Practical Wisdom in Literary Studies

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by

Yi Zheng

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Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Michael Gamper

Second examiner: Prof. Dr. Judith Glück

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I. Introduction

It is stating the obvious that our background knowledge is essential for literary interpretation, but what about a kind of *inarticulable* background knowledge? Can we articulate all the things that we know and are able to do in literary interpretation? Are we fully aware of all the assumptions behind our literary arguments? Arguing from three perspectives (philosophical, cognitive, and literary), this study explores the role of practical wisdom, an ability that we know but cannot explicitly tell, in literary studies.

Practical wisdom, given many different labels (judgment, know-how, tacit knowledge, etc.[1]), enjoys a fairly consistent understanding throughout history. It means, according to a modern definition, "an aptitude for assessing, evaluating, and choosing in the absence of certainties or principles that dictate or generate right answers."[2] Just as good judges do judge according to the law but do not solely rely on inflexible algorithms, when wise people make decisions, they do not mechanically follow a set of rules that must be followed in every situation. Instead, they use their judgment to determine which rules are relevant and how they should be applied to a particular situation.

In an age of algorithms, we may find practical wisdom an unsuitable topic for rigorous academic discussion or, indeed, for any *reasonable* discussion. Interestingly, however, as Lorraine Daston points out, the association between reason and rules and the dissociation of reason and judgment that we take for granted now are rather recent phenomena. From the Middle Ages to the mid-19th century, the main meaning of "rule" and its counterparts in other major European languages (*regula*, *Regel*, *règle*) derive from *Regula Sancti Benedicti*, a book of moral precepts written in the 6th century for

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[1] This study treats them as synonyms, see III.1 "Practical wisdom and its related terms."

[2] Leslie Paul Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment: Practical Wisdom, Neuroscience, and Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 5.

Christian monks, and refer to principles about how to behave or what to think.[3] We can still see this meaning in Enlightenment discussions of whether art should follow rules and whether it is genius that gives the rule to art. Only in the early 19th century, according to Daston, the meaning of "rule" as "algorithm," a step-by-step problem-solving procedure, begins to dominate, when effective calculating machines, civil service bureaucracies, and attempts to guarantee the logical validity of mathematical proofs are made for the first time. By the early 1950s, the ambition of reducing decision-making, intelligence, and reason to algorithmic rules has spread to psychology, economics, political science, sociology, and philosophy. When reason becomes rule-bound, the faculty of judgment that works beyond rules inevitably gradually steps aside and is no longer regarded as an essential component of reason, which seems a technological dream come true. In the second half of the 20th century, the meaning of reason is further changed by philosophers, mathematicians, computer scientists, and social scientists. In the models of decision theory and artificial intelligence, in particular, algorithmic rules finally replace judgment, which naturally influences how we understand the human sciences.[4] It is in this historical context that Gadamer's reflections on practical wisdom and his "philosophical hermeneutics" emerge. And our study begins with this historical/philosophical perspective.

From the philosophical perspective, Chapter II of this study introduces how Gadamer understands the originally Aristotelian concept, phronesis (practical wisdom). By associating phronesis with his four "guiding concepts of humanism," Bildung, sensus communis, judgment, and taste, Gadamer argues that practical wisdom distinguishes the human sciences from the natural sciences due to its unique three features of being (1) contingent, (2) inarticulable, and (3) only learnable through

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[3] Lorraine Daston, "How Reason Became Rationality," 2013, https://www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/research/projects/DeptII_Daston_Reason; Paul Erickson et al., *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013), 39–41.

[4] Daston, "How Reason Became Rationality"; Erickson et al., *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind*, 39–41.

experience. In Joel Weinsheimer's words, "they operate precisely where no determinate rule of operation can be adduced, where procedures cannot be programmed, and where common sense is required to make judgments that cannot be decided by reasons alone."[5] As a result, the human sciences cannot and should not be annexed by the natural sciences. Moreover, Gadamer also associates practical wisdom with literary interpretation in that they both involve flexibly applying universals to particulars, especially advocating the legitimacy of literary studies as an independent subject that should not be governed by the model of the natural sciences.

From the cognitive perspective, however, Chapter III argues that the case is more complicated than this. If we follow the latest developments in psychology, decision theory, and artificial intelligence, we will find that rule-bound algorithm is not the only game in town. The faculty of judgment, which often operates beyond rules, and the cognitive unconscious, the mental activities that are essential for our cognition but are not consciously accessible (let alone formalizable into rules), are widely recognized. In the emerging psychology of wisdom, for example, although the exact definition of wisdom is still contested, the mentioned three features of practical wisdom (depending on particulars; not reducible to explicit rules; only learnable through experience) are largely agreed upon. In decision theory, it has also become a consensus that most of the cognitive processes relevant to decision making are unconscious. Despite the opaque nature of practical wisdom, cognitive scientists have been making progress in laying the empirical foundation of the quantitative study of this inarticulable ability. Chapter III explores these initial results, such as the possible relations between practical wisdom and our conceptual organization, neural networks, and implicit memory.

From the literary perspective, Chapter IV critically discusses Martha Nussbaum's influential theory on the moral significance of literature. Implicitly referring to "winged words," a famous Homeric formula, Nussbaum argues that "the terms of the novelist's art are alert winged creatures, perceiving where the blunt terms of ordinary speech, or

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[5] Joel Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 111.

of abstract theoretical discourse, are blind, acute where they are obtuse, winged where they are dull and heavy."[6] Nussbaum believes that because the distinction between morally good and bad decisions lies in getting the particulars right, only a form dedicated to a fine rendering of real moral life's particularity and complexity can adequately serve moral philosophy. The literary form, in particular that of a narrative artist, is such a form. Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, for example, shows why only language as dense, concrete, and subtle as the one in this novel can properly discuss certain moral questions.[7] However, both Nussbaum's own argumentation and its academic reception leave something to be desired, such as answering what *exactly* makes the literary form important for moral philosophy. Chapter IV argues that a cognitive perspective can help here, such as suggesting that it is ambiguity that makes the literary form important because it resembles how we cognitively categorize the world. Moreover, like Gadamer, Nussbaum tends to entrench the already very deep division between the human and the natural sciences by arguing that her literature-matters-for-ethics argument proves that the unambiguous form favored by scientists does not always prevail, without realizing that ambiguity in cognition is not only recognized but a popular research topic in cognitive science. In this regard, Chapter IV demonstrates that this division does not have to be this deep and that cognitive poetics can be a two-way street where both literary scholars and scientists can learn from each other.

That said, we should not underestimate the difficulty of interdisciplinary research across the arts and sciences. Tony Jackson, a pioneer in cognitive poetics, correctly observes that neither do many literary scholars possess enough scientific knowledge nor do many cognitive scientists possess enough knowledge of literary studies to carry out meaningful cognitive literary studies. This situation is difficult to change because few scholars have time or inclination to learn the other field sufficiently to fully

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[6] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

[7] Nussbaum, 5.

understand (let alone to use or to challenge) what is most scientific about the one or most literary about the other. Consequently, there is no large audience either way.[8] However, as the following chapters will show, cognitive poetics is too promising to dismiss altogether simply because of this. It has to start from somewhere. As Raymond W. Gibbs, another influential scholar in cognitive poetics, argues, literary scholars must acknowledge the importance of the cognitive unconscious in our experience of meaning. Even though they themselves cannot examine unconscious mental processes directly, they can always collaborate with cognitive scientists and be at least aware of the empirical research in cognitive science relevant to their literary research.[9] In this spirit, the current study has been written in a way that has requested as much professional gatekeeping as possible. We have also covered essentially all of the important literature in the psychology of wisdom, paying particular attention to the most recent, empirically-based studies. Therefore, although it certainly has its limitations, this study (especially when it only intends to provide preliminary suggestions) should be able to stand up to scrutiny.

The spirit of cognitive poetics accords well with Comparative Literature as a subject, whose aim is not to compare for comparison's sake but to compare for, among other things, finding possible common ground (considering the emphasis on generality in its German equivalent *Allgemeine und Vergleichende Literaturwissenschaft*, which means General and Comparative Literature). Indeed, the birth of Comparative Literature as a subject, which begins to become what it is today around 1880, is closely related to the motive of finding commonality. At the height of colonialism in the nineteenth century, it is only natural to compare the world's different cultures to find what they have in common, especially to include the "exotic" cultures with which the Europeans were once less familiar. Two subjects, which are sometimes used interchangeably, can be considered as the predecessors of Comparative Literature:

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[8] Tony Jackson, "Questioning Interdisciplinarity: Cognitive Science, Evolutionary Psychology, and Literary Criticism," *Poetics Today* 21, no. 2 (2000): 340.

[9] Raymond W. Gibbs, *Intentions in the Experience of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 335.

philology and comparative linguistics. They emerge along with the hypothesis of Proto-Indo-European (a common ancestor of the Indo-European language family), the ambition of universal theories of language, literature, and philosophy by Herder, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and Friedrich Schlegel, and Goethe's famous notion of *Weltliteratur* based on the belief in the universality of literature.[10] The motive of finding commonality is also one of the reasons why Comparative Literature has always been emphasizing the importance of foreign language skills, because if we cannot read original texts we cannot really discuss commonalities in depth. Notably, since then, science has become a universal "language," which also both wants to and has the resources to find commonalities. Of course, taking science into account is not to replace what Comparative Literature has been doing but to include a potentially beneficial complement. In 2000, Jackson already predicts that the rapid development of cognitive science will definitely have an impact on literary studies.[11] The following chapters are going to demonstrate that, more than twenty years later, we now have even more reasons to believe so. After all, as Jackson convincingly argues, if psychoanalysis can play (until today) such an important role in literary studies, why not cognitive science? Is it because in a rapidly developing field such as cognitive science, today's truth can easily be refuted tomorrow? (But this also applies to psychoanalysis.) Or because psychoanalysis is much earlier to learn and has a wide range of application (sometimes too wide)? (If so, what does that tell us?) Either way, such a double standard has no excuse. It is at least worth *attempting* to see if learning from science is helpful for literary studies, which, to reassure skeptics like Gadamer and Nussbaum, can be done without giving science a special, superior status by us treating it as one of the many "theories" that literary scholars already know too well how to deal with.

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[10] See Ben Hutchinson, *Comparative Literature: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 50–57; Michael N. Forster, "Herder, Schlegel, Humboldt, and the Birth of Modern Linguistics," in *German Philosophy of Language: From Schlegel to Hegel and Beyond* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 109–41.

[11] Jackson, "Questioning Interdisciplinarity," 320–21.

This study is such an attempt. Although it cannot answer all the questions it puts forward, it at least reminds us of the possibility that practical wisdom has an empirical foundation and is important for literary studies. It is worth emphasizing that we do not claim that what we have now is the ultimate truth, as many studies cited here do not lack controversies. Nor do we claim that the cognitive approach is the solution to everything, as many problems in literary studies still remain unsolved. However, we do believe that cognitive poetics proves to be a valuable way of thinking thanks to the latest advancements in cognitive science, which is an ongoing lively debate that also invites literary scholars to participate. Let us begin.

II. Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom

1. The humanist tradition

The first section of the first chapter of Gadamer's opus magnum, *Truth and Method*, is called "The significance of the humanist tradition for the human sciences."[12] Gadamer opens this section by arguing that the "self-reflection that accompanied the development of the human sciences in the nineteenth century is wholly governed by the model of the natural sciences,"[13] which is problematic because:

> The experience of the sociohistorical world cannot be raised to a science by the inductive procedure of the natural sciences. Whatever "science" may mean here, and even if all historical knowledge includes the application of experiential universals to the particular object of investigation, historical research does not endeavor to grasp the concrete phenomenon as an instance of a universal rule. The individual case does not serve only to confirm a law from which practical predictions can be made. Its ideal is rather to understand the phenomenon itself in its unique and historical concreteness. However much experiential universals are involved, the aim is not to confirm and extend these universalized experiences in order to attain knowledge of a law—e.g., how men, peoples, and states evolve—but to understand how this man, this people, or this state is what it has become or, more generally, how it happened that it is so.[14]

Emphasizing the special concern of the human sciences about particulars, Gadamer introduces four "guiding concepts of humanism": Bildung, sensus communis, judgment (*Urteilskraft*), and taste (*Geschmack*).[15] He argues that if we note the differences between the human sciences and the natural sciences regarding their research history, it is immediately clear that tradition affects the human sciences in a fundamental way, because "to stand in tradition and to heed it is clearly the way of truth

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[12] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 3; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke. Bd. 1: Hermeneutik: Wahrheit und Methode. - 1. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 9. Hereafter TM and GW.

[13] TM 3; GW 1, 9.

[14] TM 4; GW 1, 10.

[15] Due to the very frequent use of Bildung and sensus communis (and phronesis), we follow the case in TM and do not italicize them in this study.

that applies in the human sciences."[16] The tradition of Bildung, for example, according to Gadamer, can be a special source of truth. He also believes this concept is so important that "it is from the survival of the humanistic idea of Bildung that the human sciences of the nineteenth century draw, without admitting it, their own life."[17] But what do Bildung, sensus communis, judgment, and taste mean and how can they be sources of truth?

1.1 Bildung

Related to the German noun *Bild*, "picture," and the verb *bilden*, "to form, constitute, educate," there is no English counterpart for the German word Bildung, for which the English translators of *Truth and Method* have offered four alternatives of translation: self-formation, education, cultivation, and culture. It refers to the German tradition dating back to the late eighteenth century, according to which we were born human, but not yet fully and perfectly. To be fully and perfectly human, we need to "form" ourselves so that our faculties can be finely developed and balanced to make sound judgments.[18] Gadamer notes that the concept of Bildung is "supremely important" and "perhaps the greatest idea of the eighteenth century, and it is this concept which is the atmosphere breathed by the human sciences of the nineteenth century, even if they are unable to offer any epistemological justification for it."[19] As a special kind of education, Bildung in this context does not concretely mean developing specific skills or learning specific knowledge, but generally and abstractly means "rising to the

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[16] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Truth in the Human Sciences," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 29; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke. Bd. 2: Hermeneutik: Wahrheit und Methode. - 2. Ergänzungen, Register* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 39–40. See also TM 296; GW 1, 287–288.

[17] TM 17; GW 1, 23–24.

[18] See Jennifer A. Herdt, *Forming Humanity: Redeeming the German Bildung Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2019); Walter Horace Bruford, *The German Tradition of Self-Cultivation: Bildung from Humboldt to Thomas Mann* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[19] TM 8–9; GW 1, 15.

universal"[20] and "rising up to humanity through culture."[21] Related to the mythical tradition that in our souls we all carry the image of God, after whom we are created, and which we must cultivate in ourselves, Bildung cannot be done by mechanically memorizing facts and rules, but grows spontaneously out of an inner process of self-formation.

According to Gadamer, during this process of self-formation, we learn "tact," "a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge from general principles does not suffice."[22] An essential quality of tact is that it is tacit and unformulable, which brings us back to Gadamer's argument mentioned before that the experience of the sociohistorical world cannot be raised to a science by the inductive procedure of the natural sciences. Gadamer cites Hermann von Helmholtz (1821–1894), well-known both as a scientist and a philosopher, who distinguishes between two kinds of induction: logical and artistic-instinctive induction. The former is employed by the natural sciences while the latter by the human sciences. The artistic-instinctive induction in the human sciences requires tact whereas the induction of the natural scientist depends entirely on the use of reason.[23] In other words, Helmholtz, whose idea is representative of the 19th-century discussion on this topic, believes that the distinctive feature of the human sciences lies in an artistic-instinctive element that can only be learned by practice and self-education, not by memorizing certain rules.[24] By Gadamer's rhetorical question, "Does not what is scientific about the human sciences lie rather here [in 'tact'] than in their methodology?"[25], we can see that he agrees with Helmholtz's emphasis on the somewhat unconscious tact that replaces "the conscious drawing of inferences" of natural scientists in order to do justice to the human sciences.

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[20] TM 12; GW 1, 18.

[21] TM 8; GW 1, 15–16.

[22] TM 15; GW 1, 22.

[23] TM 5; GW 1, 11.

[24] TM 7–8; GW 1, 13–14.

[25] TM 7; GW 1, 13.

Moreover, Gadamer argues that tact accords well with the immediacy of our senses (the ability to perceive and feel), because tact is the particular ability to feel for situations and the appropriate behaviors for these situations for which we have no knowledge of general principles.[26] People with tact know how to make sure distinctions and evaluations in an individual case without being able to give reasons. However, in contrast to the perceptual senses, tact is not natural; it must be *gebildet* (cultivated).[27] Therefore, tact is compared to the "sense" as in "common sense," because the latter must also be cultivated and, following Hegel, Gadamer emphasizes "a universal and common sense" as the nature of Bildung. People with cultivated tact are "open to what is other—to other, more universal points of view,"[28] which is the goal of Bildung that we have mentioned, "rising above itself to universality":

> To distance oneself from oneself and from one's private purposes means to look at these in the way that others see them. This universality is by no means a universality of the concept or understanding. This is not a case of a particular being determined by a universal; nothing is proved conclusively. The universal viewpoints to which the cultivated man (*gebildet*) keeps himself open are not a fixed applicable yardstick, but are present to him only as the viewpoints of possible others. Thus the cultivated consciousness has in fact more the character of a sense. For every sense—e.g., the sense of sight—is already universal in that it embraces its sphere, remains open to a particular field, and grasps the distinctions within what is opened to it in this way. In that such distinctions are confined to one particular sphere at a time, whereas cultivated consciousness is active in all directions, such consciousness surpasses all of the natural sciences. It is a universal sense.[29]

In this way, the concept of Bildung leads to Gadamer's next guiding concept of humanism: sensus communis. As we will see, the four guiding concepts (Bildung, sensus communis, judgment, taste) are not arbitrarily chosen but are steps along a path of argumentation. The conceptual connections between them will be explained further in the following.

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[26] See also IV.3.4 "A clarification" in the current study.

[27] TM 16; GW 1, 22.

[28] TM 16–17; GW 1, 22–23.

[29] TM 16; GW 1, 23.

1.2 sensus communis

Like Bildung, the term sensus communis also has a long tradition. For Aristotle and Aquinas, the sensus communis is a sense that integrates all the other senses into a general sensation. For Horace and Seneca, it means a conventional sense of propriety shared by the community.[30] For Gadamer, he agrees with Giambattista Vico, who defines sensus communis as "the sense of what is right and of the common good that is to be found in all men; moreover, it is a sense that is acquired through living in the community and is determined by its structures and aims."[31] Several other philosophers such as Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and Bergson also share a similar understanding. However, Gadamer notices that the situation in Germany is different:

> It is very characteristic of the human sciences' self-reflection in the nineteenth century that they proceeded not under the influence of the tradition of moral philosophy to which both Vico and Shaftesbury belong and which is represented primarily by France, the classical land of le bon sens, but under the influence of the German philosophy of the age of Kant and Goethe. […] The concept of sensus communis was taken over, but in being emptied of all political content it lost its genuine critical significance. Sensus communis was understood as a purely theoretical faculty: theoretical judgment, parallel to moral consciousness (conscience) and taste.[32]

Gadamer believes that sensus communis should belong to the moral faculty because he agrees with Vico's argument that the core of this concept and its tradition is not the abstract universality, which would indeed make it belong to the theoretical faculty (in Kantian sense, the universal cognitive faculty that is supposed to be the same for everyone) instead of the moral one, but "the concrete universality represented by the community of a group, a people, a nation, or the whole human race,"[33] which is why developing this shared moral sense is essential for living in a human community and

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[30] John D. Schaeffer, *Sensus Communis: Vico, Rhetoric, and the Limits of Relativism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), 2–3.

[31] TM 21; GW 1, 27.

[32] TM 25; GW 1, 32.

[33] TM 19; GW 1, 26.

thus the most important thing in Bildung. This is also why Gadamer argues that the sensus communis should play a role in distinguishing the human sciences from the natural sciences: “There is something immediately evident about grounding philological and historical studies and the ways the human sciences work on this concept of the sensus communis. For their object, the moral and historical existence of humanity […] is itself decisively determined by the sensus communis. Thus a conclusion based on universals, a reasoned proof, is not sufficient, because what is decisive is the circumstances.”[34]

It is important to stress that when making this distinction Gadamer does not deny the merits of modern natural science but tries to show its limits, because he believes that “even with this new science and its mathematical methodology, we still cannot do without the wisdom of the ancients and their cultivation of prudentia [practical wisdom] and eloquentia [eloquence].”[35] First, practical wisdom is irreplaceable because it directs towards the concrete situation and its ideal is to grasp the “circumstances” in their infinite variety, in contrast to the rational concept of objective knowledge based on universal principles that the methodology of natural science promotes. Moreover, there is an ethical motif involved that is not related to natural science: When we use our practical wisdom to judge, we judge according to what the whole community believes is right (as the adjective communis indicates).[36] Thus Gadamer believes that the German Enlightenment has “emptied” the concept of sensus communis after taking this communal moral element out of it.[37] Second, eloquence is irreplaceable because here it means more than the purely rhetorical ideal of how to say something well, which is often regarded as a derogatory term for insincere argumentation. For Gadamer eloquence means the humanist ideal of how to properly assess the beliefs of others so that we can communicate better and how to influence people not by deception and

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[34] TM 21; GW 1, 28.
[35] TM 19; GW 1, 26.
[36] TM 20; GW 1, 27.
[37] TM 28; GW 1, 35.

manipulation but by saying the *right* things.[38] This ability, like practical wisdom, therefore also goes beyond the scope of the method of natural science.

Because in Gadamer's understanding having practical wisdom and eloquence means having sensus communis, sensus communis as the second guiding concept of humanism can also serve to distinguish human science from natural science, along with the first concept Bildung. The emphasis on the common good when understanding practical wisdom and sensus communis is also shared by most of the contemporary wisdom scholars, including the psychologists of wisdom, as our next chapter will show.

1.3 Judgment

As sensus communis relates to Bildung, Gadamer's third humanistic concept, judgment, also relates to sensus communis. We have mentioned that Gadamer refuses the understanding of the sensus communis of the German Enlightenment only as a theoretical faculty because otherwise the ability to judge morally according to the concrete situation, which cannot be abstracted as a theoretical faculty, would be missed. In the case of judgment, however, it is the German understanding of the concept that he prefers in the context of the four guiding concepts of humanism. *Urteilskraft*, unlike its English equivalent, refers exclusively to the ability to judge and not to the act of judging or the propositions that are to be judged (and is therefore translated as "the power of judgment" instead of simply "judgment" in Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews' now standard translation of the *Kritik der Urteilskraft*).[39] More specifically, it is the Kantian definition that judgment means "the capacity to subsume the individual case under a universal category"[40] that Gadamer has in mind:

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[38] TM 18; GW 1, 25.

[39] R. W. Puster, "Urteilskraft; Urteilsvermögen," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie. Bd. 11*, ed. Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Gottfried Gabriel (Schwabe: Basel, 2001), 479. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[40] TM 28; GW 1, 35. The concept of reflective judgment that Kant puts forward in his *Critique of Judgment* is not relevant here.

> This development of the concept of sensus communis in eighteenth-century Germany may explain why it is so closely connected with the *concept of judgment*. "Gesunder Menschenverstand" (good sense), sometimes called "gemeiner Verstand" (common understanding), is in fact decisively characterized by judgment. The difference between a fool and a sensible man is that the former lacks judgment—i.e., he is not able to subsume correctly and hence cannot apply correctly what he has learned and knows. The word "judgment" was introduced in the eighteenth century to convey the concept of judicium, which was considered to be a basic intellectual virtue. In the same way the English moral philosophers emphasize that moral and aesthetic judgments do not obey reason but have the character of sentiment (or taste). Similarly, Johannes Nikolaus Tetens, one of the representatives of the German Enlightenment, regards the sensus communis as a judicium without reflection.[41]

Gadamer agrees with Kant that although judgment is a faculty of rule (how to subsume a particular under a universal; how to recognize something as an example of a rule), it itself does not follow any rule, otherwise there would be an endless loop, because for following this rule of judgment would require again a new power of judgment. Therefore, judgment is an ability (1) determined by particular circumstances, (2) unformulable, and (3) only learnable through concrete practice, which are the three features Gadamer also attributes to Bildung, sensus communis, and, as we will see, to taste. These three features play a central role in Gadamer's justification of the "scientificity" of the human sciences.

1.4 Taste

For the introduction of Gadamer's last humanistic guiding concept, taste, we should again refer to sensus communis and its conceptual history, which is strongly influenced by Kant. As mentioned, while the concept of sensus communis is originally associated with moral philosophy, because it is shown above all in judgments about right and wrong, doable and un-doable, and common utility, Kant excludes this moral aspect of sensus communis in his *Critique of Judgment* and understands it as taste. According to Kant, taste is "the faculty for judging an object or a kind of representation

[41] TM 28-29; GW 1, 36.

through a satisfaction or dissatisfaction without any interest. The object of such a satisfaction is called beautiful."[42] In short, taste is the faculty of judging the beautiful.

But is it not paradoxical to call sensus communis taste? Do people not all have different tastes? It is worth noting that Kant has developed a unique system of philosophical terminology. For Kant, what we call taste and the beautiful in everyday life is often influenced by charm (*Reiz*), emotion (*Rührung*), interest (*Interesse*), the agreeable (*das Angenehme*), or the good (*das Gute*). Again, these concepts all have their own specific Kantian meanings and for our purpose here it is enough to understand them as having nothing to do with our theoretical/cognitive faculty, which should be universal to everyone. Their "foreign" influences are the reason why the taste in the everyday sense is not shared by all. In other words, we differ in our tastes and have different opinions about what is beautiful because our understandings of these two concepts are "contaminated" by something not universal such as personal emotions or interests. The *real* taste and the beautiful in the Kantian sense, however, should be universal because they are based on the universal cognitive faculty of ours that is, as Kant famously claims, the same for every human being. In Gadamer's words:

> [Kant] reduces sensus communis to a subjective principle. In taste nothing is known of the objects judged to be beautiful, but it is stated only that there is a feeling of pleasure connected with them a priori in the subjective consciousness. As we know, Kant sees this feeling as based on the fact that the representation of the object is suited (*zweckmäßig*) to our faculty of knowledge. It is a free play of imagination and understanding, a subjective relationship that is altogether appropriate to knowledge and that exhibits the reason for the pleasure in the object. This suitedness to the subject is in principle the same for all—i.e., it is universally communicable and thus grounds the claim that the judgment of taste possesses universal validity.[43]

Being universally communicable, taste/sensus communis can therefore be a source of truth. It looks as if Kant has already done Gadamer's task of searching for truth in the

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[42] Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, 96; Immanuel Kant, *Kants gesammelte Schriften. Bd. 5 = Abt. 1, Werke, Bd. 5: Kritik der praktischen Vernunft: Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1913), 211. See also TM 30; GW 1, 38.

[43] TM 40; GW 1, 49.

humanistic guiding concepts for him, but Gadamer is not satisfied because according to him Kant has broken off the tradition by narrowing the concept of sensus communis down to taste:

> The importance of this cannot be easily overestimated, for what was here surrendered was the element in which philological and historical studies lived, and when they sought to ground themselves methodologically under the name of "human sciences" side by side with the natural sciences, it was the only possible source of their full self-understanding. Now Kant's transcendental analysis made it impossible to acknowledge the truth claim of traditionary materials, to the cultivation and study of which they devoted themselves. But this meant that the methodological uniqueness of the human sciences lost its legitimacy.[44]

Going into details about Gadamer's critique of Kant would go beyond the scope of this study. What is relevant here is to notice that what Gadamer believes is "surrendered" is the moral element that we have been repeatedly emphasizing. Gadamer reminds us that taste is originally not an aesthetic concept but a moral one. For humanism, taste is a "sense" of what is fitting and fair in social life and thus a mode of moral knowledge. Because moral conduct is always determined by particular circumstances, taste does not follow universal rules and therefore cannot be acquired by simply learning rules but must be "cultivated."[45] Because it does not follow rules, when taste registers a negative reaction to something, it cannot explain why, "but it experiences it with the greatest certainty."[46]

So much for the four concepts from the humanist tradition. In the preface of the eighth volume of his collected works, *Ästhetik und Poetik I. Kunst als Aussage* (*Aesthetics and Poetics I. Art as Statement*), Gadamer depicts the goal of his philosophical hermeneutics as follows:

> My hermeneutic studies set me the task of detaching the concept of knowledge and method of philosophical epistemology from the one-sided overestimation of the basic concepts of the modern empirical sciences and of asserting the experience of

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[44] TM 38; GW 1, 46.

[45] TM 33–34, 37; GW 1, 42, 45; Jean Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, trans. Kathryn Plant (London: Routledge, 2014), 27.

[46] TM 34; GW 1, 42.

> understanding alongside it. Only in the further development of phenomenology, especially of Husserl and Heidegger, the one-sidedness of this orientation to the fact of science and to a concept of truth culminating in propositional truth came into a new light. This allowed me to follow up on Aristotelian practical philosophy and its central concept, phronesis. It is repeatedly and emphatically referred to as *allo eidos gnoseos* [another mode of knowing].[47]

The reason why phronesis can help here is that, as "another mode of knowing," it summarizes what Gadamer believes the tradition of Bildung, sensus communis, judgment, and taste has to offer, which is the topic of our next section.[48]

2. The three features of practical wisdom

There can be several reasons why Gadamer introduces the four mentioned guiding concepts of humanism at the beginning of *Truth and Method*. Some scholars generally attribute it to Gadamer's emphasis on the rediscovery of tradition and his argument that the human sciences should be in constant dialogue with tradition.[49] Others believe that Gadamer aims to "show how there is a legitimacy to speaking of truth in the realm of human experience that can never be adequately captured by method, i.e., the attempt to objectify and quantify such experience."[50] A further reason is that what the four concepts of humanism have in common can distinguish human science from natural science. In the previous section, to avoid interpretation questions, we have cited Gadamer directly and substantially to show that he highlights three features shared by the four concepts: (1) always depending on individual situations, (2) inarticulable and not being reducible to explicit rules, and (3) only learnable via experience. Taken

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[47] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Gesammelte Werke. Bd. 8: Ästhetik und Poetik. - 1. Kunst als Aussage* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), V. My translation.

[48] In this study, a part like II.1 "The humanist tradition" is called a section. A part like II.1.1 "Bildung" is called a subsection. To avoid awkward expressions like "subsubsection," when referring to a part like III.2.3.1 "Wisdom and conceptual organization," we use its title directly.

[49] Karsten Stueber, "Understanding Truth and Objectivity: A Dialogue between Donald Davidson and Hans-Georg Gadamer," in *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1994), 178.

[50] Lauren S. Barthold, *Gadamer's Dialectical Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010), 79.

together, these features define practical wisdom, a concept appearing every now and then both in Gadamer's introduction of the four humanistic concepts and his philosophical works in general.

The concept of practical wisdom dates to Aristotle, according to whom, to live well, we need to have certain virtues. By "virtue", Aristotle means a state or tendency to do certain things well. There are two kinds of virtues: ethical and intellectual. Ethical virtues, such as courage and temperance, cannot reason themselves but can follow reason and enable us to carry out well what we reasonably believe we should do. Intellectual virtues are the ones that can reason, and they are divided into (1) theoretical virtues, which deal with things that cannot be otherwise, such as math and physics, and (2) practical virtues, which deal with things that can be otherwise, such as politics and ethics. The theoretical virtues are further divided into (a) nous (intuitive apprehension, intelligence), through which we attain knowledge of the premises that cannot be proven but are the first principles from which the demonstrative science proceeds, (b) episteme (science), through which we attain knowledge by demonstrative reasoning from known premises, and (c) sophia (philosophical wisdom), a combination of nous and episteme. The practical virtues are further divided into (d) techne (art, technical expertise), a reasoned state of capacity to make things, having its aim in the product, and (e) phronesis (practical wisdom), a reasoned state of capacity to act according the things that are good or bad for man, having its aim in the action itself.

Aristotle emphasizes three logically interconnected features of practical wisdom that we have been discussing: (1) Practical wisdom is about particulars, while episteme (science) is about universals.[51] In science, it is possible to find out what is common to many particulars and formulate general rules, but because what is ethically appropriate is determined case by case, practical wisdom cannot be formulated in exceptionless

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[51] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Lesley Brown, trans. W. D. Ross (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1140b31, 1141b14, 1142a23, 1143a26, 1180b15.

generalizations.[52] (2) Because practical wisdom is about variable particulars, it cannot be fully demonstrated. By contrast, science can be demonstrated because it is based on invariable first principles.[53] Despite this, Aristotle believes that "we ought to attend to the undemonstrated sayings and opinions of experienced and older people or of people of practical wisdom not less than to demonstrations; for because experience has given them an eye they see right."[54] This metaphoric "eye" is the ability to respond appropriately according to different relevant particulars.[55] (3) Because practical wisdom cannot be fully demonstrated, it can only be learned through experience. Aristotle observes that "while young men become geometricians and mathematicians and wise in matters like these, it is thought that a young man of practical wisdom cannot be found. The cause is that such wisdom is concerned not only with universals but with particulars, which become familiar from experience, but a young man has no experience, for it is length of time that gives experience."[56] In other words, because geometry and math are not directly connected with experience, it is possible for young men without experience to master them. By contrast, because practical wisdom is about particulars, it cannot be taught traditionally by passing on general rules but can only be acquired "naturally" with age and experience.[57]

Gadamer accepts these three features of practical wisdom. Regarding the first two features, he argues that practical philosophy has a unique epistemological status:

> The question is whether there can be any such thing as philosophical knowledge of the moral being of man and what role knowledge (i.e., logos) plays in the moral being of man. If man always encounters the good in the form of the particular

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[52] Aristotle, 1104a6–10, 1109b20, 1126b2–4; C. C. W. Taylor, "Aristotle's Epistemology," in *Epistemology. Companions to Ancient Thought 1*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 136; Barry Schwartz and Kenneth E. Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," *Journal of Happiness Studies* 7, no. 3 (2006): 384.

[53] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a23; Otfried Höffe, "Phronêsis," in *Aristoteles-Lexikon*, ed. Otfried Höffe, Rolf Geiger, and Philipp Brüllmann (Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner, 2005), 453.

[54] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1143b12.

[55] Aristotle, 241n; Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Sarah Broadie, trans. C. J. Rowe (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 379n.

[56] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a12.

[57] Aristotle, 1143a26–b9.

> practical situation in which he finds himself, the task of moral knowledge is to determine what the concrete situation asks of him—or, to put it another way, the person acting must view the concrete situation in light of what is asked of him in general. But—negatively put—this means that knowledge that cannot be applied to the concrete situation remains meaningless and even risks obscuring what the situation calls for. This state of affairs, which represents the nature of moral reflection, not only makes philosophical ethics a methodologically difficult problem, but also gives the problem of method a moral relevance. In contrast to the theory of the good based on Plato's doctrine of ideas, Aristotle emphasizes that it is impossible for ethics to achieve the extreme exactitude of mathematics.[58]

Regarding the third feature, Gadamer notices that "what practical philosophy is remains a real challenge for the concept of science of modern thinking as a whole, which should not be ignored," because "in any case, practical and political knowledge is of a fundamentally different structure than all these types of *teachable* knowledge and their applications."[59] When stating that practical knowledge is not teachable, Gadamer means it can only be learned through one's own experience. Science, knowledge of the immutable, by contrast, is based on demonstration and therefore teachable through instruction of the immutable laws.[60]

On the other hand, Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom diverges from Aristotle in two ways. First, Gadamer unequivocally states that he gives special importance to Aristotle's practical philosophy because it "provides the only viable model for an adequate self-understanding of the humanities."[61] For the same reason, he introduces the above-mentioned four guiding concepts of humanism. In places other than the first chapter of *Truth and Method*, Gadamer often generally refers to practical wisdom instead of the four concepts when he wants to address the question of the differences between the human and the natural sciences. This is new because although Aristotle does distinguish between episteme (science) and techne (art, technical

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[58] TM 323; GW 1, 318.

[59] GW 2, 22. My translation and emphasis.

[60] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," trans. Hans Fantel, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 5, no. 1 (1975): 32.

[61] GW 2, 319. My translation.

expertise), the divided "two cultures" of the human and the natural sciences that C. P. Snow laments in 1959 does not exist by then.[62]

Gadamer suggests that Aristotle's practical philosophy can determine the status of the human sciences in contrast to the natural sciences because he agrees with Aristotle's distinction between the domain of ethos and that of physics, which are respectively the domains of the two cultures. Because human beings can choose what to do, the ethical domain is determined by their instability in contrast to the stable laws of the natural domain.[63] Here it is important to stress again that by far our study is still primarily a historical one, intending to give a clearer account of what is said *then*, because in the contemporary debate of ethics and philosophy of science, Aristotle and Gadamer's account is far from uncontroversial. In the following chapters we will see as well that it is not practical philosophy itself that interests us, but the three features that Aristotle and Gadamer attribute to practical wisdom: contingent, inarticulable, and only learnable through experience.

Second, Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom diverges from Aristotle's in that Gadamer relates practical wisdom to hermeneutics, the study of interpretation. We recall that Aristotle's definition of practical wisdom is one's ability to "be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient for himself,"[64] which is not directly relevant for understanding a text. What would be more relevant in Aristotle's philosophy is techne, which is the ability of poiesis (production), because practical wisdom does not produce things but act.[65] Declaring this divergence ("It is true that Aristotle is not concerned with the hermeneutical problem and certainly not with its historical dimension, but with the right estimation of the role that reason has to play in moral action."[66]), Gadamer explains his association between practical wisdom and

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[62] C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

[63] Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 30.

[64] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a26.

[65] Aristotle, 1104b1–6; this is not without controversy, as techne and phronesis can influence each other. See, for example, John Wall, "Phronesis, Poetics, and Moral Creativity," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 6, no. 3 (2003): 317–41.

[66] TM 322; GW 1, 317.

literary interpretation in two steps. First, he reaffirms his first divergence from Aristotle that because the object of the human sciences is man and what he knows of himself as an acting being who can take his own initiative, the human sciences stand closer to moral knowledge than to "theoretical" knowledge, and thus are "moral sciences." An active being is concerned with what is not always the same but can be otherwise. Only in such things can he intervene, and the purpose of his moral knowledge is to govern such actions.[67] Then, Gadamer links practical wisdom to hermeneutics because they are both about applying universals to particulars: The case with practical wisdom is easily understandable because it determines if a universal moral rule applies in a particular, concrete situation. The case with hermeneutics is a little more complicated. Gadamer argues that because the most important hermeneutical question is how to understand a same text differently, hermeneutics naturally concerns the relationship between the universal and the particular.[68] However, this does not mean that the text is given for the reader as something universal that he first understands and then uses for particular applications. Rather, when the reader tries to understand this "universal," which is supposed to be the text, he already must take himself and his particular hermeneutical situation into consideration: "He must relate the text to this situation if he wants to understand at all." In this way, Aristotle's analysis of the virtue of moral knowledge offers "a kind of model of the problems of hermeneutics."[69]

Gadamer also compares this "concretization of the general," which is "the universal aspect of hermeneutics,"[70] to politics:

> Is politics just an expertise of certain technicians of human life and is there a way to teach virtue and to teach in the field of political decision-making—to teach in the sense of conveying a certain knowledge, the truth, to which the pupil can refer as something reliable? Obviously not. Well, to this extent "politics" as moral philosophy cannot be a techne and teach a set of rules, for to do so would overlook the function of phronesis which is just the application of more or less vague ideals

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[67] TM 325; GW 1, 319; Gadamer, "The Problem of Historical Consciousness," 32.

[68] TM 322; GW 1, 317.

[69] TM 333; GW 1, 329.

[70] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences," *Research in Phenomenology* 9, no. 1 (1979): 82.

> of virtues and attitudes to the concrete demand of the situation. Moreover, this application cannot evolve by mere rules but is something which must be done by the reasoning man himself.[71]

Similarly, Gadamer believes that practical wisdom is also needed when a jurist applies law or when a teacher explains the message of the Bible because "in whatever connection, the application of rules can never be done by rules."[72] Here we see that all the three features that Aristotle and Gadamer attribute to practical wisdom are again emphasized.

To summarize, we argue in this chapter that the four guiding concepts of humanism can all be connected by practical wisdom, an originally Aristotelian concept. In Gadamer's understanding, it can also distinguish the human sciences from the natural sciences and is relevant for hermeneutics. As mentioned, the reason that there are so many direct quotations from Gadamer in this chapter is to show that our paraphrases and interpretations of Gadamer's philosophy are well-grounded, which constitute the basis of the philosophical starting point of our central argument, "we know more than we can tell in literary studies." In the next chapter, we will further examine it from a cognitive perspective. Note that Gadamer also influentially argues that, in the human sciences, a text is only accessible to us through our *Vorurteil* (literarily "prejudice," but in Gadamerian sense not necessarily referring to unfair opinions but simply background knowledge in general, thus also translated as "pre-judgments") and previous understandings, whereas the natural sciences aim for an unprejudiced direction, hence the fundamental difference between these two fields. However, in this chapter, we have not expanded on this view of his and his other famous concepts such as *Horizontverschmelzung* ("fusion of horizons," meaning what the reader can see now and what the author can see then are fused together when understanding takes place). For one thing, they have been so thoroughly discussed that another elaboration is undue. For another, they are not the most relevant to our real focus, practical wisdom.

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[71] Gadamer, 82.

[72] Gadamer, 82.

III. Practical wisdom from a cognitive perspective

1. Practical wisdom and its related terms

Having examined the features of practical wisdom in Aristotle and Gadamer's understanding, we might note its similarity to several other concepts: judgment, knowledge-how/know-how, procedural knowledge, implicit knowledge, Michael Polanyi's "tacit knowledge" ("We know more than we can tell."[73]), Lorraine Daston's "trained judgment," which "relies on unconscious processes that cannot even be introspected, much less recorded,"[74] etc. Many of them indeed more or less describe an ability that is (1) always dependent on the individual situation, (2) not reducible to explicit rules, and (3) only learnable via experience, as practical wisdom does. These concepts and practical wisdom are treated in this study as synonyms. The usages of these concepts that do not include or go much beyond the three features of Aristotle and Gadamer's definition are not in our consideration. The reason for emphasizing these features instead of how we name the ability with these features is that, as we will see, they are the ones consistent with cognitive science research. Philosophers, psychologists, and linguists have all noticed the similarity between these terms and argued for an overall assessment of them while admitting that different disciplines might have different interests in studying practical wisdom and its related terms.[75] For example, sociologists and philosophers of science are more concerned with the tacit knowledge of natural scientists, while economists and management scientists want to know how to hire talent with practical wisdom.[76] Kristján Kristjánsson notices that practical wisdom has recently become a buzzword in one specific field: professional

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[73] Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 4.

[74] Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 370.

[75] Baljinder Sahdra and Paul Thagard, "Procedural Knowledge in Molecular Biology," *Philosophical Psychology* 16, no. 4 (2003): 477–98; Michele Zappavigna, *Tacit Knowledge and Spoken Discourse* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 15; Chris Swoyer, "Relativism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2003, https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/archives/spr2010/entries/relativism.

[76] For overviews see Zappavigna, *Tacit Knowledge and Spoken Discourse*, 15–42; Harry Collins, *Tacit and Explicit Knowledge* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 141–55.

ethics, particularly in relation to professionalism in medicine, nursing, social work, and teaching. Focusing on the inarticulable practical wisdom of professionals is seen by many as a useful way to save professional ethics from obsessing with explicit rules, but most literature in these fields is content to understand phronesis as some kind of mysterious intuition, without exploring the possibility of an empirical scientific study.[77]

Similarly, Gadamer does not consider such a possibility because he often regards science as a threat to the humanities, as if the humanities would lose their legitimacy when considered from the scientific perspective. However, in this chapter, we will show that, contrary to Gadamer's belief, even if the imagined arrogant natural scientists who want to annex the territory of the humanities exist, scientific findings do not support their ambition because cognitive science actually supports Gadamer's claim that our knowledge and understanding are not always reducible to explicit language. Moreover, to study practical wisdom or hermeneutics in general from a cognitive perspective is neither to ignore the elements of culture and history nor to replace literary criticism. Instead, cognitive poetics acknowledges the "unimaginable complexity of literary interpretation" that resists simple reduction.[78] Literary scholars such as Mary Thomas Crane and Raphael Lyne clarify that there is no reason to be concerned about cognitive science's deterministic or positivistic tendencies, as the discipline is also open to the fuzzy and should not be stereotyped as the scientific resolution of literary ambiguity.[79] As a result, cognitive poetics does not set out to take over but "to modify, nuance, refine,

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[77] Kristján Kristjánsson, "*Phronesis* and Moral Education: Treading beyond the Truisms," *Theory and Research in Education* 12, no. 2 (2014): 154.

[78] Marcus Nordlund, "Consilient Literary Interpretation," *Philosophy and Literature* 26, no. 2 (2002): 312; see also Lisa Zunshine, "Introduction to Cognitive Literary Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 2; Alan Richardson, "Literary Studies and Cognitive Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Science*, ed. Steven Meyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 218.

[79] Mary Thomas Crane, *Shakespeare's Brain: Reading with Cognitive Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 16; Raphael Lyne, *Memory and Intertextuality in Renaissance Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 9, 12.

and extend things literary criticism has typically done" and "endorses them and argues ultimately for their indispensability."[80]

Scholars of cognitive poetics also widely agree that the relationship between literary study and cognitive science should not be limited to literary scholars applying cognitive science findings to literary texts. Rather, it should be a two-way street: each discipline learning from and challenging the other by proposing hypotheses and serving as a testing ground.[81] In our case, the studies on the conceptual history of judgment offered by Paul Thiele and Frank Low-Beer indicate that humanities scholars since Aristotle have a rather consistent understanding of the features of judgment/practical wisdom, especially that it cannot be formalized into rules,[82] and this consistent understanding is indeed the starting point of the empirical research on practical wisdom, as we will see below.

To clear away another barrier against the cognitive approach: Cognitive science has not claimed that what is known now is the ultimate truth and will never be disproved in the future, as it is just the best we can do at the moment. As Tony Jackson points out, at the initial stage of the field, the pioneers of cognitive poetics often fail to deliver what

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[80] Lyne, *Memory and Intertextuality in Renaissance Literature*, 241.

[81] Steven Willemsen, Rikke Andersen Kraglund, and Emily T. Troscianko, "Interpretation: Its Status as Object or Method of Study in Cognitive and Unnatural Narratology," *Poetics Today* 39, no. 3 (September 1, 2018): 604; Mark Bracher, "Schema Criticism: Literature, Cognitive Science, and Social Change," *College Literature* 39, no. 4 (2012): 111; Marco Caracciolo, "Cognitive Literary Studies and the Status of Interpretation: An Attempt at Conceptual Mapping," *New Literary History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 188; Patrick Colm Hogan, *Cognitive Science, Literature, and the Arts: A Guide for Humanists* (London: Routledge, 2003); Lisa Zunshine, *Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006); for two-way street examples see Michael Burke, "The Neuroaesthetics of Prose Fiction: Pitfalls, Parameters and Prospects," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9 (2015): 1–12; Michael Burke and Emily T. Troscianko, "Mind, Brain, and Literature: A Dialogue on What the Humanities Might Offer the Cognitive Sciences," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 42, no. 2 (2013): 141–48; Patrick Colm Hogan, "Parallel Processing and the Human Mind: Re-Understanding Consciousness with James Joyce's Ulysses," *Journal of Literary Semantics* 42, no. 2 (2013): 149–64; Paul B. Armstrong, *How Literature Plays with the Brain: The Neuroscience of Reading and Art* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); G. Gabrielle Starr, *Feeling Beauty: The Neuroscience of Aesthetic Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013).

[82] Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment*, 17–69; Frank. H. Low-Beer, *Questions of Judgment: Determining What's Right* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1995), 15–89.

they have promised due to the complexity of the issues involved,[83] which is probably why the cognitive approach is not yet part of the mainstream of literary criticism. However, if we follow up the latest cognitive research, we will find that it has advanced to a point where many complex issues once seen as impossibly obscure (such as wisdom, or, once upon a time, consciousness) can now be empirically studied, at least tentatively. Some of these recent studies are introduced in the next section.

2. Psychology of wisdom

2.1 Psychological theoretical approaches to defining wisdom

In modern psychology, wisdom is first mentioned in several early developmental psychological studies as an ideal late-life stage in human development.[84] After taking part in the pioneering Berkeley Growth Study, one of the earliest long-term psychological surveys, Erik Erikson believes that we do not stop maturing even after becoming adults. As the hallmark of maturity, wisdom is the central feature of the last stage in his influential theory of psychosocial development. According to this model, certain people can evolve wisdom in the final years of their lives to peacefully look back over their lives and overcome the emotional difficulties that might appear at this stage.[85] Although Erikson does not define wisdom in a way that it can be measured and studied quantitatively, his research opens the door for Vivian Clayton, James Birren,

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[83] Jackson, "Questioning Interdisciplinarity"; Joseph Carroll, *Evolution and Literary Theory* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1995); Robert F. Storey, *Mimesis and the Human Animal: On the Biogenetic Foundations of Literary Representation* (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1996).

[84] Granville S. Hall, *Senescence: The Last Half of Life* (New York: Appleton, 1922); Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle: Selected Papers* (New York: International Universities Press, 1959).

