS, B. A. O., 'Personal Identity and Individuation'
in GUSTAFSON, (ed) *Essays in Philosophical Psychology.*

WITTGENSTEIN, L., *Remarks of the Philosophy of Psychology*
Volumes I and II (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980)

WITTGENSTEIN, L., *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1968)

WITTGENSTEIN, L., *The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1972)

WRIGHT, C., *Realism, Meaning and Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986)