[85] Igor Grossmann et al., "The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World: Knowns and Unknowns," *Psychological Inquiry* 31, no. 2 (April 2020): 105; Judith Glück, "Wisdom, Psychology Of," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (Elsevier, 2015), 590–91; Stephen S. Hall, *Wisdom: From Philosophy to Neuroscience* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 40.

and Paul Baltes, who continue to establish the psychology of wisdom, both theoretically and empirically.[86]

The first obstacle Clayton encounters in her study of wisdom in the early 1970s remains problematic today: the definition of wisdom. As a multifaceted and broadly inclusive concept, wisdom is notoriously hard to define. On the one hand, philosophers have been considering the nature of wisdom for centuries and have offered many different views (we are already familiar with the views from Aristotle and Gadamer).[87] On the other hand, laypeople, who may or may not be familiar with philosophers' definitions, also have their folk understanding of wisdom. These are two of the three theoretical approaches summarized by psychologists later to defining wisdom (the third one is how psychologists of wisdom, considering the framework of contemporary psychology, define wisdom). Clayton and Birren initially choose the first approach (later also the second), the philosophical definition. After consulting Eastern religions, Greek philosophy, and the Old Testament, Clayton concludes that wisdom differs from intelligence, a concept sometimes confused with wisdom, in that wisdom is about understanding human nature, which is "paradoxical, contradictory, and subject to continual change," while intelligence is the ability "to think logically, to conceptualize, and to abstract from reality."[88] Intelligence signifies a stable, impersonal, and nonsocial kind of knowledge. Wisdom, by contrast, an adaptive, intuitive, deeply personal, and fundamentally social kind. Clayton's definition reminds us of the three features of Aristotle and Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom, and it indeed has echoed

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[86] Vivian Clayton, "Erikson's Theory of Human Development as It Applies to the Aged: Wisdom as Contradictive Cognition," *Human Development* 18, no. 1–2 (1975): 119–28; Vivian Clayton and James Birren, "The Development of Wisdom across the Lifespan: A Reexamination of an Ancient Topic," in *Life-Span Development and Behavior*, ed. Paul B. Baltes, vol. 3 (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1980), 103–35.

[87] For overviews see Sharon Ryan, "Wisdom," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/wisdom; Dennis Whitcomb, "Wisdom," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195396577-0131.

[88] Vivian Clayton, "Wisdom and Intelligence: The Nature and Function of Knowledge in the Later Years," *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 15, no. 4 (1982): 315.

through psychology afterward and, more recently, neuroscience, as we shall see below.[89]

This distinction between wisdom and intelligence also holds if we take the second approach to a psychological definition of wisdom: the implicit theoretical approach of how laypeople define it. It is called implicit in the sense that when using wisdom in everyday language, laypeople do not need to explain what it means because it is common sense. Researchers taking this approach ask people of various ages and social backgrounds to rate a list of traits (smart, cheerful, helpful, loving, foolish, relaxed, etc.) based on the degree to which each is typical of wise persons. The results from such surveys show that laypeople can clearly distinguish wisdom from intelligence in the way like what Clayton has inferred from philosophical literature using the first approach.[90]

The third approach to defining wisdom, synthesizing how contemporary psychologists of wisdom define wisdom, yields the same result in this regard. It is the expert consensus that both intelligence and wisdom require basic general knowledge, logic, and efficient information processing, but only wisdom involves context-sensitive practical application of knowledge. In other words, whether a person is intelligent can be judged context-free, while whether a person is wise should always depend on his

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[89] Hall, *Wisdom*, 42.

[90] Ute Kunzmann and Paul B. Baltes, "The Psychology of Wisdom: Theoretical and Empirical Challenges," in *A Handbook of Wisdom*, ed. Robert Sternberg and Jennifer Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 113.

actions in specific situations.[91] Like what Clayton has found using the philosophical approach, most of the psychologists of intelligence define intelligence as the ability to think abstractly, learn quickly from experience and identify patterns and rules easily.[92] In contrast, as Igor Grossmann and his colleagues summarize, wisdom goes beyond rule-based reasoning to "balance abstract thinking with an understanding of the nuanced meaning of the concrete situation at hand,"[93] which corresponds to the first feature of Aristotle and Gadamer's definition of practical wisdom. Empirical research also suggests that intelligence performance is a poor predictor of wisdom performance.[94]

This third psychological approach to defining wisdom, also called the explicit theoretical approach (explicit in the sense that it is how psychologists of wisdom explicitly construct it), also differentiates wisdom from another related concept, rationality. In psychology, the defining features of rationality are goal prioritization, consistency, reflectivity, adaptability, and behavioral regulation. The most important of these is goal prioritization and the rest features serve it. That is to say, a rational person

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[91] Monika Ardelt, "Where Can Wisdom Be Found," *Human Development* 47, no. 5 (2004): 304–7; Paul B. Baltes and Ute Kunzmann, "The Two Faces of Wisdom: Wisdom as a General Theory of Knowledge and Judgment about Excellence in Mind and Virtue vs. Wisdom as Everyday Realization in People and Products," *Human Development* 47, no. 5 (2004): 290–99; Paul B. Baltes and Jacqui Smith, "The Fascination of Wisdom: Its Nature, Ontogeny, and Function," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 3, no. 1 (January 2008): 56–64; Igor Grossmann, "Wisdom in Context," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 12, no. 2 (March 2017): 233–57; Igor Grossmann and Anna Dorfman, "Wise Reasoning in an Uncertain World," in *Applying Wisdom to Contemporary World Problems*, ed. Robert J. Sternberg, Howard C. Nusbaum, and Judith Glück (Cham: Springer, 2019), 53; Dilip. V. Jeste et al., "Expert Consensus on Characteristics of Wisdom: A Delphi Method Study," *The Gerontologist* 50, no. 5 (2010): 668–80; Robert J. Sternberg, "A Balance Theory of Wisdom," *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 4 (1998): 347–65.

[92] Linda S. Gottfredson, "Why g Matters: The Complexity of Everyday Life," *Intelligence* 24, no. 1 (January 1997): 79–132; Richard E. Nisbett et al., "Intelligence: New Findings and Theoretical Developments.," *American Psychologist* 67, no. 2 (February 2012): 130–59.

[93] Grossmann et al., "The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World," 111.

[94] Igor Grossmann et al., "A Route to Well-Being: Intelligence versus Wise Reasoning," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 142, no. 3 (August 2013): 944–53; Grossmann et al., "The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World," 111; Ursula M. Staudinger, David F. Lopez, and Paul B. Baltes, "The Psychometric Location of Wisdom-Related Performance: Intelligence, Personality, and More," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23, no. 11 (November 1997): 1200–1214.

behaves in a way so that he can get what he most wants by being consistent, reflective, adaptive, able to delay satisfaction, etc. His rationality comes in degrees defined by the distance of the thought or behavior from the optimization of his goal fulfillment.[95] Importantly, this optimization is rule-based and aims at tackling well-defined issues with known parameters. However, wisdom concerns ill-defined problems with many unknown parameters so that it cannot be reduced to rules,[96] which corresponds to the second feature of Aristotle and Gadamer's definition of practical wisdom. Empirical research supports this dissociation, indicating that typical measures of rationality only weakly, or even negatively, relate to wisdom.[97] In addition, by defining wisdom "as the application of tacit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good," Robert Sternberg, one of most cited psychologists of wisdom, directly attributes the concept of wisdom to Polanyi's tacit knowledge. This attribution emphasizes its feature of always being connected to particular uses in particular situations. Consequently, we cannot teach certain thoughts or actions that would be regarded wise under any circumstances because tacit knowledge is context-bound and what applies in one setting may not apply in another. Therefore, Sternberg argues that to assist someone in developing wisdom, mediated learning experiences should be provided rather than direct instruction on what to do and when,[98] which corresponds to the third feature of Aristotle and Gadamer's definition of practical wisdom. The

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[95] Keith Stanovich, *What Intelligence Tests Miss: The Psychology of Rational Thought* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 15–16; Keith Stanovich, *Rationality and the Reflective Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 3.

[96] Catherine Darnell et al., "Phronesis and the Knowledge-Action Gap in Moral Psychology and Moral Education: A New Synthesis," *Human Development* 62, no. 3 (2019): 118–19; Igor Grossmann, Justin P. Brienza, and D. Ramona Bobocel, "Wise Deliberation Sustains Cooperation," *Nature Human Behaviour* 1, no. 3 (March 2017): 0061; Grossmann et al., "The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World," 111.

[97] Justin P. Brienza et al., "Wisdom, Bias, and Balance: Toward a Process-Sensitive Measurement of Wisdom-Related Cognition.," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 115, no. 6 (December 2018): 1093–1126; Staudinger, Lopez, and Baltes, "The Psychometric Location of Wisdom-Related Performance."

[98] Sternberg, "A Balance Theory of Wisdom," 347, 351; Kunzmann and Baltes, "The Psychology of Wisdom," 115.

extensive psychological literature on the development of wisdom, especially in the context of wisdom and aging, also indirectly supports this view because although there is no consensus yet on how wisdom can be best taught, none of the many potential methods includes direct teaching of explicit rules. Accumulation of life experience and careful self-reflection are the most important factors.[99]

To summarize the three approaches to defining wisdom (philosophical, implicit theoretical/laypeople, explicit theoretical/experts): As Ute Kunzmann and Paul Baltes point out, there is considerable overlap between the philosophical (not limited to Aristotle and Gadamer) and the implicit theoretical approach.[100] On the one hand, the two approaches have different advantages. While philosophers' definitions are abstract, comprehensive, and systematic, laypeople are more specific regarding the concrete human strengths subsumed under wisdom and their definitions tend to involve more particular examples and situations. On the other hand, Aristotle already blurs the distinction between these two approaches as he argues that "regarding practical wisdom we shall get at the truth by considering who are the persons we credit with it."[101] Taken together, philosophical and implicit approaches lay the foundation for the explicit approach, where psychologists of wisdom "operationalize" wisdom, turning an abstract concept measurable and a folk concept consistent with the theoretical framework of modern psychology.

As for the explicit theoretical approach, although we may never exactly and unanimously define wisdom, as it is a philosophical, a folk psychological, and an expert psychological concept at the same time (hence the three approaches) and as a result, its definition can somewhat independently evolve differently in these three discourses, psychologists generally recognize that wisdom is context-sensitive, difficult or impossible to articulate, and cannot be learned simply by memorizing rules but is

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[99] For the latest review of the research on the development of wisdom see Grossmann et al., "The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World," 116–18.

[100] Kunzmann and Baltes, "The Psychology of Wisdom," 113–14.

[101] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a25.

"experience-driven,"[102] which correspond with the three features of practical wisdom discussed in Chapter II. By invoking the psychology of wisdom, we do not claim any superiority of it over other disciplines but show that Gadamer should not worry that drawing lessons from his imagined enemy would undermine his understanding of wisdom because there is no major disagreement. On the contrary, the overall consistency found among the three theoretical approaches to defining wisdom, which include research both from the humanities and the natural sciences, indicates the great potential of an interdisciplinary dialog.

2.2 The emerging empirical basis of wisdom

After discussing how psychologists theoretically define wisdom, let us examine their corresponding empirical research. As Ursula Staudinger and Judith Glück observe in their widely cited review "Psychological Wisdom Research: Commonalities and Differences in a Growing Field" in 2011, the development and the scope of the psychology of wisdom over the last few decades show that, contrary to what many assume, it is feasible to examine this complicated concept with empirical rigor.[103] The mere fact that this review is published in the *Annual Review of Psychology*, the flagship journal with the highest impact factor in psychology, already partially proves their point. Dilip Jeste and his colleagues also note that many seemingly very vague psychological constructs, such as consciousness, emotion, and well-being, were once not seen as

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[102] Jeste et al., "Expert Consensus on Characteristics of Wisdom," 668; see also Thomas W. Meeks and Dilip V. Jeste, "Neurobiology of Wisdom: A Literature Overview," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 66, no. 4 (2009): 355–65; Dilip V. Jeste and Ellen E. Lee, "The Emerging Empirical Science of Wisdom: Definition, Measurement, Neurobiology, Longevity, and Interventions," *Harvard Review of Psychiatry* 27, no. 3 (2019): 127–40; Schwartz and Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology"; Robert J. Sternberg et al., "Testing Common Sense," *American Psychologist* 50, no. 11 (1995): 912–27; Sternberg, "A Balance Theory of Wisdom"; Judith Glück, "New Developments in Psychological Wisdom Research: A Growing Field of Increasing Importance," *The Journals of Gerontology: Series B* 73, no. 8 (2018): 1335–38; Ursula M. Staudinger and Judith Glück, "Psychological Wisdom Research: Commonalities and Differences in a Growing Field," *Annual Review of Psychology* 62, no. 1 (2011): 215–41.

[103] Staudinger and Glück, "Psychological Wisdom Research," 215.

objects of scientific inquiry because they could not be defined in a measurable way. Nonetheless, with breakthroughs in neurobiological and psychosocial sciences, all these constructs are now recognized as substantial scientific entities with significant consequences for our cognitive functioning. They believe that wisdom is in such a transition from a once-dismissed to a later-embraced concept accessible to empirical study and call for further research to test and revise the hypotheses proposed by the psychology of wisdom.[104] The work of Jeste et al. on the neurobiology of wisdom is also published in the flagship journal of psychiatry, *Archives of General Psychiatry* (now *JAMA Psychiatry*), again already making their point.[105] Specifically, after reviewing the quantitative psychological research on wisdom, Jeste et al. argue that two factors establish the empirical foundation of this elusive concept: (1) We can measure wisdom by self-report scales and performance tests; (2) we can find the neural correlates of wisdom by functional neuroimaging and examining patients with specific brain damage or disease.

To measure wisdom, psychologists ask research participants to complete a self-report questionnaire by answering how strongly they agree with statements like "I always try to look at all sides of a problem"[106] or "Reviewing my past helps gain perspective on current concerns."[107] The obvious limitation of such method is duly noted: Participants with high or low self-esteem may judge themselves inaccurately; participants may depict themselves wiser than they actually are because it is socially desirable; wise individuals, by definition, may be more honest with themselves than unwise ones, resulting in lower self-reported scores.[108] Although scientists can design

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[104] Jeste and Lee, "The Emerging Empirical Science of Wisdom," 128; Dilip V. Jeste and James C. Harris, "Wisdom—A Neuroscience Perspective," *JAMA* 304, no. 14 (2010): 1602–3.

[105] Meeks and Jeste, "Neurobiology of Wisdom."

[106] Monika Ardelt, "Empirical Assessment of a Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale," *Research on Aging* 25, no. 3 (May 2003): 317.

[107] Jeffrey Dean Webster, "An Exploratory Analysis of a Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale," *Journal of Adult Development* 10, no. 1 (2003): 16.

[108] Dilip V. Jeste et al., "The New Science of Practical Wisdom," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 62, no. 2 (2019): 219; Hall, *Wisdom*, 53–54.

the questionnaire in a way that it is less obvious what the socially desirable answers are or do not tell the participants that it assesses wisdom in the first place, as Monika Ardelt does in the first of such surveys, the mentioned limitations cannot be fully overcome. On the one hand, in cases such as wisdom measurement, because "objective" measures do not really exist, we may have to make do with subjective self-report. On the other hand, we should notice that in other cases where both subjective and objective measurements are possible, such as human well-being or health-risk behaviors, objective scores correlate astonishingly well with self-report scores, indicating that participants' self-assessment might be more accurate than we expect.[109] Therefore, the fact that the two classical measurements often used in the empirical research on wisdom, Ardelt's Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale (3D-WS) and Webster's Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale (SAWS), are both self-report scales should not be a matter of particular concern.[110]

Other psychologists attach greater importance to the situatedness of wisdom, corresponding to the first feature of Gadamer's practical wisdom, and argue that because wisdom depends on concrete situations, it cannot be measured reliably by de-contextualized self-report questionnaires.[111] Instead, Paul Baltes et al. propose a performance-based measurement, Berlin Wisdom Paradigm, defining wisdom as "an expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics of life."[112] To

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[109] A. J. Oswald and S. Wu, "Objective Confirmation of Subjective Measures of Human Well-Being: Evidence from the U.S.A.," *Science* 327, no. 5965 (January 29, 2010): 576–79; Nancy D. Brener, John O. G. Billy, and William R. Grady, "Assessment of Factors Affecting the Validity of Self-Reported Health-Risk Behavior among Adolescents: Evidence from the Scientific Literature," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 33, no. 6 (December 2003): 436–57; Jeste et al., "The New Science of Practical Wisdom," 219.

[110] Ardelt, "Empirical Assessment of a Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale"; Monika Ardelt, "Wisdom as Expert Knowledge System: A Critical Review of a Contemporary Operationalization of an Ancient Concept," *Human Development* 47, no. 5 (2004): 257–85; Webster, "An Exploratory Analysis of a Self-Assessed Wisdom Scale"; Jeffrey Dean Webster, "Measuring the Character Strength of Wisdom," *The International Journal of Aging and Human Development* 65, no. 2 (September 2007): 163–83.

[111] Kunzmann and Baltes, "The Psychology of Wisdom," 111.

[112] Paul B. Baltes and Ursula M. Staudinger, "Wisdom: A Metaheuristic (Pragmatic) to Orchestrate Mind and Virtue toward Excellence.," *American Psychologist* 55, no. 1 (2000): 122.

measure participants' wisdom while taking the varying situations into account, Baltes et al. confront them with difficult and concrete life problems such as a friend wanting to commit suicide or a 15-year-old girl wanting to get married. In addition, the Situated Wise Reasoning Scale (SWIS), developed by Justin Brienza et al., as its name indicates, also strongly emphasizes that wisdom measurement should be contextualized.[113] To achieve this goal, they employ an event-reconstruction method: Before doing self-report, participants are guided to reconstruct the details of the relevant situation by answering questions about the what, where, when, and how of the situation to facilitate their vivid experiencing. In this regard, Jeste and his colleagues also agree that to comprehensively measure wisdom we may need to combine self-report and performance-based measures. Moreover, accurate wisdom measurement may require continuous and long-time monitoring of the participants to identify and analyze their behavioral patterns because only so can the situatedness of wisdom be maximally appreciated.[114]

Apart from the fact that wisdom can be scientifically measured, psychological wisdom research is empirically founded because we can locate the neural correlates of wisdom. To accomplish this, Jeste et al. first develop a definition of wisdom that includes (1) prosocial attitudes/behaviors, (2) social decision making/pragmatic knowledge of life, (3) emotional stability, (4) reflection/self-understanding, (5) value relativism/tolerance, and (6) acknowledgment of and dealing effectively with uncertainty/ambiguity. Then they examine the neurobiology literature of these six components of wisdom, focusing primarily on their putative neuroanatomical localization revealed by functional neuroimaging and secondarily on the relevant neurotransmitter functions and their genetic determinants. They find that the prefrontal cortex plays an essential role for several components of wisdom: The lateral prefrontal cortex facilitates social decision making, while the medial prefrontal cortex is involved with emotional stability and prosocial attitudes/behaviors. When it comes to

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[113] Brienza et al., "Wisdom, Bias, and Balance."

[114] Jeste et al., "The New Science of Practical Wisdom," 220.

neurotransmitters, monoaminergic activity (especially dopaminergic and serotonergic), influenced by several genetic polymorphisms, is critical to emotional regulation (including impulse control), decision making, and prosocial behaviors. As a result, Jeste et al. propose a speculative model of the neurobiology of wisdom including these neural correlates, arguing that wisdom may involve the optimal balance between functions of phylogenetically more primitive brain regions (limbic system) and newer ones (prefrontal cortex).[115] Based on this model, Michael Thomas and his colleagues develops the San Diego Wisdom Scale (SD-WISE), a new wisdom measurement distinct from the ones mentioned earlier in having a neurobiological basis, and they have conducted an early-stage survey confirming its strength.[116]

Examining patients with specific brain damage or disease is another way to locate the neural correlates of wisdom. For example, damage to the prefrontal cortex, either through injury or degeneration, can impair the features associated with wisdom.[117] Cato et al. report a case where a 26-year-old man with an outstanding academic and professional record suffered a penetrating head injury that caused bilateral ventromedial prefrontal damage, resulting in a catastrophic decline in his social and behavioral functioning. He lost his original job and subsequently had a lifelong history of temporary low-level jobs despite average to superior scores on most neurocognitive tests (verbal IQ: 119). Patients with tumors in this brain region have similar negative impacts on social judgment as well. Patients with frontotemporal dementia, which involves brain atrophy of the prefrontal and temporal lobes, offer another example of

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[115] Meeks and Jeste, "Neurobiology of Wisdom," 355–57.

[116] Michael L. Thomas et al., "A New Scale for Assessing Wisdom Based on Common Domains and a Neurobiological Model: The San Diego Wisdom Scale (SD-WISE)," *Journal of Psychiatric Research* 108 (January 2019): 40–47; Michael L. Thomas et al., "Individual Differences in Level of Wisdom Are Associated with Brain Activation during a Moral Decision-making Task," *Brain and Behavior* 9, no. 6 (June 2019): e01302.

[117] M. Allison Cato et al., "Assessing the Elusive Cognitive Deficits Associated with Ventromedial Prefrontal Damage: A Case of a Modern-Day Phineas Gage," *Journal of the International Neuropsychological Society* 10, no. 03 (May 2004); B. L. Miller et al., "Neuroanatomy of the Self: Evidence from Patients with Frontotemporal Dementia," *Neurology* 57, no. 5 (September 11, 2001): 817–21, quoted in Jeste et al., "The New Science of Practical Wisdom," 221.

wisdom-related neuropathology. Their personalities change drastically, becoming impulsive, socially inappropriate, and emotionally incompetent, with behaviors that are the opposite of wisdom.[118]

By using these two methods, functional neuroimaging and brain damage research, to locate the neural correlates of wisdom, we can also find evidence to support the theoretical framework mentioned above, such as the clear distinction between wisdom and intelligence made by all the three theoretical approaches to defining wisdom, because the brain regions related to wisdom and intelligence are not the same.[119]

Wisdom may also have an evolutionary basis. The prefrontal cortex of humans, the most important neural correlate of wisdom, has grown significantly in terms of its size relative to other regions within the frontal lobes in the past seven million years. Another evolutionary change has been the expansion of the von Economo neurons that facilitate decision-making linked to emotion, also a component of wisdom.[120] Moreover, we recall that the earliest wisdom researchers depict wisdom as a possible late-life stage, which also accords with folk psychology. On this matter, it is noteworthy that while most animals die soon after they can no longer reproduce, female humans survive long after ceasing reproduction, the benefits of which are not obvious because what female humans do in their late lives cannot benefit their reproduction directly and thus does not seem to affect the natural selection of their genes. However, "old-age supporting" human genes, which seem to work again natural selection, do exist and they protect the aging human body by controlling the low-grade inflammation in immune system associated with aging. Jeste et al. believe that these genes exist because they contribute to the transfer of wisdom across generations. As the life lessons of grandmas might increase their grandchildren's chances of survival, the genes that enable grandmas'

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[118] Jeste and Harris, "Wisdom—A Neuroscience Perspective," 1602; Jeste et al., "The New Science of Practical Wisdom," 221.

[119] Rex E. Jung and Richard J. Haier, "The Parieto-Frontal Integration Theory (P-FIT) of Intelligence: Converging Neuroimaging Evidence," *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 30, no. 2 (April 2007): 135–54; Meeks and Jeste, "Neurobiology of Wisdom," 362.

[120] Jeste et al., "The New Science of Practical Wisdom," 222.

development and teaching of wisdom could have been evolutionarily selected for. As circumstantial evidence, we also have Lahdenperä et al. demonstrating that grandparents' engagement in their grandchildren's upbringing indeed improves their fertility.[121]

To summarize, the psychology of wisdom has an empirical basis because (1) wisdom can be measured by subjective self-report scales or by contextualized performance tests; (2) the neural correlates of wisdom can be located by neuroimaging or by comparing patients with brain damage with normal people. Although the results discussed above are far from definitive, cognitive scientists have come to realize that the meticulous empirical study of wisdom is gaining force, which can contribute to the interdisciplinary research on this ancient concept.

2.3 Psychology of practical wisdom

Having discussed the history of the psychology of wisdom, the psychological theoretical approaches to defining wisdom, and the potential empirical basis of wisdom, we can see how its sheer complexity leads to the situation Sternberg observes in his latest review of recent psychological wisdom literature: While most scholars recognize that wisdom is a broad concept encompassing many aspects, their theories often only focus on a few particular aspects for reasons of feasibility.[122] The aspects this study wants to focus on are the above-mentioned three features of practical wisdom, (1) depending on particulars, (2) inarticulable, and (3) only learnable through experience, all of which are included in the contemporary psychological definition(s) of wisdom. As the concept of practical wisdom itself is also considered as an important component of wisdom by several recent reviews,[123] we have thus far demonstrated that the aspects

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[121] Jeste et al., 222; Mirkka Lahdenperä et al., "Fitness Benefits of Prolonged Post-Reproductive Lifespan in Women," *Nature* 428, no. 6979 (March 2004): 178–81.

[122] Robert J. Sternberg and Sareh Karami, "What Is Wisdom? A Unified 6P Framework," *Review of General Psychology* 25, no. 2 (June 2021): 138.

[123] Grossmann and Dorfman, "Wise Reasoning in an Uncertain World," 51–53; Grossmann et al., "The Science of Wisdom in a Polarized World," 105; Sternberg and Karami, "What Is Wisdom?," 135–38.

this study focuses on are, theoretically, well-founded in psychology. Empirically, however, the common foundation mentioned above (quantitative measuring wisdom by self-report scales and performance tests; locating the neural correlates of wisdom by functional neuroimaging and examining brain damage patients) might not be enough, because the definitions of wisdom underlying these empirical studies tend to emphasize the pursuit of the common good, emotional control, and tolerance, which are the aspects of wisdom other than three features of practical wisdom we want to examine in literary studies. In other words, it can be far-fetched to claim that the central argument of this study, "we know more than we can tell in literary interpretation," has an empirical foundation that is based on an understanding of (practical) wisdom not primarily stressing its inarticulability. For this matter, we refer to the tentative psychology specifically of practical wisdom proposed by Barry Schwartz. Schwartz believes that three features of practical wisdom (his version, not ours) agree very well with modern cognitive science: (1) wisdom does not follow clear-cut rules to determine what is appropriate in a particular situation; (2) wisdom cannot be taught directly but can only be learned through experience; (3) wisdom often works fast and unconsciously.[124] We notice that the first two of these are identical with our summary of Aristotle and Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom and the third is also closely related in a tricky way, as we shall see. The specific findings of cognitive science that Schwartz's three features agree with are (1) how we understand a concept; (2) how our neural networks are constructed; and (3) how we make decisions.

2.3.1 Wisdom and conceptual organization

Schwartz first suggests that, to take the particular circumstances of a situation into account, the way how judgment calls instead of rules are needed to determine the morally right thing to do accords well with the fact that most human concepts do not have clear definitions and are organized around prototypes.[125]

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[124] Schwartz and Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," 387–89.

[125] Schwartz and Sharpe, 387.

When psychologists investigate how language conveys meaning, they discover that our intuitive "definitional theory of meaning" does not hold. This theory believes that our mental representations of word meanings are like dictionary entries. For example, according to this theory, when we try to decide whether an animal belongs to the concept "bird," we recall a list of properties essential for membership in the bird category, such as "winged," "covered with feathers," "very likely being able to fly," "being able to lay eggs," etc. If the target animal fulfills these conditions, it is a bird regardless of its other traits such as how it looks, how common it is, etc.[126] However, Eleanor Rosch discovers in the 1970s that this is not the case and proposes a "prototype theory of meaning" instead.[127] Rather than comparing the target animal with a list of properties necessary and sufficient for bird membership, what we do cognitively is to compare it with a "typical" bird, a prototype, to see how similar they are. The more similar they are, the more *likely* we would see the target animal as a bird. In other words, according to the definitional theory of meaning that has no grey area, a target animal is either a bird or not a bird, the only criteria being the properties of a clear definition of bird. According to Rosch's prototype theory of meaning, however, the category word "bird" does not define clear boundaries but a centered, most fitting prototype. As a result, it has a *graded* membership depending on the similarity of a target animal to this prototype. The prototype theory explains why, in ordinary people's understanding, some birds are "birdier" than other birds, although all the birds being compared meet the dictionary definition of bird. That is to say, when considering our cognitive process of daily language and not ornithology, whether an animal is a bird is not a strict either-or question, but a question of likelihood.

Over the years, from different perspectives and using different methods, a series of experiments have consistently demonstrated that most of our mental concepts indeed

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[126] Henry Gleitman, James J. Gross, and Daniel Reisberg, *Psychology*, 8th ed. (New York: Norton, 2011), 411–14.

[127] Eleanor Rosch, "Natural Categories," *Cognitive Psychology* 4, no. 3 (May 1973): 328–50; Eleanor Rosch, "Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories.," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General* 104, no. 3 (September 1975): 192–233.

have a graded membership. The less similar a target concept is to the prototype—the further it is from the "center"—it is less likely to be thought of in a production task ("Name as many birds as you can"), requires more time to be processed semantically, and gets a lower score in a rating task ("Which bird is 'birdier?'"). Robin and sparrow, for example, are far more "privileged," i.e. "birdier," than ostrich and penguin for the bird category. It does not matter much that they all have feathers and wings and lay eggs, thus all technically fit the definition of bird. This goes for concepts other than bird as well.[128]

The prototype theory reminds us of Wittgenstein's famous family resemblance theory, arguing that a group of instances may form a category even though no single feature common to all the instances exists: It is sufficient that each instance shares at least one feature with at least one more other instance. Indeed, many psychologists agree that most of our concepts have such a family resemblance structure. To take Wittgenstein's example, although board games, card games, ball games, and athletic games are all called games, we can only find an overlapping set of features shared by some of them (entertaining, competitive, etc.) but not a single feature that is common to all of them (many professional athletes do not find their games entertaining but regard them as jobs; single-player card games are not competitive). A clear, all-inclusive definition of "game" does not exist. Instead, we have "a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing."[129]

Admittedly, not all concepts are like "game" and many concepts do have unambiguous definitions, such as "even number," but in more cases, the definitions available are only generally/probably true and exceptions are not difficult to find: A bird must have feathers, but a baby bird without feathers is still a bird; a chair is for

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[128] Rosch, "Cognitive Representations of Semantic Categories."; Barbara C. Malt and Edward E. Smith, "Correlated Properties in Natural Categories," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 23, no. 2 (April 1984): 250–69; Daniel Reisberg, *Cognition: Exploring the Science of the Mind*, 7th ed. (New York: Norton, 2019), 329–32.

[129] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, and Joachim Schulte, 4th ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 65–67; "Family Resemblance," APA Dictionary of Psychology, accessed October 4, 2021, https://dictionary.apa.org/family-resemblance.

sitting, but a chair covered with nails as an item on display at an art exhibition is still a chair. Schwartz points out that psychologists since Rosch have demonstrated that our mind has a remarkable capacity to make such nuanced judgments, a capacity that can be the basis of practical wisdom.[130] When this capacity of conceptual organization operates, it does not always follow rules and definitions, even if they are as well-defined as, for example, "even number." In a peculiar, widely cited experiment designed by Armstrong et al. in 1983, participants are asked to rate "how even" a list of numbers are, although they can all be exactly divided by two and thus are all by definition equally "even." Interestingly, some even numbers, such as 2, 4, 8, or 1000 are regarded as much "evener" than others, such as 34 or 106. This suggests that concepts like even number, a mathematical concept that seemingly leaves absolutely no room for ambiguity, can also be represented cognitively as having graded membership, organized around a prototype.[131] While we can argue that when forced to make mathematically absurd judgments, the participants may intentionally or unintentionally add other features like "more common" or "easier to calculate" to the feature "evener" (therefore the result), this can happen in the cases of other concepts as well and it still shows how "irrational" and unruly our judgment can be.

To briefly summarize, we have now discussed that (a) most of our everyday concepts do not have clear-cut definitions but a family resemblance structure; (b) we might have traditionally and dogmatically been too obsessive about definitions, because we actually organize conceptual knowledge around prototypes rather than dictionary-definition-like lists of features; (c) as a result of being organized around prototypes, these concepts only have graded membership and fuzzy boundaries, whose determination requires practical wisdom.

Philosophers have already applied these findings to the long-standing debate between rules and judgment in moral philosophy. Mark Johnson, for example, argues

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[130] Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2010), 54–55.

[131] Reisberg, *Cognition*, 338; Sharon Lee Armstrong, Lila R. Gleitman, and Henry Gleitman, "What Some Concepts Might Not Be," *Cognition* 13, no. 3 (May 1983): 263–308.

that the concepts involved in a moral question or a moral principle are not exceptions to Rosch's discovery. They also usually only have ambiguous definitions, admit flexible graded membership, and thus challenge the views that restrict morality to a system of universal, inflexible rules.[132] Schwartz believes that such conceptual structure is precisely what ethics need, because moral principles as rigid as "Be loyal" or "Tell the truth" do not work, as they fail to recognize the complex situations where being loyal or telling the truth might not be the best idea (Literature, as we will see in the next chapter with the help of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*, may therefore be a better form then philosophy to vividly reproduce and insightfully explore such concrete situations). While the fuzzy nature of categorization around prototypes certainly makes it difficult to navigate in the moral world, our experience tells us that this is how real life is and why practical wisdom is indispensable.

To further emphasize the importance of practical wisdom in categorization, Schwartz elaborates on how arbitrary a category can be formed. We recall that judgment of similarity plays a fundamental role in conceptual organization because we put a target item into a category not by checking it against a definition but by determining how much it resembles the typical item of that category, which is the prototype. Such judgment of similarity seems straightforward, but consider this example: Are a plum and a lawn mower similar? While our experience makes us focus on their differences, Schwartz points out that "they are both found on earth, they both weigh less than a ton, they can both be dropped, they both cost less than $1,000, they are both bigger than a grape."[133] The last similarity of this bizarre list is perhaps the most outrageous and surprising, as "grape" can be substituted by anything smaller than a plum and a lawn mower, which is a convincing example of how tricky and flexible judging similarity and forming categories (e.g. "things bigger than a grape") can be. Both in moral life, as we have mentioned before, and in literature, as we shall find out later, an ability that is

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[132] Schwartz and Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," 387; Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 78–107.

[133] Schwartz and Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, 58.

as flexible as this when taking the concrete situation at hand into account, which goes beyond fixed rules, (often unconsciously) plays a decisive role. Of course, the emphasis on the fuzzy nature and the inarticulability of practical wisdom in our study does not suggest that we do not need moral principles at all. On the contrary, clear and definite rules are essential; what we do argue is that they are not enough, because discerning the ambiguous concepts in the rules and deciding how the rules should be applied requires wisdom.

Schwartz's inspiring association between practical wisdom and how we grasp a concept, like many other interdisciplinary studies (or to be exact, in this case, interbranch between psychology of wisdom and psychology of language), goes largely unnoticed by scholars from both fields. Neither do wisdom scholars notice that our prototype-based understanding of most concepts can be related to their research, nor do psycholinguists explore the possibility that our exceptional ability to draw the lines between fuzzy concepts is an example of practical wisdom. In the following 2.3.2, we will introduce, echoing our analysis of Aristotle and Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom, another empirical basis proposed by Schwartz that is also yet to be recognized by other wisdom scholars: biological neural network.

2.3.2 Wisdom and neural architecture

In 2.3.1, we have discussed how most of the categories we use are organized around prototypes and thus do not have clear definitions. However, despite their ambiguous nature, we do not have difficulties using them in daily life. On the contrary, it is exactly their ambiguous, flexible nature that makes these categories useful, as they allow us to notice the context-specific details that practical wisdom requires. Moreover, such nature allows room for improvement of judgment by trial and error. In Schwartz's example, a doctor may begin with a strongly held and very strict belief that honesty means always telling patients the whole truth. Then the doctor discovers that when the whole truth is bad news it is not always a good idea to reveal it completely. The concrete situations of patients (and their relatives) vary and in some cases only telling the partial

truth helps patients to die comfortably. In the end, the doctor modifies his belief about honesty accordingly.[134] Reflecting on experience, creating new categories, and modifying old categories: These are the processes of practical wisdom. As Judith Glück, another influential wisdom psychologist, points out, although most of the persons we consider wise are old, being old alone obviously does not guarantee wisdom. It is their reflective thinking rather than the simple accumulation of experience that makes them wise.[135]

As a result, Schwartz agrees with Aristotle's argument that wisdom cannot be taught directly but can only be learned by practicing. Using psychological evidence, Schwartz follows the same train of thought as in the previous chapter and draws the same conclusion that the unteachability of practical wisdom (its third feature) is derived from its first two features, (1) always depending on individual situations and (2) not being reducible to explicit rules. We can only become wise by trying out various means, getting feedback, and reducing errors accordingly—learning by doing instead of memorizing rules—because psychological experiments demonstrate that the way we organize concepts is context-sensitive and does not follow universal rules.[136]

Is there a neuropsychological basis that can explain the three features of practical wisdom? Schwartz believes that the answer is the theory of neural networks, which is shared by Baljinder Sahdra and Paul Thagard, who use "procedural knowledge," a concept this study regards as a synonym of practical wisdom,[137] in their research. Sahdra and Thagard make it clear that their account of procedural knowledge is similar to Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing, where he asserts that in many domains, we can know more than we can tell. In Polanyi's famous example, "we know a person's face and can recognize it among a thousand, indeed among a million. Yet we usually cannot

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[134] Schwartz and Sharpe, 36–38, 67.

[135] Judith Glück and Susan Bluck, "The MORE Life Experience Model: A Theory of the Development of Personal Wisdom," in *The Scientific Study of Personal Wisdom*, ed. Michel Ferrari and Nic M. Weststrate (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2013), 75–97.

[136] Schwartz and Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," 388.

[137] See III.1 "Practical wisdom and its related terms," which might explain why Schwartz seems unaware of their research. Sahdra and Thagard, "Procedural Knowledge in Molecular Biology."

tell how we recognize a face we know. So most of this knowledge cannot be put into words."[138] When it comes to the possibility of teaching such knowledge, Polanyi argues that "we can do so only by relying on the pupil's intelligent co-operation for catching the meaning of the demonstration."[139] In Sahdra and Thagard's definition:

> Decisions based on procedural knowledge are not analyzable into isolatable elements of a situation. Such decisions are intuitive in that they involve quick and effortless recognition of the key patterns of the situation. Procedural knowledge is intuitive recognition of the relevant patterns without recourse to analytical reasoning.[140]

Again, we have the three features of practical wisdom elaborated at length. These features cannot be fully explained by the rule-based cognitive model, according to which, thinking relies on inference rules in the form of "IF … THEN ..." As Sahdra and Thagard notice, because this model only accepts the conditions in the IF parts as explicit verbal clauses (e.g., "IF you see a red light THEN stop"), it cannot account for the knowledge that we know but cannot tell. A cognitive theory of procedural knowledge and tacit knowing is thus greatly needed, and Sahdra and Thagard conjecture that the theory of neural networks is up to the task, so does Schwartz independently.[141]

Although we are still far from understanding the exact neurobiological basis of consciousness, there has been significant progress in neuroscience in recent years and the theory of neural networks has been most influential to explain how the "mind" emerges from the interactions between neurons. It has also inspired powerful artificial intelligence applications. Before discussing this theory, a brief introduction of neurons, the basic units of our brain, and how they transfer information is in order.

A typical biological neuron, or nerve cell, has four parts: (1) dendrites, (2) a cell body, (3) an axon, and (4) presynaptic terminals (Figure 1). Dendrites are short, tree-like branches of a neuron for receiving incoming signals from other cells. The cell body

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[138] Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 4.

[139] Polanyi, 5.

[140] Sahdra and Thagard, "Procedural Knowledge in Molecular Biology," 491.

[141] Sahdra and Thagard, 491; Schwartz and Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," 388–89.

is the metabolic center of a neuron, which contains the nucleus, where the genes of the neuron are stored. The axon is the long, thin part of a neuron for carrying outgoing signals to other cells. Presynaptic terminals are the branches near the end of the axon where the connections to other cells are formed and such connections are called synapses.[142]

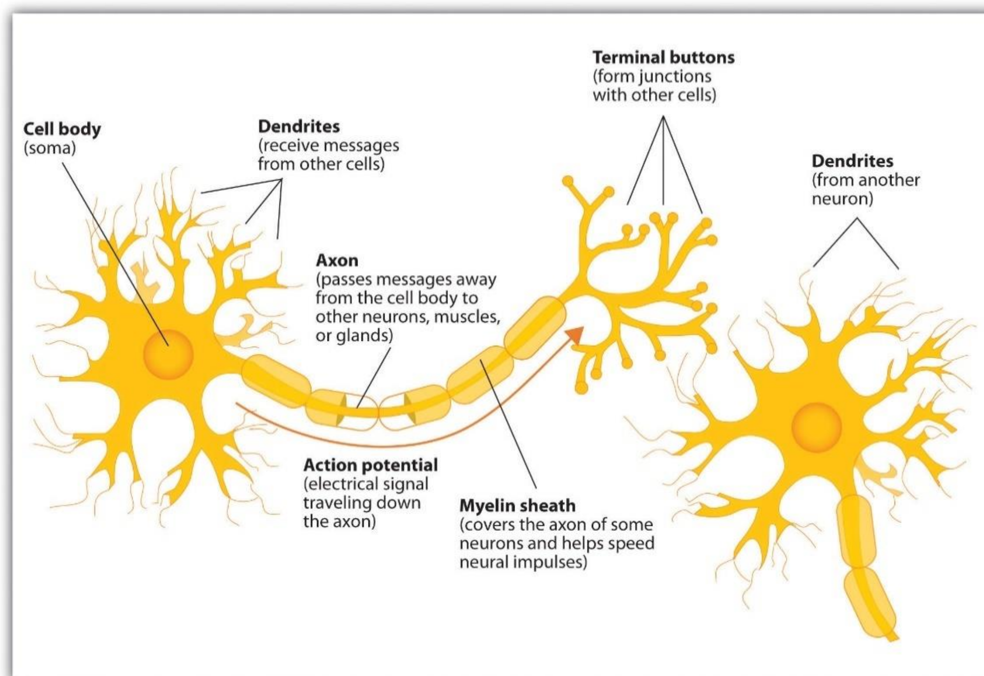

Figure 1. Components of a neuron.[143]

Neurons use action potentials (AP), which are momentary changes in electrical potential on the surface of the cells, to transfer information. APs are generated when the strength of the incoming signals from dendrites reaches a threshold value. Then they travel along the axon toward the synapses connected to other neurons, where postsynaptic potentials are generated that might trigger (or inhibit) new APs. What is especially noteworthy is that all APs are the same, even though they might be initiated by totally different stimuli. The APs that convey auditory information, for example, are identical to those that convey visual information. How do identical APs convey

[142] Michael N. Shadlen and Eric R. Kandel, "Nerve Cells, Neural Circuitry, and Behavior," in *Principles of Neural Science*, ed. Eric R. Kandel et al., 6th ed. (New York: McGraw Hill, 2021), 22–23.

[143] Charles Stangor and Jennifer Walinga, "The Neuron Is the Building Block of the Nervous System," October 17, 2014, https://opentextbc.ca/introductiontopsychology/chapter/3-1-the-neuron-is-the-building-block-of-the-nervous-system/.

different information then? First, the firing rate, which is the average number of APs per unit time, varies, which might convey the information of the intensity of the stimulus. The precise timing of APs plays a role too.[144] But these cannot account for the content differences of the information, such as the differences between auditory and visual information, which are actually "determined" by the pathway the signal travels. In other words, the type of information conveyed by an AP is not determined by the signal itself (as they are all the same) but by where the signal comes from and has been. Moreover, although there are more than 1,000 types of neurons, the type of information conveyed by an AP is not determined by the types of neurons that generate them either, because neurons with similar properties can convey different information due to the different ways they are interconnected. In sum, it is the configuration of neurons that matters, which is a fundamental organizational principle of the brain observed by neural scientists.[145]

Inspired by this principle and the structure of biological neurons, scientists have been developing artificial neural networks (ANN) since the 1940s. An artificial neural network consists of several layers (Figure 2). Loosely based on how biological neurons transfer information, each layer of an ANN transforms input data by applying a function to a weighted sum of the inputs and then transfers the results as new inputs to the next layer. Specifically, a layer consists of many nodes, or artificial neurons, which are connected to the nodes in the previous layer, from which it receives data, and the nodes in the next layer, to which it sends data. For each of the incoming datum, a node will multiply it by an individual number, a "weight" (originally randomized, then gradually adjusted for an optimal output), which corresponds to the importance of this particular incoming connection, and add the resulting products together. If the result exceeds a threshold value, the node will "fire" like a real neuron, meaning send the result to the next layer. Otherwise, no data will be transferred further.

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[144] W. Gerstner et al., "Neural Codes: Firing Rates and Beyond," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 94, no. 24 (November 1997): 12740.

[145] Shadlen and Kandel, "Nerve Cells, Neural Circuitry, and Behavior," 56, 68.

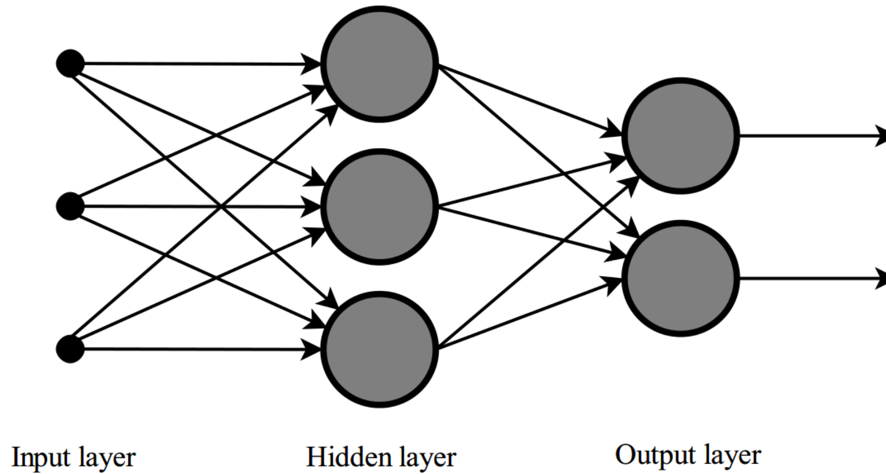

Figure 2. The structure of a simple artificial neural network.

To make accurate judgments, ANNs are trained not by giving explicit rules or exact figures (e.g., a cat has four legs; an animal with a long nose is not a cat; the width of a cat's head is about 25 percent wider than the height of its head), but simply by giving a huge number of inputs (pictures of a cat) and desired outputs (a judgment that this is a cat) so that the weights or the connections of the network can be adjusted accordingly[146] to minimize the differences between what is initially produced by the network (something meaningless) and what we ultimately want ("This is a picture of a cat"). Such a mechanism has very profound and perhaps surprising implications and is the key to why Schwartz, Sahdra, and Thagard all propose that the theory of neural networks can explain practical wisdom, as we shall see below.

ANNs are the most important tool behind the recent exploding development of artificial intelligence (AI) in the fields of speech and image recognition, self-driving vehicles, medical diagnosis, quantitative financial analysis, etc. They have contributed so significantly to AI that in many cases ANN and AI are used as synonyms. As mentioned, the ultimate goal of neuroscience is to explain how exactly neurons and action potentials step by step give rise to consciousness. Over the years, most of the influential hypothetical models addressing this problem are within the framework of the theory of neural networks, arguing that the brain indeed works like an ANN. Some elements of the theory of neural networks, such as how a neuron is structured, how an

[146] How exactly such adjustment is made is mathematically too complex to be included here.

AP is only fired when the threshold is met, and, most importantly, how the pathway a signal travels determines the information it carries, can be empirically verified when applying to the human brain (or are inspired by the empirical findings in the first place) and are thus widely regarded as fact rather than mere theory. Some elements, however, such as how the weights of the nodes are adjusted gradually towards the ideal outputs, are beyond the current technology to be tested conclusively in vivo, although they have been working successfully in machines.

Further discussing that the theory of neural networks provides illuminating insights into the collective dynamics of neurons (especially in visual perception and in the storage and recall of memories) in detail would be too technical and go beyond the scope of this study. Suffice it to say that this theory is by far the most widely accepted model for our brain and what is relevant here is that how it can explain the three features of practical wisdom summarized in II.2.

First, the theory of neural networks helps us understand the first two interconnected features of practical wisdom: being about particulars rather than universals, and not reducible to rules. We have mentioned how ANNs are trained to judge "A is B" not by giving rules enumerating the characteristics of A and B but by "feeding" the network a large number (ranging from thousands to millions) of samples of A. A sample is decomposed into raw data and put into the input layer of the network, which transforms these data into an initial, meaningless output. The weights of the nodes in the network are then adjusted so that next time the output can be a bit less like the initial, meaningless one and a bit more like the target B. The more the data are, the more accurate the ANN can judge. To take again the example of training an ANN to identify cat pictures: After the training, the network can reliably do the job, but the reason for its success is not that it has generated rules like cats have such and such characteristics after "seeing" many cat pictures, but only because the weights of the nodes in the network are adjusted to process the raw data in a certain way. Because these weights are pure numbers that cannot be "deciphered" as representing, say, a part or a characteristic of a cat, they have no real-life-meaningful causal relationships with the ideal output at all (the so-called "black box problem" of AI). The weights are adjusted

this way only because it makes the network work, nothing more. Thus, neither the ANN nor the scientists that design the ANN can explain in the form of explicit rules how the decision is made, because rules have never existed in the whole process and the decision is not based on rules in the first place. This is also why most of ANNs developed so far are highly task- and input-specific and not transferable, meaning if we want an ANN to identify, say, a cat wearing a mask or a cat with only one ear, we usually cannot just change some parameters of our existing ANN that can already identify a regular cat to make it work but must practically start all over again.

Similarly, practical wisdom is as much task- and input-sensitive. Two moral situations are rarely exactly the same and a slight difference can lead to totally different decisions, such as how optimistic the patient with terminal illness generally is when the doctor decides whether to tell the whole truth, to take the previous example, or how close the father and the daughter are when the daughter decides whether to tell him that his wife has cheated on him, as our analysis of *The Golden Bowl* will show in the next chapter. Universal, rigid rules cannot take every nuance of the situation into account and even if they can, in a specific situation we still need practical wisdom to tell us which rule is the most relevant or whether to make an exception. In the words of Jean Grondin, an authority on Gadamer, practical wisdom "has no particular content and is not dogmatic, but rather consists of a capacity to adapt itself to particular situations,"[147] which can very well also be a definition of neural networks. It is such similarity that makes psychologists believe that practical wisdom can be built by something like an ANN in our brain.

Moreover, Schwartz points out that forced reliance on rules can actually be counterproductive because a rule can "entrench" a part in a network, making it too firm to change, so that even if we experience a lot, including cases that challenge the rule, the network will not be adjusted as much as it should be. By forcedly following the rule we are unwisely interfering in the effective adapting mechanism that makes neural networks work properly. Deeply entrenched rules can therefore fossilize our brain so

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[147] Grondin, *The Philosophy of Gadamer*, 27.

that we cannot benefit from our experience and become wise even if we deliberately reflect on it and try to draw lessons.[148]

Related to the first two features of practical wisdom that (1) it is determined by concrete situations and (2) cannot be verbally formalized, the theory of neural networks also captures well how we make most of our everyday decisions—quickly, automatically, and not consciously thinking about rules, as neither the generation nor the transfer of action potentials nor the change of the neural network is directly accessible to consciousness. Although direct evidence is yet to be found, the theory of neural networks seems to be the best available model to understand why practical wisdom is implicit rather than explicit.

Second, the theory of neural networks also explains the third feature of practical wisdom that (3) it can only be learned through experience. We recall that in our brain neither the individual signals nor the individual neurons determine the information they convey but the pathway the signals travel, an organizational principle also shared by ANNs. Under normal circumstances, anatomically different neural pathways are also functionally different. This does not mean that the APs somehow directly contain the information where they have been that can be decoded. Rather, when we say the pathways of connected neurons convey information, we are only referring to the fact that the signals transferring specific information only come from the pathways responsible for such specific information. The neural pathways activated by light-sensitive receptor cells in the retina, for example, are completely different from the pathways activated by touch-sensitive sensory cells in the skin.[149] We also recall that ANNs are trained to work not by memorizing rules but by adjusting the weights of their nodes via trial and error. Because these adjustments cannot be meaningfully traced back to the real-life level, we cannot say that the successfully functioning ANNs have *de facto* developed rules either. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that practical

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[148] Schwartz and Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, 103.

[149] Shadlen and Kandel, "Nerve Cells, Neural Circuitry, and Behavior," 68.

wisdom can be based on something like an ANN because, among other reasons mentioned above, they both only learn from experience but not rules.

Apart from weight adjustment, neural networks also learn by creating new connections between neurons, which can also explain why becoming wise usually requires considerable sensory input and repeated interactions with diverse, complex situations, because it takes many trials to form the new connections required.[150] Forming new neural connections is one of the neural mechanisms of memory, and memory studies is indeed one of the subfields of neuroscience that has been offering significant supporting evidence for the theory of neural networks. In the next subsection 2.4 "Practical wisdom and implicit memory," we will further discuss how the memory potentially responsible for practical wisdom is different from the memory for memorizing explicit rules.

In III.2.3.1, we have briefly mentioned that philosophers have already applied the fuzzy nature of our categorization around prototypes discovered by psychologists to the debate between rules and judgment in moral philosophy. Can what is examined here also be applied to moral philosophy? Philosophers and psychologists both argue that it can. In 1996, when the development of ANNs was still in a very primitive stage, Paul Churchland already noticed that the neural network perspective agrees with Aristotle's perspective that moral virtue is "a matter of developing a set of largely inarticulate skills, a matter of practical wisdom," rather than a matter of moral rules.[151] Schwartz also believes that wisdom may be "more psychologically compatible with our modern understanding of cognitive organization than any system of moral rules would be."[152]

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[150] Sahdra and Thagard, "Procedural Knowledge in Molecular Biology," 491.

[151] Paul M. Churchland, "The Neural Representation of the Social World," in *Mind and Morals: Essays on Cognitive Science and Ethics*, ed. Larry May, Marilyn Friedman, and Andy Clark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 106; see also Schwartz and Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, 88–98, 105–6; Owen Flanagan, "Ethics Naturalized: Ethics as Human Ecology," in *Mind and Morals: Essays on Cognitive Science and Ethics*, ed. Larry May, Marilyn Friedman, and Andy Clark (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 19–44.

[152] Schwartz and Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," 389.

It must be emphasized that such association is still speculative, but all that we have discussed in this subsection offers us enough preliminary reasons to speculate this way.

Specifically, in addition to explaining the three features of practical wisdom, Schwartz argues that the theory of neural networks may help us understand why moral disagreement can happen even without a clash of values. Because different experiences develop different neural networks, and two people almost never have exactly the same experiences, it should not come as a surprise to see moral instances where good people with similar values draw rather different conclusions about what the particular situation at hand requires.[153] This can happen not only in moral situations but also in literary interpretation, where people believing in the same "theories" can interpret the same text differently. Different people having different judgments based on the same text might not necessarily be the result of believing in different explicit rules, theories, or values that can be articulated, but the result of inarticulable decision-making via different neural networks, formed by each person's different experiences. Because neural networks "work in mysterious ways" due to the weight-adjusting and multilayer mechanism elaborated above, the true reasons behind these different literary interpretations may never be known. Realizing this is obviously vital for literary studies.

2.3.3 Wisdom and decision making

The third reason why Schwartz believes that the concept of practical wisdom and contemporary cognitive science converge lies in the study of decision making. Since the 1970s, substantial emerging evidence from the empirical studies on decision making strongly supports the so-called dual process theory that when we make decisions, two systems are in operation: a system that works fast, unconsciously, and effortlessly (System 1) and a system that works slowly, consciously, and effortfully (System 2).[154]

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[153] Schwartz and Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, 103.

[154] Thomas Gilovich, Dale Griffin, and Daniel Kahneman, eds., *Heuristics and Biases: The Psychology of Intuitive Judgment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Jonathan Haidt, "The Emotional Dog and Its Rational Tail: A Social Intuitionist Approach to Moral Judgment.," *Psychological Review* 108, no. 4 (2001): 814–34.

Examples of the automatic activities attributed to System 1 include detecting that one object is more distant than another, turning to the source of a sudden sound, detecting hostility in a voice, reading words on large billboards, understanding simple sentences, and understanding nuances of social situations. Many experiments demonstrate that we can only realize the results of these activities and not their processes. We cannot really control these activities either, as they happen automatically when the corresponding stimuli are present. For instance, when a printed sentence in our mother tongue is in front of us, we cannot *not* read it. Examples of the deliberate activities attributed to System 2 include focusing on the voice of a particular person in a noisy environment, looking for a person with a blue dress, and counting the occurrences of a particular letter in a text. Unlike the activities of System 1, these activities can only be done consciously and intentionally and would be disrupted when attention is distracted.[155]

Although we tend to emphasize the conscious System 2, System 1 is actually responsible for most of our mental activities, which will be further discussed in the context of cognitive poetics in the next chapter. Such division of labor is usually efficient and optimal. Efficient because relying primarily on the automatic System 1 means we can have the luxury of being in a relaxed mode for most of the time. Indeed, our daily activities seldom require our full attention and maximum cognitive effort. Optimal because the automatic System 1 usually predicts accurately, reacts appropriately and quickly, and judges correctly. However, in certain situations, System 1 shows biases and makes poor intuitive logical and statistical judgments.[156] In other cases, the fact that System 1 cannot be "turned off" causes problems too, as we shall see below.

One of the core findings of the dual process theory is that System 1 and System 2 do not always agree, as a series of papers by Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman first demonstrated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, which revolutionized our understanding

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[155] Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 21–22.

[156] Kahneman, 25.

of human decision making.[157] Most of the social scientists at that time believed that (1) generally, people are rational and their reasoning is sound, and (2) if people become irrational, their reasoning must be disturbed by emotions such as fear, love, or hate. However, the experiments done by Tversky and Kahneman challenged both assumptions by empirically showing systematic errors in our reasoning and theoretically attributing these errors to System 1 rather than to the "corruption" by emotion.[158] The influence of their research soon extended beyond psychology to many other fields and Kahneman was awarded a Nobel Prize in economics as a psychologist in 2002. One of the most compelling and most cited examples of the conflicts between System 1 and System 2 is the famous Müller-Lyer illusion (Figure 3). Here, although they look different, the four horizontal line segments here are of the same length (use a ruler if you believe otherwise):

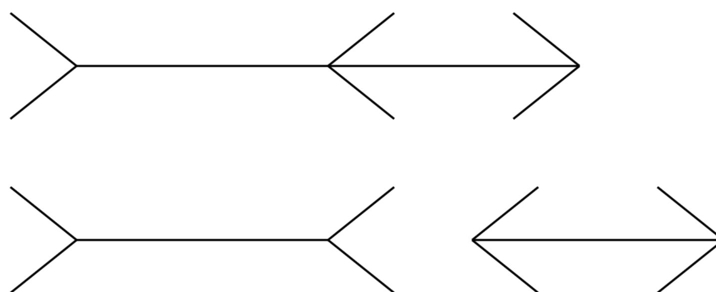

Figure 3. The Müller-Lyer illusion.

What is particularly striking here is that even though we now *know* (System 2 working) they are of the same length, we still *feel* (System 1 working) that the two segments on the left are slightly longer than the right ones. The undeniable coexistence of these two thoughts demonstrates the coexistence of the two systems.

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[157] These papers are collected in Daniel Kahneman, Paul Slovic, and Amos Tversky, eds., *Judgment under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[158] Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 8.

Another good example of the conflicts between System 1 and System 2 is the conjunction fallacy discovered by Tversky and Kahneman, also known as the Linda problem.[159] In their experiment, participants are given the following text:

> Linda is 31 years old, single, outspoken, and very bright. She majored in philosophy. As a student, she was deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, and also participated in anti-nuclear demonstrations.

Then they are asked to rank the following eight statements about Linda according to their probabilities:

> Linda is a teacher in elementary school.
>
> Linda works in a bookstore and takes Yoga classes.
>
> Linda is active in the feminist movement. (F)
>
> Linda is a psychiatric social worker.
>
> Linda is a member of the League of Women Voters.
>
> Linda is a bank teller. (T)
>
> Linda is an insurance salesperson.
>
> Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement. (T&F)

More than 80% of the three groups of participants, including a "statistically naive" group of 88 undergraduate students at the University of British Columbia with no background in probability or statistics, a "statistically informed" group of 53 first-year graduate students at Stanford familiar with the basic concepts of probability after one or more courses in statistics, and a "statistically sophisticated" group of 32 doctoral students in the decision science program of the Stanford Business School who have taken several advanced courses in probability, statistics, and decision theory, all consider T&F as more likely than T, which is false in all circumstances because T&F obviously presupposes T and therefore the probability of T&F cannot be higher than T.

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[159] Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, "Extensional versus Intuitive Reasoning: The Conjunction Fallacy in Probability Judgment," *Psychological Review* 90, no. 4 (1983): 293–315.

Strikingly, the statistical training a participant receives plays no significant role here, as 85% of the sophisticated group also made the mistake. Eliminating the irrelevant statements and directly asking the participants only to compare T and T&F does not change the result either.[160]

Surprised by their finding and trying to exclude the possibility that the participants can interpret T as "T&(not F)" when compared to T&F (i.e., interpreting "Linda is a bank teller" as "Linda is a bank teller and is not a feminist" when compared to "Linda is a bank teller and is a feminist"), Tversky and Kahneman designs another test to deliberately induce a reflective attitude and to make the case more clear. They present another group of 58 undergraduates with the same description of Linda followed by the same two statements, T and T&F, and ask them which of the following two arguments are more convincing:

> Argument 1. Linda is more likely to be a bank teller than she is to be a feminist bank teller, because every feminist bank teller is a bank teller, but some women bank tellers are not feminists, and Linda could be one of them.
>
> Argument 2. Linda is more likely to be a feminist bank teller than she is likely to be a bank teller, because she resembles an active feminist more than she resembles a bank teller.

This time the compelling reason why the probability of T&F cannot be higher than T is made very clear, but 65% of the participants still believe that Argument 2 is more convincing.

Still unsatisfied, Tversky and Kahneman do a further test, practically giving the correct answer to the participants directly this time. The new test is the same as the one before except that the statement T is replaced by:

> Linda is a bank teller whether or not she is active in the feminist movement. (T*)

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[160] Tversky and Kahneman.

Deliberately formulated like this, it cannot be more obvious that T* includes T&F, "Linda is a bank teller and is active in the feminist movement." Still, 57% of the 75 participants think T&F is more likely than T*.[161]

How can we explain such stubbornness and how is it relevant to practical wisdom? We recall that concepts are mentally organized and processed around prototypes rather than clear definitions like dictionary entries. When we try to determine whether an animal is a bird, we usually do not compare it with a list of features defined by ornithology. Instead, we compare it with a prototype, which is a typical member of the category bird that is perhaps most common and therefore can be instantly thought of, such as a robin. Similarly, when we try to determine the probability of an event, we usually do not think about the logic and the rules of probability, such as the conjunction rule that the probability of T&F cannot be higher than T. Instead, we compare it with a prototype. In the Linda problem, the description of Linda (outspoken, majoring in philosophy, deeply concerned with issues of discrimination and social justice, etc.) is intentionally designed to remind the participants of the prototype of a feminist (F) but not of a bank teller (T). In other words, because the conjunction, "Linda is a bank teller and a feminist" (T&F), is more representative (i.e., easier to imagine or to retrieve from memory) than its constituent, "Linda is a bank teller" (T), the participants consider T&F more probable than T, although T&F is logically less inclusive, therefore less probable, than T. This mental shortcut, making probability judgment based on how similar the target is to the prototype rather than the laws of probability, is called the representativeness heuristic. A shorter but equally excellent example of this heuristic, given by the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, is that between the two categories "poet" and "accountant," people tend to assign a person in unconventional clothes reading a poetry book to the former because the description matches the prototype/stereotype of a poet rather than an accountant. However, statistically speaking, even though maybe

[161] *Somewhat* reassuringly, statistical training matters this time, as "only" 36% of the 64 graduate students of social sciences at Berkeley and Stanford who have taken statistics courses commit the fallacy in this test. Reassuring because it seems that human rationality triumphs after all; *somewhat* because 36% is still very high.

only a small portion of accountants would match the description (we do not really know, but suppose it is true), because there are far, far more accountants than poets in the world, if we encounter a person matching the description randomly in real life, he or she is actually much more likely to be an accountant.[162]

Interestingly, Tversky and Kahneman note that, even having been explained why they are wrong after the experiment, most of the participants of the Linda test still feel a compulsion to see T&F as more likely although they admit their mistakes. As Stephen Jay Gould vividly describes: "I know that the [conjunction] is least probable, yet a little homunculus in my head continues to jump up and down, shouting at me — 'but she can't just be a bank teller; read the description.'"[163] We may feel the same in the case of poet and accountant because it is so much easier to imagine a poet in unconventional clothes reading a poetry book rather than an accountant in unconventional clothes reading a poetry book. However, being easier to be imagined does not mean being more likely (stereotypes are called stereotypes for a reason), which is the root of our mistake. This root is so entrenched that, as mentioned, statistical training does not matter much. Knowing the rules and admitting the mistake afterward does not really help either, because intuition can still gain the upper hand. As a famous line of one Linda test participant goes, who acknowledges the validity of the conjunction rule, "I thought you only asked for my opinion,"[164] meaning his opinion/feeling is different from the rules of probability and logic and is worth sharing.

The existence of this almost irresistible compulsion to believe in two contradicting statements indicates how powerful and obstinate the automatic System 1 is, which is also demonstrated by our earlier example of the Müller-Lyer illusion (Figure 3). We recall that System 1 is responsible for the automatic assessment of distance, length,

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[162] "Representativeness Heuristic," APA Dictionary of Psychology, accessed November 11, 2021, https://dictionary.apa.org/representativeness-heuristic.

[163] Stephen Jay Gould, *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1992), 469, quoted in Steven A. Sloman, "Two Systems of Reasoning," in *Heuristics and Biases*, ed. Thomas Gilovich, Dale Griffin, and Daniel Kahneman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 385.

[164] Tversky and Kahneman, "Extensional versus Intuitive Reasoning," 300.

perspective, etc. When we open our eyes, we instantly see everything as three-dimensional, assess which objects are closer to us, which are further away, which are longer, which are shorter, etc. These activities cannot be stopped even if we want to, as we cannot stop feeling that the four horizontal line segments are not the same length in the Müller-Lyer illusion even if we have measured them by a ruler and are absolutely sure that they are the same length. There are several theories explaining why System 1 perceives the Müller-Lyer illusion as such, which is not directly relevant here. What is relevant is the disturbing fact that despite knowing perfectly well that the rule-based ("T&F is logically less probable than T") or empirically based ("A ruler shows us that all the line segments are of the same length") judgments made by the effortful System 2 are *true*, we still find the intuitive, *false* judgments made by the effortless System 1 compelling. Although System 2 can suppress and overrule System 1, because of System 1's speed, efficiency, and usual reliability, its judgments often dominate or at least loom parallelly as appealing options.[165]

This phenomenon calls the common understanding of human rationality into question and, again, realizing this is obviously vital for literary studies. As Tversky and Kahneman observe, "naive [i.e., statically unsophisticated] subjects generally endorse the conjunction rule in the abstract, but their application of this rule to the Linda problem is blocked by the compelling impression that T&F is more representative of her than T is."[166] Such irrational blocking can also happen in literary interpretation without us knowing. Consciously endorsing a rule or a literary theory generally without reference to specific texts does not guarantee its application, because we may unconsciously be influenced by something else when interpreting a concrete text, which is another form of "we know more than we can tell," or an innocent form of "saying one thing but meaning another." Most literary scholars (except the psychoanalysts, which is another story) take for granted that when trying to explain the reasons behind

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[165] Steven A. Sloman, "Two Systems of Reasoning," in *Heuristics and Biases*, ed. Thomas Gilovich, Dale Griffin, and Daniel Kahneman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 391.

[166] Tversky and Kahneman, "Extensional versus Intuitive Reasoning," 300.

an interpretation, all we need to do is to reflect on what we are consciously thinking during the interpreting process. Indeed, what else can there be? This is so self-evident that even the slightest consideration to challenge it seems absurd. However, the Linda problem and the Müller-Lyer illusion exactly challenge this premise. In the next chapter, we will continue to discuss the implication of the dual process theory of decision making for literary studies.

Going back to the topic of this subsection, how can what we have found about System 1 and System 2 be the empirical basis of practical wisdom? The fast, unconscious, and effortless System 1 already reminds us of the inarticulable practical wisdom discussed before. While there certainly are situations where practical wisdom needs to make slow, conscious decisions (especially when it comes to controlling our impulses), it makes more quick, unconscious decisions like System 1 does in our daily lives. Moreover, one characterization of the dual process theory is describing System 1 as associative (because its computations are based on similarity, as explained by the Linda problem) and describing System 2 as rule-based (because its computations reflect a rule structure that has logical content and variables).[167] This characterization again corresponds with what we have discussed in III.2.3.1 and 2.3.2, namely how practical wisdom, our conceptual organization, and the theory of neural networks are connected: Because our conceptual organization around prototypes is a good example of the associative nature of System 1, and the reasons behind the characteristics of System 1 can be that it is organized like a neural network and therefore inherently cannot be formalized, they can all account for the inarticulability of practical wisdom.

It is worth noticing that despite these correspondences there is an important difference between our discussion of practical wisdom in literary studies and the contemporary decision-making studies, because the latter investigates normative (what people should do) and prescriptive (how to help people do what they should) approaches to decision making, focusing on the "good" decisions and human rationality.

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[167] Steven A. Sloman, "The Empirical Case for Two Systems of Reasoning," *Psychological Bulletin* 119, no. 1 (1996): 3; Sloman, "Two Systems of Reasoning," 380, 395.

We recall that in III.2.1, when discussing the third psychological approach to defining wisdom, namely, how psychologists of wisdom define wisdom considering contemporary psychological framework, we have distinguished wisdom from rationality. In psychology, rationality is about how to best achieve one's goal. This goal is usually well-defined and the process working towards it is rule-based, while practical wisdom deals with ill-defined problems and cannot be formalized into rules. One of the main issues decision scientists focus on is how heuristics and biases impair our rationality. Heuristics are mental shortcuts that simplify, not necessarily for the good, complicated tasks so that we can handle them quickly and effortlessly, examples of which are the representativeness heuristic showed in the Linda problem and in the case of poet and accountant. Instead of effortfully thinking about the logic that the probability of T&F cannot be higher than T or assessing that there are more accounts than poets in the world, it is much easier to simplify "being more probable" as "being easier to imagine," which are actually not the same, and thus simplify the corresponding cognitive task. Importantly, such decision-making studies presuppose that it is fairly easy for the researcher to determine which decision is good and rational, either by obvious rules or facts, as in the case of the Linda problem, or by goal prioritization (e.g., if our goal is to save for retirement, to wait for one year to get 1,000 dollars is a better and more rational choice than to get 500 dollars right away). In literary studies, however, judgments are much more difficult to be clearly determined as bad or irrational. This is not to say that the study of heuristics and biases in literary interpretation and the potential normative study of what is the best and most rational decision in literary studies are not important, but only to indicate that the study on the unconscious nature of decision making per se and the study on how to avoid bad, unconsciously made decisions are different. For the same reason, the current study is also different from some of the studies in the field of psychology of wisdom, which limit their research to judgments easily determinable as good.

However, this difference in research focus does not concern the foundation of decision making that the psychologists have established, namely the dual process theory, and therefore does not hinder our study of practical wisdom in literary studies from

building on this foundation. The unconscious System 1 also differs from the Freudian unconscious that is already present in literary theory. According to Freud, certain (dark) thoughts and desires are unconscious because they are repressed, which has little standing in contemporary cognitive science for lack of proof. The dual process theory, by contrast, with solid proof, merely points out that certain thoughts are unconscious, without speculating why (perhaps because too much is going on too fast). This is one of the main reasons why cognitive poetics is essential, as literary scholars tend to only focus on the conscious part of interpretation.

When introducing the tentative psychology of practical wisdom proposed by Schwartz at the beginning of III.2.3, we have mentioned that perhaps not all of the empirical foundation found by the psychologists of wisdom can be directly applied to literary studies, because these empirical studies tend to highlight the pursuit of the common good, emotional control, and tolerance as the core components of wisdom, rather than the three features of practical wisdom that we seek to investigate in literary studies, especially its inarticulability. Therefore, to explore the empirical foundation of practical wisdom specifically for our purpose, we have expanded on Schwartz's originally very brief suggestion that our current understanding of conceptual organization, neural architecture, and decision making offers a great deal of promise. On the other hand, to conclude this subsection, although the focus of many psychological studies on wisdom (including some of the latest research explicitly dedicated to practical wisdom[168]) is its moral aspects and not the three features that we have summarized, they can still be meaningfully linked to literary studies regardless of what underlies its empirical foundation. The first reason, as mentioned in II.2, is that practical wisdom is ultimately an ability to properly apply universals to particulars and to choose between possibly conflicting rules according to concrete situations, an idea

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[168] Darnell et al., "Phronesis and the Knowledge-Action Gap in Moral Psychology and Moral Education"; Mario De Caro and Maria Silvia Vaccarezza, eds., *Practical Wisdom: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2021); Kristján Kristjánsson et al., "*Phronesis* (Practical Wisdom) as a Type of Contextual Integrative Thinking," *Review of General Psychology* 25, no. 3 (September 2021): 239–57.

shared both by Gadamer and contemporary psychology, and this ability, being moral or not, is evidently important for literary studies. The second reason, as we will further explore in Chapter IV, is that the moral situations practical wisdom deals with are often so complicated and ambiguous that it must take the rich form of literature to be fully represented.

2.4 Practical wisdom and implicit memory

There is another possible strong empirical evidence for the features of practical wisdom, which is seldom mentioned by wisdom scholars: our implicit memory.

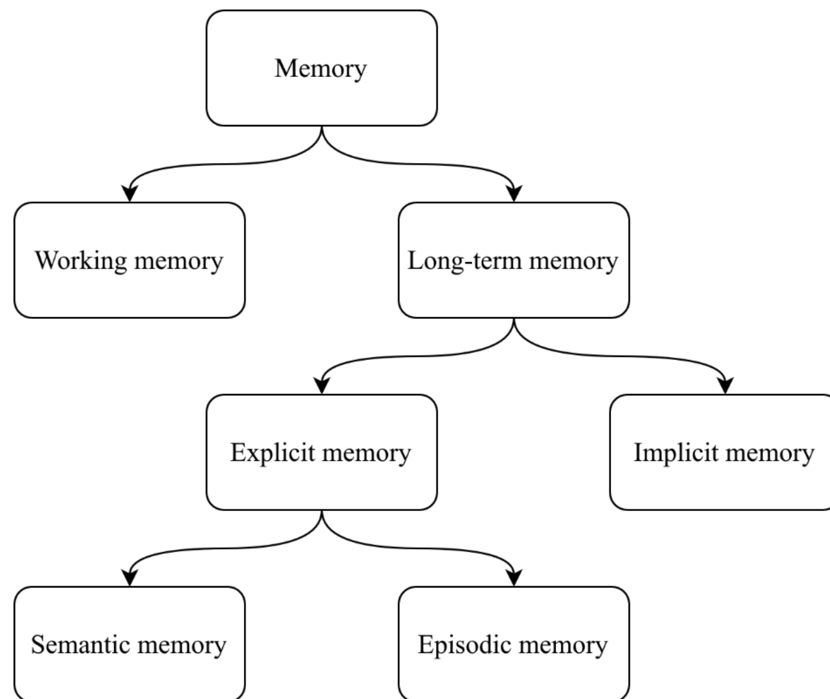

Figure 4. Human memory.

Human memory (Figure 4) consists of working memory (or short-term memory[169]) and long-term memory. As the terms suggest, working memory stores information for a short period (seconds, minutes), while long-term memory stores information for longer periods (days, months, years). Long-term memory is divided into explicit (or

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[169] For the possible distinction between the two terms see Bart Aben, Sven Stapert, and Arjan Blokland, "About the Distinction between Working Memory and Short-Term Memory," *Frontiers in Psychology* 3 (2012): 1–9.

declarative) memory, which enables conscious recollection of facts and events that can be articulated, and implicit (or procedural) memory, which is unconscious and cannot be articulated but can be expressed through performance. Explicit memory is further subdivided into semantic memory, which stores conceptual knowledge independent of personal experiences (e.g., remembering what the capital of France is), and episodic memory, which stores personal experiences (e.g., remembering where you went on vacation last year).[170]

Working memory and the explicit part of long-term memory are easy to understand and they are obviously essential for literary interpretation. What requires some explanation is the implicit part of long-term memory. How can we prove that we can unconsciously store and recall information? How can implicit memory be relevant to practical wisdom and literary studies?

2.4.1 Priming

A particularly convincing example of implicit memory is the fact that an early encounter with a stimulus can influence the processing of that stimulus (or a related one) later, even if we cannot consciously recall the early encounter. This effect is called priming, as the first encounter induces or "primes" the processing of the second. For example, in a lexical decision task (LDT), participants are asked to decide if a string of letters (e.g., DOCTOR) is a word (as opposed to nonwords). It is not surprising that they can decide more quickly if they have already seen the target string earlier in the same experiment and can consciously recall it. However, abundant evidence shows that even if they cannot consciously recall having seen the target string, they can still process it more quickly. This change of the processing time indicates that the earlier encounter is stored and recalled after all, without our awareness, which is another example of "we know more than we can tell" (or to be exact, "we remember more than we believe we

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[170] Dale Purves, *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 2nd ed. (Sunderland, MA: Sinauer, 2013), 248; Teal S. Eich and Edward E. Smith, "Cognitive Neuroscience," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Psychology* (Oxford University Press, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780199828340-0015.

remember"). Before we go into details about different types of priming and their possible roles in literary interpretation, let us briefly review its neural basis.

The classification of human memory (Figure 4) is not just nominal, meaning different memory systems are based on different brain regions and are independent in the sense that one memory system can be physically and functionally intact and while the other is impaired. This is convincingly demonstrated by perhaps the most famous and the most studied patient in medical history, Henry Molaison, also known for privacy reasons as H.M. during his lifetime. H.M. suffered from severe epilepsy, resulting in about ten minor seizures every day and a major seizure every few days since the age of 16. Because the seizures totally incapacitated him and they were uncontrollable by maximum medication of various kinds, in 1953, the 27-year-old H.M. underwent a "frankly experimental" surgery by William Scoville who removed much of his temporal lobes on both sides, including about two-thirds of the two hippocampi. Although the surgery successfully relieved his seizures, it also unexpectedly caused H.M. devastating amnesia: He seemingly cannot remember anything that happened after the surgery. His memory for the three years before the surgery was partially lost too.[171]

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[171] W. B. Scoville and B. Milner, "Loss of Recent Memory after Bilateral Hippocampal Lesions," *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery & Psychiatry* 20, no. 1 (1957): 11–21; Brenda Milner, Suzanne Corkin, and H.-L. Teuber, "Further Analysis of the Hippocampal Amnesic Syndrome: 14-Year Follow-up Study of H.M.," *Neuropsychologia* 6, no. 3 (September 1968): 215–34; Neal J. Cohen and L. R. Squire, "Preserved Learning and Retention of Pattern-Analyzing Skill in Amnesia: Dissociation of Knowing How and Knowing That," *Science* 210, no. 4466 (1980): 207–10; Mary Jo Nissen, Daniel Willingham, and Marilyn Hartman, "Explicit and Implicit Remembering: When Is Learning Preserved in Amnesia," *Neuropsychologia* 27, no. 3 (1989): 341–52; Paul J. Reber, Barbara J. Knowlton, and Larry R. Squire, "Dissociable Properties of Memory Systems: Differences in the Flexibility of Declarative and Nondeclarative Knowledge," *Behavioral Neuroscience* 110, no. 5 (1996): 861–71; Larry R. Squire and John T. Wixted, "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Human Memory Since H.M.," *Annual Review of Neuroscience* 34, no. 1 (July 21, 2011): 259–88.

Because such surgery was never performed again due to its damage, H.M. became a unique case in the history of neurology.[172] After Scoville's initial report in 1957, more than 100 researchers tested H.M. with different tasks until his death in 2008 and their findings significantly contributed to the contemporary memory research. The reason why H.M.'s case drew so much attention is fourfold: First, except for the memory loss, his other perceptual and cognitive functions such as language ability and intelligence remained normal, which suggests that memory is a distinct brain function. Second, his amnesia involved information acquired through all sensory modalities in both verbal and nonverbal forms, which suggests that the removed brain region mediates sensory perception and memory consolidation. Third, his working memory remained normal, which suggests neural dissociation between working and long-term memory. Fourth and most importantly, researchers discovered that he could still form certain new long-term memory after all, memory of something that was inarticulable and could only be expressed through performance, which suggests the neural dissociation between explicit and implicit memory, and that although his explicit memory was completely damaged, his implicit memory was still at least partially functioning.[173] The reason why we believed he could still form new memory is that he could develop certain motor skills (such as mirror tracing, where he traced a shape while looking at his hand only as reflected in a mirror, and rotary pursuit, where he followed a moving target with a stylus) and perceptual and cognitive skills (such as priming and reading mirror-reversed words) after practicing.[174] Although he could not recall having practicing these skills at all, the

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[172] Over the years, the removal of only one of the hippocampi (but not both) from certain patients suffering from epilepsy uncontrollable with medication has become a mature procedure: Most patients having this surgery are cured of their epilepsy with minimal side effects, because the one hippocampus left can take over the function of the one removed. See Rodrigo Quian Quiroga, *Borges and Memory: Encounters with the Human Brain* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 54.

[173] Purves, *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 244–45; Squire and Wixted, "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Human Memory Since H.M."

[174] For reviews see Suzanne Corkin, "What's New with the Amnesic Patient H.M.?," *Nature Reviews Neuroscience* 3, no. 2 (February 2002): 153–60; Squire and Wixted, "The Cognitive Neuroscience of Human Memory Since H.M."; Felipe De Brigard, "Know-How, Intellectualism, and Memory Systems," *Philosophical Psychology* 32, no. 5 (2019): 719–58.

fact that he could acquire new skills or improve old skills clearly indicated that information had been stored and recalled without his awareness.

Conversely, there was another patient called M.S. who showed intact explicit memory but impaired implicit memory. Like H.M., M.S. underwent brain surgery to relieve intractable epileptic seizures, but instead of the medial temporal lobes, most of his right occipital regions were removed. These two cases reveal the double dissociation between explicit and implicit memory and suggest that separate brain systems are responsible for these two kinds of memory.[175]

There are several forms of implicit memory, two of which can be particularly relevant to literary interpretation: priming and skill learning. As mentioned, priming is a change in the processing of a stimulus because of a previous encounter with the same or a related stimulus without one's awareness. Skill learning is learning to perform a task with proficiency, which is defined by ease, speed, and accuracy of performance. A skill may be motor, perceptual, cognitive, or a combination of these. While priming can result from a single encounter with a stimulus, skill learning requires extensive practice.[176]

Priming is divided into direct and indirect priming. If the stimulus in the first encounter (the prime) and the result that is generated or processed in the later processing (the target) are the same, such priming is called direct priming, or repetition priming, like our earlier example of priming in lexical decision task. If the prime and the target are different, such priming is called indirect priming (Figure 5).

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[175] John D.E. Gabrieli et al., "Double Dissociation Between Memory Systems Underlying Explicit and Implicit Memory in the Human Brain," *Psychological Science* 6, no. 2 (March 1995): 76–82.

[176] "Skill Learning," APA Dictionary of Psychology, accessed November 26, 2021, https://dictionary.apa.org/skill-learning; Purves, *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 251.

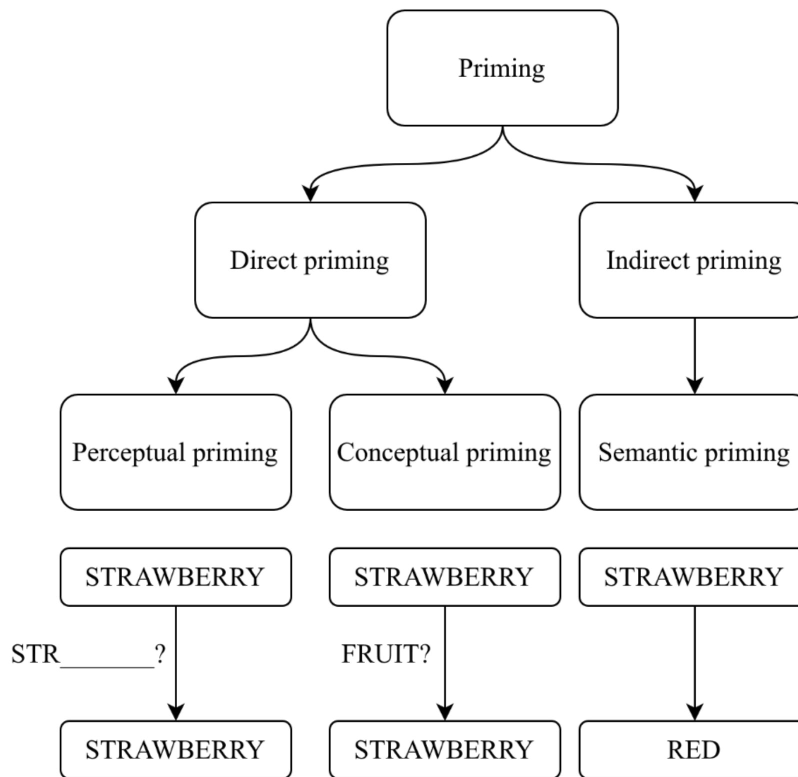

Figure 5. Priming

Direct priming is further divided into perceptual and conceptual priming. In perceptual priming, the test cue and the target are perceptually related, such as having similar forms or the same color. In a typical experiment, participants attend a first session where they are presented with so many words for so little time that although the intended prime (such as "STRAWBERRY") is included it will only be skimmed through and not particularly remembered. Then in a second session, they are asked to complete word fragments (such as "STR_______") with the first words that they think of. Participants are found to be more likely to come up with words they have seen (but not remember having seen, because otherwise we are not talking about implicit but explicit memory) in the first session, and this increase in probability can measure the strength of priming. Priming can also be measured by the increase in processing speed of the target as in our earlier example of lexical decision task, where participants decide more quickly if a string of letters is a word when they have seen it before.

In conceptual priming, the test cue and the target are semantically related, such as doctor/nurse or house/room. In a typical experiment conceptual priming, participants

attend the same first session as perceptual priming where they read many words. In a second session, given the test cue (such as "FRUIT"), they are asked to generate words that first come to mind. Unsurprisingly, they are more likely to generate STRAWBERRY, although they cannot consciously recall that they have seen this word before.[177]

Unlike perceptual and conceptual priming, where the prime and the target are the same and the target is induced either perceptually or semantically by a test cue, in indirect priming, the prime and the target are different and there is no test cue. The most typical form of indirect priming is semantic priming, where the prime and the target are semantically related (In conceptual priming there is also semantic relation but between the test cue and the target). In a typical experiment, participants are found to be able to spend less time reading words (such as "RED") preceded by semantically related words (such as "STRAWBERRY") than for words preceded by semantically unrelated words. Again, they have no explicit memory of the earlier encounters, suggesting that STRAWBERRY is stored in implicit memory. Note that because of the role of the semantic relation ("Strawberry is red"), which is not stored in implicit memory but in semantic memory, which is a part of explicit memory, semantic priming is an example of the interaction between explicit and implicit memory and it shows that such interaction can happen implicitly. According to the influential theory of spreading activation, which is used to explain many semantic memory phenomena (including semantic priming), semantic memory is organized like a network,[178] with each node corresponding to a concept and each link corresponding to an association between two concepts. When a node is activated, the activation spreads through the network according to the strength of the associations between nodes. In our example, because the word STRAWBERRY is presented to the participants in the first session, the node

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[177] Purves, *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 252–53.

[178] Note that the nodes here are not necessarily the biological neurons, as the theory is only formulated in "quasi-neurological terms." There can therefore be further levels between the spreading activation theory and the theory of neural networks discussed above, see Allan M. Collins and Elizabeth F. Loftus, "A Spreading-Activation Theory of Semantic Processing," *Psychological Review* 82, no. 6 (1975): 411.

representing this concept is activated and the activation spreads to the node representing RED. Therefore, the word RED is processed faster in the second session.[179]

2.4.2 Skill learning

Besides priming, skill learning is another important form of implicit memory. Considerable evidence shows that although amnesia patients cannot memorize new facts or experiences, they can still learn certain new skills even though they cannot recall that they have learned them and cannot realize their improvement, suggesting that information can be stored and recollected unconsciously. We have mentioned that a skill is defined as motor, perceptual, cognitive, or a combination of the three. Literary interpretation mainly involves the latter two. Perceptual skill learning is learning to faster process perceptual stimuli identical or similar to stimuli that have been encountered many times before. Apart from the visual or the auditory processing that is usually associated with perceptual skill, this type of skill learning is also essential for understanding language, because when communicating, language comes in as perceptual stimuli. Many who have learned foreign languages can attest that the more language understanding depends on explicit memory, the slower and more difficult it is, because having to consciously recollect grammar or word meanings requires considerable time and effort. Therefore, we depend on perceptual skill learning to eventually be able to automatically and efficiently understand sentences.[180]

Cognitive skill learning refers to improvements in mentally demanding problem-solving tasks through practice and, importantly, without the mediation of explicit, conscious memory. As "cognitive" has a wide meaning, cognitive skill learning generally includes every skill that is neither motor nor perceptual. The Tower of London task (TOL) and its variants are widely used to test implicit cognitive skill learning. In TOL, participants are asked to solve puzzles, which involve moving colored balls on

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[179] Purves, *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 256; Collins and Loftus, "A Spreading-Activation Theory of Semantic Processing."

[180] Purves, *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 261.

three sticks from an initial state to match a goal state with as few moves as possible. Only the balls on the top of a stick can be moved and only one ball can be moved at a time. To minimize the role of motor skill, participants are asked to plan the whole sequence of their moves mentally before executing them. The tasks vary in difficulty and the difficult ones are so designed that the less obvious moves must be done before the simple strategy of moving balls directly to the target stick can work. Skill learning is then measured by the improvement in performance after several trials.[181] Importantly, because there are no universal, explicit rules that can solve all puzzles, it is hypothesized that learning to better solve TOL mainly involves implicit knowledge that cannot be articulated. Indeed, research shows that the level of explicit knowledge about TOL (and some of its possible explicit rules of thumb) does not significantly influence how participants learn and perform.[182]

Another famous example of cognitive skill learning is artificial grammar learning (AGL).[183] In AGL, participants first study exemplars of letter strings generated by an artificial grammar. Then they are asked to classify new letter strings as grammatical or nongrammatical. Research first finds that normal participants can learn to classify letter strings accurately without developing explicit knowledge about the underlying rules on which they base their classification. Then amnesic patients are found to perform as well as normal subjects in AGL, even though they perform more poorly on a recognition test of the exemplars that had been presented, which is consistent with their condition of

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[181] T. Shallice, "Specific Impairments of Planning," *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London. B, Biological Sciences* 298, no. 1089 (1982): 199–209; L.H. Phillips, "The Role of Memory in the Tower of London Task," *Memory* 7, no. 2 (March 1999): 209–31; M.H. Beauchamp et al., "Neural Substrates of Cognitive Skill Learning in Parkinson's Disease," *Brain and Cognition* 68, no. 2 (November 2008): 134–43; Marc Ettlinger, Elizabeth H. Margulis, and Patrick C. M. Wong, "Implicit Memory in Music and Language," *Frontiers in Psychology* 2 (2011): 1–10.

[182] Marie-Christine Ouellet et al., "Acquiring a Cognitive Skill with a New Repeating Version of the Tower of London Task.," *Canadian Journal of Experimental Psychology/Revue Canadienne de Psychologie Expérimentale* 58, no. 4 (2004): 272–88.

[183] Arthur S. Reber, "Implicit Learning of Artificial Grammars," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Verbal Behavior* 6, no. 6 (December 1967): 855–63; P.D. Skosnik et al., "Neural Correlates of Artificial Grammar Learning," *NeuroImage* 17, no. 3 (November 2002): 1306–14; Emmanuel M. Pothos, "Theories of Artificial Grammar Learning," *Psychological Bulletin* 133, no. 2 (March 2007): 227–44.

(explicit) memory loss.[184] Both results from the normal and the amnesic group suggest that we can learn to know more than we can tell. Besides artificial grammar, levels of natural linguistic structure can be learned without our awareness as well, such as syntax and word segmentation.[185]

Possibly related to artificial grammar learning, probabilistic classification learning (PCL), learning to classify stimuli based on statistical information, also strongly suggests that we can learn unconsciously.[186] In a typical task of PCL, the weather prediction task, participants are first told that they are going to see different kinds of cards that are associated with different weather conditions. Then, in each trial, they are presented with a card and are asked to "forecast" (that is, to guess) what the weather this card predicts. After each trial, they will be told if their prediction is correct. What the participants do not know is that the cards and the weather conditions are only probabilistically associated. For example, they can be told on 70% of trials that card A predicts rain and on the other 30% of trials that the same card predicts sunshine. Because of the probabilistic nature of this association, participants may find it difficult to formulate a consistent, explicit rule for their explicit memory and any attempts to do so can be counterproductive early in learning, because the "rules" they create (card A predicts rain) may soon contradict themselves (card A also predicts sunshine). Nevertheless, the participants still implicitly learn the probabilistic information, which is shown by the improvement of their prediction accuracy after many trials, even though

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[184] Barbara J. Knowlton, Seth J. Ramus, and Larry R. Squire, "Intact Artificial Grammar Learning in Amnesia: Dissociation of Classification Learning and Explicit Memory for Specific Instances," *Psychological Science* 3, no. 3 (May 1992): 172–79.

[185] Jenny R. Saffran, Richard N. Aslin, and Elissa L. Newport, "Statistical Learning by 8-Month-Old Infants," *Science* 274, no. 5294 (December 13, 1996): 1926–28; Victor S. Ferreira et al., "Memory for Syntax Despite Amnesia," *Psychological Science* 19, no. 9 (September 2008): 940–46; For a review see Ettlinger, Margulis, and Wong, "Implicit Memory in Music and Language."

[186] B. J. Knowlton, L. R. Squire, and M. A. Gluck, "Probabilistic Classification Learning in Amnesia," *Learning & Memory* 1, no. 2 (1994): 106–20; Barbara J. Knowlton, Jennifer A. Mangels, and Larry R. Squire, "A Neostriatal Habit Learning System in Humans," *Science* 273, no. 5280 (September 6, 1996): 1399–1402; Russell A. Poldrack et al., "Striatal Activation during Acquisition of a Cognitive Skill.," *Neuropsychology* 13, no. 4 (1999): 564–74; R. A. Poldrack et al., "Interactive Memory Systems in the Human Brain," *Nature* 414, no. 6863 (November 2001): 546–50.

they do not consciously know how they do it. Like AGL, amnesic patients can learn probabilistic classification normally.[187] As researchers make sure that the performance on this weather prediction task is not the result of storing the probabilistic associations in short-term memory (because even when they interrupt the testing by 5 mins, both control subjects and amnesic patients still demonstrate significant savings), the result can only suggest the existence of long-term implicit memory independent of explicit memory.

Referring again to linguistics, we are all familiar with the fact that while recalling and explicitly formulating the meaning of words are easy, we are often unaware of or unable to articulate many language rules, although they are undoubtedly stored in our memory and are applied all the time, which indicates the implicit nature of the recollecting process of implicit memory. When it comes to the learning process of implicit memory, we are also no stranger to cases where people can learn language by "immersion" without consciously memorizing rules or explicit instructions, especially when thinking about how readily children learn language, one of the reasons for which may be their better implicit memory than adults.[188] When introducing probabilistic classification learning after introducing artificial grammar learning, we have argued that these two phenomena can be related: Although a sentence is made up of variable units, they can only be varied to a degree for the sentence to remain meaningful. Grammar can thus be characterized by statistical relations among language units and some of our linguistic knowledge may be represented probabilistically, which makes implicit statistical learning important for language learning and processing.[189]

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[187] When the experiment is extended beyond 50 trials, however, normal subjects outperform the amnesic patients, suggesting that declarative memory plays a role in this task after all, probably because after 50 trials normal subjects finally also explicitly realize that the association is probabilistic and have roughly estimated the corresponding probability. See Knowlton, Squire, and Gluck, "Probabilistic Classification Learning in Amnesia."

[188] Ettlinger, Margulis, and Wong, "Implicit Memory in Music and Language," 3; Emma V. Ward, Christopher J. Berry, and David R. Shanks, "Age Effects on Explicit and Implicit Memory," *Frontiers in Psychology* 4 (2013): 1–11.

[189] Christopher M. Conway et al., "Implicit Statistical Learning in Language Processing: Word Predictability Is the Key," *Cognition* 114, no. 3 (March 2010): 356–71.

Many of the specific cognitive skills involved in the examples of implicit learning discussed above, such as mental planning (Tower of London task), pattern recognition (artificial grammar learning), and probability prediction (weather prediction task), are evidently also involved in literary studies. For example, what we can expect from a text, a genre, or an author is among the most discussed topics in literary studies, and our interpretation of a text often focuses on the unexpected and the abnormal. What if, in the reading process, as the participants in the weather prediction task, we have learned an association without consciously knowing it? What if the reason for a literary interpretation does not lie in our conscious retrospection and rationalization but in our unconscious memory? Of course, since it is unconscious and, by definition, resists conscious investigation, it is difficult, if not impossible, to study it directly. But we may be able to infer it indirectly, especially when we have a literary debate and the contending parties seem to run out of articulable arguments.

Moreover, research on implicit learning implies that we may also unconsciously learn certain sequences or patterns either during the local reading process of a specific text or the global reading process throughout our careers. Thanks to Freud there is no lack of discussion on such hidden patterns and their possible unconscious influences on authors and readers, but it is hoped that we have demonstrated (and will continue to) that this study employs a fundamentally different approach taken by contemporary cognitive science to tackle the unconscious from the psychoanalysts, even though they might make some similar general conclusions. Relatedly, since we can unconsciously learn grammar that we cannot express or are even unaware of, it is entirely possible that we can unconsciously learn certain literary reading strategies and abilities that we cannot express or are unaware of, especially when it involves multiple languages and multiple texts,[190] a standard practice of comparative literature. It is stating the obvious that comparing and synthesizing different texts, theories, authors, genres, and eras in

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[190] Jean-François Rouet, M. Anne Britt, and Anna Potocki, "Multiple-Text Comprehension," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Cognition and Education*, ed. John Dunlosky and Katherine A. Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 356–80.

different languages crucially depend on our long-term memory, but it is seldom mentioned in literary studies that a part of long-term memory cannot be consciously accessed, let alone verbally articulated. Although considerable research has linked implicit cognitive skill learning to reading comprehension,[191] it is the research on skillful performance that strongly emphasizes the implicit nature of expertise.[192] Perhaps due to its tendency to focus on the skillful performance in sports and music, this area of inquiry has received little attention from cognitive poetics. However, we have demonstrated that literary expertise is not an exception regarding implicit skill learning.

Before discussing the cognitive research on skillful performance, we should note that, especially when connecting hermeneutics and cognitive science, using cognitive approaches for literary studies does not automatically mean embracing reductionism, which argues that the complex phenomena involved in literary studies can always be explained at the biological level,[193] or intellectualism, which argues that know-how/implicit knowledge is a form of know-that/explicit knowledge.[194] Gadamer's fear that the introduction of the method of the natural sciences will undermine the human

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[191] Anne E. Cook and Edward J. O'Brien, "Fundamental Components of Reading Comprehension," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Cognition and Education*, ed. John Dunlosky and Katherine A. Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 237–65; Gigi Luk and Judith F. Kroll, "Bilingualism and Education: Bridging Cognitive Science Research to Language Learning," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Cognition and Education*, ed. John Dunlosky and Katherine A. Rawson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 292–319.

[192] See K. Anders Ericsson, ed., *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Jörgen Sandberg et al., eds., *Skillful Performance: Enacting Capabilities, Knowledge, Competence, and Expertise in Organizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

[193] For context, see Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2016), 31; Tony Jackson, "Issues and Problems in the Blending of Cognitive Science, Evolutionary Psychology, and Literary Study," *Poetics Today* 23, no. 1 (2002): 161–79; P. W. Anderson, "More Is Different," *Science* 177, no. 4047 (1972): 393–96.

[194] For context, see Carlotta Pavese, "Knowledge How," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, 2021, https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/knowledge-how; Marcus P. Adams, "Empirical Evidence and the Knowledge-That/Knowledge-How Distinction," *Synthese* 170, no. 1 (2009): 97–114; De Brigard, "Know-How, Intellectualism, and Memory Systems."

sciences is, at least when considering contemporary cognitive science, ill-founded. Most cognitive scientists who study skillful performance, for example, believe that the more masterful a skill is, the more automatic it is cognitively and the less conscious control we have over it. Consequently, very little can be known about it. As John Sutton aptly describes:

> For all the rage about embodied cognition, for all the resources poured into sport science, for all the wishful dreams of a future neuroaesthetics, we have no integrated theoretical grip on the nature and mechanisms of skilled movement. Neither disappointingly abstract philosophical work on embodiment nor scientific data gathered in artificial lab settings far from the complex ecologies of practice can match what we fleetingly glean about the experience of expert performance from the occasional unusually articulate practitioner.[195]

The main reason for such difficulty is the implicit nature of expertise, which is not only largely inarticulable but also consciously inaccessible and tends to be disturbed by direct inspection. As argued before, research on skilled performance, including literary expertise, may thus have to be indirect. While experts and masters do have their own rich ways to talk about their performance, outsiders, including cognitive scientists with all their theoretical and experimental apparatus, still find it challenging to grasp what they mean, or indeed to evaluate whether what they *think* they know is actually what they know in the first place (Our many examples have shown that these can be two very different things). Thus Sutton believes that creative writers and artists with their "subtler tools" might offer "different imaginative access" to this issue.[196] As previewed in 2.3.1 and 2.3.2, our analysis of Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* inspired by Martha Nussbaum's interpretation in the following chapter will try to demonstrate that literature is not only an imaginative alternative but a serious possibility for exploring the fuzzy nature of our concepts and for comprehending and describing the concrete, complex situation in full for a moral decision (and the corresponding expertise to make

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[195] John Sutton and Evelyn B. Tribble, "'The Creation of Space': Narrative Strategies, Group Agency and Skill in Lloyd Jones' *The Book of Fame*," in *Mindful Aesthetics: Literature and the Science of Mind*, ed. Chris Danta and Helen Groth (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 144.

[196] Sutton and Tribble, 144.

such decision), hence connecting practical wisdom to literary studies. This is an example of the two-way street of cognitive poetics that we have been arguing for, where not only cognitive science contributes to literary studies but vice versa too.

Some of the perceptual and cognitive skills we have discussed are based on explicit rules, ranging from the simple ones such as repeated patterns or probabilistic associations that can easily be formalized (although not necessarily consciously accessible) to the complicated ones such as grammar that can only be formalized with the help of experts. Some of them are not based on rules and they require improvisation according to the concrete situation, such as the skill for the Tower of London task, and are therefore not formalizable, to which practical wisdom and a part of the literary expertise belong. In other words, implicit skill learning can both refer to implicit learning of explicit knowledge (based on rules and formalizable) and to implicit learning of implicit knowledge (not based on rules and not formalizable). Either way, implicit skill learning reveals that we can unconsciously learn and use knowledge (explicit or implicit), which is not always realized in literary studies, and the main goal of this study is to initiate such realization because of its potentially profound consequences, especially when considering that when interpreting, we are technically not dealing with the text directly, but our *memory* of the text, which can be implicit. We have been using many “maybes” and “what ifs” in this chapter, as empirical research on practical wisdom in general and on its role in literary studies in particular are both only emerging, and we do not claim to have any conclusive answers but first to emphasize the importance of *realizing* that we know more than we can tell.

It must also be emphasized that, like the classification of human memory in general, the classification of priming and skill learning is not just nominal either. Different kinds of priming and skill learning depend on different brain regions, which is demonstrated by comparing patients with brain lesions with normal people and by neuroimaging. All the classification we have discussed so far is not made only for conceptual convenience but is based on real, distinct neural correlates. Therefore, we have argued that implicit memory offers possible strong empirical evidence for the features of practical wisdom because the reason why practical wisdom is considered inarticulable and only learnable

through experience might be that it is based on implicit memory. However, despite the promising possibility of connecting the two, there has been little discussion about it in the psychology of wisdom, possible reasons being that, as mentioned, the pursuit of the common good instead of these features of practical wisdom has been the main concern of wisdom scholars. Although experimental studies specifically on the relations between implicit memory and wisdom remain to be done and before that we are only speculating, this subsection has demonstrated their potential.

In II.1 "The humanist tradition" we have discussed how Gadamer agrees with Helmholtz's distinction between two kinds of induction: logical and artistic-instinctive. According to them, the first underlies the human sciences and the second the natural sciences. Gadamer further argues that this distinction itself is not logical but *psychological*, because:

> Both kinds of science make use of the inductive conclusion, but the human sciences arrive at their conclusions by an unconscious process. Hence the practice of induction in the human sciences is tied to particular psychological conditions. It requires a kind of tact and other intellectual capacities as well—e.g., a well-stocked memory and the acceptance of authorities—whereas the self-conscious inferences of the natural scientist depend entirely on the use of his own reason.[197]

Setting aside a possible objection that natural scientists may also depend on tact, a well-stocked memory, and the acceptance of authorities, it seems we have found evidence that Gadamer also notices the connection between memory and the practical wisdom that distinguishes *Geistes*- and *Naturwissenschaften*. However, he soon clarifies that by memory he means something other than the memory discussed in this subsection:

> The nature of memory is not rightly understood if it is regarded as merely a general talent or capacity. Keeping in mind, forgetting and recalling belong to the historical constitution of man and are themselves part of his history and his Bildung. Whoever uses his memory as a mere faculty—and any "technique" of memory is such a use—does not yet possess it as something that is absolutely his own. […] It is time to rescue the phenomenon of memory from being regarded merely as a

[197] TM 5; GW 1, 11.

psychological faculty and to see it as an essential element of the finite historical being of man.[198]

In other words, Gadamer actually does not regard the psychological memory as relevant to practical wisdom. His understanding of memory rather reminds us of the concept of collective and cultural memory.[199] Just as choosing the approach of cognitive poetics does not imply that the noncognitive approaches to literary studies are depreciated in any way, focusing on the psychological instead of the cultural understanding of memory in this study does not claim any superiority. The fact that the psychological understanding of memory, which Gadamer categorically sees as unfit for tact and practical wisdom, can actually effectively support them illustrates the value of interdisciplinary dialog that this study aims to initiate. The fact that, in his *Truth and Method*, Gadamer sees the urgent need to remind us of the significance of *Vorurteil* ("pre-judgment," practically meaning background knowledge) for our understanding also already suggests the existence of implicit learning, because if we are aware of all of our pre-judgments, we do not need to be reminded of it in the first place. Even now that Gadamer's take on *Vorurteil* and his hermeneutics have been so influential that for many people it is commonplace that we have unarticulated, sometimes inarticulable, background knowledge, a cognitive perspective still offers new insights.

Besides priming and skill learning, there are several other forms of implicit memory, ranging from simple conditioning (Pavlov's dog) to advanced task performance in dynamic system control,[200] where it has been demonstrated that while practice improves task performance but not the ability to answer explicit questions about the underlying principles, verbal instruction improves the ability to answer

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[198] TM 14; GW 1, 20.

[199] Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (München: Beck, 1992); Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33; Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume: Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: Beck, 1999).

[200] Dianne C. Berry and Donald E. Broadbent, "On the Relationship between Task Performance and Associated Verbalizable Knowledge," *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology Section A* 36, no. 2 (May 1984): 209–31.

explicit questions but not task performance. They all indicate that we can be sensitive to underlying rules or patterns without explicit knowledge of their existence. They also offer empirical support for the three theoretical features of practical wisdom, (1) depending on concrete situations, (2) inarticulable, and (3) only learnable through experience. The reason why we have been focusing on priming and skill learning is that their relevance to literary studies appears obvious. The link between implicit skill learning and literary studies has already been discussed; as for priming, it shows that our processing of a stimulus can be unconsciously influenced by an earlier encounter with the same or a related stimulus, which is entirely possible in literary interpretation, especially in the cases where we disagree with each other even though we agree on all the already articulated arguments, which implies that there are stones unturned. Specifically, conceptual priming, where the change of processing the stimulus is induced by a semantically related cue, can happen when we encounter an experience or a situation in a novel that is related to the ones in our own memory. Although we might not be consciously reminded of this personal experience, it can still influence our interpretation without our awareness. Semantic priming, where we process a stimulus differently without an inducing cue but simply because of an earlier encounter with a semantically related stimulus, also offers new insights into the importance of erudition and the possibility of providing the wrong explanation for our interpretation, as our interpretation can be the result of some automatically activated but not consciously considered ideas. The much-discussed concept of "defamiliarization," which, according to some, defines the "literariness" of literature as distinct to nonliterature, may also work partially by inhibiting priming. Moreover, priming is believed to contribute to understanding metaphor as well. Last but not least, we have been exclusively discussing the possible influence of implicit memory from the perspective of readers. What about its influence on authors, especially when considering the long-standing debate on the so-called "intentional fallacy"? We will continue our discussion of these questions with more literary examples in the next chapter.

IV. How are practical wisdom and literature related?

An appropriate way of thinking about cognitive poetics should be problem-specific: avoiding generalizations about whether science is an authority or a social construct and concentrating on laying out arguments from both literary studies and cognitive science for the same specific problem to see which ones are more plausible. Andrew Elfenbein insightfully observes that while literary scholars often assume that psychologists all support biological reductionism, believing that every cognitive process, literary reading included, can be and should be explained at the biological level in terms of genes and neurons, psychologists generally avoid such claims. They do not prove their hypothesis through general reductionism but through convergent evidence: If the same experiment results can be reproduced using different methodologies and randomly selected samples from many different populations, then such findings are less influenced by social and cultural forces than literary scholars might like to believe.[201] In the same spirit, Shaun Gallagher argues that although hermeneutics is often contrasted with cognitive science, they actually correspond on several points (such as that our knowledge does not consist of disconnected pieces of information but is organized into patterns and these patterns are inherently ambiguous) and they can complement each other. Specifically, Gallagher suggests that, via practical wisdom, hermeneutics provides a suitable model for understanding what Gadamer calls "hermeneutical situations" that are ill-defined, ambiguous, and not open to rule-following solutions.[202]

Gallagher's suggestion is worth examining. As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the major findings of cognitive science is that most of our mental processes are unconscious.[203] In a conversation, for example, cognitive scientists have demonstrated that to understand even the simplest utterance, automatic processes such as retrieving memory, recognizing words, making semantic sense of the sentences, framing the

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[201] Andrew Elfenbein, *The Gist of Reading* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018), 4.

[202] Shaun Gallagher, "Hermeneutics and the Cognitive Sciences," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 11, no. 10–11 (2004): 162–64, 168.

[203] J. Kihlstrom, "The Cognitive Unconscious," *Science* 237, no. 4821 (1987): 1445–52.

relevant situation, drawing inferences, and constructing mental images are all prerequisites. III.2.3.3 "Wisdom and decision making" has discussed how it is not just that we do not always detect these processes; they cannot be detected or controlled even if we want to. Below the level of consciousness are not only most of these cognitive operations but also our implicit memory storing information that we do not know that we know, which has been explored in III.2.4 "Practical wisdom and implicit memory." Together they constitute the cognitive unconscious that makes conscious thought possible.[204]

Literary interpretation is of course not an exception and also depends largely on the cognitive unconscious. As a result, it cannot be fully investigated solely by self-reflection, which is mainly what literary scholars have been doing, but calls for external empirical study, an important reason why cognitive poetics is meaningful. However, it is widely recognized that very little is known about what exactly happens in the brain when we interpret literary texts,[205] and most of the few existing empirical studies on literary interpretation employ a "think-aloud" method, asking participants to say

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[204] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 5–13.

[205] Edward J. O'Brien, Anne E. Cook, and Robert F. Lorch, "Preface," in *Inferences during Reading*, ed. Edward J. O'Brien, Anne E. Cook, and Robert F. Lorch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), xvi; Susan R. Goldman, Kathryn S. McCarthy, and Candice Burkett, "Interpretive Inferences in Literature," in *Inferences during Reading*, ed. Edward J. O'Brien, Anne E. Cook, and Robert F. Lorch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 386; Kathryn S. McCarthy, "Reading beyond the Lines: A Critical Review of Cognitive Approaches to Literary Interpretation and Comprehension," *Scientific Study of Literature* 5, no. 1 (2015): 99; Arthur M. Jacobs, "Towards a Neurocognitive Poetics Model of Literary Reading," in *Cognitive Neuroscience of Natural Language Use*, ed. Roel M. Willems (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 135; Arthur M. Jacobs, "Neurocognitive Poetics: Methods and Models for Investigating the Neuronal and Cognitive-Affective Bases of Literature Reception," *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 9 (April 16, 2015): 1.

everything that they are thinking out loud for researchers to record.[206] Such a method obviously cannot explore the inarticulable unconscious. Nevertheless, the unconscious part of literary interpretation is by no means unresearchable and there is circumstantial evidence pointing to the role of practical wisdom.

Why do we interpret a same text differently? A straightforward explanation is that people have different memories. This sounds like stating the obvious, but if we consider our implicit memory, this banal fact is noteworthy. First, notice that the direct object of literary interpretation is technically not the text, but the reader's mental representation of the text, which is not always realized by literary scholars.[207] Such representation is usually a reconstruction because the reader typically cannot memorize the whole text verbatim for interpretation and because to interpret a text means to look for deeper, nonliteral meaning by constructing inferences that go beyond the text itself, inevitably retrieving the reader's memory of things other than the text (personal experience, relevant background knowledge, etc.).[208] Second, acknowledging that memory is crucial for literary interpretation practically means acknowledging that we know more than we can tell in literary interpretation, because memory can be implicit.

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[206] McCarthy, "Reading beyond the Lines"; Candice Burkett and Susan R. Goldman, "'Getting the Point' of Literature: Relations Between Processing and Interpretation," *Discourse Processes* 53, no. 5–6 (2016): 457–87; Laura Wilder and Joanna Wolfe, "Sharing the Tacit Rhetorical Knowledge of the Literary Scholar: The Effects of Making Disciplinary Conventions Explicit in Undergraduate Writing about Literature Courses," *Research in the Teaching of English* 44, no. 2 (2009): 170–209; James E. Warren, "Literary Scholars Processing Poetry and Constructing Arguments," *Written Communication* 23, no. 2 (2006): 202–26; David S. Miall, "Neuroaesthetics of Literary Reading," in *Neuroaesthetics*, ed. Martin Skov and Oshin Vartanian (London: Routledge, 2009), 233–47.

[207] Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon, "Memory and Mental States in the Appreciation of Literature," in *Investigations into the Phenomenology and the Ontology of the Work of Art*, ed. Peer F. Bundgaard and Frederik Stjernfelt (Cham: Springer, 2015), 32, 46; Nicolae Babuts, *Memory, Metaphors, and Meaning: Reading Literary Texts* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1–78; Andrew Elfenbein, "Cognitive Science and the History of Reading," *PMLA* 121, no. 2 (2006): 487.

[208] McCarthy, "Reading beyond the Lines," 100; Kathryn S. McCarthy and Susan R. Goldman, "Constructing Interpretive Inferences about Literary Text: The Role of Domain-Specific Knowledge," *Learning and Instruction* 60 (2019): 245.

Although different theories of text processing and literary reading disagree with respect to the percentage of the conscious and the unconscious process involved,[209] the tacit premise shared by many literary scholars that we can tell all that we know in literary interpretation is unanimously challenged by cognitive scientists. By far the most comprehensive neurocognitive poetics model proposed by Arthur Jacobs, for example, hypothesizes a fast, automatic route of literary reading that facilitates immersive processes (transportation, absorption) through effortless word recognition, sentence comprehension, activation of familiar situation models, and the experiencing of non-aesthetic emotions, such as sympathy or suspense.[210] Taking Gadamer's argument that practical wisdom is crucial for literary interpretation into account seems therefore unavoidable for literary study, especially in cases, which should not be unfamiliar to literary scholars, where even if someone presents all the reasons why he interprets a text in specific ways and we agree with all of these, we still do not necessarily reach the same conclusion, indirectly showing that something implicit might be missing. In this chapter, we first examine Martha Nussbaum's proposal of the association between practical wisdom and literature, then discuss what the previous chapter has talked about can bring to Nussbaum's argument.

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In II.2 "The three features of practical wisdom" and III.2.3.3 "Wisdom and decision making" we have mentioned two reasons why practical wisdom and literature can be related. The first reason, elaborated in II.2, comes from Gadamer: Although according to Aristotle, practical wisdom is the moral ability to "be able to deliberate well about what is good and expedient,"[211] which is at first sight not directly related to

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[209] Richard J. Gerrig, "Conscious and Unconscious Processes in Readers' Narrative Experiences," in *Current Trends in Narratology*, ed. Greta Olson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011), 37–60; Michael Burke, *Literary Reading, Cognition and Emotion: An Exploration of the Oceanic Mind* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 3–12; Gail McKoon and Roger Ratcliff, "Inference during Reading.," *Psychological Review* 99, no. 3 (1992): 440–66; Arthur C. Graesser, Murray Singer, and Tom Trabasso, "Constructing Inferences during Narrative Text Comprehension.," *Psychological Review* 101, no. 3 (1994): 371–95.

[210] Jacobs, "Towards a Neurocognitive Poetics Model of Literary Reading," 142.

[211] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a26.

literature, Gadamer suggests that because determining what is morally good in a concrete life situation and understanding what a text means for the concrete situation of a reader both involves applying universals to particulars, practical wisdom is related to literature.[212] Most importantly, Gadamer emphasizes the common flexibility of such application both in ethics and in literature and how it resists naive generalization: "Understanding, like action, always remains a risk and never leaves room for simple application of a general knowledge of rules to the statements of the texts to be understood."[213] Associating practical wisdom with literature also agrees with Gadamer's influential view that understanding is always historically situated and contextual, because focusing on the *Vorurteil* (pre-judgment) and the *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons) of the reader inevitably makes the role of an ability to apply universals (what the reader knows beforehand) to particulars (this particular text) essential for literary studies.[214] It is this sensitivity to particulars and the concrete situations (the first feature of practical wisdom) that makes practical wisdom not reducible to universal rules (the second feature) and only learnable through experience (the third feature).

The second reason why practical wisdom and literature are related, which is only briefly mentioned in III.2.3.3 and will be elaborated at length here, comes from Nussbaum. In her seminal *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum argues that literature is indispensable for ethics because "certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist."[215] The logic of her argument goes like this: For ethics, (1) not only the content but the

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[212] TM 322; GW 1, 317.

[213] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 109.

[214] TM 324, 333; GW 1, 319, 329; see also Georgia Warnke, *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition, and Reason* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1987), 94; Jussi Backman, "Hermeneutics and the Ancient Philosophical Legacy: Hermēneia and Phronēsis," in *The Blackwell Companion to Hermeneutics*, ed. Niall Keane and Chris Lawn (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2016), 29; Richard J. Bernstein, "From Hermeneutics to Praxis," *The Review of Metaphysics* 35, no. 4 (1982): 828.

[215] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 5.

form of discussion matters; (2) the concrete situation matters; (3) therefore, literature, a form that can richly illustrate the concrete situation, matters.

1. The form matters

Nussbaum regards the relationship between form and content in the exploration of ethics as a fundamental issue about the connections between philosophy and literature. She argues that, both in philosophy and literature, our life is never simply presented as it is by a text, but always *represented as* something. This representation must be inspected not only regarding the content that can be paraphrased and summarized differently, but also regarding the form, namely *how* the content can be represented differently, which itself subtly expresses values choices that may influence the reader differently. When a story is told or an argument is offered, "the selection of genre, formal structures, sentences, vocabulary," and how the reader is addressed all already convey a sense of what deserves our attention and what does not. As a result, the form matters.[216]

For example, if we agree with Henry James's (also Aristotle's and Gadamer's) belief that good moral deliberation demands a very complicated, nuanced perception of the concrete situation at hand, we could express this belief either (a) abstractly, in a form that does not *actually* describe the situation in detail, as we just did, or (b) concretely, in a form that can vividly and comprehensively capture the situation, namely a literary one, as James does through his novels. Nussbaum argues that, in the case of (a), while the content makes a claim, its form seems to make another.[217] It is at best insufficient and at worst self-contradictory to assert that the concrete situation is important in a non-concrete form: If the concrete situation is indeed important, why not use all resources available (and that includes the appropriate form) to represent it as detailed as possible? In the following sections, our analysis of several passages from James's *The Golden Bowl*, which Nussbaum also frequently refers to, will show that

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[216] Nussbaum, ix, 3–7.

[217] Nussbaum, 7.

many situations (fictional but possible) are so nuanced that they truly require the complexity and the ambiguity of literature to be faithfully depicted. What is at issue here is therefore really the form and not the length, as some may object that the abstract form, given enough length, can also qualify for the task. As a result, only (b) is suitable to express such belief without potential contradiction.

Nussbaum also observes that the discussions on the connections between literature and ethics sometimes effectively limit literature simply to examples that offer moral lessons and overlook its formal subtleties. The truly exemplary ethical criticism, by contrast, has been emphasizing these subtleties shown in literature and using them to challenge reductive theories.[218] Nussbaum uses the following passage of philosophical prose from an article called "A Conceptual Investigation of Love" to show what she means by "reductive theories":

> Having defined the field of investigation, we can now sketch the concepts analytically presupposed in our use of "love". An idea of these concepts can be gained by sketching a sequence of relations, the members of which we take as relevant in deciding whether or not some relationship between persons A and B is one of love. These are not relevant in the sense of being evidence for some further relation "love" but as being, in part at least the material of which love consists. The sequence would include at least the following:
>
> (1) A knows B (or at least knows something of B)
>
> (2) A cares (is concerned) about B
>
> A likes B
>
> (3) A respects B
>
> A is attracted to B
>
> A feels affection for B
>
> (4) A is committed to B
>
> A wishes to see B's welfare promoted

[218] Nussbaum, 21–22.

> The connection between these relations which we will call “love-comprising relations” or “LCRs” is not, except for “knowing about” and possibly “Feels affection for” as tight as strict entailment.[219]

This might be an extreme example, but it gives us an impression of what Nussbaum is arguing against. What exactly has gone lost about love in this kind of abstraction and formalization? Is it too strong to claim that the literary form is *indispensable* for certain ethical discussions? In the following sections, we will further explore these questions.

2. The concrete situation matters

In II.1 “The humanist tradition,” we have talked about the long philosophical tradition that associates moral judgment not with reason but with perception. Not with reason because knowledge from general principles and the capacity to logically deduce from these principles do not suffice for moral judgment, as what is morally good depends on the contingent situation. With perception because moral judgment and perceptual senses are similarly immediate and determinate. For example, we see things and smell things directly, without much thinking, and we seldom doubt the results, just as people with practical wisdom can feel for the current situation and often immediately “see” the accordingly appropriate decisions as evident and certain. Different than perceptual senses, however, practical wisdom does not come naturally and must be cultivated, *gebildet*. It is thus regarded as a special kind of sense and compared to the “sense” as in “common sense,” because they both have to be cultivated, and importantly, not by mechanically memorizing rules but by experiencing them firsthand. We have also mentioned how conceptual-historically, before Kant, taste is not so much aesthetic as moral, as a sense of what is morally fitting. In this way, practical wisdom and its three features, (1) depending on particulars, (2) inarticulable, and (3) only learnable through experience, connect Gadamer’s four guiding concepts of humanism: Bildung, sensus communis, judgment, and taste.

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[219] W. Newton-Smith, “A Conceptual Investigation of Love,” in *Philosophy and Personal Relations*, ed. Alan Montefiore (London: Routledge, 1973), 118–19, quoted in Nussbaum, 20n33.

Relatedly, III.2.3.3 "Wisdom and decision making" has discussed the long-overlooked importance of the fast, unconscious, and effortless System 1 (as opposed to the slow, conscious, and effortful System 2) in our decision making and a common example of System 1 is perception. In the Müller-Lyer illusion, for example, we cannot be aware of (let alone control) the process of perceiving that the line segment with two arrow tails is longer than the one with two arrow heads, even if objective measurement tells us they are equally long. Thus, what philosophers see in perception that is worthy of being associated with moral judgment, its immediacy and determinacy, may well have an empirical basis.

Similarly, both Aristotle and Henry James believe that moral judgment is like perception because the concrete situation about which the judgment is made must always be fully perceived. To lead a good life, Aristotle famously argues that we should strive for an ideal intermediate state between the excess and the deficiency. What counts as intermediate, however, cannot simply be judged by *logos*:

> But this [to hit the intermediate] is no doubt difficult, and especially in individual cases; for it is not easy to determine both how and with whom and on what provocation and how long one should be angry; for we too sometimes praise those who fall short and call them good-tempered, but sometimes we praise those who get angry and call them manly. The man, however, who deviates little from goodness is not blamed, whether he do [sic] so in the direction of the more or of the less, but only the man who deviates more widely; for he does not fail to be noticed. But up to what point and to what extent a man must deviate before he becomes blameworthy it is not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception.[220]

Here, through the tricky question of "When is it good to be angry (and how much angry)?" Aristotle makes an important point of his moral epistemology, namely that good behaviors are determined not easily by reasoning but by particular situations discerned by perception.[221] This view that accepts the seemingly unreliable perception

[220] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109b11–23, see also 1126b2–4.

[221] Aristotle, 217n; Taylor, "Aristotle's Epistemology."

as a source of (practical) knowledge is clearly incompatible with the moral generalist view that knowledge must be based on universal, invariable rules.

Indeed, as mentioned in II.2 "The three features of practical wisdom," Aristotle further remarks: "That practical wisdom is not scientific knowledge is evident; for it is [...] concerned with the ultimate particular fact, [...] which is the object not of scientific knowledge but of perception—not the perception of qualities peculiar to one sense but a perception akin to that by which we perceive that the particular figure before us is a triangle.[222] By comparing practical wisdom to the perception that a given figure is a triangle and not the perception of an individual (perceptual) sense, Aristotle emphasizes the importance of taking a panoramic overview of the situation and perceiving it as a whole for sound moral judgment, an argument shared by James, as we will see below. In the following, we will also show that, with the help of some complex literary examples from James, while it is ideal and convenient to have universal moral rules that can be easily applied to all situations, there are situations that require idiosyncratic, nuanced moral deliberation, and, consequently, perception of the morally significant features of the situations matters. The Aristotelian "scientific knowledge" that is contrasted with practical wisdom here has several dimensions, one of which is the (epistemological) priority of universals to particulars. Like Gadamer, Nussbaum does not regard such contrast as an admission of a defect; quite the opposite, she sees it as a merit because "it is in the very nature of truly rational practical choice that it cannot be made more 'scientific' without becoming worse," suggesting a quasi-essentialism of practical decision making that resists the scientific method.[223] However, throughout this study, we have been arguing for a less simplistic, less dualistic view regarding the differences between literary studies (or ethics or the humanities in general) and natural sciences. We will continue to show that certain findings from cognitive scientists can support certain claims from philosophers and literary scholars (such as our central argument "We know more than we can tell in literary studies") and vice versa (such as

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[222] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1142a23-31.

[223] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 54–55.

Nussbaum's argument that the literary form can contribute to understanding morality, a subject scientists have been struggling to cope with).

In the following, we do not attempt to expand on the Aristotelian teleology that argues perception can be regarded as a reliable source of knowledge (hence meaningfully compared to moral judgment) because human beings are *naturally* fitted to discover the truth and our senses are *naturally* adapted to perceive their proper objects in the sense that these are the purposes they exist to serve. Nor is it within our scope to further examine Aristotle's argument in the broader philosophical context of moral generalism and moral particularism.[224] What we are going to discuss are only the most relevant arguments from Aristotle that have directly influenced Gadamer and Nussbaum and prompted them to argue that "The concrete situation matters for moral judgment" for later discussion in IV.4, where a cognitive perspective will offer us new insights.

Two closely interconnected reasons that can be powerfully illustrated by the literary form support the concrete-situation-matters argument. The first reason is that the concrete situation involved in a moral judgment can be so nuanced that general rules alone are not enough for an automatic, self-evident decision, because even when people accept the same moral rules (which is not always the case), they can still disagree about the relevance, the ordering, the weighting, or the formulation of these rules, especially when rules conflict. People also disagree about what the facts of a situation are, how the facts should be interpreted, how the rules should be applied, what we can infer from these rules, etc., which all require practical wisdom.

The second reason for the importance of particulars is that there can always be unexpected new situations. If we believe that the fixed rules that we have established now can cover not only all the situations happened so far, but also the ones in the future, we might be overconfident. For this point, Aristotle compares "matters concerned with

[224] See Jonathan Dancy, "Moral Particularism," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2017, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/moral-particularism; Uri D. Leibowitz, "Particularism in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 10, no. 2 (2013): 121–47; Marc Gasser-Wingate, *Aristotle's Empiricism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

conduct and questions of what is good for us" to "matters of health" in that neither has fixity. As doctors should neither expect that what they have memorized from the textbooks is all they need for actual practice nor believe that what is good for this person's health must be indiscriminately applied to another, a wise person should consider what is morally appropriate case by case. Aristotle also compares moral judgment to the art of navigation, suggesting that both expertise do not only rely on rules developed from previous experience but also on an ability to improvise according to the uncharted.[225]

Nussbaum reminds us that emphasizing particulars and the concrete situation does not mean that Aristotelians do not care about universals or the universalizability of moral judgments. After all, unexpected new cases cannot be so brand new that old experience cannot help at all. In addition, we may encounter the same situations that we have seen before again. For those cases, the same judgments would again be good; only the resulting highly qualified universals are not likely to be as useful as the moral generalists would like to believe.[226] Despite its limited, less than ideal scope of application, recognizing that the "concrete situation matters" argument still allows universalizability is crucial for our following discussion on the ethical importance of literature. In 3.4 "A clarification," we will return to this point after discussing the literary examples.

3. Literature matters

After establishing that the form of discussion and the concrete situation at hand both matter for ethical inquiry, Nussbaum concludes that literature as the appropriate form to fully represent the situation must matter. Related to this, Aristotle announces already at the beginning of the *Nicomachean Ethics* that, because the concrete situation matters for ethics, ethicists should neither expect too much exactness nor demand exceptionless generalizations in their subject in the first place:

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[225] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a1-9; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 38.

[226] Dancy, "Moral Particularism"; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 38, 95.

> Our discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of, for precision is not to be sought for alike in all discussions. […] Now noble and just actions, which political science investigates, exhibit much variety and fluctuation, so that they may be thought to exist only by convention, and not by nature. […] We must be content, then, in speaking of such subjects and with such premisses to indicate the truth roughly and in outline, and in speaking about things which are only for the most part true, and with premisses of the same kind, to reach conclusions that are no better.[227]

Consequently, Nussbaum believes that, by admitting that philosophical discussion provides at most an "outline" of what noble and just actions are, Aristotle is suggesting that this outline must be complemented with life experience and, perhaps even better, with literature.[228] Indeed, Aristotle famously asserts that "a young man is not a proper hearer of lectures on political science; for he is inexperienced in the actions that occur in life, but its discussions start from these and are about these,"[229] with which Shakespeare seems to agree ("young men, whom Aristotle thought / Unfit to hear moral philosophy"[230]).

Nussbaum further argues that, considering the commitment of practical wisdom to particulars and context-sensitive perception, certain novels with thick enough descriptions and realistic enough settings, such as Henry James's novels, are suitable to properly express the Aristotelian way of choosing and why it is good.[231] In the preface of *The Princess Casamassima*, James observes that:

> The figures in any picture, the agents in any drama, are interesting only in proportion as they feel their respective situations; since the consciousness, on their part, of the complication exhibited forms for us their link of connexion with it. But there are degrees of feeling—the muffled, the faint, the just sufficient, the barely intelligent, as we may say; and the acute, the intense, the complete, in a word—the power to be *finely aware and richly responsible*. It is those moved in this latter fashion who "get most" out of all that happens to them and who in so doing enable

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[227] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094b13-17, b19-24.

[228] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 36–39, 141.

[229] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1095a1-4. See also 1142a12, where Aristotle states that young men can become mathematicians but not men of practical wisdom for lack of experience.

[230] William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, 2019, 2.2.166, https://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/doc/Tro_M/scene/2.2/index.html.

[231] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 85, 152.

> us, as readers of their record, as participators by a fond attention, also to get most. Their being finely aware—as Hamlet and Lear, say, are finely aware—makes absolutely the intensity of their adventure, gives the maximum of sense to what befalls them. We care, our curiosity and our sympathy care, comparatively little for what happens to the stupid, the coarse and the blind; care for it, and for the effects of it, at the most as helping to precipitate what happens to the more deeply wondering, to the really sentient. Hamlet and Lear are surrounded, amid their complications, by the stupid and the blind, who minister in all sorts of ways to their recorded fate.[232]

Here James, in agreement with Aristotle and as summarized by Nussbaum, regards moral judgment not simply as judgment based on general rules but as perception of particulars, emphasizing the moral significance of taking in all the details and nuances of the relevant situation. Importantly, such perception involves putting oneself in someone else's position with imagination and emotion. Literature can both train us to do so and serve as a form to provide a satisfactory description of the situation itself. Therefore, the main reason why Nussbaum believes James's novels are good examples for understanding practical wisdom is not that they happen to be so, but that the author is acutely conscious of what he is doing: To make his characters as interesting as Hamlet and Lear, James intentionally tries to make them as finely aware of their situations and as morally richly responsible.

It is important to stress that Nussbaum's argument for the ethical importance of literature not only says that literature provides illuminating examples or literature creates possible worlds for ethics, but also that, for ethical discussion, *what* is said and *how* it is said are inseparable because certain morally significant aspects are so nuanced and context-specific that they cannot be adequately captured in a plain summary or paraphrase. Only literature, according to Nussbaum, especially novels that constantly strive to describe particular situations as comprehensive as possible, can deliver enough details necessary for responsible moral judgment, which needs these details to determine what rules are relevant, how exactly they should be applied, or even to revise

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[232] Henry James, "Preface," in *The Princess Casamassima* (New York: Scribner's, 1908), I.vii-viii. Emphasis added, which is also the title of one of Nussbaum's chapters.

the existing rules according to the current case.[233] We have mentioned that emphasizing particulars does not deny the significance of universals for moral judgment. The relationship between particulars and universals is not either/or but that, to misquote Kant, universals without particulars are empty, while particulars without universals are blind. However, as Nussbaum points out, although in some cases the concrete situation at hand can be outlined by general terms without sacrificing its idiosyncrasies, in other cases general terms cannot even outline the concrete situation in a morally significant way. In what follows we will see how rules like "Do not lie" or "Be considerate towards others" and general terms like love, friendship, father, or daughter do not suffice for good moral judgment. Literature matters because its dedication to details matters and, more exclusively, because its tolerance of ambiguity matters.

3.1 What should Adam do?

Published in 1904, *The Golden Bowl* is James's last major work, featuring its irreducible style and sharp attention to detail of the complicated interrelationships between its four main characters. The novel begins as Maggie Verver, daughter of a wealthy American widower Adam Verver settling in London, marries an impoverished Italian prince, Amerigo, without knowing that he and her best friend, Charlotte Stant, had been lovers (They could not afford marriage because of their mutual poverty). Before Maggie's wedding, Amerigo and Charlotte go to an antique shop for a wedding gift. They find an interesting, gilded crystal bowl but choose not to buy it because Amerigo believes that the bowl has a crack.

Maggie and Adam had always had a special bond. However, after Maggie has married, she finds that she and her father are not as close as before. Fearing that Adam could feel isolated and lonely, Maggie convinces him to marry Charlotte. Adam agrees. Afterward, the father and the daughter continue to spend most of their time together, even at the cost of leaving their respective spouses out in the cold. As Charlotte and Amerigo are left attending social events together, they restart their old relationship.

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[233] For our critical discussion on this view, see IV.4.1 "Conceptual organization revisited."

Although Maggie suspects they may have an affair, she has no solid proof. It is only when she happens to buy the same golden bowl that once attracts Charlotte and Amerigo that Maggie learns from the shopkeeper that her husband and her best friend seemed in love when they spoke to each other in the shop. She confronts Amerigo but he seems unmoved. Then, by tactfully convincing her father to return to America with Charlotte, Maggie successfully drives Amerigo and Charlotte apart without telling Adam or Charlotte what she knows. Impressed by Maggie's tact, Amerigo, who had only thought of Maggie as a naive girl, has new feelings for her. At the end of the novel, Amerigo professes his love to Maggie by saying that he can see nothing but her, and the two embrace.

As many critics point out, the plot of *The Golden Bowl*, compared to the other pieces commonly included in the discussion on literature and ethics, is rather straightforward and undramatic. In David Brudney's words: "Almost nothing happens. In the course of more than five hundred pages there are two marriages, one affair, and a single act of violence, the smashing of the golden bowl. The rest is reflection, nuance, detail."[234] However, it is exactly these reflection, nuance, and detail that make it relevant for our discussion. Let us first see how Maggie tries to convince her father to get married:

> "Should you really," he now asked, "like me to marry?" He spoke as if, coming from his daughter herself, it *might* be an idea; which for that matter he would be ready to carry right straight out should she definitely say so.
>
> Definite, however, just yet, she was not prepared to be, though it seemed to come to her with force, as she thought, that there was a truth in the connexion to utter. "What I feel is that there's somehow something that used to be right and that I've made wrong. It used to be right that you hadn't married and that you didn't seem to want to. It used also"—she continued to make out—"to seem easy for the question not to come up. That's what I've made different. It does come up. It *will* come up."
>
> "You don't think I can keep it down?" Mr. Verver's tone was cheerfully pensive.

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[234] Daniel Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence: *The Golden Bowl* and Moral Philosophy," *Critical Inquiry* 16, no. 2 (January 1990): 397.

> “Well, I’ve given you by *my* move all the trouble of having to.”
>
> He liked the tenderness of her idea, and it made him, as she sat near him, pass his arm about her. “I guess I don’t feel as if you had ‘moved’ very far. You’ve only moved next door.”
>
> “Well,” she continued, “I don’t feel as if it were fair for me just to have given you a push and left you so. If I’ve made the difference for you I must think of the difference.”
>
> “Then what, darling,” he indulgently asked, “do *you* think?”
>
> “That’s just what I don’t yet know. But I must find out. We must think together—as we’ve always thought. What I mean,” she went on after a moment, “is that it strikes me I ought to at least offer you some alternative. I ought to have worked one out for you.”
>
> “An alternative to what?”
>
> “Well, to your simply missing what you’ve lost—without anything being done about it.”
>
> “But *what* have I lost?”[235]

Although this is only the beginning of a lengthy, awkward conversation, there are already many subtle nuances worth exploring. It begins with Adam kindly helping Maggie to say the things she had difficulty saying, namely suggesting that he should get married. Although surprised by her father’s straightforwardness, Maggie still manages to take up the thread. This has set the tone for who is the calm and active party and who is the nervous and passive party in this unpleasant encounter. Adam seems passive but is actually in control, while Maggie, who is supposed to be proactive, appears less confident when she struggles to hide her manipulative intention. By emphasizing that something wrong *will* come up, Maggie implies that Adam cannot handle the situation of being single in the long run, which is again straightforwardly brought out into the open by Adam. By being “cheerfully pensive,” Adam is considering something we do not know for sure. Is he a bit humiliated by the lack of confidence of his daughter for him (but pretends to be cheerful)? Or does he understand that Maggie

[235] Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (New York: Scribner’s, 1909), I.171–72 (hereafter GB).

only suggests this for his own benefit, at least in her mind? Maggie evades his question and points out that she feels guilty of having to move out after her own marriage. While this may not be a big deal for other fathers and daughters, it is for Maggie and Adam because they have always been particularly close for several reasons: (1) Maggie is the only child and Adam is a widower; (2) They both share a passionate interest in art; (3) Maggie has been protecting Adam from harm, such as shielding Adam from fortune-hunting women like Mrs. Rance. However, Adam's reply seems indifferent ("I guess I don't feel as if you had 'moved' very far."), although the narrator indicates otherwise by stating that he appreciates Maggie's good intention. Maggie again evades Adam's reply and insists to be considerate towards him, to do good to him on his behalf, as if Adam does not know what is good for himself. Although Adam has seen through her already at the beginning of this conversation and has taken the initiative to let her speak her mind directly, Maggie here again pretends as if she does not know exactly what she is suggesting (In fact, she is more than clear. She has even already chosen the candidate of her stepmother, as we shall see soon). By repeatedly asking what Maggie means, Adam not only shows a loving father's excessive indulgence, but also almost practically makes fun of her. After all, how insensitive (or, indeed, stupid) does Maggie think Adam is so that he needs others to tell him what he has lost by being single?

So far, we have offered a summary/paraphrase of the cited passage with some additional background information. What would readers of this summary miss that can be significant for a responsible moral judgment of, say, Maggie's action? They can of course get that here each party in this conversation treats the other as a child. Maggie, in particular, is trying to restrict his father's freedom in the name of his best interest. What they would not get are, for example, *how exactly* reluctant Adam is when considering Maggie's suggestion, *how exactly* anxious but firm Maggie is when persuading Adam, etc. This is not to say that readers would all unanimously agree on the exact degrees of "how," because ambiguity prevails ("Is Adam as cheerful and tolerant as the narrator depicts?"), but it does suggest that readers would get *more* (if not the whole picture) when reading the original full text. We have mentioned the two reasons that support the "concrete situation matters" argument. First, the concrete

situation matters for a moral judgment because the relevance, formulation, ordering, and weight of the rules applicable need to be determined case by case. The moral rules (or recommendations) that may be relevant in this case are, for example, "Respect others," "Do not manipulate others," "Be honest," "Be filial/grateful to parents," "Take good care of children," "Be considerate towards others," only to name a few. Some of them potentially contradict each other: How should Maggie at the same time respect Adam's freedom of choice, avoid manipulating him, and be considerate by helping him realize that being single is indeed bad for him, which is far from obvious (He himself certainly does not feel that way)? How should Adam, being a responsible father, make Maggie worry less without lying, when repeatedly telling the truth is only regarded by her as him pretending to be fine?

Second and relatedly, the concrete situation matters for a moral judgment because fixed old rules cannot always cover new cases. Take "Be filial/grateful to parents" and "Take good care of children" for example, moral rules like these that include general terms such as "parents" or "children" often proves inadequate to be useful because they have different moral significance for different people in different situations. On the one hand, a simple "closed parent-child relationship" cannot fully describe the morally salient features of the situation between Adam and Maggie, as we will see. On the other hand, as Nussbaum points out, neither does Adam, a "so remarkably distinct figure,"[236] mean to Maggie only as an abstract "parent"[237] nor can Maggie, who has been "more than a daughter,"[238] be dogmatically fitted into any moral rules that dictate what should or should not be done to a child by a parent. Those who only read our summary/paraphrase, for example, would miss the delicacy of how almost hypocritically eager yet sincere Maggie is to do the best for her father, which is essential for Adam to decide how to react and for us to judge if her actions are moral, let alone the other details in the rest of *The Golden Bowl*, if they only read a synopsis of the novel.

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[236] GB, II.330.

[237] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 90–91.

[238] GB, I.134.

It is unlikely that the previously established rules can be comprehensive enough to cover such a nuanced situation; even if they can, it requires extra effort to prove it (because it is not self-evident), for which the concrete situation and an appropriate form to describe the situation still matter.

Note that stressing the concrete situation and practical wisdom does not mean that rules are not important, but only that they are not enough. Even moral generalists such as Kantians or utilitarians, who believe that the concrete situation does not matter and there are universal rules applicable to every situation, would find it difficult to deny that the *application* of rules still requires practical wisdom. Classical utilitarians such as Bentham and Mill, for example, believe that there is only one moral rule: "What we do should serve the greatest amount of good for the greatest number." But just *how* should this rule be applied in our case? What counts as the greatest amount of good for Adam and Maggie? Is what is good for them also good for others (This question, as we shall see below, is particularly tricky and demands moral attention to detail)? To answer these questions, we need practical wisdom that takes the concrete situation into account.

Our summary is already a substantial one, considering the relatively short length of the original dialog, and almost certainly has to be further reduced for practical reasons, but it still misses so much. We are all aware that something must be missing when the original text is summarized or paraphrased, but it has usually been treated as an acceptable "necessary evil." Even Nussbaum who argues that to judge Maggie we should quote the whole novel does not end up actually doing it.[239] Is there anything wrong with this pragmatic attitude? Are there cases where the missing information is so important that, for a moral evaluation, the literary form is *indispensable*? Let us resume the previous dialog:

> She thought a minute, as if it were difficult to say, yet as if she more and more saw it. "Well, whatever it was that *before* kept us from thinking, and kept you, really, as you might say, in the market. It was as if you couldn't be in the market when you were married to *me*. Or rather as if I kept people off, innocently, by being married to you. Now that I'm married to some one else you're, as in consequence,

[239] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 88.

married to nobody. Therefore you may be married to anybody, to everybody. People don't see why you shouldn't be married to *them*."

"Isn't it enough of a reason," he mildly enquired, "that I don't want to be?"

"It's enough of a reason, yes. But to *be* enough of a reason it has to be too much of a trouble. I mean *for* you. It has to be too much of a fight. You ask me what you've lost," Maggie continued to explain. "The not having to take the trouble and to make the fight—that's what you've lost. The advantage, the happiness of being just as you were—because I was just as *I* was—that's what you miss."

"So that you think," her father presently said, "that I had better get married just in order to be as I was before?"

The detached tone of it—detached as if innocently to amuse her by showing his desire to accommodate was so far successful as to draw from her gravity a short light laugh. "Well, what I don't want you to feel is that if you were to I shouldn't understand. I should understand. That's all," said the Princess gently.

Her companion turned it pleasantly over. "You don't go so far as to wish me to take somebody I don't like?"

"Ah father," she sighed, "you know how far I go—how far I *could* go. But I only wish that if you ever should like anybody you may never doubt of my feeling how I've brought you to it. You'll always know that I know it's my fault."

"You mean," he went on in his contemplative way, "that it will be you who'll take the consequences?"

Maggie just considered. "I'll leave you all the good ones, but I'll take the bad."[240]

After Adam asks Maggie to enlighten him about what he has lost by being single, she continues to pretend that what she is doing is not planned beforehand. Maggie conveniently compares their closed relationship to marriage and attributes the reason why people are turned away from Adam to her "spousal" protectiveness. She adds, seemingly casually but deliberately, that whatever she does, either keeping people off or being "married" to her father, is done innocently, as if she cannot help it. Just when we assume that this incestuous metaphor cannot be serious, Maggie's next argument indicates that she means it. According to her, the reason why people should not doubt

[240] GB, I.172–73.

Adam is available now is not that Maggie has realized her overprotection and will correct her mistake, but that people see Maggie is now *actually* married to someone and thus cannot be in the way. The fact that such an inappropriate metaphor can be thought of effortlessly and shamelessly without qualification by Maggie, and that it is not resisted by Adam illustrates not only the unusual intimacy between the father and the daughter, but also their appalling moral indifference and naivety. This should have a direct bearing on the moral consequences of their actions, both before and after Adam's marriage, but readers who only read its paraphrase may fail to grasp its subtlety, to grasp just *how exactly* brazen Maggie is (and at the same time perhaps too childish to be harshly criticized) and *how exactly* almost unforgivably indulgent Adam is (and at the same time perhaps understandably).

Then we again have the back-and-forth of Adam defending his autonomy and Maggie insisting on thinking on his behalf. Only this time, the detached tone of Adam finally forces Maggie to embarrassingly react to it. Adam's next question, "You don't go so far as to wish me to take somebody I don't like," is almost a reprimand, because it sounds like an amusing question for someone supposed to love him deeply. Maggie restates that her suggestion is based on nothing but a genuine wish for Adam's best and she is willing to take the consequences. But is Maggie making a promise she cannot keep? Can she really take the consequences if Adam's marriage fails? How?

In what follows Adam makes it clearer that "I don't *want* to like it. […] I don't want to have to think I like it in a case when I really shan't. […] I don't want to […] be *made* to make a mistake." Maggie stubbornly persists. Finally, in the last round of back-and-forth before Adam gives in, the irony and the embarrassment of the situation reach a new level:

> Mr. Verver uttered an odd vague sound. "Don't you think a good deal's done when you come out and talk to me this way?"
>
> "Ah," said his daughter, smiling at him, "we make too much of that!" And then to explain: "That's good, and it's natural—but it isn't great. We forget that we're as free as air."
>
> "Well, *that's* great," Mr. Verver pleaded.

"Great if we act on it. Not if we don't."

> She continued to smile, and he took her smile; wondering again a little by this time, however; struck more and more by an intensity in it that belied a light tone. "What do you want," he demanded, "to do to me?" And he added, as she didn't say, "You've got something in your mind." It had come to him within the minute that from the beginning of their session there she had been keeping something back, and that an impression of this had more than once, in spite of his general theoretic respect for her present right to personal reserves and mysteries, almost ceased to be vague in him. There had been from the first something in her anxious eyes, in the way she occasionally lost herself, that it would perfectly explain. He was therefore now quite sure. "You've got something up your sleeve."

Just as by asking "Isn't it enough of a reason that I don't want to be?" Adam really wants to tell Maggie it is already enough, by asking "Don't you think a good deal's done when you come out and talk to me this way?" Adam is saying "It's a good deal and you've meddled enough." Maggie refuses to take the hint and surprisingly mentions that they forget that they are "free as air," although Adam certainly has not forgotten about it. Afterward, Adam never resists again and has decided to sacrifice himself to Maggie's "good intention." Ironically, from the perspective of Maggie, she believes that she is the one making a sacrifice because once Adam gets married, she will be alienated (although this does not really happen, as we will see). We are not sure why Maggie still insists even at this stage where Adam has spoken very plainly that he does not want to accept Maggie's suggestion. If she really only cares for his father, should she not stop by now because there is little room to interpret Adam's replies as "pretending to be fine so that she can worry less" anymore? Or is her motive rather making *herself* feel better by convincing herself that she has to hold on to the last to do what she believes is the best for Adam, no matter what he thinks? The answer is open for discussion, but, again, reading only the summary or the paraphrase of this passage would, for example, miss Adam's helplessness when he pleads, "Well, *that's* great," and his desperateness when he asks, "What do you want to do to me?" as if Maggie is not his daughter but his kidnapper, which are both essential for morally evaluating this particular situation.

After Adam has given in, his concern changes from "to sacrifice or not to sacrifice" to "how much to sacrifice" (Here we skip a passage):

> It relieved him a little, yet the beautiful consideration of her manner made it in a degree portentous. "'Stand' one—?"
>
> "Well, mind her coming."
>
> He stared—then he laughed. "It depends on who she *is*."
>
> "There—you see! I've at all events been thinking whether you'd take this particular person but as a worry the more. Whether, that is, you'd go so far with her in your notion of having to be kind."
>
> He gave at this the quickest shake to his foot. "How far would she go in *her* notion of it?"
>
> "Well," his daughter returned, "you know how far, in a general way, Charlotte Stant goes."
>
> "Charlotte? Is *she* coming?"
>
> "She writes me, practically, that she'd like to if we're so good as to ask her."
>
> Mr. Verver continued to gaze, but rather as if waiting for more. Then as everything appeared to have come his expression had a drop. If this was all it was simple. "Then why in the world not?"[241]

Here we witness an emotional roller coaster. After the "kidnapper" says that she only wants to ask if Adam "could stand just now another woman," he first feels relieved because this is what he expects, but then immediately realizes that "the beautiful consideration" of Maggie can be an unpleasant sign, with which we should now be familiar. Maggie's initial unclear response about who the woman is creates suspense that makes Adam involuntarily give "the quickest shake to his foot." Only when hearing that it is Charlotte that she has in mind can Adam finally relax because he does not dislike her. An intruding free indirect discourse here is worth noticing: "If this was all it was simple." In *The Golden Bowl* it is not uncommon that the narrator directly describes Adam's mental activities at length, either in normal or free indirect discourse, but such a sudden insertion presenting what Adam is thinking fully from his point of view is rare. It powerfully puts us into Adam's mind and invites us to sympathize with

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[241] GB, I.177–78.

him. No other forms can so efficiently enable readers to personally experience what Adam has to go through: First anxiously wait for a closure; then realize that that is it; and eventually breathe a sigh of relief: “If this was all it was simple. [I don’t have to sacrifice too much.]”

A much simpler (and more common in practice) summary of what we have quoted so far from the beginning of this conversation would be: “Although Adam is satisfied with being single, he agrees to get married just to keep Maggie from worrying about him after several rounds of back-and-forth.” Only based on this, we may quickly judge Adam irresponsible, especially to his future wife because he does not marry for romantic love but for her daughter. We may also think it is better for him to simply say no and explain that he is genuinely fine to Maggie. However, if we read the whole conversation, we will find that it is much more complicated than this. First, Maggie has indeed made up her mind and seems not to be persuaded. Second, her intention is arguably good, and it may break her heart to turn her down, considering their particularly intimate father-daughter relationship. Third, Adam’s decision to get married for her daughter is admittedly morally risky, but what if Adam and Charlotte actually can make a good couple even without Maggie’s meddling, considering that they have been getting along well anyway? Considering these may not eventually make a difference for our moral evaluation, but they are surely important. Maggie’s stubborn persistence, Adam’s futile resistance, and the heated confrontation between the two cannot be simply summarized by “several rounds of back-and-forth” either. Concrete words from Adam like “But *what* have I lost?”, “Isn’t it enough of a reason […] that I don’t want to be?”, “You don’t go so far as to wish me to take somebody I don’t like?”, and “What do you want […] to do to me?” all matter for readers to grasp the nuances of what is at hand here. So do the detailed descriptions of Adam’s and Maggie’s mental activities, as our close reading above has shown. They together present us with a concrete, unique situation that defies simple paraphrasing and challenges an

indiscriminating application of universal moral rules such as "Self-sacrifice for the greater good."[242]

Sacrifice is a major theme in *The Golden Bowl*. Towards the end of the novel, where Adam is about to go back to America with Charlotte and leave Maggie and Amerigo in London, he frankly tells his daughter the real motive of his marriage: "'You see,' he presently added, 'how right I was. Right, I mean, to do it for you.'"[243] Before this Maggie herself has also realized that "'He did it [i.e., got married] for *me*, he did it for me […] he did it exactly that our freedom—meaning, beloved man, simply and solely mine—should be greater instead of less; he did it, divinely, to liberate me so far as possible from caring what became of him."[244] She believes that if she insists on it, "she might verily hear him bleating it at her, all conscious and all accommodating, like some precious spotless exceptionally intelligent lamb,"[245] with words like "Sacrifice me, my own love; do sacrifice me, do sacrifice me!"[246] It is around this time that Maggie misses the most the harmonious situation between her and her father before Charlotte bursts into their lives where "nothing could have been more beautiful."[247] However, it is also around this time that Maggie starts to suspect something unfaithful might be going on between her husband and her stepmother, without which she may never realize Adam's sacrifice. In other words, if Charlotte were never to cheat, Maggie would continue to complacently live in her carefully arranged "pagoda"[248] and take Adam's (and also Charlotte's) sacrifice for granted. It should therefore not surprise us

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[242] Whether this is indeed a universal moral rule is of course controversial (especially in the context of utilitarianism), but that is another topic. It only serves as an example of the potential moral rules applicable here. Our focus has not been to find out what moral rules there are and defend them but to argue that the concrete situation matters for whatever rules there are.

[243] GB, II.364.

[244] GB, II.81.

[245] GB, II.83.

[246] GB, II.82–83.

[247] GB, II.80–81.

[248] GB, II.3–5. Many studies have discussed this famous metaphor. See, for example, Amy Ling, "The Pagoda Image in Henry James's *The Golden Bowl*," *American Literature* 46, no. 3 (1974): 383–88; Edgar Dryden, "The Imp of the Perverse: Metaphor in *The Golden Bowl*," *The Henry James Review* 31, no. 2 (2010): 111–24.

that once acknowledging that the "house of cards" has now collapsed, Maggie does not blame Adam but herself, because whatever Adam did, he did it for her, "a wonderful act."[249]

David Brudney even goes as far as to claim that all of the four main characters in *The Golden Bowl* are ready to protect and to sacrifice for each other (as their "sovereign law [would be] the vigilance of 'care' [and …] never consciously to wound"[250]), but this kindness does not work out well and that is the main conflict of the novel.[251] Whether cheating and concealing the affair from Maggie and Adam count as Charlotte and Amerigo being considerate is debatable, but the mutual sacrifice of Maggie and Adam is indeed a key element that pushes the story forward. Brudney quotes Fanny Assingham, a common friend of everyone, who observes that the problem of Maggie and Adam is exactly that they are "too much taken up with considering each other"[252] although "in their way, they've been so improbably good."[253] Similarly, in a reply to Hilary Putnam's review that regards her argument as a denigration of rules in general, Nussbaum argues that, according to her reading, the solution to Maggie's problem has actually always been to take rules *more seriously* and not the opposite. Her argument should thus not be interpreted as saying that because rules collide in Maggie's situation, they do not matter anymore, but that Maggie should still regard herself bound by them and work it out using her practical wisdom even if they collide. Maggie's childish obsession to rule consistency (her "rule" of sacrificing for everyone and absolutely wronging no one) makes her end up wronging everyone in the first half of the novel and it is such obsession, which denies the importance of the concrete situation, that Nussbaum argues against, not the individual, potentially conflicting rules and obligations themselves.[254] Fanny summarizes Maggie's obsession aptly:

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[249] GB, II.81.

[250] GB, I.325.

[251] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 401.

[252] GB, I.392.

[253] GB, I.394.

[254] Martha C. Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam," *New Literary History* 15, no. 1 (1983): 205–6.

"Maggie had in the first place to make up to her father for her having suffered herself to become—poor little dear, as she believed—so intensely married. Then she had to make up to her husband for taking so much of the time they might otherwise have spent together to make this reparation to Mr. Verver perfect. And her way to do this, precisely, was by allowing the Prince the use, the enjoyment, whatever you may call it, of Charlotte to cheer his path—by instalments, as it were—in proportion as she herself, making sure her father was all right, might be missed from his side. By so much, at the same time, however […] by so much as she took her young stepmother, for this purpose, away from Mr. Verver, by just so much did this too strike her as something again to be made up for. It has saddled her, you'll easily see, with a positively new obligation to her father, an obligation created and aggravated by her unfortunate even if quite heroic little sense of justice. She began with wanting to show him that his marriage could never, under whatever temptation of her own bliss with the Prince, become for her a pretext for deserting or neglecting him. Then that, in its order, entailed her wanting to show the Prince that she recognised how the other desire—this wish to remain, intensely, the same passionate little daughter she had always been—involved in some degree and just for the present, so to speak, her neglecting and deserting *him*."[255]

Maggie does not even have to accommodate everyone to find herself in trouble. An absolutely-harm-no-one-mentality can already create a vicious endless circle between her and Adam, the one who she loves the most and also the one loving her the most: She feels bad because she *believes* Adam feels isolated after her marriage; Adam feels bad because she feels bad; then Maggie feels bad because Adam feels bad, etc. Maggie believes that Adam sacrifices himself by pretending to be fine so that he will not cause her any trouble; Adam believes that Maggie sacrifices herself by finding him a wife so that Adam will not be lonely, even if this means Maggie will be alienated. Each of them certainly thinks the best of each other, assuming the best intention possible, but ironically such mentality blinds them to their real needs. To morally evaluate this episode and the rest of the story, it is important to know how much of a sacrifice they each make and how reluctant they are, for which, based on what we have discussed, the complexity and the ambiguity of the original literary form indeed are crucial.

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[255] GB, I.394–95.

Only to make the situation even more complex and ambiguous, the thorny issue of Adam and Maggie's objectification of people, a theme mentioned by almost all the critics of *The Golden Bowl*, also emerges here. To resume our previous dialog:

> "Well, I guess she likes *us*," said Adam Verver.
>
> "Yes—fortunately she likes us. And if I wasn't afraid of spoiling it for you," Maggie added, "I'd even mention that you're not the one of our number she likes least."
>
> "Why should that spoil it for me?"
>
> "Oh my dear, you know. What else have we been talking about? It costs you so much to be liked. That's why I hesitated to tell you of my letter."
>
> He stared a moment—as if the subject had suddenly grown out of recognition. "But Charlotte—on other visits—never used to cost me anything."
>
> "No—only her 'keep,'" Maggie smiled.
>
> "Then I don't think I mind her keep—if that's all."[256]

If such undisguised materialistic calculation of marriage can still be allowed considering its historical background, surely what follows is unexcused:

> The Princess, however, it was clear, wished to be thoroughly conscientious. "Well, it may not be quite all. If I think of its being pleasant to have her, it's because she *will* make a difference."
>
> "Well, what's the harm in that if it's but a difference for the better?"
>
> "Ah then—there you are!" And the Princess showed in her smile her small triumphant wisdom. "If you acknowledge a possible difference for the better we're not, after all, so tremendously right as we are. I mean we're not—as a family—so intensely satisfied and amused. We do see there are ways of being grander."
>
> "But will Charlotte Stant," her father asked with surprise, "make us grander?"
>
> Maggie, on this, looking at him well, had a remarkable reply. "Yes, I think. Really grander."

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[256] GB, I.179.

He thought; for if here was a sudden opening he wished but the more to meet it. "Because she's so handsome?"

"No, father." And the Princess was almost solemn. "Because she's so great."

"'Great'—?"

"Great in nature, in character, in spirit. Great in life."

"So?" Mr. Verver echoed. "What has she done—in life?"

"Well, she has been brave and bright," said Maggie. "That mayn't sound like much, but she has been so in the face of things that might well have made it too difficult for many other girls. She hasn't a creature in the world really—that is nearly—belonging to her. Only acquaintances who, in all sorts of ways, make use of her, and distant relations who are so afraid she'll make use of *them* that they seldom let her look at them."

Mr. Verver was struck—and, as usual, to some purpose. "If we get her here to improve *us* don't we too then make use of her?"

It pulled the Princess up, however, but an instant. "We're old, old friends—we do her good too. I should always, even at the worst—speaking for myself—admire her still more than I used her."

"I see. That always does good."[257]

If we only read a summary of this passage that says something like "Adam and Maggie objectify Charlotte," we cannot get *how exactly* they do it. This sounds like stating the obvious, but what we have been arguing is that this "necessary evil" of skipping the original for practical reasons risks ignoring essential details shaping the concrete situation that matters for a moral judgment. If we do not know how exactly they objectify Charlotte, we do not know how morally despicable it is. Maggie's initial wording, for example, is "If I think of its being pleasant to have her, it's because she *will* make a difference." It is neither neutrally "for you to marry her" nor enthusiastically "to welcome her into our family," but greedily "to have her," as if Charlotte is desirable work of art that they must have. And the reason for its being pleasant, in Maggie's mind, is not that she is a good match for Adam or that she will

[257] GB, I.180–81.

make him happy, but she will “make a difference” and “make us grander […] really grander,” as if Charlotte is a medal of honor. Moreover, after all these, Maggie ironically pities Charlotte for having no real friends or relatives who will not make use of her. When confronted by Adam who is not sure if they are also making use of her, she feels like a child being rebuked by her father for doing something wrong (but only for a moment) before rationalizing that (1) by accepting Charlotte into their family, they also offer her financial and social security (that is to say, this is at most *mutually* making use of each other), and (2) she objectifies Charlotte as something that can make them grander only because she admires Charlotte.

Note that getting these nuances does not necessarily change our moral evaluation based only on a summary, but a morally responsible evaluation should always take every aspect of the situation into account as much as possible and it does not matter if the final conclusion is the same. The literary form not only helps us to form such a holistic view, but also brings us to face the unavoidable ambiguities in moral life. Here, for example, Adam’s attitude is ambiguous. On the one hand, he rather directly accuses Maggie of making use of Charlotte. On the other hand, he seems too easily convinced by her daughter’s unconvincing rationalization (Is *mutually* making use of each other morally any better? How is marrying Charlotte because she makes us look good to admire her more than to use her?). Recall that this conversation is a follow-up to the one we talked about earlier where Maggie tries to persuade Adam to get married. There, what Adam really thinks (“I’m fine. I don’t need your suggestion.”) is very different than what he appears to be (“Tell me what you want, and I’ll consider it.”). If that is still the situation here, we have enough reasons to believe that by saying “I see. That always does good,” Adam does not mean it either and he does not approve of the use and objectification of Charlotte. He only says this because he recognizes the “good” intention of Maggie and does not want to directly confront her. However, we also have reason to believe that, after giving in and deciding to sacrifice himself to please Maggie, Adam might be calculating how much sacrifice there is. He does not seem to know Charlotte as well as he thinks he does, and he looks surprised when Maggie boasts about the greatness of Charlotte. As a result, when considering that Charlotte turns out to be

so great and thus his sacrifice would be minimal, Adam might not regard objectifying Charlotte as an issue anymore (or he is himself objectifying her by thinking this way, and he is not ready to criticize himself). An exchange later in the same dialog suggests this interpretation:

> "Isn't it always a misfortune to be—when you're so fine—so wasted? And yet," she went on, "not to wail about it, not to look even as if you knew it?"
>
> Mr. Verver seemed at first to face this as a large question, and then, after a little, solicited by another view, to let the appeal drop. "Well, she mustn't be wasted. We won't at least have waste."
>
> It produced in Maggie's face another gratitude. "Then, dear sir, that's all I want."[258]

What "another view" distracts Adam? A view that this objectification is unacceptable, but he should pretend to be on board? Or a view that to objectify Charlotte is indeed, as Maggie says, to "do her good" so that she "mustn't be wasted?" There are two possibilities from which such ambiguity can be derived. First, the narrator is unreliable. As we have indicated in our earlier discussion on Adam's reluctance to accept Maggie's suggestion, it is unlikely that Adam can be as sincerely gentle as depicted by the narrator when saying something as sarcastic as "But *what* have I lost?" and "Isn't it enough of a reason [...] that I don't want to be?" Similarly, here it can also be interpreted as unlikely that right after unflinchingly challenging Maggie with "If we get her here to improve *us* don't we too then make use of her?" Adam would suddenly yield to persuasion. Granted, "I see. That always does good" is what he says, but how is it said is conveniently not depicted by the narrator, leaving us with great room for imagination. The narrator might not be "deliberately" lying here because James explicitly states that he does not want his narrator to play God, to which we will come back later in our next subsection, and the narrator can thus make an honest mistake. Besides, the narrator might also only be tacitly adopting Maggie's perspective here as Maggie may indeed only see what she wants to see.

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[258] GB, I.185.

Second, ambiguity arises because it is actually what happens, and the narrator reliably depicts it. That is to say, Adam really is such a good actor (or a conflicting person) that he can say sarcastic things pleasantly and change his mind conveniently, which, based on our analysis, is unlikely but not impossible. Hypocritical, self-contradictory, and inscrutable people like him do exist and understanding and dealing with them is a big challenge in real life. If this is the case, we have a new reason to appreciate James's realism. Either way, it is the literary form that invites us to explore these ambiguities, which moralists have to face, that are open to different interpretations and ours is only one of them.

Critics have discovered many other examples of Maggie and Adam's objectification. Related to our example of their discussion to prevent Charlotte from being "wasted," Brudney cites this passage at the end of the novel where the narrator describes Maggie's thoughts before Adam leaves Maggie: "They were parting, in the light of it, absolutely on Charlotte's *value* […]. Somehow, when all was said, and with the memory of her gifts, her variety, her power, so much remained of Charlotte's! What else had she [Maggie] herself meant three minutes before by speaking of her [Charlotte] as great? Great for the world that was before her—*that* he proposed she should be: she wasn't to be wasted in the application of his plan. Maggie held to this then—that she wasn't to be wasted."[259] Lee Mitchell also notices that Maggie is not shy to admit that she has a "sense of possession"[260] of Amerigo or that she enjoys "using her friend to the topmost notch."[261] Because of this objectifying habit of theirs, the opening sentence of the abstract of the Oxford World's Classics edition of *The Golden Bowl* is "A rich American art-collector and his daughter Maggie *buy in* for themselves and to their greater glory a beautiful young wife and a noble husband,"[262] as if Charlotte and Amerigo are two barrels of grain they reserve for a severe winter. Similarly, Charles

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[259] GB, II.365, quoted in Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 435.

[260] GB, II.20.

[261] GB, II.145, quoted in Lee Clark Mitchell, "Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Case of Late James," *Raritan* 22, no. 4 (2003): 84.

[262] Henry James, *The Golden Bowl* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). Emphasis added.

Thomas Samuels straightforwardly uses expressions like "Adam buys Amerigo for Maggie" or "The Ververs had originally bought Charlotte and the Prince as if they were *objets*"[263] in his interpretation of the novel. He even argues that the reason why Amerigo initially resists Charlotte, then participates only passively in their affair, and in the end gives her up very quickly after Maggie finds out is that "*bought* for his physical charm," Amerigo is sincerely grateful to Adam (and also nervous in front of him, as depicted in the first two chapters) who rescues him from poverty, and "he fully intends to give value for money."[264]

However, while Brudney suspects that the passage he cites above can be the most offensive passage in the entire novel, he recognizes that Adam and Maggie's objectifying language is "so elaborate and deliberate that it is unclear what it means to take it seriously." In another widely cited episode, Maggie tells Amerigo at the beginning of the novel, answering his question about why Adam agrees to their marriage: "You're at any rate a part of his collection. […] You're a rarity, an object of beauty, an object of price. You're not perhaps absolutely unique, but you're so curious and eminent that there are very few others like you—you belong to a class about which everything is known. You're what they call a *morceau de musée* [a museum piece]."[265] Brudney considers Maggie's tone here so amusing, her conceit so stylized that what she says should not be taken seriously.[266] His argument makes particular sense if we consider Amerigo's immediate reaction to Maggie's words: "'I see. I have the great sign of it,' he had risked—'that I cost a lot of money.'"[267] Although Amerigo sees some risk in making this joke, he clearly does not think Maggie means what she says.

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[263] Charles Thomas Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 211.

[264] Samuels, 213. Emphasis added.

[265] GB, I.12.

[266] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 435.

[267] GB, I.12.

Another evidence to question the seriousness of Maggie's objectification can be found after she says "I should always […] admire her still more than I used her" in our first example of her objectifying Charlotte:

> "You'll not persuade me that you're not so good as Charlotte Stant," he [Adam] still placidly enough remarked.
>
> "I may be as good, but I'm not so great—and that's what we're talking about. She has a great imagination. She has, in every way, a great attitude. She has above all a great conscience." More perhaps than ever in her life before Maggie addressed her father at this moment with a shade of the absolute in her tone. She had never come so near telling him what he should take it from her to believe. "She has only twopence in the world—but that has nothing to do with it. Or rather indeed"—she quickly corrected herself—"it has everything. For she doesn't care. I never saw her do anything but laugh at her poverty. Her life has been harder than any one knows."
>
> It was moreover as if, thus unprecedentedly positive, his child had an effect upon him that Mr. Verver really felt as a new thing. "Why then haven't you told me about her before?"[268]

If we believe, based on the dialog quoted earlier, that Maggie wants Adam to marry Charlotte not because she really cares about them but because she only wants to *formally* live up to her filial duty and not *actually* listen to what they need, we find ourselves in a difficult position here. What should we make of this undoubtedly lavish yet sincere praise of Charlotte from Maggie? The repeated use of the superlative clearly indicates that the narrator definitely believes in Maggie's sincerity—and so does Adam. Maggie's spontaneous self-correction from saying that Charlotte's poverty is irrelevant to her greatness to saying that she is great partly because she is not ashamed of being poor further makes her praise more authentic. We again face a similar ambiguity to Adam's attitude. Is Maggie such a good actor that she can completely fool Adam *and* the narrator? Or is she a conflicting person who at the same time sincerely wishes Charlotte the best and selfishly only wants to make use of her? As mentioned, we may really encounter such ambiguity of a concrete situation or of a specific person in real moral life. Experiencing this episode through the literary form, for which ambiguity is

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[268] GB, I.181–82.

totally legitimate, if not praiseworthy, not only prevents us from omitting morally significant nuances in individual situations, but also reminds us of the complexity and the uncertainty of reality.

To add another dimension to this ambiguity, note that Adam and Maggie not only objectify "outsiders," but also each other. Adam, for example, aestheticizes Maggie as a statue:

> She had got up with these last words; she stood there before him with that particular suggestion in her aspect to which even the long habit of their life together hadn't closed his sense, kept sharp, year after year, by the collation of types and signs, the comparison of fine object with fine object, of one degree of finish, of one form of the exquisite with another—the appearance of some slight slim draped "antique" of Vatican or Capitoline halls, late and refined, rare as a note and immortal as a link, set in motion by the miraculous infusion of a modern impulse and yet, for all the sudden freedom of folds and footsteps forsaken after centuries by their pedestal, keeping still the quality, the perfect felicity, of the statue; the blurred absent eyes, the smoothed elegant nameless head, the impersonal flit of a creature lost in an alien age and passing as an image in worn relief round and round a precious vase. She had always had odd moments of striking him, daughter of his very own though she was, as a figure thus simplified, "generalised" in its grace, a figure with which his human connexion was fairly interrupted by some vague analogy of turn and attitude, something shyly mythological and nymph-like. The trick, he wasn't uncomplacently aware, was mainly of his own mind; it came from his caring for precious vases only less than for precious daughters.[269]

The dense texture of James's irreducible style is perfectly exemplified in this passage. Adopting Adam's perspective, the narrator goes at great length to let the reader know what it is like to look at Maggie from a loving father's eyes. Adam does not shy away from an objectifying point of view at all; instead, he is proud of it. He is proud of his aesthetic sense, through which he perceives Maggie here, that is kept sharp "by the collation of types and signs, the comparison of fine object with fine object, of one degree of finish, of one form of the exquisite with another" year after year. He also proudly compares his precious daughter to his precious vases, for which he cares "only less." The detailed description of Maggie's aesthetic similarities to artistic works shows

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[269] GB, I.187–88.

absolutely no signs of belittling, the reason why objectification is morally condemned, either. Because this episode happens only shortly after Adam and Maggie's discussion on how Charlotte can make them grander, Adams's train of thought should be regarded as uninterrupted and it seems far-fetched to argue that his previous action is wrong, while here the same action is innocent. However, although this interesting episode is not unnoticed by critics, it has not been interpreted as a potential "counterexample" of Adam's supposedly malicious objectification.[270]

Reciprocally, Maggie also objectifies Adam:

> [Maggie] felt the slow surge of a vision that at the end of another minute or two had floated her across the room to where her father stood looking at a picture, an early Florentine sacred subject, that he had given her on her marriage. He might have been in silence taking his last leave of it; it was a work for which she knew he entertained an unqualified esteem. The tenderness represented for her by his sacrifice of such a treasure had become to her sense a part of the whole infusion, of the immortal expression; the beauty of his sentiment looked out at her always, from the beauty of the rest, as if the frame made positively a window for his spiritual face: she might have said to herself at this moment that in leaving the thing behind him, held as in her clasping arms, he was doing the most possible toward leaving her a part of his palpable self. She put her hand over his shoulder, and their eyes were held again together by the abiding felicity; they smiled in emulation, vaguely, as if speech failed them through their having passed too far: she would have begun to wonder the next minute if it were reserved to them, for the last stage, to find their contact, like that of old friends reunited too much on the theory of the unchanged, subject to shy lapses.
>
> "It's all right, eh?"
>
> "Oh my dear—rather!"
>
> He had applied the question to the great fact of the picture, as she had spoken for the picture in reply, but it was as if their words for an instant afterwards symbolised another truth, so that they looked about at everything else to give them this extension. She had passed her arm into his, and the other objects in the room, the

[270] See, for example, Ruth Taylor Todasco, "Theme and Imagery in *The Golden Bowl*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 4, no. 2 (1962): 236–37; Harry C. Rutledge, "Contest and Possession: Classical Imagery in Henry James' 'The Golden Bowl,'" *The Comparatist* 1 (1977): 59; A. Kventsel, *Decadence in the Late Novels of Henry James* (London: Palgrave, 2007), 191–92; Ashley C. Barnes, *Love and Depth in the American Novel: From Stowe to James* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2020), 123–61.

> other pictures, the sofas, the chairs, the tables, the cabinets, the "important" pieces, supreme in their way, stood out, round them, consciously, for recognition and applause. Their eyes moved together from piece to piece, taking in the whole nobleness—quite as if for him to measure the wisdom of old ideas. The two noble persons seated in conversation and at tea fell thus into the splendid effect and the general harmony: Mrs. Verver and the Prince fairly "placed" themselves, however unwittingly, as high expressions of the kind of human furniture required aesthetically by such a scene. The fusion of their presence with the decorative elements, their contribution to the triumph of selection, was complete and admirable; though to a lingering view, a view more penetrating than the occasion really demanded, they also might have figured as concrete attestations of a rare power of purchase. There was much indeed in the tone in which Adam Verver spoke again, and who shall say where his thought stopped? "Le compte y est [It's all there]. You've got some good things."[271]

This episode happens at the end of the novel before Maggie and Adam part. While critics have been focusing on the last paragraph where Charlotte and Amerigo are regarded as "high expressions of the kind of human furniture required aesthetically by such a scene," we do not cite this passage to offer yet another example of their being objectified. Instead, we want to focus on the largely neglected first paragraph. Here, Maggie catches Adam looking at a painting that he values the most but has given her as a marriage gift. Adam seems to be saying goodbye to it, taking one last look. Maggie appreciates his gesture so much that she regards the frame of the painting as "a window for his spiritual face" and the painting as "a part of his palpable self." Only by reading the original text can we grasp the subtlety of the seamless transition from "his palpable self" to "She put her hand over his shoulder," a transition from Maggie's imagination to reality. In fact, even at this point we still cannot be completely sure that Maggie is not just *imagining* that she put her hand over a virtual shoulder. It is not until the dialog between the two of them that we can finally be certain that the transition has taken place and that what we are reading now is what really happens. Maggie's wholehearted commitment to this imagery shows that her objectification of Adam should be taken seriously here. The argument that "If the objectification is not seriously meant, it may not be morally wrong," which was discussed earlier in another example from Brudney,

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[271] GB, II.359–60.

is therefore not applicable here. However, just as there is no malice in Adam's serious objectification of Maggie, there is clearly no malice in Maggie's serious objectification of Adam here. On the contrary, it is motivated by sincere love and gratitude.

When Maggie asks, "It's all right, eh?" it is unclear if she wants to ask how the painting is or how Adam is. Adam automatically takes it to mean asking how the painting is, which subtly reflects that for Adam the distinction between human and artwork is ambiguous and he thinks that here asking for the painting is more likely. The following paragraph also shows that for them their art collections are a continuation of their persons, the boundaries that define them and these artworks are continuous, and they value these objects not simply because they carry valuable memories, but because, as Lee Mitchell accurately puts it, that Adam and Maggie "construe themselves in terms of the things (and the people) they possess."[272] Importantly, as in the case of Adam, Maggie's objectification of Adam and her objectification of Charlotte and Amerigo go uninterrupted. If we believe what she does to her father here is innocent, the argument that when she does the same to others it becomes morally wrong is debatable. Undeniably, regarding your wife and son-in-law (Adam) and regarding your stepmother and husband (Maggie) as human furniture is appalling, but what we get from the concrete situation, presented to us with all its details and nuances through literature instead of a plain summary or paraphrase, makes us feel that Maggie and Adam deserve a more responsible moral judgment than a simple and brutal "morally repugnant."[273]

As mentioned, a more responsible moral judgment is not necessarily a different one (because moral judgment based on a limited understanding of the situation can *happen* to be right). Nor is it easier to be made. Based on all the details and nuances uncovered by our close meaning, we still find it difficult to definitely conclude that Adam and Maggie *generally* bear no malice in comparing people to works of art because they do so to the ones they love the most as well. Does the fact that they do not recognize objectification as bad and also objectify their loved ones make their

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[272] Mitchell, "Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Case of Late James," 84.

[273] Mitchell, 84.

objectification less bad? Is it possible that when they objectify each other, it is always well-intended, but when they objectify others, it is condescending and therefore despicable? Should we further distinguish between Maggie's and Adam's objectification of other people? These are difficult but important questions. Whether they are morally condemnable not only concerns the moral evaluation of this part, but also what happens afterward. The main reason for Charlotte and Amerigo's affair is that their partners spend so much time together that they are left out in the cold, which is by no means an excuse for adultery, but it certainly makes the situation more complex (in the spirit of "You reap what you sow"). Although moral rules like "We should not treat humanity as a means only but always as an end in itself" should be applicable here, it is still unclear how exactly we should apply them, given this complex situation, for which practical wisdom is needed.

Most of the examples we have analyzed so far come from Book 2, Chapter 4 of *The Golden Bowl*. Henry Wonham summarizes this chapter as follows:

> Adam asserts that he can "hold out" against female pursuers as long as Maggie is there to help, but she cleverly realizes that the right marriage might provide even more security. She loses no time in putting her plan into action by suggesting that Adam should invite her old friend Charlotte Stant for a visit. Adam is stunned by this suggestion, but he listens carefully as Maggie extols Charlotte's virtues. Adam seems more impressed by his daughter's beauty and eloquence, which strike him as "mythological and nymph-like," than by the substance of her argument, but he would do anything to please her, including this.[274]

Readers of this summary can of course get the gist of what happened, but what would they miss? Adam's reluctance, his tolerance, Maggie's insistence, the awkwardness of the whole conversation, and all the other things we have been discussing—among them most importantly, the ambiguities that may only be properly expressed by the literary form. These ambiguities are of course fictional, but we should not be unfamiliar with the real-life versions of them, and they are important factors for

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[274] Henry B. Wonham, "*The Golden Bowl*," in *Critical Companion to Henry James: A Literary Reference to His Life and Work*, ed. Eric L. Haralson and Kendall Johnson (New York: Facts On File, 2009), 84.

responsible moral judgment to consider. Thus, to answer moral questions like "What should Adam do?" and "Are Adam and Maggie's objectification of people reprehensible?" we do need to substantially cite the original text so that the concrete situation in question can be fully grasped.

3.2 What should Charlotte do?

To find out more subtleties in *The Golde Bowl* only perceivable in the original literary form but not in the standard prose of a summary, consider how Adam proposes to Charlotte:

> Every evening after dinner Charlotte Stant played to him; seated at the piano and requiring no music she went through his "favourite things"—and he had many favourites—with a facility that never failed, or that failed but just enough to pick itself up at a touch from his fitful voice. She could play anything, she could play everything—always shockingly, she of course insisted, but always, by his own vague measure, very much as if she might, slim sinuous and strong, and with practised passion, have been playing lawn-tennis or endlessly and rhythmically waltzing. His love of music, unlike his other loves, owned to vaguenesses, but while, on his comparatively shaded sofa, and smoking, smoking, always smoking, in the great Fawns drawing-room as everywhere, the cigars of his youth, rank with associations—while, I say, he so listened to Charlotte's piano, where the score was ever absent but, between the lighted candles, the picture distinct, the vagueness spread itself about him like some boundless carpet, a surface delightfully soft to the pressure of his interest. It was a manner of passing the time that rather replaced conversation, but the air at the end none the less, before they separated, had a way of seeming full of the echoes of talk. They separated, in the hushed house, not quite easily, yet not quite awkwardly either, with tapers that twinkled in the large dark spaces, and for the most part so late that the last solemn servant had been dismissed for the night.[275]

This episode happens not long after the one we have extensively discussed, where Maggie has successfully convinced Adam to propose to Charlotte. Maggie and Amerigo then depart for Rome to see the Prince's ancestral home, leaving Adam and Charlotte alone in London. During this time Adam certainly knows Charlotte better, but does he begin to love Charlotte? We can find some clues from this seemingly uneventful but

[275] GB, I.202–3.

psychologically penetrating passage that critics rarely talk about. Although these clues cannot give us a conclusive answer, they can help us grasp some morally significant nuances so that we can begin to responsibly evaluate the situation. The narrator first adopts a quasi-neutral perspective to describe Charlotte's musical talent. Both what she plays and how she plays please Adam, but he neither loves music as much as he loves collecting art, nor does he know music as much. Adam thus somewhat only uses her music as an ideal background for deliberation, a tool for creating a comfortable atmosphere. Although the passage reads peacefully, we can catch a glimpse of Adam's stressfulness in the metaphor of the boundless carpet, where the vague atmosphere created by Charlotte's music is compared to "a surface delightfully soft to the pressure of his interest": He is under the pressure of Maggie's suggestion to marry Charlotte. Importantly, the narrator points out that although Adam and Charlotte are not talking directly, they are still communicating tacitly. It is unclear if Charlotte knows what Adam is thinking about. If so, such tacit mutual understanding would be significant progress in their relationship. It is also unclear if Adam truly falls in love with Charlotte. If so, such mutual understanding would become mutual admiration and form a morally irreproachable foundation for marriage. Then neither is Adam marrying Charlotte only to reassure Maggie nor is he making use of Charlotte without considering how she feels, which obviously makes all the difference for our moral evaluation of this situation. Because a simple summary of this passage cannot fully express this ambiguity, a moral evaluation based on it would be irresponsible.

One day afterward, Adam again loses himself "in a far [mental] excursion":

> He had as to so many of the matters in hand a divided view, and this was exactly what made him reach out, in his unrest, for some idea, lurking in the vast freshness of the night, at the breath of which disparities would submit to fusion and so spreading beneath him, make him feel he floated. What he kept finding himself return to, disturbingly enough, was the reflexion, deeper than anything else, that in forming a new and intimate tie he should in a manner abandon, or at the best signally relegate, his daughter. […] Light broke for him at last, indeed, quite as a consequence of the fear of breathing a chill upon this luxuriance of her spiritual garden. As at a turn of his labyrinth he saw his issue, which opened out so wide, for the minute, that he held his breath with wonder. He was afterwards to recall how just then the autumn night seemed to clear to a view in which the whole place,

> everything round him, the wide terrace where he stood, the others, with their steps, below, the gardens, the park, the lake, the circling woods, lay there as under some strange midnight sun. It all met him during these instants as a vast expanse of *discovery*, a world that looked, so lighted, extraordinarily new, and in which familiar objects had taken on a distinctness that, as if it had been a loud, a spoken pretension to beauty, interest, importance, to he scarce knew what, gave them an inordinate quantity of character and verily an inordinate size. The hallucination, or whatever he might have called it, was brief, but it lasted long enough to leave him gasping. The gasp of admiration had by this time however lost itself in an intensity that quickly followed—the way the wonder of it, since wonder was in question, truly had been the strange *delay* of his vision. He had these several days groped and groped for an object that lay at his feet and as to which his blindness came from his stupidly looking beyond. It had sat all the while at his hearthstone, whence it now gazed up in his face.[276]

The opening part of this passage, for the first time, explicitly tells us what bothers Adam the most. If he gets married, it will seem that Maggie is abandoned or dismissed to an inferior position. Those who are unfamiliar with their relationship would not understand this worry at all, but even for us who have read about Adam and Maggie's intimacy, it can still be puzzling why Adam keeps returning to this reflection. After all, if he does get married, what he does is only to follow Maggie's suggestion. Surely, Maggie herself would not hold a grudge because of this?[277] Otherwise, why would she suggest it in the first place? There can be two possible answers to this. First, it is not Maggie that he worries about, but what others think of it. Adam has been maintaining a loving father image in front of outsiders, and if he marries a young lady at his daughter's age in his later years, it will tarnish this image that he cares very much about. Second, we have talked about the vicious circle of mutual sacrifice. On the one hand, Adam believes that Maggie actually feels abandoned but is willing to sacrifice for his good. On the other hand, although Adam repeatedly states that he is fine being single, Maggie refuses to believe him since she thinks Adam says this only because he does not want her to worry. In other words, Maggie mistakenly takes Adam's honest words

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[276] GB, I.205–7.

[277] This is not impossible though, as in a scene at the end of Book 5, Chapter 5, Charlotte angrily accuses Maggie of resenting their marriage and working against her by competing for Adam's attention. See GB, II.317–18.

as his willingness to sacrifice for her. Now Adam might have made the same mistake, taking Maggie's honest words as her willingness to sacrifice for him. To put this ironic situation into a tongue twister, by not sacrificing himself (getting married to assure Maggie) Adam believes he can avoid Maggie's actually nonexistent sacrifice (persuade Adam to get married although it hurts her) for his actually nonexistent sacrifice (pretend to be fine although he feels lonely). While one may argue that all the fuss will disappear once Adam and Maggie can be completely honest and assume each other to be honest, both the complicated situation depicted here and our real-life experience will tell us that it is easier said than done. Considering their good intentions, it is harsh to judge their dishonesty. Moral rules (or suggestions) like "Do not lie" and "Be considerate towards your loved ones" clearly conflict here.

In what follows in this long passage, beginning with "Light broke for him at last," we witness a vivid and bizarre hallucination of Adam. We do not know what "issue" he sees at a turn of his mental labyrinth that can widely open out, but we do grasp the striking nature of this epiphany and we grasp it visually. It is as if Adam sees everything differently and more alertly. The narrator enumerates many concrete items so that what Adam "sees" can be conveyed as vividly as possible: the autumn night, the wide terrace, the gardens, the park, the lake, the circling woods, some strange midnight sun, etc. These items together, with typically Jamesian long sentences, forms a picturesque scene that the reader can easily imagine. We are thus invited to join Adam in gasping at this scene and have an embodied understanding of Adam's moral deliberation. If the situation is not so complicated and the sacrifice not so painful, his deliberation will not be so difficult. Neither will he be so relieved nor satisfied after the hallucination. It is the poetic expressiveness of James's language that enables all these, which are important because knowing that Adam's decision is not made hastily and arbitrarily is critical to how he should be evaluated morally.

What "light" then breaks for him? What is his final decision?

> The sharp point to which all his light converged was that the whole call of his future to him as a father would be in his so managing that Maggie would less and less appear to herself to have forsaken him. And it not only wouldn't be decently

> humane, decently possible, not to make this relief easy to her—the idea shone upon him, more than that, as exciting, inspiring, uplifting. […] The way in which it might be met was by his putting his child at peace, and the way to put her at peace was to provide for his future—that is for hers—by marriage, by a marriage as good, speaking proportionately, as hers had been. As he fairly inhaled this measure of refreshment he tasted the meaning of recent agitations. He had seen that Charlotte could contribute—what he hadn't seen was what she could contribute *to*. When it had all supremely cleared up and he had simply settled this service to his daughter well before him as the proper direction of his young friend's leisure, the cool darkness had again closed round him, but his moral lucidity was constituted. […] He might have been equally in want and yet not have had his remedy. Oh if Charlotte didn't accept him the remedy of course would fail; but, as everything had fallen together, it was at least there to be tried. And success would be great—that was his last throb—if the measure of relief effected for Maggie should at all prove to have been given by his own actual sense of felicity. He really didn't know when in his life he had thought of anything happier. To think of it merely for himself would have been, even as he had just lately felt, even doing all justice to that condition—yes, impossible. But there was a grand difference in thinking of it for his child.[278]

This passage presents us with a still-water-runs-deep person. We finally fully see what intricate considerations lie behind the man who smokes silently and stressfully night after night to Charlotte's music. Just when we, based on the piano passage, begin to suspect that Adam has real feelings for Charlotte, this passage makes it again clear that the only thing he cares about is still how not to make Maggie feel guilty and not to make her feel like she has abandoned him. It seems that the ambiguity of whether Adam selfishly objectifies and exploits Charlotte can be finally resolved: Not only does he see that "Charlotte could contribute," but he also believes that he is entitled to determine "the proper direction" of her leisure. However, newly emerging ambiguities suggest that the case is not so simple. First, if Adam conscientiously believes that it is moral to solve his problem by simply making use of Charlotte, why does he feel that he is again surrounded by "cool darkness?" This indicates that Adam may actually still worry that by doing so he will wrong Charlotte, despite his constituted "moral lucidity." Second, the narrator leaves us enough reasons to suspect that, to make himself look like a great father, Adam may be lying to himself that the only reason he marries Charlotte is to

[278] GB, I.207–9.

make Maggie worry less. He is so self-absorbed in his image as a self-sacrificing father and his concern for Maggie that the idea to relieve Maggie shines on him not only as "decently humane, decently possible" but also as "exciting, inspiring, uplifting." The narrator's excessive enumeration of adjectives, unlike the case of Adam's hallucination, sounds mechanical and suggests sarcasm. Adam's closing thoughts, which have been taken by many critics at face value, actually also make him too noble to be trusted. How can the happiest thing in his long life be to marry someone he does not truly love to reassure his daughter? We can thus reasonably doubt that putting Maggie's mind at ease is at least not the *only* reason Adam decides to marry Charlotte; he marries her also because of love. What we do not know is the proportion of the influence of each of these two reasons on his final decision. Considering that Adam goes so far as to claim that thinking merely for himself is "impossible" (by contrast, he can do anything for his child), it is likely that he exaggerates the role of being considerate towards Maggie and downplays the role of his love for Charlotte. For a moral judgment, the greater the role of the former objectifying reason is, the more morally reprehensible Adam's decision is. It is therefore morally responsible to fully grasp both the direct portrayal of Adam's mind here and the more lyrical portrayal of his hallucination and his silent communication with Charlotte discussed above and to compare them. We again see that a literary form that can reflect highly ambiguous complexity significantly contributes to understanding this concrete situation.

Then Adam and Charlotte leave Fawns, Adam's country house, and go on holiday in Brighton, where their relationship further deepens. Adam officially proposes:

> "We've had, as it seems to me, such quite beautiful days together that I hope it won't come to you too much as a shock when I ask if you think you could regard me with any satisfaction as a husband." As if he had known she wouldn't, she of course couldn't, at all gracefully and whether or no, reply with a rush, he had said a little more—quite as he had felt he must in thinking it out in advance. He had put the question on which there was no going back and which represented thereby the sacrifice of his vessels, and what he further said was to stand for the redoubled thrust of flame that would make combustion sure. "This isn't sudden to me, and I've wondered at moments if you haven't felt me coming to it. I've been coming ever since we left Fawns—I really started while we were there." He spoke slowly, giving her, as he desired, time to think; all the more that it was making her look at

> him steadily, and making her also, in a remarkable degree, look "well" while she did so—a large and so far a happy consequence. She wasn't at all events shocked—which he had glanced at but for a handsome humility—and he would give her as many minutes as she liked. "You mustn't think I'm forgetting that I'm not young."
>
> "Oh that isn't so. It's I who am old. You *are* young." This was what she had at first answered—and quite in the tone too of having taken her minutes. It hadn't been wholly to the point, but it had been kind—which was what he most wanted. And she kept, for her next words, to kindness, kept to her clear lowered voice and unshrinking face. "To me too it thoroughly seems that these days have been beautiful. I shouldn't be grateful to them if I couldn't more or less have imagined their bringing us to this." She affected him somehow as if she had advanced a step to meet him and yet were at the same time standing still. It only meant, however, doubtless, that she was gravely and reasonably thinking—as he exactly desired to make her. If she would but think enough she would probably think to suit him. "It seems to me," she went on, "that it's for *you* to be sure."[279]

Adam's proposal is not particularly romantic because, instead of trying to please Charlotte, he is busy choosing his words with care so that there can be no "going back." This implies that he is afraid he will not be able to propose, or that after proposing he will take it back, which is unusual because, usually, people who sincerely propose generally only worry about whether their partners will say yes, not whether they themselves will regret proposing. Once again, we are torn between two different interpretations of the main reason why Adam decides to get married. However, unlike our tentative conclusion based on the previous passage, Adam's fear here that he might regret his proposal suggests that Adam gets married not so much because he loves Charlotte, but for Maggie's peace of mind after all, because only due to the latter reason does he need to sacrifice himself, and one may indeed regret the decision to sacrifice oneself, no matter how firmly that decision was established before.

Adam's smooth manner—anticipating that she cannot reply quickly because of ladylike reserve and that she actually needs time to think—keeps Charlotte calm, and her reply further makes the whole scene filled with adult worldliness and pragmatic calculation instead of the passion of love. For Adam, Charlotte is not ready to "suit him" yet, but he believes she will. As Charlotte already deliberately caters to Adam's musical

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[279] GB, I.217–19.

tastes when playing the piano back at Fawns, Adam's optimism is not unfounded. However, we do not really know what Charlotte is thinking at the moment because the narrator is adopting Adam's point of view. By saying "it's for *you* to be sure," Charlotte seems to imply that this marriage is fine with her as long as Adam does not regret it. Is she really so indifferent to her marriage? Does she love Adam? Does Charlotte consider Maggie's feelings and want to sacrifice herself for Maggie as well? Or is she just looking for an opportunity to get closer to Amerigo? Let us continue to follow their dialog:

> "Ah but I *am* sure," said Adam Verver. "On matters of importance I never speak when I'm not. So if you can yourself face such a union you needn't in the least trouble."
>
> She had another pause, and she might have been felt as facing it while, through lamplight and dusk, through the breath of the mild slightly damp south-west, she met his eyes without evasion. Yet she had at the end of another minute debated only to the extent of saying: "I won't pretend I don't think it would be good for me to marry. Good for me, I mean," she pursued, "because I'm so awfully unattached. I should like to be a little less adrift. I should like to have a home. I should like to have an existence. I should like to have a motive for one thing more than another—a motive outside of myself. In fact," she said, so sincerely that it almost showed pain, yet so lucidly that it almost showed humour, "in fact, you know, I want to *be* married. It's—well, it's the condition."
>
> "The condition—?" He was just vague.
>
> "It's the state, I mean. I don't like my own, 'Miss,' among us all, is too dreadful—except for a shopgirl. I don't want to be a horrible English old-maid."
>
> "Oh you want to be taken care of. Very well then I'll do it."
>
> "I dare say it's very much that. Only I don't see why, for what I speak of," she smiled—"for a mere escape from my state—I need do quite so *much*."
>
> "So much as marry me in particular?"
>
> Her smile was as for true directness. "I might get what I want for less."
>
> "You think it's so much for you to do?"
>
> "Yes," she presently said, "I think it's a great deal."

> Then it was that, though she was so gentle, so quite perfect with him, and he felt he had come on far—then it was that of a sudden something seemed to fail and he didn't quite know where they were. There rose for him with this the fact, to be sure, of their disparity, ignore it as mercifully and perversely as she would. He might have been her father. "Of course, yes—that's my disadvantage: I'm not the natural, I'm so far from being the ideal, match to your youth and your beauty. I've the drawback that you've seen me always, and so inevitably, in such another light."
>
> But she gave a slow headshake that made contradiction soft—made it almost sad, in fact, as from having to be so complete; and he had already, before she spoke, the dim vision of some objection in her mind beside which the one he had named was light, and which therefore must be strangely deep. "You don't understand me. It's of all that it is for *you* to do—it's of that I'm thinking."
>
> Oh with this for him the thing was clearer! "Then you needn't think. I know enough what it is for me to do."
>
> But she shook her head again. "I doubt if you know. I doubt if you *can*."
>
> "And why not, please—when I've had you so before me? That I'm old has at least *that* fact about it to the good—that I've known you long and from far back."
>
> "Do you think you've 'known' me?" asked Charlotte Stant.
>
> He debated—for the tone of it, and her look with it might have made him doubt. Just these things in themselves, however, with all the rest, with his fixed purpose now, his committed deed, the fine pink glow, projected forward, of his ships, behind him, definitely blazing and crackling—this quantity was to push him harder than any word of her own could warn him. All that she was herself, moreover, was so lighted, to its advantage, by the pink glow. He wasn't rabid, but he wasn't either, as a man of a proper spirit, to be frightened.[280]

In this episode, after Adam assures Charlotte that he has made up his mind, Charlotte admits she does not want to be single for the rest of her life. However, she replies with "true directness" that she "might get what [she wants] for less," frankly acknowledging that marrying Adam is too much for her. Adam takes it to mean she dislikes him for being too old, although he is fully aware that what she worries about is something more serious than this. Indeed, Charlotte explicitly tells Adam she worries about the sacrifices he will have to make (for Maggie) to get married and she is not as confident as Adam that he can handle them. The episode ends with Adam again thinking

[280] GB, I.219–21.

of the metaphor that compares his inability to turn back now to the fictive situation where he has set his imagined vessels on fire. With the "definitely blazing and crackling" pink glow behind him, he has to persuade Charlotte.

Now that we again have offered a summary of the cited episode, what would the reader of this summary miss? First, they cannot authentically feel Adam's conflicted mind. On the one hand, he is concerned about what Charlotte's straightforwardly unenthusiastic response means ("Of a sudden something seemed to fail and he didn't quite know where they were"). The fact that Adam keeps admitting he is not an ideal match for her reflects his vulnerability and lack of confidence, because he cannot explain why he is still worthy of consideration and can only seek Charlotte's sympathy. On the other hand, he is (or pretends to be) confident that their disparity will eventually be ignored by the merciful Charlotte. He also *must* be confident because he repeatedly reminds himself that there is no going back. If we can grasp Adam's ambivalence and pain, including the ones shown in the earlier examples, we would think twice before making simple moral judgments about his "selfish objectification of others." Second, the reader who only reads the summary would also miss Charlotte's shrewd diplomacy, miss how she heroically "through lamplight and dusk, through the breath of the mild slightly damp south-west, […] met his eyes without evasion," and miss how she graciously admits her fear of being a spinster while kindly showing concerns for Adam's sacrifices ("But she gave a slow headshake that made contradiction soft"). We have wondered if Charlotte's motives are benevolent, but at least based on the nuances of this episode, she should be regarded as, in Fanny's words, "unmistakeably sincere."[281]

In the ensuing conversation, Charlotte continues to express her reservations about the marriage, to challenge Adam with "I don't see why you're not happy," and to urge him to "think a little of others […] at least in loyalty—at any rate in delicacy—to think of Maggie."[282] It seems that Charlotte does not know that Adam's main reason for

[281] GB, I.281.

[282] GB, I.222.

deciding to get married (at least according to him) is precisely to think of Maggie, to which Adam clarifies:

> "Oh if she's at ease about me the rest will take care of itself. The case," he declared, "is in your hands. You'll effectually put out of her mind that I feel she has abandoned me."
>
> Interest certainly now was what he had kindled in her face, but it was all the more honourable to her, as he had just called it, that she should want to see each of the steps of his conviction. "If you've been driven to the 'likes' of me mayn't it show that you've truly felt forsaken?" […]
>
> "No—I haven't. But if it's her idea—!" If it was her idea, in short, that was enough. This enunciation of motive the next moment however sounded to him perhaps slightly thin, so that he gave it another touch. "That is if it's my idea. I happen, you see, to like my idea. "
>
> "Well, it's beautiful and wonderful. But isn't it possibly," Charlotte asked, "not quite enough to marry me for?"
>
> "Why so, my dear child? Isn't a man's idea usually what he does marry for?"
>
> Charlotte, considering, looked as if this might perhaps be a large question, or at all events something of an extension of the one they were immediately concerned with. "Doesn't that a good deal depend on the sort of thing it may be?" She suggested that about marriage ideas, as he called them, might differ; with which however, giving no more time to it, she sounded another question. "Don't you appear rather to put it to me that I may accept your offer for Maggie's sake? Somehow"—she turned it over—"I don't so clearly *see* her quite so much finding reassurance, or even quite so much needing it."
>
> "Do you then make nothing at all of her having been so ready to leave us?"
>
> Ah Charlotte on the contrary made much! "She was ready to leave us because she had to be. From the moment the Prince wanted it she could only go with him."
>
> "Perfectly—so that if you see your way she'll be able to 'go with him' in future as much as she likes."
>
> Charlotte appeared to examine for a minute, in Maggie's interest, this privilege—the result of which was a limited concession. "You've certainly worked it out!"
>
> "Of course I've worked it out—that's exactly what I *have* done. She hadn't for a long time been so happy about anything as at your being there with me."

"I was to be with you," said Charlotte, "for her security."[283]

Here Adam is surprisingly honest about his motive for getting married: To let Charlotte "effectually put out of [Maggie's] mind that [he feels] she has abandoned me." Even a stable, worldly person like Charlotte cannot help but be intrigued and amazed to be able to see Adam's brazenness (or, to put it neutrally, his naivety). When asking "If you've been *driven* to the 'likes' of me mayn't it show that you've truly felt forsaken?" (Emphasis added) Charlotte obviously already has a positive answer. Charlotte here strikingly reminds us of Adam who was forced by Maggie to get married (and now Adam takes the position of Maggie then) as both of them almost make fun of their companions by asking such obvious questions ("Isn't it possibly […] not quite enough to marry me for?"). Adam becomes rather flustered and answers incoherently, which is calmly pointed out by Charlotte. She is sensible enough not to stick to this issue and raises another pointed question about Adam's seemingly taken-for-granted assumption that she will sacrifice herself for Maggie. She also questions Maggie's need for them to reassure her. Adam first answers Charlotte's second question by enlightening her about the real reason why Maggie is now unburdened and can leave with her husband whenever she wants: Because Adam has promised her that he will get married, she no longer has the guilt that he feels he has been abandoned. Just when we are wondering why he does not answer her first question (Does he acquiesce to the first question? Does he find it too embarrassing to answer?), Adam declares his stand with a veiled threat, "*so that if you see your way* she'll be able to 'go with him' in future as much as she likes" (Emphasis added). Charlotte finally concedes.

In the unquoted conversation that occurs between this and the previous quoted passage, Charlotte makes it clear that, considering "[Maggie's] everything to [Adam]—she has always been," she doubts that if "there's room in [Adam's] life" for her.[284] Here too, it seems that she concedes because she is now convinced that this marriage is in Maggie's best interest. However, the narrator carefully chooses his words when saying

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283 GB, I.223–25.

284 GB, I.222.

"Charlotte *appeared* to examine for a minute, in Maggie's interest, this privilege" (Emphasis added). There are at least two other possible reasons why she should consider this marriage while lying to herself (as Adam perhaps does) that she does it only for nobly being considerate towards Maggie. First, she can gain direct access to Amerigo, whom she genuinely loves. The fact that her marriage with Adam is just a sham and he and Maggie will certainly continue to spend all day together should provide a perfect condition for having an affair with the Prince. Second, instead of marrying for Maggie's security, Charlotte may as well marry for her own security. She has admitted that she hates being unattached and adrift, and marrying the wealthy Adam is apparently not a bad solution to this problem. Indeed, we can interpret Adam's aforementioned admission of his marital undesirability without explaining why he is still worth considering as implying that there are obviously economic benefits to marrying him. He is just not comfortable openly talking about these benefits, but they are real. As in several cases in our discussion on "What should Adam do?" it is the wording of the narrator ("Charlotte *appeared* to"), which is considered to be a topic especially worth discussing in literature much more than in any other form, that enables our nuanced exploration of the ambiguity of Charlotte's intention, which is crucial for responsibly deciding "What should Charlotte do?"

In IV.2 we have discussed two reasons why not only moral rules but also the concrete situation matters for moral judgment. First, without understanding the concrete situation, we do not know what rules should be applied and how. In Charlotte's case, without knowing whether Adam proposes to her because he truly loves her or because he only wants to reassure Maggie, she will be torn between "Do not marry someone you do not love because it is irresponsible" and "Be considerate towards your best friend and sacrifice yourself when necessary."[285] Even when she decides she wants to

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[285] In case that some would argue that these are not real moral rules, they can also be formulated more generally such as "Be responsible for your children," "Be considerate towards other people," or, as Kantian categorical imperative, "act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law," but these more uncontroversial moral rules are just as unclear about how they should be applied to a specific situation.

follow the latter rule, without practical wisdom grasping the concrete situation she still does not know what exactly she should sacrifice and how. In Nussbaum's words, only knowing that you should sacrifice yourself for someone you love is not enough because "to sacrifice in the wrong words with the wrong tone of voice at the wrong time would be worse, perhaps, than not sacrificing at all."[286] The second reason the concrete situation matters is the possibility to face situations that are unprecedented and require moral improvisation. We do not have to repeat what has been analyzed in this subsection to point out that it is very unlikely that the entanglements between Adam, Charlotte, and Maggie can be fully covered by existing rules. Even if they can, proving it should still require getting a full picture of the situation at hand.

It is again time to compare this subsection with Wonham's summary of the relevant chapters from *The Golden Bowl*:

> Adam begins to see Charlotte in a new light as they meet each day in the nursery, where the happy domestic circle is recreated in Maggie's absence. Charlotte plays the piano for him every evening, and it is not long before Adam contemplates marriage, provided that this would make Maggie happy. To marry for his own happiness (or that of Charlotte, for that matter) would be "impossible," but "there was a grand difference in thinking of it for his child."
>
> Charlotte and Adam take a three-day holiday on the coast in Brighton, where their relationship flourishes. The season is in full swing […]. Adam asks Charlotte to marry him, but she is concerned that Maggie may not approve of her as a stepmother. Charlotte agrees to accept Adam's proposal only if Maggie endorses the marriage.[287]

For readers who only read this summary, in addition to the obvious loss of details of the original story, they lose the opportunity to grasp the ambiguities of the situation, which is regarded as undesirable by many forms other than the literary one. The prose of analytical philosophy, for example, aims to eliminate ambiguities. However, as mentioned, both in fiction and in real life, the situation is often ambiguous because we often have to infer what really happens from what is only ostensibly there. As a result,

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[286] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 156.

[287] Wonham, "*The Golden Bowl*," 84.

not only can we disagree about what rules should be applied and how, but we can also disagree about what the facts are and how they should be interpreted. We have offered many examples where our moral judgment will be significantly different if a detail of the situation is left out or a word is formulated in other ways. Thus, although our discussion is based on a work of fiction, it is reasonable to believe that, even when discussing moral issues that actually occur, a form that allows ambiguity is important for fully grasping the situation so that responsible moral judgment can be made. As is the case in 3.1, a plot summary, with its nonliterary style, does not work for the purpose of ethical discussion.

3.3 What should Maggie do?

Let us examine one last dialog from Book 4, Chapter 5, where Adam makes an intriguing assessment of their family life (By now he and Charlotte have been married for a long time, while Charlotte and Amerigo are having an affair and Maggie begins to suspect it):

> "There seems a kind of charm, doesn't there? on our life—and quite as if just lately it had got itself somehow renewed, had waked up refreshed. A kind of wicked selfish prosperity perhaps, as if we had grabbed everything, fixed everything, down to the last lovely object for the last glass case of the last corner, left over, of my old show. That's the only take-off, that it has made us perhaps lazy, a wee bit languid—lying like gods together, all careless of mankind."
>
> "Do you consider that we're languid?"—that form of rejoinder she had jumped at for the sake of its pretty lightness. "Do you consider that we're careless of mankind?—living as we do in the biggest crowd in the world and running about always pursued and pursuing."
>
> It had made him think indeed a little longer than she had meant; but he came up again, as she might have said, smiling. "Well, I don't know. We get nothing but the fun, do we?"
>
> "No," she had hastened to declare; "we certainly get nothing but the fun."
>
> "We do it all," he had remarked, "so beautifully."
>
> "We do it all so beautifully." She hadn't denied this for a moment. "I see what you mean."

"Well, I mean too," he had gone on, "that we haven't no doubt enough the sense of difficulty."

"Enough? Enough for what?"

"Enough not to be selfish."

"I don't think *you* are selfish," she had returned—and had managed not to wail it.

"I don't say it's me particularly—or that it's you or Charlotte or Amerigo. But we're selfish together—we move as a selfish mass. You see we want always the same thing," he had gone on—"and that holds us, that binds us, together. We want each other," he had further explained; "only wanting it, each time, *for* each other. That's what I call the happy spell; but it's also a little—possibly—the immorality."

"'The immorality'?" she had pleasantly echoed.

"Well, we're tremendously moral for ourselves—that is for each other; and I won't pretend that I know exactly at whose particular personal expense you and I for instance are happy. What it comes to, I dare say, is that there's something haunting—as if it were a bit uncanny—in such a consciousness of our general comfort and privilege. Unless indeed," he had rambled on, "it's only I to whom, fantastically, it says so much. That's all I mean at any rate—that it's 'sort of' soothing; as if we were sitting about on divans, with pigtails, smoking opium and seeing visions. 'Let us then be up and doing'—what is it Longfellow says? That seems sometimes to ring out; like the police breaking in—into our opium-den—to give us a shake. But the beauty of it is at the same time that we *are* doing; we're doing, that is, after all, what we went in for. We're working it, our life, our chance, whatever you may call it, as we saw it, as we felt it, from the first. We *have* worked it, and what more can you do than that? It's a good deal for me," he had wound up, "to have made Charlotte so happy—to have so perfectly contented her. *You*, from a good way back, were a matter of course—I mean your being all right; so I needn't mind your knowing that my great interest since then has rather inevitably been in making sure of the same success, very much to your advantage as well, for Charlotte. If we've worked our life, our idea really, as I say—if at any rate I can sit here and say that I've worked my share of it—it has not been what you may call least by our having put Charlotte so at her ease. *That* has been soothing, all round; that has curled up as the biggest of the blue fumes, or whatever they are, of the opium. Don't you see what a cropper we would have come if she *hadn't* settled down as she has?" And he had concluded by turning to Maggie as for something she mightn't really have thought of. "You, darling, in that case, I verily believe, would have been the one to hate it most."[288]

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[288] GB, II.90–93.

Seemingly out of now where, Adam claims that there is “a kind of wicked selfish prosperity” in his family. We again encounter his favorite artwork metaphor: They have done everything, including taking care of the most marginal exhibits in his art show. What does Adam mean by selfish here, when all he has been doing is being considerate towards Maggie (at least according to him)? Is Adam just tired of living a privileged life and begins to feel guilty about it (“lying like gods together, all careless of mankind”)? Or by “we’re selfish together,” he really does not want to include himself, but refer to Maggie? At first, Maggie does not take Adam’s complaint seriously, but later she has to ask herself these questions when Adam actually speaks of immorality. Although *The Golden Bowl* is widely regarded as a moral novel, James rarely lets his narrator or characters directly address the topic of morality, but here is an exception that deserves our special attention. Adam casually says that he and Maggie are happy at someone else’s expense, but he does not know who. Then he self-contradictingly mentions Charlotte’s name, just as he self-contradictingly believes that they are sitting about on divans, smoking opium, and doing nothing while at the same time “working it, our life, our chance, whatever you may call it.” He also believes that they have been wickedly selfish while at the same assures himself that “what more can you do than that?” If the ambiguity of Adam we talked about earlier still needs a little digging, here it is plainly evident. The copious and fluent nature of James’s writing authentically reflects the whole picture of Adam’s inner self, and the fact that it is full of contradictions and interpolations shows that the narrator does not pick and choose. Realizing this prevents us from jumping to conclusions based on only one or two lines from Adam, which is not the responsible way of moral judgment.

Recall that when Maggie persuades Adam to marry Charlotte, she tries very hard to convince him that Charlotte, who is “great in nature, in character, in spirit,” must not “be wasted.”[289] At the time we discussed the ambiguity of whether Adam sincerely believes Maggie or not, whether he decides to marry Charlotte indeed because he thinks it does good to her (not that such objectification and parentalism should be encouraged),

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[289] GB, I.180–81, 185.

or simply because this marriage can shut Maggie's mouth. Now we know Adam only wants to reassure Maggie, at least when he looks back at this point. When counting what he has done so that his life should not be shamefully regarded as selfish and languid, Adam proudly states that he has "so perfectly contented" Charlotte, as if she is an untamed animal that can explode any time: "Don't you see what a cropper we would have come if she *hadn't* settled down as she has?" By boasting about this, Adam apparently sees Charlotte as more of a ticking bomb than his loving wife. He also makes it clear that if things do not work out between him and Charlotte, his daughter would be most dissatisfied, to which Maggie replies:

> "To hate it—?" Maggie had invoked vagueness.
>
> "To hate our having, with our tremendous intentions, *not* brought it off. And I dare say I should have hated it for you even more than for myself."
>
> "That's not unlikely perhaps when it was for me, after all, that you did it."
>
> He had hesitated, but only a moment. "I never told you so."
>
> "Well, Charlotte herself soon enough told me."
>
> "But I never told *her*," her father had answered.
>
> "Are you very sure?" she had presently asked.
>
> "Well, I like to think how thoroughly I was taken with her, and how right I was, and how fortunate, to have that for my basis. I told her all the good I thought of her."
>
> "Then that," Maggie had returned, "was precisely part of the good. I mean it was precisely part of it that she could so beautifully understand."
>
> "Yes—understand everything."
>
> "Everything—and in particular your reasons. Her telling me—that showed me how she had understood."
>
> They were face to face again now, and she saw she had made his colour rise; it was as if he were still finding in her eyes the concrete image, the enacted scene, of her passage with Charlotte, which he was actually hearing of for the first time and as to which it would have been natural he should question her further. His forbearance to do so would but mark precisely the complication of his fears. "What she does like," he finally said, "is the way it has succeeded."

> "Your marriage?"
>
> "Yes—my whole idea. The way I've been justified. That's the joy I give her. If for *her* either it had failed—!" That however wasn't worth talking about; he had broken off.[290]

The narrator sharply comments that Maggie is caught off guard by Adam's suggestion that she overenthusiastically cares about his marriage with Charlotte: She has to "[invoke] vagueness" to duck it. However, Adam refuses to give her an out ("I dare say I should have hated it for you even more than for myself"). Maggie has no other choice but to finally admit that Adam gets married for her. The detail that Adam hesitates afterward is thought-provoking. Does he regret hinting so obviously that Maggie is embarrassed? Are "I never told you so" and "I never told *her*" (instead of "That is not true") ways of approving Maggie's words indirectly? Or does he mean something else with this whole speech about selfishness (We will soon discuss the possibility that Adam knows about Charlotte and Amerigo's affair by now)? Adam does not seem surprised, at least at first, to hear that Charlotte knows the true reason why he marries her and that she even tells Maggie about it. He then becomes completely honest about how he consoles himself by telling/lying to himself that he actually loves Charlotte. Adam only shows "the complication of his fears" when Maggie ruthlessly emphasizes again that Charlotte understands Adam's plight so perfectly that she does not even have difficulties telling *her*, the person behind this arranged marriage that has caused Charlotte immense pain. We do not know whether it is the narrator or Maggie who sees Adam's fears and his imagination of the scene where Charlotte tells Maggie. If it is Maggie, her ability to face her father's fears so blithely without doing anything about it certainly will have a negative impact on our moral judgment of her. If it is the narrator, we should have a deeper sympathy for Adam's suffering, which is so intense that the once neutral narrator begins to take his side. Either way, it is again the literary form that enables James to play with such ambiguity that richly represents the original (fictional but possible) situation.

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[290] GB, II.93–94.

In the end, Adam concludes that, however unjustified the initial reason for this marriage may be, it eventually turns out to be good because of the joy he has given Charlotte. But many examples from the book tell the opposite story, especially after Maggie knows about the affair and tactfully makes Adam go back to America with Charlotte in Book 5, Chapter 3. In the following Chapter 4, when Amerigo, now knowing that Maggie knows, begins to distance himself from Charlotte, Charlotte tries to escape reality by acting as a tour guide of Adam's art collection. She breaks down and weeps publicly during a tour; her voice is so unnaturally high and shaky that Maggie thinks it must come from "a creature in anguish."[291] Then, in a tense but not yet full-scale confrontation, Charlotte tells Maggie that *she* has decided to take Adam back to America because that is where he belongs, which is of course only a way to save face because actually it is Adam who takes the lead, at the request of Maggie. Maggie plays along with her by pretending to be upset that Charlotte wants to take her father away from her. When cornered by Charlotte's "You haven't worked against me?"[292] Maggie, with great acting skill, does not deny it but reluctantly "admits" that she has failed to bring Charlotte down, which is the scene we just mentioned when questioning Maggie's claim that Charlotte tells her Adam gets married for her. After successfully deceiving Charlotte, Maggie finally breathes a sigh of relief and "[sinks] upon a seat." The narrator approvingly concludes: "Yes, she had done all."[293] In a way, by telling only Amerigo that she knows, withholding the truth from Adam, and lying to Charlotte, Maggie really keeps the dignity of all of them. But several (potential) moral rules clearly conflict here, such as "Be honest" and "Respect others." Without the literary form that allows for the ubiquitous ambiguity of moral life, the concrete situation at hand here cannot be fully grasped. Without fully grasping the concrete situation, even people with practical wisdom cannot determine which of these rules should be applied here and how.

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[291] GB, II.294.

[292] GB, II.317.

[293] GB, II.318.

Although here Maggie is only acting, on several other occasions, she does have seriously reflected on how her particularly close relationship with Adam might have troubled Charlotte. While in Book 2, Chapter 3, Maggie still firmly believes it is entirely fine that Adam has taken over Amerigo's role as father in Maggie's nuclear family with her son, in Book 4, Chapter 2 and 3, after she begins to suspect Amerigo and Charlotte's relationship, Maggie realizes how "Charlotte had been 'had in,' as the servants always said of extra help,"[294] how Amerigo and Charlotte were pulling "the family coach" while "she and her father were not so much as pushing,"[295] and how, once realizing her mistake, behaving as she might have behaved before "would be to act for Amerigo and Charlotte with the highest hypocrisy."[296] On the other hand, towards the end of the story, when Maggie tells Fanny that she thinks Amerigo should see Charlotte alone for the last time before they depart, she "quite lucidly" declares that she and Adam are "lost to each other really much more than Amerigo and Charlotte are; since for them it's just, it's right, it's deserved, while for us it's only sad and strange and *not caused by our fault*."[297] How should we make of this inconsistency? Does Maggie keep changing her mind (from "My relationship with Adam is appropriate" to "It hurts Charlotte and Amerigo" to "It is not our fault after all")? Or is she torn between two conflicting positions, as Adam and Charlotte might also be?

These are open-ended questions, and we do not aim to offer any definite answers but to emphasize the role of the literary form here, with its dedication to details and its tolerance of ambiguity, for enabling us to ask these questions in the first place. First, we cannot simply say that Charlotte's suffering is all self-inflicted because it is also the result of a loveless marriage and the disregard of Adam and Maggie. This is of course not to say that Charlotte and Amerigo's cheating can be somehow justified, but to point out that Maggie cannot find herself completely on the moral high ground to judge others. Second, when deciding whether to tell Adam and Charlotte that she knows about the

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[294] GB, II.23.

[295] GB, II.23.

[296] GB, II.47.

[297] GB, II.333. Emphasis added.

affair, Maggie faces, besides the above-mentioned conflicting moral rules of "Be honest" and "Respect others," also conflicting obligations as a daughter and as a friend. While Maggie, as a filial daughter of her father, is arguably obliged to tell Adam that his wife has cheated on him, she, as the closest friend (and the stepdaughter) of Charlotte, perhaps should handle it more tactfully. The possibility that Adam and Charlotte each have willingly sacrificed greatly for Maggie's happiness makes this decision even harder. We say "possibility" because the ambiguities we explored earlier suggest that both Adam and Charlotte may exaggerate their sacrifices: Adam may truly love Charlotte and Charlotte may only want to get closer to Amerigo or to secure Adam's financial support. However, discussing the possibility that they have other motives for marrying besides self-sacrifice cannot completely erase their good intentions for Maggie, because the ambiguities are, at best, about the proportion of self-sacrificing and non-self-sacrificing reasons. In addition to the nuances of Charlotte's reluctance to marry Adam mentioned above, which are vividly illustrated through James's characteristic dense literary language, Charlotte's reaction to Maggie and Amerigo's endorsement of her marriage with Adam is also worth citing:

> [The portress] raised aloft a telegraphic message and as she delivered it sociably discriminated. "Cette fois-ci pour madame!"—with which she as genially retreated, leaving Charlotte in possession. Charlotte, taking it, held it at first unopened. Her eyes had come back to her companion, who had immediately and triumphantly greeted it. "Ah there you are!"
>
> She broke the envelope then in silence, and for a minute, as with the message he himself had put before her, studied its contents without a sign. He watched her without a question and at last she looked up. "I'll give you," she simply said, "what you ask."
>
> The expression of her face was strange—but since when had a woman's at moments of supreme surrender not a right to be? He took it in with his own long look and his grateful silence—so that nothing more for some instants passed between them. Their understanding sealed itself—he already felt she had made him right. But he was in presence too of the fact that Maggie had made *her* so; and always therefore without Maggie where in fine would he be? She united them, brought them together as with the click of a silver spring, so that on the spot, with the vision of it, his eyes filled, Charlotte facing him meanwhile with her expression

> made still stranger by the blur of his gratitude. Quite through it withal he smiled. “What my child does for me—!”[298]

This happens not long after Adam’s proposal to Charlotte. Based on what happened then, we would assume that, for whatever reason Charlotte chooses to marry Adam (It will make Maggie worry less; she can get access to Amerigo; she can be financially covered for the rest of her life), she has made up her mind. But this episode clearly shows she still has considerable hesitation and unspeakable pain. She hesitates to open the telegram, contrasted by Adam’s impatience, reads it “without a sign,” and only replies “I’ll give you […] what you ask” with a strange expression. Adam obviously realizes that this is not the most enthusiastic reaction one can get to a proposal and, strikingly similar to their mutual understanding in the piano scene, they stay silent for a while. They both understand that the other is doing this, however reluctantly, for Maggie. The narrator dramatizes Adam’s shameless gratitude (“without Maggie where in fine would he be?”), cruelly leaving a descriptive void of Charlotte’s quiet suffering. Charlotte may be considering that, although this sacrifice is tremendous, for Maggie it is worth it (Recall how Adam consoles himself by believing that he has been “justified” because of the “joy” he gives Charlotte and note how ironic this self-soothing sounds now). Not every best friend can make such a sacrifice (and not every best friend will ask for it either, especially when “it” means asking your best friend to marry your father so that he will not be alone). Therefore, for discussing the application of relevant moral rules in this case, neither can Charlotte be mechanically categorized as “friend” for rules like “Take care of your friends” nor can her relationship with Maggie simply be categorized as “friendship,” just as neither can Adam be mechanically categorized as “parent” for rules like “Be filial to parents” nor can his relationship with Maggie as a simple “closed parent-child relationship,” which was analyzed in 3.1. For the same reason, if there are moral rules about how we should normatively handle adultery, we should think twice before mechanically applying them here. This adds another

[298] GB, I.239–40.

dimension to why not only universal moral rules but also the concrete individual situation should be considered for moral judgment.[299]

When we interpreted Adam's speech on selfishness, we talked about how he self-contradictingly believes that he and Maggie might only be happy at Charlotte's expense, and that he has successfully managed to protect Charlotte from misery. Now that we have further analyzed Charlotte's situation, his first belief makes more sense, because based on Charlotte's reaction, both immediately after Adam's proposal and long after they get married, we can infer that when Adam and Maggie sacrifice for each other, they also sacrifice Charlotte, rather than do her good (not to mention that Charlotte once complaints to Amerigo that Adam can "never" have any children, suggesting his impotence or sterility[300]). This is the reason why this study, unlike Nussbaum, has been cautious about not calling Adam and Maggie's acts laudable altruism.[301] This also makes the question "What should Maggie do?" more complicated, especially after she knows about the affair. As both Samuels and Nussbaum notice, when defending her rights, Maggie is not a merciless agent of justice. She feels sympathy for her rival in a famous passage where she vividly imagines Charlotte as a soul in pain.[302] Here, Maggie even fully conceives what Charlotte would say to her in Charlotte's voice:

> "You don't know what it is to have been loved and broken with. You haven't been broken with, because in *your* relation what can there have been worth speaking of to break? Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness; and if it was to have no meaning, no better meaning than that such a creature as you could breathe upon it, at your hour, for blight, why was I myself dealt with all for deception? why condemned after a couple of short years to find the golden flame—oh the golden flame!—a mere handful of black ashes?"[303]

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[299] For similar discussion on whether we should always tell the truth, see III.2.3.2 "Wisdom and neural architecture."

[300] GB, I.307–8.

[301] See Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 149, 154, 165.

[302] GB, II.327–31; Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, 216; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 85–91.

[303] GB, II.329–30.

The lifelike resentful tone and the powerful metaphor ("Ours was everything a relation could be, filled to the brim with the wine of consciousness") in this passage are striking, which convincingly show how heartfelt Maggie's sympathy for Charlotte is despite her betrayal. By contrast, Charlotte believes that "I can't put myself into Maggie's skin—I can't, as I say. It's not my fit—I shouldn't be able, as I see it, to breathe in it."[304]

Maggie not only imagines Charlotte's pain, she also imagines Amerigo's pain. In the following Book 6, Chapter 2, Maggie imagines him as a trapped beast in a "locked cage" as he often isolates himself now in his reading room, "his prison" with "four walls that enclosed his restlessness."[305] When she for the first time steps into this prison with Amerigo, she suddenly sees him "as if he were hers, hers in a degree and on a scale, with an intensity and an intimacy, that were a new and a strange quantity, that were like the irruption of a tide loosening them where they had stuck and making them feel they floated."[306] The stirring metaphor of the irruptive tide, which almost makes Maggie put out her hands to Amerigo and catches at him,[307] again graphically shows us how so vulnerable Amerigo is in Maggie's sympathetic eyes. With such genuine sympathy, Maggie is practicing practical wisdom: We should not claim in a universal way that adulterers deserve punishment (or forgiveness) but put ourselves in the shoes of the persons concerned and judge according to the particular situation. This noble, considerate, and kind image of Maggie seems to be very different from the selfish and domineering Maggie we talked about earlier. We again face the ambiguity presented to us by James's intricately designed novel. Has Maggie changed (or grown up, as Fanny and many critics would put it)? Or are these simply different sides of her, a conflicting person? There are no definite answers, but *realizing* such ambiguity is already a good start for good moral judgment, which is made possible by the literary form.

To further explore the question "What should Maggie do?" and the role of the literary form in it, let us examine a more concrete question disputed by several critics:

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[304] GB, I.311.

[305] GB, II.337–8.

[306] GB, II.339.

[307] GB, II.340.

Should Maggie tell Charlotte that she knows about the affair? Robert Pippin, agreeing with Frederick Olafson, argues that the novel ends in "a great moral crash" because its resolution still rests on lies (Maggie convinces Adam to go back to America with Charlotte without telling them about the affair, effectively ending Charlotte's contact with Amerigo).[308] Pippin believes that this is understood by James, and we, too, do not have to be a narrow moralist to see why solving Maggie's crisis by lying is unacceptable. For Pippin, both Maggie's direct lying to Charlotte that she does not know about the affair ("Upon my honour"[309]) and her hiding the truth from Adam are escapism because such a crisis can only be solved openly, frankly, and mutually. Brudney, by contrast, argues that by not telling them the truth Maggie does them good for preserving their self-respect and preventing a family scandal.[310] He recognizes that the reason some people disapprove of white lies is that they might be disrespectful to the person being lied to, as Charlotte probably does not want others to decide for her what is good for her. Maggie's lie, however, according to Brudney, is based on respect for Charlotte. We have talked about how Maggie plays along with Charlotte's face-saving claim that she is the one who decides to go to America with Adam. While not everyone would agree with Brudney's interpretation, reading the original text of this heated confrontation certainly helps us understand Charlotte's desperate need to remain in control and why Maggie's lie may thus be regarded as respectful.

When considering whether Maggie should tell Charlotte, we have to consider what kind of person Charlotte is and how much she suffers from the marriage with Adam. This, again, depends on getting the concrete situation right. We have mentioned how Charlotte breaks down when she tries to escape reality by being a guide for Adam's art collection. Maggie's sympathetic imagination of Charlotte's pain also partially explains

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[308] Robert B. Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 77–80; Frederick A. Olafson, "Moral Relationships in the Fiction of Henry James," *Ethics* 98, no. 2 (January 1988): 310–12.

[309] GB, II.251.

[310] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 407–10. A more subtle possibility is that Charlotte knows Maggie knows, but they both prefer not to discuss it *openly*.

why she chooses to lie. There is a conflict between honesty, friendship, and family affection as well, because while lying to a friend is frowned upon, telling Charlotte could indirectly and negatively affect Adam, no matter Charlotte intentionally passes on the news to him or not. Other conflicts of moral rules include Maggie's highest-priority rule that she does not want to hurt *anyone* (See her "felt need of not working harm" and her "superstition of not 'hurting'"[311]). It is because of this belief that Maggie can come up with the vividly imagined complaint from Charlotte in Charlotte's voice quoted earlier and even make Amerigo see Charlotte once more before she leaves, possibly for good. It is also because of this belief that Maggie tells Fanny she "can bear anything":

"Oh 'bear'!" Mrs. Assingham fluted.

"For love," said the Princess.

Fanny hesitated. "Of your father?"

"For love," Maggie repeated.

It kept her friend watching. "Of your husband?"

"For love," Maggie said again.[312]

Twice, Maggie deliberately (and perhaps annoyingly) avoids Fanny's questions about whom she is bearing for. However, such obsession with moral perfection proves to be problematic. F. O. Matthiessen sees "something slightly sickening in this wide-open declaration of being in love with love without discrimination between kinds."[313] Failing to discriminate between loves is failing to see the obvious fact that, in Maggie's situation, she cannot keep her father, her husband, and her closest friend from being hurt *at the same time* anymore; she has to make a choice. Samuels thus believes that this passage contradicts Maggie's presumed awakening (by Fanny and many critics) in

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311 GB, I.160, II.64, quoted in Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 126.

312 GB, II.116.

313 F. O. Matthiessen, *Henry James: The Major Phase* (London: Oxford University Press, 1944), 97, quoted in Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, 218.

the second half of the novel to the grown-up fact that love is inevitably exclusive, and that she cannot be a full-time wife and a full-time daughter simultaneously.[314] These three "For love" in a row also sound so morally conceited that Maggie appears to be "crafty-innocent, smugly virtuous, coolly victorious"[315] rather than simply innocent and virtuous. Similarly, Nussbaum regards Maggie's unrealistic wish that "I want a happiness without a hole in it big enough for you to poke in your finger. [...] The golden bowl with all our happiness in it. The bowl without the crack."[316] as childish and even morally reprehensible because it makes her deny or bypass the obvious conflicting rules and obligations in her case.[317]

Returning to the concrete question of whether Maggie should lie to Charlotte and Adam, we argue that there is no universal rule about lying that can fit any situation (Even if such a rule exists, its application and the resolution of its potential conflicts with other rules still, as mentioned, require practical wisdom—we do not want to avoid acknowledging the possibilities of such conflicts, as Maggie does), because different lies in different situations should have different moral significance: Doctors lies to dying patients, adulterers' lies to Maggie, Maggie's lies to Charlotte and not-telling to Adam should not be treated equally in moral judgment. By discussing "What should Maggie do?" we do not aim at giving any moral prescriptions but argue that such debate should be based on understanding the concrete situation, which is often full of ambiguities worth considering, and that the literary form allows us to grasp these ambiguities well. Based on his categorical imperative, Kant's famous argument that lying is wrong in all situations is controversial exactly because it may be too absolute and does not consider the situations where we commonly believe it is acceptable to lie.

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[314] See Samuels, 208, although one may argue that Maggie can still *wishfully* express such desire for moral purity after she has grown up. See also Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 401.

[315] Ferner Nuhn, *The Wind Blew from the East: A Study in the Orientation of American Culture* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1942), 137, quoted in Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, 218.

[316] GB, II.216–17.

[317] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 125–26, 134–35; Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam."

After all, if it is still debatable that a doctor can lie to a dying patient, we should be allowed to lie to a murderer who is looking for his victim.[318]

Pippin thinks the theme of deception and our strong aversion to it are at the center of interest in James's greatest works, as "deceived heiresses" can be found not only in *The Golden Bowl* but also in *Washington Square* and *The Portrait of a Lady*. They can be seen as paradigmatic characters not just because of their convenient potential for melodrama, but also because they create strong moral reactions to engage readers, without which both the moral and the aesthetic value of these novels would be compromised.[319] Indeed, many critics notice a soul-searching question related to deception put forward by the shopkeeper when he responds to Charlotte's suspicion about whether the golden bowl is flawed: "But if it's something you can't find out, isn't it as good as if it were nothing?"[320] This question is a vital clue in *The Golden Bowl*. After Maggie finds out that the bowl is proof of Amerigo's infidelity, Fanny smashes it right in front of her, hoping this can make Maggie console herself that whatever bothers her "has ceased to exist."[321] Fanny does this for a reason, because beforehand when Maggie suspects that something is going on between Amerigo and Charlotte, she "steadily and intensely refuses" to believe it and turns to Fanny for consolation (or more accurately, for a lie). In Fanny's words, Maggie does not want proof but "*dis*proof, as against herself" when she "appealed to me, so extraordinarily, to side against her."[322] They even tacitly (but "solemnly") have "a grand, high compact": Maggie will "keep up her lie so long as I keep up mine." When Bob, Fanny's husband and confidant, asks what Fanny means exactly by Maggie's lie, she straightforwardly says it means "the pretence that she believes me. Believes they're innocent."[323]

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[318] Kant has his own explanation for this though, see Immanuel Kant, "Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals; with On a Supposed Right to Lie Because of Philanthropic Concerns," trans. James W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1993), 65.

[319] Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, 3–4, 71.

[320] GB, I.114.

[321] GB, II.178–79.

[322] GB, II.130–31.

[323] GB, II.130.

In this section we have discussed several examples where one person mistakenly decides things for the other, innocently (or not) and stubbornly believing that this is in the other's best interest even when the other openly opposes it. Here, do we finally have an example where such "thoughtful" consideration is truly appropriate? Does Maggie really not want to know? Fanny apparently thinks so. Even after Maggie has found solid proof of the affair and seemingly cannot continue cheating herself anymore, Fanny still wants to faithfully practice the shopkeeper's motto by destroying the proof. Maggie, on the one hand, seems to agree with Fanny (Maggie has a similar motto: "Not to be afraid *not* to speak"[324]). On the other hand, she starts to manage this crisis discreetly long before being definitely sure about it. The smashing of the golden bowl happens in Book 4, Chapter 9, but in Book 4, Chapter 2 Maggie already starts to work on her relationship with Charlotte after realizing that her intimate daughter-father relationship with Adam might have desolated Charlotte. In the following Chapter 3, she deliberately tries to meet Charlotte alone by trying to send Amerigo away to travel with Adam. In Chapter 4, after also realizing that Adam might have got married only to reassure her, she tries to create opportunities for the four of them to spend more time together. What we can get from the text during this period about whether Maggie really wants to lie to herself is ambiguous (Although it would be great to cite them in full again as in our earlier discussion, we, at last, have reached the point where practical reasons such as length should be considered and we have to ask our readers to read them for themselves).[325] While Brudney does not hesitate to conclude that what *The Golden Bowl* teaches us is that "there are times when the right thing to do is not to know what another person knows or feels"[326] (and perhaps also not to decide for others what is in their best interest), we refrain from offering such moral prescriptions based on the "moral" of this novel but only try to show that getting the concrete situation (with all its ambiguities) right is a prerequisite for offering any such prescriptions.

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[324] GB, II.118.

[325] See, for example, GB, II.115–20.

[326] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 437. See also Patrick Gardiner, "Professor Nussbaum on *The Golden Bowl*," *New Literary History* 15, no. 1 (1983): 179–84.

In addition to whether Maggie should tell Charlotte, whether she should tell Adam is another tricky question. According to Maggie, no one knows how much Adam knows about the affair (and no one asks).[327] Adam's willingness to sacrifice for Maggie (and the sacrifice he already makes to marry Charlotte) makes the question of whether Adam knows very complex. It is entirely possible that he finds out himself through some clues not mentioned in the book, but he chooses not to tell Maggie, not only for fear of breaking her heart, but also because he does not want her to blame herself for having recommended Charlotte to him (Those who have read our previous quotations involving Adam should have no doubt that this would be his biggest concern rather than accusing his daughter of being blind and introducing him to the wrong woman). The fact that Adam is so easily convinced by Maggie to return to America also suggests that he may have known about the adultery and also considers it to be the best solution. From the perspective of Maggie, she faces a conflict between romantic love and filial love: She must leave her father to win back Amerigo. From Adam's perspective, it seems the same, but is it not that for Adam, it is much more important to be able to continue to see his daughter than to split up the adulterers because he does not love Charlotte that much? We do not know for sure. This is another good example of the novel's layered and nested structure, which richly illustrates a fictional but plausible, complicated, and ambiguous moral situation.

It is according to this situation that Maggie eventually decides not to talk to Adam about the affair, whether he already knows or not. James makes sure that we see this and, according to Nussbaum, he also intentionally sets Bob and Fanny up in a way that they represent two extremes of the debate between moral generalism and moral particularism.[328] Bob only cares about rules and what can be generalized, while Fanny pays too much attention to trivial details, chattering and immersing herself in her world and imagination. When James makes Fanny endlessly gossip about others and Bob amusingly struggle to follow her thought and disagree with her, which happens

[327] GB, II.335.

[328] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 157–58.

throughout the novel, they not only move the plot forward but also inspire the reader to reflect on the relationship between the universal and the particular in moral judgment, a topic James consciously focuses on. We recall how both James and Aristotle, as moral particularists, emphasize the perception of particulars to show moral rules are insufficient for good moral judgment because a) rules alone do not tell us how they should be applied (General terms such as "friend" and "father," for example, have different moral meanings for different persons in different situations) and b) brand new, paradigm-changing situations not yet covered by existing rules are always possible.

From the preface of *The Princess Casamassima*, where James compares moral judgment with perception, Nussbaum quotes this interesting remark: "The person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to *record* it dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen, or, as we say, give away the value and beauty of the thing."[329] Note that here James is not generally talking about the importance of heightened perception of particulars for moral judgment but the concrete criteria of great writers (Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Balzac are mentioned earlier in the same paragraph). We can thus see how, for him, the image of a person with practical wisdom and the image of a great writer almost overlap.[330] In this section, we have demonstrated that the literary form, because of its complexity and its tolerance of ambiguity, indeed contributes to ethics in the spirit of James's another confident assertion: "To 'put' things is very exactly and responsibly and interminably to do them,"[331] this time from the preface of *The Golden Bowl*.

3.4 A clarification

It is worth emphasizing again that discussing the contribution of literature to ethics is not to argue that literary works can replace moral philosophy, or that special cases

[329] James, "Preface," 1908, I.xii-xiii, quoted in Nussbaum, 84.

[330] See Nussbaum, 84.

[331] Henry James, "Preface," in GB, I.xxiv, quoted in Nussbaum, 84.

and specific situations can replace universal or general rules, but to argue that the former can *complement* the latter. In a reply to this misunderstanding that we have mentioned in 3.1, Nussbaum clarifies that the central argument in her attack on Maggie's naive notion of ethical consistency (that she wants to break absolutely no rules and hurt absolutely no one) is exactly that rules are not taken *seriously enough*, because if they are, Maggie would not try to unwisely deny the existence of conflicting rules in the first place.[332]

Recall that the first reason we believe that the concrete situation matters for moral judgment is also that rules can conflict in a given situation, which already shows that we do not deny the importance of rules, otherwise conflicting rules would not be a problem. Similarly, Nussbaum argues that James sees this too, otherwise he would not use the contrast between Bob and Fanny to illustrate how neither only focusing on rules nor only focusing on the concrete situation works.[333] Instead, wise people take both into consideration. Nussbaum also notices that both Aristotle and James regard good moral judgment as a kind of improvisation, which is taken by some to mean that rules are not important anymore, which is not what is meant.[334] From the side of James, for example, how Maggie depicts her way of dealing with the tricky situation in her family at the beginning of the second half of the novel is approvingly described as follows:

> Maggie went, she went—she felt herself going; she reminded herself of an actress who had been studying a part and rehearsing it, but who suddenly, on the stage, before the footlights, had begun to improvise, to speak lines not in the text. It was this very sense of the stage and the footlights that kept her up, made her rise higher: just as it was the sense of action that logically involved some platform—action quite positively for the first time in her life, or, counting in the previous afternoon, for the second. The platform remained for three or four days thus sensibly under her feet, and she had all the while with it the inspiration of quite remarkably, of quite heroically improvising. Preparation and practice had come but a short way; her part opened out and she invented from moment to moment what to say and to

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332 Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam," 205.

333 Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 155.

334 Nussbaum, 37, 71, 94, 155.

> do. She had but one rule of art—to keep within bounds and not lose her head; certainly she might see for a week how far that would take her.[335]

As Maggie correctly realizes, the key to improvising well is not to freely do anything as she pleases, but to "keep within bounds and not lose her head." She must still first study her part, then constantly observe the evolvement of the situation and the reactions of other actors and respond accordingly. Only in this way can her actions on the stage be "heroically improvising" instead of mechanically following the script. Indeed, what Maggie does in the end successfully preserves everyone's face while finding an appropriate balance between her conflicting obligations and considering the others' changing needs.[336]

From the side of Aristotle, he argues that:

> The whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we said at the very beginning that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or precept, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation.[337]

Here Aristotle compares practical wisdom to two other kinds of expertise, the art of medicine and the art of navigation, because they all do not simply consist in knowing exact rules but in being able to act according to different situations. Take medicine, for example: On the one hand, when treating patients, doctors certainly "realize the need to improvise,"[338] as Daniel Devereux argues when analyzing this passage, because "rules" like "Whenever the patient shows symptoms A, apply treatment B" still require them to decide the timing and the quantity of medication (only to name two variables

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[335] GB, II.33.

[336] For different opinions, especially regarding whether it is moral to lie for achieving this balance, see the above 3.3 "What should Maggie do?"

[337] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a1–9.

[338] Daniel T. Devereux, "Particular and Universal in Aristotle's Conception of Practical Knowledge," *The Review of Metaphysics* 39, no. 3 (1986): 495–96.

in a treatment) according to the situation of the patient, the stage of the disease, the potential presence of other symptoms, etc. The difference between good doctors and mediocre doctors often lies in these nuances, as the same medical "rules" are supposedly known to everyone. On the other hand, obviously, even a good doctor should "keep within bounds and not lose her head," as Maggie does, and take existing rules seriously when improvising.

To summarize, when comparing good moral judgment to improvisation, both James and Aristotle carefully choose their words and examples to avoid the misunderstanding that they somehow do not admit the importance of moral rules. Related to this, Brudney deliberately chooses Gadamer's concept "tact" that we have talked about to describe what is remarkable about Maggie, because he thinks Gadamer's definition best captures "her reserve, her silence, and her express willingness to live with her lack of knowledge"[339] while unequivocally insisting that the need for improvisational practical wisdom in moral judgment does not suggest that rules do not matter anymore. This somewhat isolated reference to Gadamer might seem a bit out of context for the reader of Brudney's original article, as it is not even remotely about hermeneutics or Gadamer per se, but here, it is a welcome and helpful reminder of what we have discussed in II.1 "The humanist tradition" in the context of Gadamer's four guiding concepts of humanism. Gadamer defines tact as "a special sensitivity and sensitiveness to situations and how to behave in them, for which knowledge from general principles does not suffice. Hence an essential part of tact is that it is tacit and unformulable."[340] By saying "general principles does not *suffice*" (Emphasis added) Gadamer also makes it clear that he does not regard principles as useless but only argues that they alone are not enough, because:

> It is clearly not only a matter of logical but of aesthetic judgment. The individual case on which judgment works is never simply a case; it is not exhausted by being a particular example of a universal law or concept. Rather, it is always an

[339] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 431. We do not necessarily agree with Brudney's distinction between "low-level rules" and "justificatory principles" here though, but that is another question.
[340] TM 15; GW 1, 22.

> "individual case," and it is significant that we call it a special case, because the rule does not comprehend it. Every judgment about something intended in its concrete individuality (e.g., the judgment required in a situation that calls for action) is—strictly speaking—a judgment about a special case. That means nothing less than that judging the case involves not merely applying the universal principle according to which it is judged, but co-determining, supplementing, and correcting that principle. From this it ultimately follows that all moral decisions require taste—which does not mean that this most individual balancing of decision is the only thing that governs them, but it is an indispensable element. It is truly an achievement of undemonstrable tact to hit the target and to discipline the application of the universal, the moral law (Kant), in a way that reason itself cannot. Thus taste is not the ground but the supreme consummation of moral judgment.[341]

What interests us here most is Gadamer's emphasis that tact is undemonstrable, in contrast to reason, which is demonstrable because it is governed by rules. Tact is instead related to "taste," which is used here by Gadamer in its historical meaning as a moral "sense," underlining its immediacy like that of our perception (i.e. we know for sure what is moral as we know what is green or what is hot simply because we *sense* it, without the need of any further justification). Taste, not reason, is thus "the supreme consummation of moral judgment." This accords well with Aristotle's argument that the mean between the excess and the deficiency a moral person should pursue is "not easy to determine by reasoning, any more than anything else that is perceived by the senses; such things depend on particular facts, and the decision rests with perception."[342] Indeed, in this regard, Gadamer notes that the emergence of the concept of taste in seventeenth-century Europe is connected with a moral philosophical tradition that goes back to antiquity, and that the ethics of the mean that Aristotle develops is "in a profound and comprehensive sense an ethics of good taste."[343]

A related point to the clarification that rules are still important for moral judgment is Nussbaum's distinction between the general and the universal. The general is opposed to the concrete (different in specificity), while the universal is opposed to the particular or the unique (different in applicability). While there are general and universal rules

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[341] TM 36; GW 1, 45.

[342] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109b11–23, see also 1126b2–4.

[343] TM 37; GW 1, 45.

(“Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself”), general yet not universal rules (“Do not lie”) that do not always apply and universal yet not general rules (“When the patient has been clearly and repeatedly telling his family all his life that they should not lie to him if he has a terminal illness, and he has also always been a persevering and optimistic person, do not lie to him about his illness”) that are too specific do exist.[344] It is thus a misunderstanding to say that moral particularists, who argue that rules alone do not suffice and the concrete situation matters, do not demand universalizability at all, because they have no problems recognizing very concrete universals like the “rule” of the optimistic patient just mentioned. By contrast, Nussbaum argues that recognizing that context-sensitive moral judgments can be universalizable plays an important role in how a novel offers ethical education and stimulates ethical imagination.[345] The only issue is that such concrete universals might not have a broad scope of application many would expect.[346] In the case of *The Golden Bowl*, according to Nussbaum, we can either concretely conclude “If a person were like Maggie and had a father exactly like Adam, and a relationship and circumstances exactly like theirs, the same actions would again be warranted” or more generally “One should consider the particular history of one’s very own relationship to one’s particular parents, their characteristics and one’s own, and choose, as Maggie does, with fine responsiveness to the concrete.”[347] The first “rule,” although not very useful, is an example of the universal that moral particularists would recognize.

Nussbaum’s attitude to the second rule is more complicated. On the one hand, it goes in line with the “concrete situation matters” argument as it encourages us to find a concrete universal (like the first rule) fitted to our situation. On the other hand, Nussbaum suspects that we cannot always successfully find such a concrete universal, because, as James’s novel shows, “we sense in Maggie and Adam a depth and quality

[344] It is of course debatable whether these indeed are valid moral rules (or whether general but not universal rules count as rules at all), but they are only given as examples of *possible* rules.

[345] Nussbaum, *Love’s Knowledge*, 38, 95.

[346] Nussbaum, 67.

[347] Nussbaum, 38.

of love that would not, we feel, tolerate the substitution of a clone, even one who had all the same describable features. She loves *him*, not just his properties, or him beyond and behind the properties—however mysterious that is."[348] While in what follows Nussbaum assuredly states that the reason for such essentialism is that a salient feature of human life is it is lived only once, she does not shy away from vague, nonargumentative expressions like "we sense" or "we feel," openly admitting the mysterious nature of her argument. Due to this mysterious essentialism, even if a clone of Adam exists, Maggie would not recognize him as her father and love him as much, because we all act by default in a way that every person is unique (and there is no clone or parallel universe), thus effectively limits the possibility and the usefulness of moral universals like the first rule. This mysterious essentialism also gives us more reason to pay close attention to the concrete situation in moral judgment: If there are not that many repeatable universals in our lives and in the persons we love, why care so much about them? Maggie has to realize that taking the concrete situation into account means recognizing that the exactly same situation will never happen again, and that she has only one irreplaceable father (which is essential for her love for him). To imagine otherwise is to irresponsibly deny reality.[349] Relatedly, Nussbaum agrees with Aristotle who suggests that not recognizing that one's children are the only ones one has will severely undercut the essence and the value of one's love for them.[350]

But, as Nussbaum admits, this essentialist argument in the end appeals to the mysterious because she cannot explain why exactly Maggie "loves *him*, not just his properties, or him beyond and behind the properties" (What is it that is so essential in Adam besides his properties that Maggie loves?). Similarly, much of what we have discussed in this study so far, including the inarticulable nature of practical wisdom and the related cognitive evidence such as the ambiguity of our conceptual organization and the black box of neural networks, all seems mysterious. However, we see it as

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[348] Nussbaum, 39.

[349] Nussbaum, 39, 167.

[350] Nussbaum, 39.

unfortunate that Nussbaum is content with only pointing out its mysteriousness (Just what is it that "we sense" and "feel" in Maggie and Adam's relationship? How can Nussbaum be so sure that we all feel it?) because contemporary cognitive science is at least trying to demystify (though far from fully explaining) it and has already achieved initial results. We have also repeatedly emphasized that this mystery should not be an obstacle for the humanities to reject the cognitive approach based on a misconception of science that it does not tolerate fuzziness and ambiguities at all, but rather can be a bridge communicating between the "two cultures." In the following section, we will offer several such examples.

4. The cognitive perspective

4.1 Conceptual organization revisited

In III.2.3.1 "Wisdom and conceptual organization," we have discussed how most of our concepts have no clear-cut definitions and are organized around prototypes. Psychologists have solid evidence to show that people classify a target item into a certain category not according to the dictionary definition of that category but according to how much it resembles the most typical item of that category, namely the prototype. For example, when we decide whether sparrow is a kind of bird, we do not mentally check it against a list of properties that would appear in a dictionary entry of bird, such as "having wings and feathers" or "egg-laying," but simply compare it with a kind of bird that most likely comes to our mind when we think about bird, such as dove. Then, because sparrow resembles dove, a prototype of bird, we classify it as bird. More than this, because sparrow resembles dove *closely*, we regard it as "birdier" than, say, a penguin, which also fits the dictionary definition of bird but only resembles dove *remotely*. The membership of a concept is thus not either-or but graded, as some members are more like the prototype and therefore more "privileged," leaving large room for ambiguities and judgment calls. Even for strictly defined concepts such as "even number," people still, for whatever reasons, distinguish between "evener" numbers and "less even" numbers, again convincingly showing how seemingly

irrational our judgment can be. However, as Barry Schwartz suggests, such flexible nature of our conceptual organization with no clear boundaries serves responsible moral judgment well, because, as demonstrated by the previous sections, too rigidly defined concepts and rules fail to recognize the uncertainty and the unpredictability of the concrete situations as well as our conflicting obligations that are ubiquitous in real moral life. Consequently, if there is a form that allows such ambiguous conceptual organization, it is a naturally fitted form to describe real-life situations and how we cognitively categorize them. The literary form, by its commonly accepted definition, is such a form, and the ability to navigate through these ambiguities is practical wisdom.

This answers an important question that Nussbaum does not seem to make clear when arguing that literature matters for ethics. In *Love's Knowledge*, Nussbaum succinctly summarizes her central argument in similar expressions in several places, a representative example being "My aim is to establish that certain literary texts (or texts similar to these in certain relevant ways) are indispensable to a philosophical inquiry in the ethical sphere: not by any means sufficient, but sources of insight without which the inquiry cannot be complete."[351] A key question that this summary does not answer is: What exactly is it that is so unique and irreducible about the literary form that makes it indispensable for ethics?

It is not that Nussbaum does touch on this question at all, but she only does so vaguely and indirectly. For example, after analyzing the passage where Maggie vividly imagines Charlotte's pain towards the end of the story, she writes:

> We also discover that the style of this example sounds like something that does not belong in philosophy at all. To contrast it with the prose of an example in a theoretical work of decision theory would be too comic. But even the less scientific prose of a typical philosopher's example is simplicity itself next to this complex and mysterious construction, full of indefiniteness and obliquity, periphrasis and indirection, conveying the core of its meaning in metaphors and pictures rather than in logical formulae or in universal propositions. This is, I believe, the prose of Aristotelian perception, expressing the "yearnings of thought and excursions of sympathy" that the person of practical wisdom will perform. This prose expresses the commitment of the agent to confront all the complexities of the situation head

[351] Nussbaum, 23.

> on, in all their indeterminacy and particularity, and to regard the act of deliberation as an adventure of the personality as a whole. It depicts in its cadences the moral effort of straining to see correctly and to come up with the appropriate picture or description; its tensions, obliquities, and circumnavigations express the sheer difficulty of finding the right description or picture for what is there before one. If, as James says, to "put" is to "do," showing this is showing moral activity of a valuable kind.[352]

If we recall Chapter II "Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom," we will indeed notice that here "each of the major features of Aristotelian deliberation is present, and in a way that ought to convince us that this, and not some simpler or neater thing, is what rationality requires."[353] By "this" Nussbaum seems to refer to a "complex and mysterious construction, full of indefiniteness and obliquity, periphrasis and indirection." So, are complexity, mysteriousness, indefiniteness, obliquity, periphrasis, and indirection (although the last two seem to mean the same thing) the features that distinguish the literary form from the "theoretical work of decision theory" or "the less scientific prose of a typical philosopher?" We do not know for sure. Other critics, facing the same question either when describing James's style in *The Golden Bowl* or when paraphrasing Nussbaum's argument, have used expressions like "richness and depth" and "range and sensitivity"[354] or the "superior vivacity"[355] of literature, but none of them are as clear as Samuels and Brudney's "complexity and ambiguity." For Samuels, "If Maggie is both good and bad, then she is complex; if her badness is both demonstrated and denied, then she is ambiguous."[356] For Brudney:

> I call a situation "complex" if it involves a variety of elements related to one another in a variety of ways. A mosaic or a proof in mathematical logic may be quite complex. To grasp either accurately may require significant mental concentration, and perhaps specific visual or mathematical abilities. Yet in

[352] Nussbaum, 88.

[353] Nussbaum, 88.

[354] Gardiner, "Professor Nussbaum on *The Golden Bowl*," 179.

[355] Geoffrey Galt Harpham, "The Hunger of Martha Nussbaum," *Representations* 77, no. 1 (2002): 57.

[356] Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, 225. One may of course debate, for example, whether her badness is indeed simultaneously demonstrated and denied, which is a matter of interpretation. The fact that whether a literary text is ambiguous or not is open to interpretation does not prevent it from contributing to ethics. See our discussion on this in 4.3 "Skill learning revisited."

> principle there is no reason why the mosaic or the proof cannot be utterly clear, in the sense that competent observers would provide substantially equivalent descriptions of what the mosaic depicts or the proof proves.
>
> I call a situation "ambiguous" if it admits of at least two legitimate and incompatible descriptions. […] An ambiguous situation is one about whose description competent observers disagree.[357]

A text can, of course, both be complex and ambiguous, such as *The Golden Bowl*. And while Brudney understands "complex" as "consisting of many connected elements," we have been using it more in the sense of "consisting of many details." What is more important though, is whether complexity and ambiguity as two features of the literary form can distinguish it from other forms. As mentioned, Nussbaum's position on this question is unclear. On the one hand, when rhetorically asking "couldn't we derive everything we require from a text that stated and argued for these conclusions about human beings plainly and simply, without the complications of character and conversation, without the stylistic and structural complexities of the literary—not to mention the particular obliquities, ambiguities, and parentheses of this particular literary text?" (Her answer is no)[358] Nussbaum seems to suggest that all these elements (the complications of character and conversation, the stylistic and structural complexities of the literary, etc.), which may arguably be further reduced to Samuels and Brudney's "complexity and ambiguity," are what makes the literary form appropriate for ethical discussion and different from the other forms. On the other hand, when talking about the supposed differences between novel and philosophical writing, Nussbaum argues that although we tend to assume that a commentary on a novel has to be simpler, clearer, and more theoretical than the original text, and that this is not the case with a commentary on a philosophical work, philosophical writing is not *intrinsically* simple and clear: Why can a text not be a philosophical work "precisely by showing the complexity and indeterminacy that is really there in human life, and by refusing to make any simplifying theoretical statements? […] By saying only what can

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[357] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 416–17.

[358] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 138.

be said and by refusing to say anything simpler, less storylike, than human life is, the novel does make a philosophical claim (about the human truth and, implicitly, about the limits of theory) that could not simply be paraphrased in a nonnovelistic text."[359] In other words, she believes that literature, because of its "complexity and indeterminacy" (again in agreement with Samuels and Brudney's expressions), can also be regarded as philosophical, and that philosophical writing should not be defined by its form (whether it is simple and clear) but by its content (whether it reveals the truth), blurring the distinction between the literary form and the other ones. Note that these are already deliberately selected passages from Nussbaum's relevant works that are relatively less vague about what it is that is unique about the literary form that makes it arguably indispensable for ethics, but they are still not coherent enough. In most of the other passages, she does not even distinguish between the complexity and the ambiguity of literature as Samuels and Brudney do, which makes a further clarification really necessary.

The complexity and the ambiguity of literature indeed both significantly help us fully grasp the concrete situation for responsible moral judgment, as demonstrated in IV.3 "Literature matters," but we argue that only ambiguity serves as the unique feature of the literary form that distinguishes it from other forms for two reasons. First, not all literature is complex. Mitchell, for example, argues that Nussbaum focuses on James's late novels because she believes "their difficult style itself suggests an engagement with the deeper, more vexing problems of moral philosophy" and that "aesthetic complexity [...] points to ethical self-consciousness, while the plain style of a Hemingway or a Dreiser is ill-suited for complex moral problems."[360] This is of course a misunderstanding (but an understandable one due to the reasons just mentioned) because Nussbaum would certainly not go as far as to argue that Hemmingway's plain writing cannot depict complex moral situations, but the obvious fact Mitchell points out that not all literature is as complex as James's late novels is worthy of our attention.

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[359] Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam," 207.

[360] Mitchell, "Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Case of Late James," 76.

Second, complexity is not exclusively a feature of literature. Nussbaum claims that only the literary form dedicates itself to describing the particular details of one's concrete situation, making it specific enough for ethical discussion.[361] But, as mentioned above, philosophical writing can also be like this. Because of philosophers' aversion to ambiguity, philosophical examples concerning real moral life are actually often intentionally made very complex so that they can be unambiguous. When Stephen Mulhall paraphrases Nussbaum's argument, he suggests that novel is unique because of "its emphasis upon the particular circumstances and idiosyncrasies of character and society, its openness to contingency, accident and surprise, its focus on painful conflicts, and on the insights and blindnesses induced by strong feeling" and can thus display before us "a wealth of richly realized detail."[362] But novelists are not the only ones who are able to do so. Besides philosophers, can journalists, historians, anthropologists, and lawyers not do the same, especially in terms of their dedication to complex details? If the logic of Nussbaum's central argument is that because the concrete situation matters for moral judgment and only literature can adequately describe the concrete situation, literature is indispensable for moral judgment, then journalism, (auto)biography, history, anthropology, and perhaps most related to ethics, legal documents such as plaintiffs' complaints or judges' legal opinions, may be equally indispensable. In 3.3 "What should Maggie do?" we talked about how James's style, with its characteristic contradictions and interpolations, shows that the narrator does not pick and choose and thus authentically reflects the full picture of Adam's inner self. But similar characteristics can also be found, for example, in a reliable transcript of an interview from a journalist or an anthropologist.

As a result, if we want to focus on the importance of finding an appropriate form to adequately describe the complex details of a concrete situation that responsible moral judgment demands, we have to either dismiss Nussbaum's claim that the literary form

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[361] See, for example, Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 154.

[362] Stephen Mulhall, "Ethics and Literature," in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online* (London: Routledge, 2016), https://doi.org/10.4324/9780415249126-L137-1.

is the only such form (because it is not) or make the definition of "literature" broad enough to include every writing dedicated to describing details. If someone insists on a narrower definition, which should not be surprising, then Nussbaum's whole enterprise fails. To prevent this truly worthwhile enterprise from failing due to such a minor issue, we discard complexity and choose ambiguity as the key feature of the literary form that makes it unique and crucial for ethics, because it is much less controversial that literature defines itself, at least partially, by tolerating ambiguity much more than other kinds of writing.

As Brudney notices, seeing a literary text as philosophical faces the problem of how to deal with ambiguity, which is undesirable in philosophy but entirely acceptable, if not desirable, in literature.[363] Because philosophy, to quote Wittenstein, "aims at the logical clarification of thoughts,"[364] different interpretations of the same clarification are not welcome. Literature, however, arguably lives on different interpretations. The findings of cognitive science that our conceptual organization is just as ambiguous undoubtedly make the literary form that tolerates ambiguity more worthy of study. The previous section analyzes how untypical the relationship between Adam and Maggie is and how untypical the relationship between Charlotte and Maggie is. It also analyzes, from the perspective of literary studies, how such untypicality makes universal rules that contain general terms such as "parent," "daughter," or "friend" less useful, and how their application thus requires practical wisdom. This also makes perfect sense when considered from the cognitive perspective. Because our conceptual knowledge is not based on dictionary-like definitions of concepts but prototypes of concepts, it is probabilistic instead of definite in the sense that the more a target item resembles the prototype of a concept, the more likely we are to judge it as belonging to that concept. This has been demonstrated by many psychological experiments where the target items more like the prototypes are mentioned more often, recognized more readily, or

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[363] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 417.

[364] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness (London: Routledge, 2001), 4.112.

straightforwardly judged as "better" than other members of the concept in question.[365] In the case of *The Golden Bowl*, this explains why although what is between Adam and Maggie technically fits the definition of a "father-daughter relationship," due to their unusual intimacy and all the other complications discussed earlier, we would hesitate to classify it into this concept because they barely resemble the prototype of father and daughter. Therefore, rigid rules with such only technically fit concepts are of little use, while practical wisdom is always useful because of the wiggle room left by our ambiguous conceptual organization.

Brudney insightfully points out that Maggie's extraordinary courage is best displayed not by her willingness to suffer "for love" but by her willingness to endure high ambiguity, which preserves the last hope of her marriage.[366] Maggie does not definitely know the answers to any of the following questions: Does Amerigo love her? Does he love Charlotte? Does he sincerely come around or is he only being perfunctory? Neither do we, because James does not want to use his author's privilege to give us any direct access to Amerigo's inner world.[367] This obviously creates ambiguity but also, perhaps more importantly, authenticity because this is how real moral life looks like (We do not have direct access to the inner world of any real person either). As shown in the analysis of *The Golden Bowl* in the previous section, a simple way to find ambiguity in a novel is to question the character's sincerity (Note that insincerity does not necessarily mean immorality, because both selfishness and selflessness can cause insincerity), especially when the narrator is not omniscient. Quite the contrary, the narrator knows little more than what the characters know in *The Golden Bowl*. Even when the narrator occasionally seems to know more than he is supposed to, suggesting that this comes directly from the omniscient author, we still have plausible reason to question him. For example, the self-contradictory psychological portrayal of Adam and how he appears to be indulgent but say very harsh words to Maggie at the same time,

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[365] Reisberg, *Cognition*, 334.

[366] On whether this is worth promoting, see 3.3 "What should Maggie do?"

[367] Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 415, 434.

which was discussed in 3.1 “What should Adam do?” gives us such a reason. What Fanny and Bob, who often play the roles of driving the plot and thus partially serve as narrators, say has room for doubt too.[368] All these are commonplace in the literary form. Other forms, however, such as nonfiction, can also be as complex in terms of their dedication to detail and nuance, but we do not usually question the narrator of nonfiction in the same way that we question the narrator of fiction.[369] Therefore, instead of complexity, we pick ambiguity as the inherent, defining feature of the literary form. It gives both the author and the reader enough space to meaningfully explore moral issues in a truly *realistic* way, because real moral life is full of ambiguities (We can never act like an omniscient narrator or author to authoritatively clarify them) and, thanks to the findings of cognitive science, we now know that the way how we categorize the world is as ambiguous.

In 3.3 “What should Maggie do?” we have mentioned that the focus of our analysis of the story is not to offer any moral prescriptions but to emphasize that before offering prescriptions we need to grasp the concrete situation at hand, which needs practical wisdom.[370] In his famous “The Art of Fiction,” James makes a related point by stating that the novel should not have a “conscious moral purpose” and we should not mix up questions of art and questions of morality.[371] The tolerance of ambiguity in the literary form enables him to implement this belief, because it allows him the peace of mind only to be an onlooker and *not* to always make everything clear. As J. A. Ward points out, James neither wants his novels to preach directly nor wants the reader to assume that the author knows what a character should do in a particular situation in the first place. Consequently, the reader is left to speculate with Maggie if Adam knows about

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[368] Some critics take them at their words though. Brudney, 415, for example, firmly believes that Amerigo does not love Charlotte simply because Fanny says so, which seems somewhat unwarranted.

[369] Here we employ the narrow definition of literature as literary fiction.

[370] See also III.2.3.3 “Wisdom and decision making.”

[371] Henry James, “The Art of Fiction,” in *The Writer’s Art: By Those Who Have Practiced It*, ed. Rollo Walter Brown (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 212, 227; see also J. A. Ward, “The Ambiguities of Henry James,” *The Sewanee Review* 83, no. 1 (1975): 41.

the affair, if Adam gets married only for her, etc.[372] Indeed, in the preface of *The Golden Bowl*, James says "one of the liveliest sources of amusement" in the novel is that the author does not play God but walks into the story and merges with the characters: "It's not that the muffled majesty of authorship doesn't here *ostensibly* reign; but I catch myself again shaking it off and disavowing the pretence of it while I get down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle that provides for the others in the circling tiers the entertainment of the great game."[373] Ward further suggests that the reason why James often refuses us a glimpse into Adam's consciousness although he obviously knows what Adam is thinking may be that he wants to dramatize ignorance; "he needs to make the reader feel the pain of the ignorance suffered especially by Charlotte,"[374] which really takes effect. This, again, is enabled by the literary form's tolerance of ambiguity because we usually do not expect a philosopher or a nonfiction writer to dramatize ignorance; we expect them to *eliminate* it.

Determining that ambiguity is what makes literature unique for ethics may also resolve an inconsistency in Nussbaum's "literature matters" argument. On the one hand, Nussbaum makes a claim both about novels and about literature in general. When talking about the "Noncommensurability of the Valuable Things," she argues that, in the novels studied in *Love's Knowledge*, we find "a commitment to qualitative distinctions" and we could "hardly imagine a literary art without that commitment."[375] Moreover:

> The novel is committed more deeply than many other forms to a multiplicity and fineness of such distinctions. The organizing vision of the novels shows that one thing is not just a different quantity of another; that there is not only no single metric along which the claims of different good things can be meaningfully considered, there is not even a small plurality of such measures. The novels show us the worth and richness of plural qualitative thinking and engender in their readers a richly qualitative kind of seeing. The novelist's terms are even more

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[372] Ward, "The Ambiguities of Henry James," 41.

[373] Henry James, "Preface," in *The Golden Bowl* (New York: Scribner's, 1909), vi.

[374] Ward, "The Ambiguities of Henry James," 58.

[375] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 36.

> variegated, more precise in their qualitative tightness, than are the sometimes blunt vague terms of daily life; they show us vividly what we can aspire to in refining our (already qualitative) understanding.[376]

Regarding the ethical ability that she calls "perception," after both Aristotle and James,[377] which is the "the ability to discern, acutely and responsively, the salient features of one's particular situation" and "*at the core of what practical wisdom is*," Nussbaum observes a similar case made by James when he constantly emphasizes that we should be "finely aware and richly responsible." Thus, she believes that "once again, this commitment seems to be built into the very form of the novel as genre."[378] There are several other similar general claims in *Love's Knowledge*, such as "certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist,"[379] a quote we have cited once at the beginning of this chapter.

On the other hand, Nussbaum argues that "no claim about novels in general, far less about literature in general, could possibly emerge from this book" (although she does believe that "these larger questions can best be approached through the detailed study of complex particular cases—all the more since it is the importance of complex particularity that we shall, in these studies, be trying to make clear").[380] She makes a similar point later in the book.[381] While one may argue that this is the result of a book collecting her essays from different stages of her academic career, considering that Nussbaum has substantially revised these essays and added long notes at the end of each essay for coherence, this inconsistency is still too serious to ignore.

Determining that it is ambiguity that makes literature unique for ethics in Nussbaum's argument helps resolve this inconsistency because, although our analysis so far only involves fictional prose, leaving out poetry and drama, considering that

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376 Nussbaum, 36.

377 See IV.3 "Literature matters."

378 Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 37. Emphasis added.

379 Nussbaum, 5, see also 95.

380 Nussbaum, 23.

381 Nussbaum, 138.

ambiguity is commonly accepted as one of the defining features of literature, our conclusion should apply to them as well, without the need of any particular explanation as to whether our argument is only about novels or literature in general.[382]

To summarize, the cognitive evidence that our conceptual organization is ambiguous helps us answer Nussbaum's unanswered question: What makes the literary form unique in its contribution to ethics? We argue that it is ambiguity because other forms usually require the author to at least reduce the uncertainty of meaning and, if not, to adequately explain why, whereas literature, be it prose, poetry, or drama, is automatically ambiguous and the author should have a clear consciousness writing that way. This is also the case both in real moral life and in our cognition, making literature particularly relevant for ethics because the inherent (and perhaps desired) ambiguity of the literary form resembles the ambiguity of our conceptual organization, which plays a vital role in how we behave and thus obviously in ethics as well.

4.2 Neural networks revisited

In the previous subsection, we have talked about how the ambiguity of the literary form distinguishes it from other forms and how it resembles the ambiguity of our conceptual organization, which demands practical wisdom. But how do we acquire practical wisdom? III.2.3.2 "Wisdom and neural architecture" suggests that we acquire it like how artificial neural networks (ANN) learn: not by memorizing rules but by trial and error. An ANN consists of layers of interconnected nodes, which contain adjustable "weights" to process the data they transfer. Scientists train an ANN simply by giving it an enormous number of pairs of an input and a corresponding ideal output. By processing each pair, the weights of the ANN are adjusted in a way that the initial inaccurate output it produces step by step comes near the ideal output. Most importantly, explicit rules never come into existence in the whole process of machine learning: Neither are ANNs given explicit rules at the beginning, nor do they develop articulable

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[382] The big question on the differences between literary genres remains though, which is beyond the scope of this study.

rules after they have learned the desired ability. It is the plasticity of ANN that allows it to learn in this way. Similarly, many scientists believe that our brain works like an ANN, and it is the ambiguous, flexible nature of our conceptual organization that enables us to learn things quickly and adjust what we have learned according to the rapidly changing environment, especially in moral life.

Dogmatically sticking to fixed definitions and explicit rules therefore not only does not help but can also do harm, because we seldom encounter a situation that is exactly the same as one of the situations we have experienced. What usually happens is a situation that *partially* reminds us of one or several past situations. Our experience of those can thus be valuable, but only to an extent, because there are also new elements that may require us to react differently. Each of such encounters strengthens (or weakens) some neural connections in our brains, and that is how we learn. This also explains why even the most experienced, wise people may need some time to deliberate when facing certain new situations (despite the usual automatic, unconscious nature of practical wisdom), because there can always be new situations where the old experiences do not apply (If all they know is to mechanically repeat what they did before, they do not have to deliberate).[383]

Once we realize that moral education is only possible when the concrete situation and its details, not general rules, are emphasized, the importance of literature becomes evident, because it offers us these learning materials. There is much evidence that children's language learning does not depend only on explicit input. They learn a language largely unconsciously through passive exposure instead of goal-oriented instructions. Similarly, Schwartz believes that the "moral networks" of children are not taught by rules but tuned by their exposure to moral examples set by others, and their moral development is captured by the growth and refinement of these networks.[384] Therefore, for moral education, in addition to the obvious way of broadening one's real-

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383 Schwartz and Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, 102–4; Schwartz and Sharpe, "Practical Wisdom: Aristotle Meets Positive Psychology," 388.

384 Schwartz and Sharpe, *Practical Wisdom: The Right Way to Do the Right Thing*, 102.

life experience, reading literature is also a useful way to quickly and repeatedly experience (although not in real life) what we may or may not have the opportunity to experience. Indeed, many empirical experiments in recent years on the moral education function of literature (in our study, literature refers specifically to literary fiction) prove that reading fiction makes us more caring, more sympathetic, and more able to put ourselves in the shoes of others.[385]

What we have talked about so far in this subsection can be classified as the most common literature-gives-examples-for-ethics argument when discussing the role of literature for ethics. Nussbaum's main argument, however, is subtly different. Since its publication, *Love's Knowledge* has been highly influential in the discussion on the relationship between literature and ethics. However, its readers often mainly regard this book simply as yet another work arguing "literature offers ethics thought-provoking examples" or "literature invites us to imagine certain specific moral situations and perspectives" and only slightly touch on her more provocative claim summarized above.[386] To recapitulate, Nussbaum argues that literature offers ethics, in John Horton's words, "an appreciation of the noncommensurability of values, a recognition

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[385] Raymond A. Mar et al., "Bookworms versus Nerds: Exposure to Fiction versus Non-Fiction, Divergent Associations with Social Ability, and the Simulation of Fictional Social Worlds," *Journal of Research in Personality* 40, no. 5 (October 2006): 694–712; Raymond A. Mar, "The Neural Bases of Social Cognition and Story Comprehension," *Annual Review of Psychology* 62, no. 1 (January 2011): 103–34; Dan R. Johnson, "Transportation into a Story Increases Empathy, Prosocial Behavior, and Perceptual Bias toward Fearful Expressions," *Personality and Individual Differences* 52, no. 2 (2012): 150–55; Dan R. Johnson et al., "Potentiating Empathic Growth: Generating Imagery While Reading Fiction Increases Empathy and Prosocial Behavior.," *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 7, no. 3 (August 2013): 306–12; David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano, "Reading Literary Fiction Improves Theory of Mind," *Science* 342, no. 6156 (October 2013): 377–80; P. Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp, "How Does Fiction Reading Influence Empathy? An Experimental Investigation on the Role of Emotional Transportation," *PLoS ONE* 8, no. 1 (January 2013): e55341; Keith Oatley, "Fiction: Simulation of Social Worlds," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20, no. 8 (August 2016): 618–28; Diana I. Tamir et al., "Reading Fiction and Reading Minds: The Role of Simulation in the Default Network," *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience* 11, no. 2 (2016): 215–24.

[386] See, for example, Gardiner, "Professor Nussbaum on *The Golden Bowl*"; Richard Wollheim, "Flawed Crystals: James's *The Golden Bowl* and the Plausibility of Literature as Moral Philosophy," *New Literary History* 15, no. 1 (1983): 185–91; Harpham, "The Hunger of Martha Nussbaum"; Richard Rorty, "Comments on Pippin on James," *Inquiry* 45, no. 3 (September 2002): 351–58.

of the priority of the particular (a special kind of perception), and an acknowledgement of the place of contingency and uncertainty in human life."[387] These features of moral judgment can only be properly appreciated by the literary form, with its dedication to nuances and its tolerance of ambiguity, which therefore complements the moral theorizing that tends to only focus on abstraction, generality, and complete commensurability.[388]

Cora Diamond's responses to Nussbaum are representative of such inadequate reception. Although Diamond accurately recognizes Nussbaum's main argument and notes that it has been missed even by very careful commentators,[389] in her comments on the earlier versions of two chapters in *Love's Knowledge*, Diamond still talks within the literature-gives-examples-for-ethics framework. For instance, she cites Wordsworth's "The Old Cumberland Beggar" and argues that such poems show that we all have the ability to empathize with others. She also cites Dickens's realistic description of how the world looks like to a small and helpless child in *Great Expectations*, which comes from the child's own perspective, and argues that this does a much better job on moral education than simply telling the reader that children see the world differently in a way that deserves adults' attention and respect.[390] Providing vivid examples, as Wordsworth and Dickens do, is certainly an important reason why literature matters for ethics, and Diamond indeed convincingly demonstrates that, without introducing new facts and rules, it is still possible, through imagery and literary descriptions, to "reactivate" our moral perception of the moral facts and rules that we know so well that we sometimes become insensitive to them.[391]

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[387] John Horton, "Life, Literature and Ethical Theory: Martha Nussbaum on the Role of the Literary Imagination in Ethical Thought," in *Literature and the Political Imagination*, ed. John Horton and Andrea T. Baumeister (London: Routledge, 1996), 76.

[388] Horton, 76–77.

[389] Cora Diamond, "Martha Nussbaum and the Need for Novels," *Philosophical Investigations* 16, no. 2 (April 1993): 132.

[390] Cora Diamond, *The Realistic Spirit: Wittgenstein, Philosophy, and the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995), 297–99.

[391] Diamond, 297–308.

However, when finally addressing Nussbaum's main argument that certain moral facts can only be expressed by literature, Diamond believes that "what is here 'food' for moral philosophy is the story itself, what happens, and to what kind of people, in what sort of situation; what plays no role is how the story is told."[392] Moreover, she argues that Nussbaum's questions "How is it that this (whatever feature of the novel it may be) is an illuminating way of writing about that (whatever feature of human life)?" and "How is it that this is so much more illuminating a way of writing about it than are the familiar ways of moral philosophy?" do not fit into the "prevalent view" and the "current conception" of moral philosophy, which focuses on abstract analysis instead of concrete descriptions.[393] Whether this is an accurate characterization of the prevalent view of moral philosophy or, indeed, whether simply citing the prevalent view counts as solid proof for one's argument is questionable; what seems less questionable is that the cognitive theory about neural networks mentioned earlier can potentially challenge this prevalent view. Rigidly adhering to unambiguous rules and definitions hinders effective learning, because it hinders the mechanism on which neural networks depend (trial and error). Therefore, the ambiguity of conceptual organization and practical wisdom should not be regarded as a disadvantage but as an advantage. It is of course ideal if moral philosophy can be as unambiguous and general as Diamond wants it to be, but the cognitive perspective tells us that sometimes we have to be ambiguous and concrete.

That said, the inadequate reception of Nussbaum is also excusable in the sense that Nussbaum often blurs the distinction between her main argument and the literature-gives-examples-for-ethics argument (She once regards the latter as her "weaker claim,"[394] making it consistent enough, but this is not always the case) herself. She

[392] Diamond, 378.

[393] Diamond, 379. We will continue to discuss this in the next subsection.

[394] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 148.

often directly uses a literary example, such as Euripides's *Hecuba*,[395] to prove a theoretical point, such as moral particularism, without giving any justification why a fictional example can serve as supporting evidence (If there is a play where genocide makes the world a better place, can we cite it as an example to justify the Holocaust?). In a more tenable case, she uses *The Golden Bowl* to prove the inadequacy of our moral attention: Because in this novel neither the author nor the narrator tries to play God, their limitations are so obvious that we ignore Charlotte's suffering in the second part of the novel where the focus is on Maggie. This realistic design powerfully illustrates that it is almost impossible to be fully aware of all the aspects of the situation at hand at the same time, even if we know how morally vital it is and try our best to do so.[396] More than this, we should bear in mind that a novel this complex is still written from only several among many other possible points of view, and that the whole situation is even more complex than the novel. When only grasping these several points of view already demands an effort as painstaking as IV.3 "Literature matters," how difficult it should be to grasp the whole situation? How many facts that are essential to a responsible moral judgment might we have overlooked?[397] In IV.3 we have offered several such instances. In 3.2 "What should Charlotte do," for example, we analyze several passages where the narrator only adopts Adam's point of view and we are thus, to some extent, only hearing his version of the story. Even so, the situation is complicated enough with moral ambiguities. It should thus not be difficult to imagine if we can also hear Charlotte's version, how complicated it will further be, and still, we are far from getting the whole picture of the situation, as there might be five more other versions of the same story from other witnesses. In this case, we are expanding on Nussbaum's literature-gives-examples-for-ethics argument, and we regard this case as

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[395] Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, Rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 312–15. Although this part does not come from *Love's Knowledge*, it is frequently referred to in the latter work and thus can be regarded as a part of Nussbaum's whole theoretical framework.

[396] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 144–45. See also the previous subsection.

[397] Nussbaum, 87–88.

more tenable because here, unlike the Hecuba case, the argumentation takes place at a metalevel (What the story is exactly about does not matter much as it mainly serves to remind us of the difficulty of considering every aspect of a situation) and the fictional plot itself is not directly cited as supporting evidence. Nevertheless, however more tenable this line of argumentation is, it is still, in Nussbaum's words, her "weaker claim," and many, as Nussbaum herself also often does, fails to distinguish it from her stronger claim.

As indicated in 3.4 "A clarification," even when Nussbaum explicitly talks about what is relevant to her stronger claim, namely the literary form is indispensable for ethics because certain ethical situations can only be fully grasped by the literary form, her argumentation is often wanting in that it commits the logical fallacies of appealing to authority ("we are told by the Aristotelian view that […]"[398]) and appealing to obviousness and mysteriousness ("we are fully aware […]"[399]; "how can this style […]?"[400]; "we sense […] we feel […] however mysterious that is."[401]). We argue that now offering a cognitive perspective, as we have been doing in this section, can be useful (although this does not mean that every study that contains the keywords "cognitive" or "empirical" will do, because the inadequate reception of Nussbaum who fails to recognize her main argument includes such studies.[402])

As the titles of IV.1 "The form matters," IV.2 "The concrete situation matters," and IV.3 "Literature matters" suggest, Nussbaum's main argument (or, in her words, her stronger claim) can be divided into three steps. First, she argues that any style makes, itself, a statement. An abstract theoretical style, for example, makes a statement that abstractness and generality are more important than concreteness and particularity. It is

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398 Nussbaum, 92.

399 Nussbaum, 134.

400 Nussbaum, 142.

401 Nussbaum, 39. These should not be fallacies if they are complemented by further justification, but they are often all there is.

402 For example, Charles Duncan, Georgene Bess-Montgomery, and Viktor Osinubi, "Why Martha Nussbaum Is Right: The Empirical Case for the Value of Reading and Teaching Fiction," *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 19, no. 2 (2017): 242–59.

problematic to argue in this style, as many moral philosophers try to do, that concreteness and particularity are more important in ethics without self-contradiction (because why not use a style more concrete to make this point?). An abstract theoretical style also implicitly states that the faculties of the reader for abstract analysis are more important than other faculties, such as practical wisdom. And arguing otherwise in this style is, again, self-contradictory.[403] Second, she supports moral particularism, which argues that no moral rules can be indiscriminately applied to every situation and that what is moral should be determined case by case. Third, she argues that moral particularism, an ethical conception that gives priority to the perception of particular people and situations rather than to abstract rules, is thus best expressed not in abstract philosophical forms but in concrete literary forms. Practical wisdom, which is the ability to take these particulars into account for a sound moral judgment, and literature are thus related.[404]

People often argue that "for practical reasons" we cannot cite the literature we discuss in full but have to make do with plot summary. The premise of this argument is that plot summary, while not perfect, still works *to some extent* for whatever reasons that they are cited. What if, for a faithful reconstruction of a specific moral dilemma, for example, plot summary does not work *at all*? Our analysis of several such cases from *The Golden Bowl* has demonstrated this. Nussbaum is aware of the potential self-contradiction of her own writing. Stephen Mulhall puts it aptly: "If her argument is sound, should she not be writing novels rather than books of philosophical readings of novels?"[405] On the one hand, Nussbaum tries to remedy this problem by quoting the original text at length (Her quotation of *The Golden Bowl* sometimes runs for pages). On the other hand, she argues that her writing is not really in a philosophical-theoretical form but something like that of the Aristotelian ethical inquiry, which is not intended as a purely theoretical study, but as a practical guide (We will continue to discuss

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[403] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 7.

[404] Nussbaum, ix.

[405] Mulhall, "Ethics and Literature."

Nussbaum's moral prescriptions in the next subsection).[406] Although novels can also offer practical guidance, they are never as straightforward as Aristotle's treatises. In other words, the option that Mulhall somewhat ironically suggests is not that absurd for Nussbaum after all: Had she not been so intent on offering concrete practical moral guidance, she could have written her own moral novels, as her hero Henry James and heroine Iris Murdoch do.

We now see how the cognitive perspective can offer insights and clarify misunderstandings for the reception of Nussbaum, for Nussbaum's own argumentation, and for the discussion on literature and ethics in general. Emphasizing the importance of the ambiguous literary form and the contingent concrete situation seems irrational, but contemporary cognitive science has a new understanding of rationality, which *is* ambiguous (see, in particular, III.2.3.3 "Wisdom and decision making"). We have also discussed how this is not necessarily a bad thing, because it allows our neural networks to adapt and learn efficiently without the constraints of fixed rules.

4.3 Skill learning revisited

III.2.4.2 "Skill learning" talks about how we are able to implicitly learn several cognitive skills, such as mental planning (Tower of London task), pattern recognition (artificial grammar learning), and probability prediction (weather prediction task). While these skills obviously play roles in literary interpretation, and cognitive studies on them are thus certainly of interest for literary studies, we have also discussed how literature may help us catch a glimpse of the otherwise almost inaccessible mechanism of skillful performance (hence the two-way street of cognitive poetics). Researchers believe that the more masterful a skill is, the more automatic it is cognitively and the less conscious we are of it. As a result, it is very difficult to study it directly. However, art may indirectly help us to understand implicit skill learning through its different forms and ways of description. Literature, for example, especially with its tolerance of ambiguity, offers such a possibility. When both experts and the researchers studying the

[406] Gasser-Wingate, *Aristotle's Empiricism*, 208.

experts do not know how to describe how experts perform in a "scientific" form, where ambiguities should be reduced to a minimum, the literary form, where almost all kinds of expressions are allowed, be it mysterious, vague, intuitive, or hesitant, can offer them a description of the concrete situation at hand and the whole process of deliberation as detailed and as close to the reality as possible for their reference, just as what Henry James has managed to achieve in *The Golden Bowl*, with its recognition of our limited moral attention, its straightforward description of the ambiguous and self-conflicting moral deliberations of Adam, Charlotte, and Maggie, its realistic portrayal of the impenetrable darkness of the inner worlds of others, etc.

This reminds us of the distinction between the general and the universal mentioned in IV.3.4 "A clarification." Although what literature has to offer can be very specific and personalized (as opposed to be general), it can still be universal, meaning applicable broadly. Nussbaum recognizes a potential critique arguing that a "non-scientific" view from Aristotle on something as difficult to grasp as practical wisdom can only have theoretical value but not much practical use because it does not admit commensurability (i.e. everything is measurable by a same standard) and intellectualism (i.e. know-how is just a form of know-that) and has no systematic account of good moral judgment.[407] But she also points out that Aristotle would regard this as an accurate, neutral appraisal rather than a negative critique because he argues himself too that "the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely" and there is nothing negative about it.[408] Just as we may conclude from *The Golden Bowl* that "If a person were like Maggie and had a father exactly like Adam, and a relationship and circumstances exactly like theirs, the same actions would again be warranted,"[409] we may infer something as highly specific yet potentially universal from implicit skill learning like "It is as if I get bodily peace and fully enter my body. Then I feel

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[407] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 312.

[408] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a1, see also 1094b19–23.

[409] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 38.

everything inside and outside,"[410] which is usually too ambiguous and literary to be included in a "scientific" study.[411] It would of course be ideal if what guides our moral judgment or our cognition in general can be described in a general, universal, and unambiguous way, but the cognitive perspective suggests that the reality is less than ideal and we often have to make do with something specific, only potentially universal, and ambiguous.

Related to this, many criticize Nussbaum's attempt to include literature in the ethical discussion by pointing out that literature, compared to philosophy, is much more open to interpretation. This is problematic because if a certain literary text is argued to be relevant for ethical discussion, which interpretation(s) of it are we talking about? John Horton's formulation of this problem is representative and worth citing in full:

> One significant cluster of issues about which Nussbaum has surprisingly little to say in a work which places such importance upon the attentive reading of texts are the very considerable difficulties of appropriating fictional texts for philosophical purposes. For example, fictional narratives typically employ a vast array of literary devices and techniques—metaphor, allegory, symbolism, imagery, allusion, ambiguity, irony and multiple narrative perspectives to mention only a few of the most common—which make novels resistant to straightforward incorporation within other discursive contexts. So, while agreeing with Nussbaum about the fundamentally important role of philosophical commentary in the process of appropriation, we need to be told rather much more about the relationship between a novel and any philosophical commentary on it. Novels, especially good ones, do not just tell a story, they also tell it in a particular way; and how the story is told is integrally connected to what the story is. Novels, as Nussbaum herself insists, do not consist of neutral reports on the real world. If we are to be sensitive to the relationship between form and content we have to be alert to more than the fact that a novel tells a story and that the story is likely to be more richly detailed than any philosophically constructed example. There is always more to any interesting novel than can be contained within any commentary on it and novels rarely if ever permit of only one plausible reading. Hence, there are inevitably questions which need to be asked about the authority of any particular reading of a novel; about the relevance and legitimacy from a philosophical perspective of the rhetorical strategy

[410] Camille Buttingsrud, "Bodies in Skilled Performance: How Dancers Reflect through the Living Body," *Synthese* 199, no. 3 (2021): 7540.

[411] As indicated by this quote (originally from a dancer) being included in a paper published in a prestigious analytical philosophy journal, recent research in philosophy and cognitive science on embodied cognition begins to change this situation.

and textual devices employed in the narrative; and about the relationship between the reading of a novel and its role in interpreting our experience of life.[412]

Similarly, Merle Williams argues that although reading James's fiction within the ethical context is nothing new, because James's late works are resistant to paraphrase due to their complex metaphoricity, it is actually very difficult to find convincing grounds for an ethical interpretation of them.[413] Indeed, that James's late works, especially *The Golden Bowl*, "resist clear analysis"[414] or defy "any sort of economical discussion"[415] is a common view reached by many of the most cited studies on James's novels.[416] On the one hand, this naturally supports Nussbaum's argument (and ours, as shown in IV.3 "Literature matters") that we should quote James's original text, instead of offering a paraphrase or a plot summary, whenever possible. On the other hand, it also undermines the role that literature can really play in ethical discussions. After all, if we cannot even figure out what a literary text is saying in the first place, how can we discuss its relevance to ethics?

To this issue, Nussbaum has offered her response (although still unsatisfying, as we will see soon), which is already briefly mentioned by Horton. After discovering that Richard Wollheim's estimate of Maggie differs greatly from hers, Nussbaum realizes that this serious disagreement between two very attentive readers can be used against her argument.[417] Truly, whether Maggie is good or evil is notoriously controversial in the critical literature on James.[418] However, Nussbaum firmly believes that the issue of interpretation should not be a barrier to the connection between literature and ethics.

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[412] Horton, "Life, Literature and Ethical Theory," 78–79.

[413] Merle A. Williams, "Ethics," in *Henry James in Context*, ed. David McWhirter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 161.

[414] Frederick C. Crews, *The Tragedy of Manners: Moral Drama in the Later Novels of Henry James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 81.

[415] Pippin, *Henry James and Modern Moral Life*, 66.

[416] See also Mitchell, "Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Case of Late James," 75, 83, 87; Ruth Yeazell, *Language and Knowledge in the Late Novels of Henry James* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976).

[417] Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam," 201.

[418] Daniel Mark Fogel, *Henry James and the Structure of the Romantic Imagination* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), 85–88; Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, 212.

But due to the limited space (she writes this in a reply to a forum section on "Literature and/as Moral Philosophy" of *New Literary History*), she cannot elaborate but simply states that "any problems of underdetermination, and also of indeterminacy arise just as acutely for the reader of a complex philosophical text—for example, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*—and also, perhaps even more acutely, for the reader of events and persons in a life. The need for commentary is equally great in all. (*The Sacred Fount* shows James exploring such connections.) It would be a mistake to infer from the difficulty and complexity of all of these tasks that there is nothing that counts as success or truth in each."[419]

However, as Horton argues, it is questionable whether the needs for commentary for a literary text and for a complex philosophical text are "equally great" (Nussbaum's argument for the uniqueness of the literary form clearly argues otherwise). It is also crafty that Nussbaum chooses *Nicomachean Ethics*, an ancient and pre-analytic philosophical work, as an example of a philosophical text that particularly needs commentary, because we may not think that contemporary analytic philosophy is as greatly in need of commentary. No wonder Nussbaum admits herself that this is done "cryptically and without argument."[420] Again, the cognitive perspective can offer useful insights here. Although one may disagree with our interpretation of *The Golden Bowl* in IV.3, it does not affect the validity of the cognitive evidence discussed in Chapter III (Refuting that is certainly possible, but it requires empirical research, which is not simply a matter of literary interpretation anymore). On the contrary, the possibility of different interpretations exactly demonstrates the ambiguous nature of the literary form that makes literature matter for ethics (although some critics argue that James's ambiguity is more of self-contradiction than profundity, which is also a matter of interpretation[421]). It makes literature matter for ethics because a) as mentioned in IV.3, for fully grasping the concrete situation in real moral life, which is often

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[419] Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam," 201.

[420] Nussbaum, 201.

[421] Samuels, *The Ambiguity of Henry James*, 3–4, 217–25.

ambiguous, we need a form that allows ambiguity (Nussbaum's claim that the issue of interpretation is "perhaps even more acutely, for the reader of *events and persons in a life*"[422] is thus appropriate here) and b) as mentioned in 4.1 "Conceptual organization revisited," how we cognitively categorize the world, which should obviously be taken into account for ethical discussion, is also ambiguous.

Also due to this issue of interpretation, some critics fail to distinguish Nussbaum's main argument from her prescriptive view on "how should one live," which is based on her personal interpretation of *The Golden Bowl*.[423] For example, Lee Mitchell's critique of Nussbaum's endeavor to link literature to ethics begins with his disagreement with some of her specific literary interpretations, without realizing that such disagreement does not affect Nussbaum's main argument. We are already familiar with Nussbaum's (and many others') approving view of how Maggie manages to grow from naively believing that she can do absolutely no harm to anyone she loves to a mature recognition that "meaningful commitment to a love in the world can require the sacrifice of one's own moral purity."[424] Mitchell argues that we cannot be sure of this because:

> Maggie's point of view is revealed only indirectly, from afar, through others' biased perspectives. […] Indeed, we never do see Maggie self-conscious about her own development, or have any sense that she ever thinks to balance jealous desires, marital demands, and sympathy with others. All we can know for certain—which we learn from being plunged into Maggie's consciousness—is the need to imitate Maggie in resisting easy assumptions or ready generalizations, and to avoid the putative possibility of any final "love's knowledge."[425]

What strikes us first is that if we were to meet such a high standard of certainty for a literary interpretation, we may never be sure of anything (Does Maggie have to lay out her entire thinking process step by step every time for Mitchell to make him believe

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[422] See above. Emphasis added.

[423] "We study not just for the sake of learning but also to see our 'target' and ourselves more clearly, so that we can ourselves live and act better." Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 139; see also 36, 143. This may be contrary to James's intention of not explicitly being a moralist, but that is a different story.

[424] Nussbaum, 134.

[425] Mitchell, "Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Case of Late James," 82.

that she is really "self-conscious" of doing these things?). But this is again a matter of interpretation and not our focus here. Our focus is how some of Mitchell's arguments actually agree with Nussbaum's main argument that we have repeatedly summarized, such as that for responsible moral judgment, we should resist easy assumptions or ready generalizations. In what follows in his essay we can find more evidence of this, some of which practically sound like direct quotes from *Love's Knowledge*: "The web of desire, intention, mutual possession, and imaginative play is simply not to be parsed by categorical imperatives or ethical maxims;"[426] "The point of invoking this passage is in part to confirm how indeterminate major moments can be in James, and how firmly a novel like *The Golden Bowl* can resist paraphrase into more manageable prose."[427] While by these passages Mitchell tries to show how difficult it is to find common grounds for an ethical reading of James, an issue we have discussed earlier, he seems to take Nussbaum's "love's knowledge" as certain "final," specific personal interpretations of certain literary texts. However, Nussbaum never claims any final say of the interpretation of *The Golden Bowl*, and her "love's knowledge" is exactly something that Mitchell himself also is arguing for, namely "to reveal the general inadequacy of ethics at moments of the most intense and idiosyncratic experience" and "how inadequate they are to given constraints, particular conditions, and actual individuals, and how literary experience does not reduce itself to a moral algebra".[428] It is astonishing how people can completely miss Nussbaum's main point when they only focus on the issue of interpretation and unknowingly try to refute her using her own argument (In 3.1 "What should Maggie do?" we have also cited Mitchell because he agrees with us in believing that literature is too nuanced to be brutally summarized and that the "baroque complexity" of Maggie's imagination resists a simple moral condemnation of her objectification of others as repugnant.[429]).

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[426] Mitchell, 84.
[427] Mitchell, 87.
[428] Mitchell, 88.
[429] Mitchell, 83–85.

Mitchell makes it clear that by saying a novel like *The Golden Bowl* is irreducible, he does not want to suggest that James is being willfully obscure, but "to register the supreme imaginative restlessness of his work. To convert unsettling language into a series of settled ideas, then—of rules, exemplars, models, allegories, or the like—is to miss James's achievement in order to domesticate him to our own uses."[430] Similarly, Richard Rorty believes that "both Nussbaum and Pippin try too hard to fit James's achievement into a specifically philosophical context. Analogously, I think that the greatest novels offer an alternative to philosophy, and that putting them into philosophical contexts may diminish them."[431] However, they are arguing against a straw man, because Nussbaum never tries to somehow philosophize the language of novels. On the contrary, she values it as it is. What leads to their misunderstanding may be that as soon as they think of linking literature to ethics, they automatically imagine that the former has to make certain sacrifices for the latter so that it can be "domesticated," without considering the possibility that "domesticating" literature for ethical discussion or "putting them into philosophical contexts" does not necessarily mean the valuable literariness we all cherish has to be diminished. Quite the opposite, it is exactly this literariness that makes literature worth domesticating.

On the level of moral prescription, Mitchell's objection to Nussbaum can be valid. Nussbaum indeed believes that we should act like Maggie, but whether her exploitation of other people as artifacts, jokingly or not, is also worth imitating is debatable.[432] However, such objection does not affect Nussbaum's main argument that literature still matters for ethics because certain complicated and ambiguous moral situations can only be adequately expressed by the literary form, especially given the cognitive evidence we have mentioned. Relatedly, Jesse Kalin disagrees with Nussbaum because he

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[430] Mitchell, 87.

[431] Rorty, "Comments on Pippin on James," 353.

[432] See, for example, Mitchell, "Ethics, Aesthetics, and the Case of Late James," 76–84; Brudney, "Knowledge and Silence," 400. Nussbaum's explanation that this does not necessarily mean moral corruption, but rather can be regarded as a sign of her obsession with moral purity can be found in Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 129–32.

believes that if responsibly judging a moral situation requires the familiarity as great as a careful reader's familiarity with a long, complex novel like *The Golden Bowl*, then most people are like strangers to us (Surely, we already know Maggie and Adam much better than most of the people we know in real life), and such "rich responsibility" Nussbaum advocates is almost impossible.[433] Undoubtedly, reading others' minds is by no means as straightforward as reading novels. Regarding the realness of moral issues, we the reader might be spoiled if we expect to really *know* someone in real life as much and as deep as we know a fictional character profoundly portrayed by an 800-page novel. But this is still an objection on the level of moral prescription, because if we do not aim at giving practical moral prescriptions but only theoretically *describing* the ethically relevant phenomena, simply because it is difficult to achieve is not a very good reason to dismiss "rich responsibility" entirely (Kalin would certainly also agree that it would be ideal if we can really be that richly responsible). In Nussbaum's above-cited words, "it would be a mistake to infer from the difficulty and complexity of all of these tasks that there is nothing that counts as success or truth in each."[434]

To summarize, as is the case in the previous discussion on Diamond's responses to Nussbaum, the cognitive perspective again helps us clarify some misunderstandings in the reception of *Love's Knowledge* and, more importantly, in the general discussion on literature and ethics. It is the literary form, which allows ambiguity, that may help us understand how experts unconsciously learn and use masterful skills, without unnecessarily entangling ourselves with the issue of interpretation or the issue of moral prescription. The fact that some critics bother with the issue of interpretation actually shows that they also support moral particularism and feel that the concrete situation is important and worth clarifying, because if they support moral generalism, the moral rule(s) and its application would be the same regardless of how the concrete situation described by the ambiguous text is interpreted, and there would be no need to bother

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[433] Jesse Kalin, "Knowing Novels: Nussbaum on Fiction and Moral Theory," *Ethics* 103, no. 1 (1992): 145.

[434] Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam," 201.

with the issue of interpretation. And as we have been arguing, supporting moral particularism necessarily means supporting Nussbaum's main argument that literature matters for ethics, because literature can best describe certain morally significant particulars.

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Admittedly, many of the arguments and evidence mentioned in this section are only tentative and we again have used many "mays" and "cans," but it is already clear that the two ends of the two-way street cognitive poetics, literary studies and cognitive science, can at least complement each other by providing different perspectives and ideas. Some critics of Nussbaum astutely point out that she fails to consider the phenomenological or existentialist traditions which always have more philosophical interest in literature (for example, Gadamer) than the Anglo-American analytical one.[435] Considering that the connection between phenomenology and cognitive science has been increasingly strong in recent years, this also indirectly illustrates the potential of discussing Nussbaum's argument from a cognitive perspective.

When talking about the irreducibility of literature and the inarticulability of practical wisdom, Nussbaum sometimes mixes up the judgments that *can be* explicitly formulated but *have not yet been* formulated and the judgments that *cannot be* explicitly formulated at all. For example, when analyzing the scene in Book 5, Chapter 3 where Maggie tactfully persuades Adam to take Charlotte with him to America to solve the family crisis, Nussbaum argues that here both the father and the daughter can tacitly and fully understand each other's situation and see it as appropriate not to openly lay them out, which is unproblematic. What is problematic is she further argues that, based on this scene, we can conclude that "moral communication is not simply a matter of the uttering and receiving of general prepositional judgments" and that "the morally valuable aspects of this exchange could not be captured in a summary or paraphrase."[436] This is problematic because here Adam and Maggie's moral communication actually

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[435] Horton, "Life, Literature and Ethical Theory," 74; Kalin, "Knowing Novels," 141.

[436] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 153.

can be put into propositional judgments (e.g. Adam: "I know about Charlotte's affair but let's not talk about it." Maggie: "I know you know but let's pretend that you go back to America is not because of this."), it is just that they choose not to. In IV.3 "Literature matters," we have discussed that there are all kinds of reasons why certain judgments that can be articulated remain implicit: to respect others, to keep one's own dignity, etc. In III.2 "Psychology of wisdom," we have also discussed the reasons, mainly from the cognitive perspective, why certain judgments inherently cannot be articulated at all. Taking these into account can evidently help us clarify Nussbaum's mix-up. In IV.1 "The form matters," we cited a "quasi-formal" philosophical definition of love that is despised by Nussbaum and used as a negative example. There, she argues that "this passage should illustrate, for readers unfamiliar with professional philosophical prose, what I am talking about in this section. [Michael] Tanner admirably concludes, 'What is needed is a recognition that there are other modes of rigor and precision than quasi-formal ones, and ways of being profound that do not require near-unintelligibility.'"[437] We believe that, with the help of the cognitive perspective, Nussbaum's main argument, put into the context of our discussion on the practical wisdom in literary studies, can fulfill Tanner's (and, in effect, Gadamer's) criteria.

This section is therefore not a simple reiteration of the already much-discussed (although sometimes unsatisfactorily) *Love's Knowledge*, but it calls for attention to Nussbaum's often overlooked main argument and revisits the cognitive findings discussed in III.2.3 "Psychology of practical wisdom" that are relevant to this argument and to the discussion of literature and ethics in general. As Kalin argues, Nussbaum's claim for the *indispensability* of literature for ethics may be overstated,[438] but it is reasonable to argue that literature can at least complement ethics, given these cognitive findings. Our literature-matters-for-ethics argument should not be simply understood as arguing that fully citing the original text offers more insights than a summary or a paraphrase, which is stating the obvious. If we understand it this way, both the

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[437] Nussbaum, 20n33.

[438] Kalin, "Knowing Novels," 142.

importance of the concrete situation and the importance of the literary form are only a matter of degree. That is to say, although a one-sided grasp of the concrete situation is not as good as a full grasp, although non-literary forms are not as good as literary forms for describing certain moral situations, the former still has merit, especially when considering practical reasons such as length. Consequently, the difference between one-sided grasp and full grasp and the difference between non-literary forms and literary forms are only a matter of degree of positive goodness. However, both Nussbaum's and our analysis of *The Golden Bowl* show that there are cases where it is a matter of evil and good and a matter of total irresponsibility and responsibility.

There have been many studies linking ethics and cognitive science,[439] but even when especially talking about the cognitive perspective in this section, we cannot possibly expand on them all because our focus is on literature rather than ethics per se. Our focus is on the importance of really understanding the concrete situation before making moral judgments and that the concrete situation often requires the ambiguity of literature to be fully presented. By saying that practical wisdom is relevant for literature, we are not primarily arguing that practical wisdom is relevant as a moral ability to determine right and wrong (however plausible it might be), but that practical wisdom is relevant as an ability that is (1) depending on concrete situations, (2) inarticulable, and (3) only learnable through experience but not through memorizing rules. In this sense, the name of this ability is not very important because our focus is its three features (see III.1 "Practical wisdom and its related terms"). Particularly emphasizing the inarticulability of this ability, our study can very well also be called *The (New/Cognitive) Unconscious in Literary Studies.*[440] Although such a title may have fewer potential objections (for practical wisdom is more often associated with a moral

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[439] For a latest review see Hyemin Han, "How Can Neuroscience Contribute to Moral Philosophy, Psychology and Education Based on Aristotelian Virtue Ethics," *International Journal of Ethics Education* 1, no. 2 (2016): 201–17 and its bibliography.

[440] The two potential adjectives are chosen to distinguish our method from Freud and to echo Kihlstrom et al. See Kihlstrom, "The Cognitive Unconscious"; Ran R. Hassin, James S. Uleman, and John A. Bargh, *The New Unconscious* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

ability than with the cognitive unconscious), it does not stress enough the two-way street of cognitive poetics that we want to promote. As mentioned, humanities scholars from Aristotle to Gadamer have a rather consistent understanding of what judgment, practical wisdom, and its related terms consist of, especially its inarticulability. While this consensus can offer insights for cognitive science, both Gadamer and Nussbaum, influenced by Aristotle, tend to pit practical wisdom again natural sciences. Gadamer writes that "I cannot really make sense of a phronesis that is supposed to be scientifically disciplined."[441] Likewise, Nussbaum writes that "the long-standing fascination of Western philosophers with the methods and the style of natural science, which have at many times in history seemed to embody the only sort of rigor and precision worth cultivating, the only norm of rationality worth emulating, even in the ethical sphere. [They argue that] the true nature of the ethical domain is such that it can best be conveyed in the style we usually associate with mathematics or natural science."[442] However, we have shown that natural sciences do not necessarily have to be their enemies. For realizing this, philosophers and literary scholars need more exchanges with their "counterparts" about the latest development in each others' fields, and cognitive poetics as a two-way street can greatly facilitate such exchanges.

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[441] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "A Letter by Professor Hans-Georg Gadamer," in *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis.*, ed. Richard J. Bernstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 262.

[442] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 19; see also 54–55, 141; Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 290.

V. Conclusion

Paul Baltes, a pioneer in the psychology of wisdom and one of the most influential developmental psychologists, regards wisdom as "a topic at the interface between several disciplines: philosophy, sociology, theology, psychology, political science, and literature, to name a few."[443] Although very few studies actually link the psychology of wisdom and literature, many studies indeed link the psychology of wisdom and the other disciplines mentioned by Baltes. More than that, practical wisdom has also been extensively discussed in the fields of law,[444] medicine,[445] management,[446] education,[447] and social science.[448] Many such studies are widely cited, indicating that they have attracted considerable interest. The most noteworthy among them is the discussion on practical wisdom in the field of education. There are both many highly

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443 Hall, *Wisdom*, 19.

444 William N. Jr Eskridge, "Gadamer/Statutory Interpretation," *Columbia Law Review* 90 (1990): 609–81; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 100; Barry Schwartz, "Practical Wisdom and Organizations," *Research in Organizational Behavior* 31 (2011): 3–23.

445 Fredrik Svenaeus, "Hermeneutics of Medicine in the Wake of Gadamer: The Issue of Phronesis," *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 24, no. 5 (2003): 407–31; Lauris Christopher Kaldjian, "Teaching Practical Wisdom in Medicine through Clinical Judgement, Goals of Care, and Ethical Reasoning," *Journal of Medical Ethics* 36, no. 9 (2010): 558–62; Ben Kotzee, Alexis Paton, and Mervyn Conroy, "Towards an Empirically Informed Account of Phronesis in Medicine," *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine* 59, no. 3 (2016): 337–50.

446 Ikujiro Nonaka and Ryoko Toyama, "Strategic Management as Distributed Practical Wisdom (Phronesis)," *Industrial and Corporate Change* 16, no. 3 (2007): 371–94; Jon Billsberry and Andreas Birnik, "Management as a Contextual Practice: The Need to Blend Science, Skills and Practical Wisdom," *Organization Management Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 171–78; John Shotter and Haridimos Tsoukas, "In Search of Phronesis: Leadership and the Art of Judgment," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 13, no. 2 (2014): 224–43.

447 Carrie Birmingham, "Phronesis: A Model for Pedagogical Reflection," *Journal of Teacher Education* 55, no. 4 (2004): 313–24; Mieke Lunenberg and Fred Korthagen, "Experience, Theory, and Practical Wisdom in Teaching and Teacher Education," *Teachers and Teaching* 15, no. 2 (2009): 225–40.

448 Bent Flyvbjerg, Todd Landman, and Sanford Schram, eds., *Real Social Science: Applied Phronesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Gary Thomas, "The Case: Generalisation, Theory and Phronesis in Case Study," *Oxford Review of Education* 37, no. 1 (2011): 21–35; De Caro and Vaccarezza, *Practical Wisdom*.

theoretical and many empirical studies on the role of practical wisdom in education,[449] perhaps because, compared to literary scholars, educators seem to care much more about how to make the implicit explicit. They are eager to know what their students are implicitly thinking, how to teach an implicit ability (especially the implicit aspects in reading and writing), and what the (implicit) differences between novice and veteran readers are. The last question may not seem directly relevant to our purpose, but it is because it practically equals this question: What does the training in literary studies (implicitly) change? To answer these questions proves to be very difficult, because, after all, one of the three features of practical wisdom is that it cannot be directly taught.[450] As a result, many such studies are, unfortunately, satisfied with the think-aloud method (asking readers to say everything they are thinking so that the researcher can study it), without listing it as a limitation and thus partially defeating their purpose because it obviously cannot reveal the unconscious processes that are important for reading.[451] Moreover, as Kristján Kristjánsson points out, although phronesis is often mentioned in the field of education, at least until 2014, there is not a single paper on how phronesis can be developed, which has actually been one of the focuses of the psychology of wisdom since its birth.[452] Therefore, there is still much to be done in the study of this ancient concept because, on the one hand, the promising link between practical wisdom and literary studies remains largely unexplored, and, on the other hand, the already extensively explored fields often do not communicate with each other.

This study thus aims to provide a preliminary inquiry into the role of practical wisdom in literary studies and to bridge some of these non-interactive fields. The

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449 For theoretical studies, see Louise Wetherbee Phelps, *Composition as a Human Science: Contributions to the Self-Understanding of a Discipline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Michael F. Bernard-Donals, *The Practice of Theory: Rhetoric, Knowledge, and Pedagogy in the Academy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). Like Gadamer, they both explicitly argue that practical wisdom can distinguish the human sciences from the natural sciences. The empirical studies do not necessarily use the concept "practical wisdom," but they do investigate an inarticulable ability that, according to our definition, is practical wisdom.

450 For reviews see O'Brien, Cook, and Lorch, "Preface"; McCarthy, "Reading beyond the Lines."

451 For an exception, see Burkett and Goldman, "'Getting the Point' of Literature."

452 Kristjánsson, "*Phronesis* and Moral Education," 154.

biggest of them are the human sciences and the natural sciences in general. The smaller ones are psychology, literary studies, linguistics, philosophy, and history of science. The even smaller branches are psychology of wisdom, memory studies, psycholinguistics, cognitive poetics, hermeneutics, and ethical criticism. We argue that many studies on wisdom in these fields and branches actually have much in common (their goals, methods, results, etc.), but due to stereotypes, misunderstandings, and the nuanced subdivision of modern academia, they miss out on potentially very fruitful and mutually reinforcing exchanges. What is particularly unfortunate is, for example, that the psychology of practical wisdom based on conceptual organization, neural architecture, and decision making proposed by Schwartz that we have discussed in III.2.3 goes relatively unnoticed.

Our interdisciplinary study does not prioritize any discipline. As Lisa Zunshine puts it, "though 'vitally interested' in cognitive science, cognitive literary critics work not toward consilience with science but toward a richer engagement with a variety of theoretical paradigms in literary and cultural studies."[453] Mary Thomas Crane, another influential cognitive literary critic, also argues that the cognitive theory needs to be read *alongside*, not *in place of*, other theories. We can evaluate it like how we evaluate any other theory: Does it make sense? Is it coherent and rigorous? Does it provide illuminating insights?[454] Although opponents of cognitive poetics, such as Jonathan Kramnick, claim that cognitive poetics often only involves one-way application of work from science to literary studies,[455] this study has offered many examples of cognitive poetics as a two-way street.

Chapter II "Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom" begins with Gadamer's emphasis on the humanistic tradition: "The modern concept of science and the

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[453] Zunshine, "Introduction to Cognitive Literary Studies," 2.

[454] Mary Thomas Crane, "Cognitive Historicism: Intuition in Early Modern Thought," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 16.

[455] Natalie M. Phillips, "Literary Neuroscience and History of Mind. An Interdisciplinary FMRI Study of Attention and Jane Austen," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 56.

associated concept of method are insufficient. What makes the human sciences into sciences can be understood more easily from the tradition of the concept of Bildung than from the modern idea of scientific method. It is to the humanistic tradition that we must turn. In its resistance to the claims of modern science it gains a new significance."[456] According to Gadamer, in addition to Bildung (self-cultivation), this also applies to his other three guiding concepts of humanism: sensus communis ("the sense of what is right and of the common good that is to be found in all men"[457]), judgment, and taste (not in an aesthetic but a moral sense). What these four concepts have in common is the three features of practical wisdom: (1) contingent, (2) inarticulable, and (3) only learnable through experience. The four concepts are interconnected in that, according to the humanistic tradition, during the process of *Bildung*, we do not learn certain explicit facts or rules but teach ourselves implicitly how to *judge* properly and intuitively and thus become a person with *sensus communis* and *taste*. Specifically, Gadamer argues that "just this is obviously what gives the idea of taste its original breadth: that it constitutes a special way of knowing. Like reflective judgment, it belongs in the realm of that which grasps, in the individual object, the universal under which it is to be subsumed. Both taste and judgment evaluate the object in relation to a whole in order to see whether it fits in with everything else—that is, whether it is 'fitting.' One must have a 'sense' for it—it cannot be demonstrated."[458] He also believes that "in fact the logical basis of judgment—subsuming a particular under a universal, recognizing something as an example of a rule—cannot be demonstrated. Thus judgment requires a principle to guide its application. In order to follow this principle another faculty of judgment would be needed, as Kant shrewdly noted. So it cannot be taught in the abstract but only practiced from case to case, and is therefore more an ability like the senses. It is something that cannot be learned, because no demonstration from concepts can guide the application of rules."[459]

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[456] TM 17; GW 1, 23.

[457] TM 21; GW 1, 27.

[458] TM 35; GW 1, 43.

[459] TM 29; GW 1, 36.

Emil Angehrn, a student of Gadamer, correctly observes that, for Gadamer, these concepts of humanism are different forms of practical wisdom, which is an alternative to the rationalistic understanding of knowledge. It is supposedly "indisputable" that they play an important role in defining what the humanities are.[460] Each of these four concepts has a deep tradition behind it, but because here we are only concerned with its inarticulable nature, we do not go into the other aspects of them. Neither do we, as mentioned in Chapter I "Introduction," expand on Gadamer's "philosophical hermeneutics" that goes beyond the traditional hermeneutics, which is not only about how we understand a text anymore but how we understand the world and the *Dasein* (the being of man-in-the-world). Of course, not discussing them in detail does not mean that our discussion on Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom, treated here as a philosophical starting point of our study, is detached from his theoretical framework, as he does argue that "concretization of the general," which is what practical wisdom is all about, is "the universal aspect of hermeneutics."[461] This is also why Gadamer believes that practical wisdom is important both for ethics and literary studies, since the meaning of a text depends on the concrete situation of the reader, just as the relevance of an ethical rule depends on the concrete situation of an action. If we consider this with his other much-discussed hermeneutical concepts that stress the historical situatedness of literary interpretation, such as *Vorurteil*, *Horizontverschmelzung*, and aesthetic differentiation (judging a work of art as an isolated object only by its aesthetic qualities and ignoring how and why it is created), we can see that they all come down in one continuous train of thought: Only by stressing the historical context of the text and the reader can the process of interpretation be understood as the application of universals to particulars, the job of practical wisdom.

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[460] Emil Angehrn, "Die Wissensform der Kultur: hermeneutische Perspektiven der Geisteswissenschaften," in *Phronesis: die Tugend der Geisteswissenschaften: Beiträge zur rationalen Methode in den Geisteswissenschaften*, ed. Gyburg Radke-Uhlmann (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012), 291n20. See also Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again*, trans. Steven Sampson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

[461] Gadamer, "Practical Philosophy as a Model of the Human Sciences," 82.

It is worth emphasizing that this philosophical starting point is about Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom,[462] and we cannot delve into Aristotle's practical wisdom itself, whose definition is far from uncontroversial. Some, in agreement with Gadamer and Nussbaum, believe that Aristotle's phronesis is based on an almost aesthetic judgment about the particularities of a situation, while others believe that it is ultimately based on rational principles after all.[463] This study takes the side of the former, and it would be beyond our scope to examine this controversy in a broader context other than citing a crucial quote from *The Nicomachean Ethics*, which is already cited twice before: "The whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we said at the very beginning that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or precept, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine or of navigation."[464] While our readers can decide themselves which side of the controversy they want to take (or, for that matter, contextualize this quote), we want to bring to their attention that here Aristotle clearly points out the first two features of practical wisdom (contingency and inarticulability) summarized in Chapter II, which are our focus here. As for the third feature (only learnable through experience), which

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[462] Many have argued that Gadamer has a quite unique interpretation of Aristotle's phronesis. See, for example, Richard J. Bernstein, "What Is the Difference That Makes a Difference? Gadamer, Habermas, and Rorty," *PSA: Proceedings of the Biennial Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association* 1982, no. 2 (1982): 337; Günter Figal, "*Phronesis* as Understanding: Situating Philosophical Hermeneutics," in *The Specter of Relativism: Truth, Dialogue, and Phronesis in Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. Lawrence Schmidt (Evanston, Ill: Northwestern University Press, 1995), 236–47. Enrico Berti, in particular, points out that Gadamer raises the status of practical wisdom and ignores the original primacy of sophia. See Enrico Berti, "Gadamer and the Reception of Aristotle's Intellectual Virtues," *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 56, no. 3/4 (2000): 347, 359.

[463] See Thornton Lockwood, "Aristotle's Ethics," in *Oxford Bibliographies in Classics* (Oxford University Press, 2013), https://doi.org/10.1093/obo/9780195389661-0079; Taylor, "Aristotle's Epistemology."

[464] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1104a1.

is a direct result of contingency and inarticulability, Aristotle, in another place, also writes that we cannot find any young people of practical wisdom because practical wisdom requires experience and young people do not have it.[465] Gadamer accepts all these (so do many other philosophers throughout history who have studied the concept of judgment) and believes that they are what enables practical wisdom to distinguish the humanities from science.

However, nowadays both scientists and philosophers of science have generally come to realize that science has a hermeneutical dimension too because scientists also *interpret* data and graphs, which is one of the reasons why logical positivism has faded away since the 1960s.[466] While it can still be argued that practical wisdom plays a more important role in the humanities than in science, this debate is too general to be relevant here because this study only tries to prove that we know more than we can tell in literary studies. Between Chapter II and Chapter III comes this transition of our study from a historical to a contemporary perspective, for we use Aristotle's and Gadamer's theories of practical wisdom as a philosophical starting point not because we agree with *all* of it, but simply because it can provide *some* food for thought for contemporary discussion.

Chapter III "Practical wisdom from a cognitive perspective" challenges Gadamer's (and Nussbaum's, as we shall see) unsatisfactorily demonstrated argument that science cannot investigate ethics and literary studies because they both involve the inarticulable practical wisdom that defies the scientific method. It is unsatisfactorily demonstrated because Gadamer usually bases his argumentation simply on what the tradition, especially Aristotle, tells us, without evaluating its validity. As John D. Schaeffer sharply criticizes, "Do we not see in Gadamer's work, brilliant though it is, another

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[465] Aristotle, 1142a12. See also Thiele, *The Heart of Judgment*, 89, 92, 161.

[466] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 192; Hubert L. Dreyfus, "Holism and Hermeneutics," *The Review of Metaphysics* 34, no. 1 (1980): 3–23; Daston and Galison, *Objectivity*; Alan Richardson, "'That Sort of Everyday Image of Logical Positivism': Thomas Kuhn and the Decline of Logical Empiricist Philosophy of Science," in *The Cambridge Companion to Logical Empiricism*, ed. Alan Richardson and Thomas Uebel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 347; Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, 16; Michael Friedman, *Reconsidering Logical Positivism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

example of what Eliza Butler called 'the tyranny of Greece over Germany'? Gadamer never questions the centrality of the Greek philosophical tradition or its suitability as a model of hermeneutics."[467] Many other scholars have noticed this problem (even when they agree with Gadamer's conclusion), but most of them still try to remedy it within the philosophical framework. We are not saying that arguing within the philosophical framework cannot work, but only suggesting that a cognitive perspective can shed some new light. Although Gadamer's understanding of practical wisdom is much discussed, very few try to combine it with contemporary cognitive science, perhaps because it is only until recently that this obscure concept becomes the subject of empirical research. But if we really want to be a Gadamerian, taking what cognitive scientists have found recently into account seems to be a legitimate way for a contemporary "fusion of horizon."

In a reply to Richard J. Bernstein's hugely influential *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Gadamer writes that "I become acutely aware of just how much I am caught up, one might say, in the tradition of German Romantic and post-Romantic philosophy. I live, as it were, in a closed horizon of problems and lines of questioning, which still understands itself to be philosophy, and which recognizes neither a social-scientific nor a skeptical questioning of philosophy itself."[468] Chapter III shows that, to fuse this horizon of Gadamer with the horizon of cognitive science does not necessarily question philosophy itself, but it complements it in a meaningfully way, especially when wisdom is shifting from a vague abstraction to an empirically grounded concept of human ability, and a robust scientific study of wisdom is taking shape thanks to more sophisticated neurobiological measurement tools.[469] For example, functional neuroimaging allows us to explore neural correlates of the complex psychological attributes that constitute the common definition of wisdom, such as social decision making, pragmatic knowledge of life, and

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[467] Schaeffer, *Sensus Communis*, 125. See also Chrysostomos Mantzavinos, *Naturalistic Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 68.

[468] Gadamer, "A Letter by Professor Hans-Georg Gadamer," 262.

[469] Jeste et al., "The New Science of Practical Wisdom," 219.

reflection/self-understanding.[470] Based on the emerging psychology of wisdom, we argue that the three features of practical wisdom all have potential empirical evidence. Within the framework of developmental psychology, for example, psychologists of wisdom widely believe that wisdom can only be acquired through learning from one's own experience, not through reading textbooks or following others' explicit instructions.[471] The fact that our conceptual knowledge is not organized around unambiguous definitions but around prototypes reminds us of the inarticulable practical wisdom too. Moreover, implicit memory, a kind of memory that we cannot consciously retrieve but can be expressed through performance, is also a possible empirical basis of practical wisdom. A famous example of it is H.M.'s tacit skill learning mentioned in III.2.4. Another example is priming: a change in the processing of a stimulus due to a previous encounter with the same or a related stimulus. For instance, reading the word "doctor" first will make it easier to read the word "nurse" afterward, even if people do not recall that they have read the word "doctor." People also process "bear—cave" faster after reading "bird—nest" (same relation) as opposed to "bird—desert" (unrelated). Psychologists believe that this kind of relational priming very likely plays a role in understanding metaphors, an indispensable part of literary interpretation.[472]

We refer to cognitive science only to show another perspective on whether we indeed have an inarticulable ability (More than that, it is crucial for our cognition and has long been largely neglected). This ability is not necessarily moral, as the general understanding of practical wisdom often tends to be, but an ability to apply universals to particulars and to make decisions according to the concrete situation. Our discussion on practical wisdom and literary studies, therefore, is not really about the relation between moral philosophy and literary studies, which has already been extensively

[470] Meeks and Jeste, "Neurobiology of Wisdom," 355–57.

[471] Sternberg, "A Balance Theory of Wisdom," 347, 351; Kunzmann and Baltes, "The Psychology of Wisdom," 115.

[472] Purves, *Principles of Cognitive Neuroscience*, 243–52; Keith James Holyoak, *The Spider's Thread: Metaphor in Mind, Brain, and Poetry* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019), 63.

discussed.[473] As mentioned in III.2.3, except the psychology of practical wisdom suggested by Barry Schwartz, most of the empirical studies on wisdom treat the moral aspect of wisdom as essential. Judith Glück believes, however, that this does not have to be the case when discussing wisdom in literary studies.[474] Indeed, strictly speaking, the object of our study does not necessarily have to be practical wisdom (which is usually understood as a moral ability), but an ability that is contingent, inarticulate, and only learnable through experience. Put it in another way, this study does not necessarily aim to prove that *practical wisdom* plays an important role in literary studies, but that *we know more than we can tell* in literary studies. Notice that the latter formulation does not include the concept "practical wisdom," an advantage being to avoid objections to our definition of practical wisdom and our treatment of practical wisdom and its related concepts as synonyms (although this is very common usage, as with many time-honored concepts, there are always different understandings of practical wisdom). We choose the former formulation despite such potential objections because of concision: "An ability that is contingent, inarticulate, and only learnable through experience in literary studies" as a title is far too long. Another reason, discussed in IV.4.3 "Skill learning revisited," is that the latter formulation would miss the contribution from the human sciences, where scholars historically have a fairly consistent understanding of what practical wisdom/judgment/tacit knowledge/know-how is, and would therefore not highlight the ideal two-way street of cognitive poetics that we want to emphasize.

On the other hand, we must fully recognize the difficulty of scientifically studying the unconscious/inarticulable in literature (hence the speculative nature of this study). As Andrew Elfenbein rightly claims, "no book on a topic as complex as reading can be definitive."[475] Keith Holyoak, a leading cognitive psychologist and a poet, also notes

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[473] See, for example, Wayne C. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Geoffry Galt Harpham, *Shadows of Ethics: Criticism and the Just Society* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999); Noël Carroll, "Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research," *Ethics* 110, no. 2 (January 2000): 350–87.

[474] Judith Glück, personal communication with author, September 11, 2019.

[475] Elfenbein, *The Gist of Reading*, 15.

that conscious and unconscious brain networks work together in a continuous, difficult-to-differentiate way in writing poetry, making directly studying them very challenging.[476] What can literary scholars do then other than, in agreement with Blakey Vermeule, recognizing that the unconscious is by definition elusive and that the so-called psychoanalysis is even less probable?[477] One possibility is to explore whether literature itself can give us special access to the inarticulable. Elfenbein cites Arthur Henry Hallam's influential 1831 essay "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry," where he compares poetry to magic:

> The heights and depths of art are most within the reach of those who have received from Nature the 'fearful and wonderful' constitution we have described, whose poetry is a sort of magic, producing a number of impressions, too multiplied, too minute, and too diversified to allow of our tracing them to their causes, because just such was the effect, even so boundless and so bewildering, produced on their imaginations by the real appearance of Nature.[478]

Elfenbein argues that although contemporary literary scholars do not write like this anymore, Hallam's account does captures something important about the nuanced aesthetic experience of poetry.[479] Similarly, Elliot Eisner suggests that the existence of a kind of knowledge/ability that cannot be verbally expressed is significant because it opens the door for multiple forms of representation, giving art enormous value because what cannot be verbally expressed may be artistically expressed.[480]

In the same spirit, while many suggest that literature may register some of its effects (perhaps the most profound ones) at a level that readers can hardly verbalize, Chapter IV "How are practical wisdom and literature related?" examines Nussbaum's

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[476] Holyoak, *The Spider's Thread*, 139–66.

[477] Blakey Vermeule, "The New Unconscious: A Literary Guided Tour," in *The Oxford Handbook of Cognitive Literary Studies*, ed. Lisa Zunshine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 471.

[478] Arthur Henry Hallam, "On Some of the Characteristics of Modern Poetry, and on the Lyrical Poems of Alfred Tennyson," *Englishman's Magazine* 1 (1831): 618, quoted in Elfenbein, *The Gist of Reading*, 35.

[479] Elfenbein, *The Gist of Reading*, 36.

[480] Elliot Eisner, "Art and Knowledge," in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, ed. J. Knowles and Ardra Cole (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2008), 5.

argument that the literary form is indispensable for ethics because certain situations that are, in Hallam's words, "too multiplied, too minute, and too diversified," can only be satisfactorily expressed by literature.[481]

We talked earlier about how moral rules cannot tell us exactly what to do in many situations in our daily lives, so we need practical wisdom, and relying on specific situations is the first of the three features of practical wisdom: Doctors really need to know their patients to decide whether to tell them about their terminal illness. Another example from Aristotle is that there are different criteria for what counts as an appropriate display of anger in different situations, and to determine that in a given situation cannot be reasoned out from principles but requires judgment that is similar to perception.[482] Because many real-life situations are much more complicated and ambiguous than these two examples, Nussbaum believes that we need literature to fully address them, and Henry James's *The Golden Bowl* can be regarded as a "story about human practical wisdom."[483] In this novel, much is made of a moral ability that Nussbaum calls perception,[484] after both Aristotle and James, emphasizing the immediacy and certainty of our moral judgment although it "cannot be reasoned out from principles." According to Nussbaum, one of the most fascinating and urgent tasks in ethics today is to articulate the relationship between rule and perception in an Aristotelian morality. Analyzing James's work, which exemplarily helps us to begin this task, seems therefore necessary.[485] She emphasizes Aristotle's defense of the priority of concrete situational judgments and his insistence that practical wisdom cannot be a systematic science concerned only with general rules.[486] Arguing that not every rational judgment can be captured in a system of rules which can be automatically

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[481] For a review see Mark J. Bruhn, "Philosophy of Science, Methodology, and Theory Development in Empirical Studies of Literary Experience," in *Handbook of Empirical Literary Studies*, ed. Don Kuiken and Arthur M. Jacobs (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 497.

[482] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109b11–23, see also 1126b2–4.

[483] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 143.

[484] Nussbaum, 37.

[485] Nussbaum, "Reply to Richard Wollheim, Patrick Gardiner, and Hilary Putnam," 206.

[486] Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge*, 66.

applied to every new case does not mean that rules are not important anymore or that anything goes, but only points out that the ethical norm critically depends on those "whom we can rely for competent judgment—just as, in Aristotle's very similar view, the norm of good perception is the judgment of a certain type of person, the person of practical wisdom."[487] This strikingly reminds us of how contemporary psychologists of wisdom, especially Paul Baltes, understand this ancient concept, from which they begin their empirical research that ultimately supports its inarticulability. However, although Nussbaum agrees with what we have argued, namely that literature may give us special access to the inarticulable, she, like Gadamer, pits scientific and literary studies against each other, without realizing that cognitive science may already begin to better explain Hallam's "sort of magic" than philosophy or normative literary criticism, precisely because, as Nussbaum notes, contemporary academic writing has pushed the latter two into a form that was once exclusively "scientific" and intolerant of ambiguity. After all, a long-standing objection to the scientific study of art is that its emotionless tools cannot grasp the lived aesthetic experience, which seems remarkably similar to Nussbaum's objection to contemporary moral philosophy that its "quasi-formal" style cannot grasp the moral nuances.[488] Yet, the cognitive evidence we have discussed suggests that literature and cognitive science, once considered to be two extremes, seem more to belong to the same "camp" that can complement each other when studying practical wisdom.

In IV.3 "Literature matters" we offer our own interpretation of several passages from *The Golden Bowl*, and we pay particular attention to the fictional but possible cases where the concepts of, for example, "father" and "best friend," which are easily included in moral rules, have different meanings for different people in different situations. It is thus unwise to blindly deny such complexity and dogmatically impose universality by saying we should always behave so and so to our father or our best friend, regardless of the concrete situation. Critically, we dig into the ambiguous details

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[487] Nussbaum, 181.

[488] Nussbaum, 20n33. See also Elfenbein, *The Gist of Reading*, 36.

of these cases and argue that they indeed often can only be comprehensively depicted by the literary form, which, unlike the other forms, inherently tolerates (if not champions) ambiguities. In IV.4 "The cognitive perspective" we further argue that, despite the influence of *Love's Knowledge*, not many have analyzed in depth Nussbaum's main argument; for those who have, they can also benefit from a cognitive perspective. While Nussbaum's literature-matters-for-ethics argument shows what literature can offer for understanding morality, our revisit of some of the scientific findings discussed in Chapter III shows what cognitive science can offer for the general discussion on literature and ethics (although, as just mentioned, ethics per se is not our focus), which is another example of how fruitful the two-way street cognitive poetics can be, where, rather than one party being guided unilaterally by the other, they promote each other.

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At the end of almost every study in the field of cognitive science, there is a section specially dedicated to suggestions for future research. Although our study still locates itself primarily in the field of literary studies, we find it meaningful to include such a section, also for finding new ways of integrating the insights from the "two cultures." From the philosophical and literary perspective, what remains to be done includes studying the argument that the tolerance of ambiguities makes the literary form important for ethics in the context of several other established subfields, such as the study on ambiguity itself, on description and representation, on form vs. matter/content, on universals and particulars, etc.[489] In addition, associating Nussbaum's argument with the well-developed stylistics, especially the studies on philosophical style, can be interesting.[490] The problem of literary interpretation also seems to be inseparable from metaphor theory, from how to construct and understand secondary meanings beyond the primary ones, and combining what is discussed here with this subfield can initiate

[489] Almost all of these keywords have their entries in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.

[490] See, for example, Horton, "Life, Literature and Ethical Theory," 74.

further fascinating conversation.[491] Finding more examples both in literary history and in contemporary discussion where people seem to have inarticulable reasons behind their interpretations may offer new evidence for the role of practical wisdom in literary studies too.

From the cognitive perspective, it would be promising to include literary expertise in the general study on expertise, which already notices the importance of the implicit part of expert skill.[492] Richard J. Gerrig, for example, believes that expert readers may well have developed sufficient skill for certain kinds of literary analyses that they do it unconsciously. Just as we may all remember a time when simply reading required a substantial conscious effort, expert readers may remember a time when analyzing literary texts was effortful. It is quite possible that important aspects of their literary expertise, which would be effortful for less experienced readers, have become part of their System 1.[493] If they are unaware of these aspects (or, as in the case in the Müller-Lyer illusion discussed in III.2.3.3 where we cannot help but believe that the two line segments are not equally long, they cannot control these aspects even if they are aware of them), how should we deal with their supposed "explanation" of how they interpret a literary text?

Another exciting possibility is to conduct experiments to concretely examine the role of implicit forms of memory such as priming or skill learning in literary interpretation. It is beyond doubt that we can unconsciously store and retrieve memory in literary interpretation, but there is very little research concretely linking, for example, priming and literary interpretation, from whatever perspective. Future research could specifically investigate the possible effects of conceptual priming and semantic priming in literary interpretation. And such research is likely to require collaboration between

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[491] See Holyoak, *The Spider's Thread*, 658.

[492] See Anna T. Cianciolo et al., "Practical Intelligence and Tacit Knowledge: Advancements in the Measurement of Developing Expertise," *Learning and Individual Differences* 16, no. 3 (January 1, 2006): 235–53; Anna T. Cianciolo and Robert J. Sternberg, "Practical Intelligence and Tacit Knowledge: An Ecological View of Expertise," in *The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*, ed. K. Anders Ericsson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 770–92.

[493] Gerrig, "Conscious and Unconscious Processes in Readers' Narrative Experiences," 55.

both literary and scientific scholars, because as contemporary scholarship evolves more and more specialized, it is increasingly difficult for one person to do meaningful interdisciplinary work. Moreover, such research may encounter many difficulties because literary interpretation involves many variables, such as the nature of the text, the goals, motivations and resources of the reader, and the environment where the reading occurs, which are very hard to finely control.[494]

That said, before solving these difficulties and finding more direct evidence, simply *realizing* that we know more than we can tell in literary interpretation is already a significant step. It can help, among other things, avoid forcedly finding the reasons for literary interpretations that are actually consciously inaccessible and forcedly finding differences in apparent consensus, especially in resolving disputes over concrete interpretations and literary theories. After all, it is one thing that we have not yet conclusively understood the role of practical wisdom in literary studies; it is another thing that we do not at least acknowledge its existence. Although what is discussed here is less than definite and only serves as a plausible, tentative alternative approach to investigating literary interpretation,[495] stressing its unconscious part, we have proven the potential of such interdisciplinary thinking. In addition, the possible empirical foundations of practical wisdom mentioned in this paper, such as unconscious implicit memory, fuzzy conceptual boundaries, and the black box of neural networks, are widely recognized scientific facts (not that they may never be proven wrong—just the best we can do now), so even if some do not approve of our definition of practical wisdom, we can entirely skip this concept and talk directly about how these real empirical foundations will affect literary interpretation without undermining our central argument. In other words, it is our association of practical wisdom with these empirical findings

[494] See Carol D. Lee, "Inquiry and Learning in Literature," in *International Handbook of Inquiry and Learning*, ed. Ravit Golan Duncan and Clark A. Chinn (Routledge, 2021), 277.

[495] Note that cognitive science is always evolving, and many new studies have been published during the time this study is being written, so many findings cited here would probably soon be (or already are) out of date (although much of the scientific literature cited in this study is less than three years old).

that is less than definite, not that these findings themselves leave us much room for doubt (at least for now).

Of course, although the emphasis throughout this study has been on the unconscious and the inarticulable, the conscious and the articulable are certainly also indispensable for literary interpretation and for our cognition in general. As Steven Sloman, a pioneer in the study of our "two systems," soberly reminds us, we should not overemphasize the "irrationality" of System 1, because people can often correct themselves at critical moments or after they have suffered from unexamined intuition:

> Instead of performing a complete analysis of their interests, people vote for a politician because they have always for voted for that person or buy an item because it is associated with an image that they would like to project. However, most people only go so far. They would not do something that they consider irrational if it entailed a real penalty or cost. Fewer people buy an item after it has been linked to cancer. So, on one hand, people "follow their noses" by allowing associations to guide them; on the other hand, they are compelled to behave in a manner more justifiable.[496]

This study thus aims at *compelling* us to think about the inarticulable aspects of literary interpretation, making it more justifiable. The criteria for valid literary interpretation and the various theories surrounding this issue have been debated for a long time, and it seems to be the default that we can tell all that we know. However, we know more than we can tell.

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[496] Sloman, "Two Systems of Reasoning," 396.

Abstract

This study explores the role of practical wisdom, an ability that we know but cannot explicitly tell, in literary studies. We argue from philosophical, cognitive, and literary perspectives that we cannot articulate all the things that we know and are able to do in literary interpretation. From the philosophical perspective, we discuss Gadamer's understanding of the originally Aristotelian concept, phronesis, which (1) always depends on the concrete situation, (2) cannot be formalized into rules, and (3) can only be learned by experience. From the cognitive perspective, we argue that, according to the emerging psychology of wisdom, the three features of practical wisdom may have empirical foundations. From the literary perspective, by critically examining Nussbaum's argument that literature matters for ethics and revisiting the cognitive evidence mentioned before, we argue that, for an adequate understanding of ethics, we need the literary form to grasp the ambiguities of a concrete situation, which is required by practical wisdom for a responsible moral judgment. Overall, we advocate the idea of cognitive poetics, which is not, as its opponents often claim, necessarily about how literary studies one-sidedly learn from cognitive science, but can be a two-way street where the two parties contribute to each other.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Studie untersucht die Rolle der praktischen Weisheit, einer Fähigkeit, die wir kennen, aber nicht explizit sagen können, in der Literaturwissenschaft. Wir argumentieren aus philosophischer, kognitiver und literarischer Perspektive, dass wir nicht alles, was wir in der literarischen Interpretation wissen und können, ausdrücken können. Aus philosophischer Perspektive diskutieren wir Gadamers Verständnis des ursprünglich aristotelischen Begriffs der Phronesis, die (1) immer von der konkreten Situation abhängt, (2) nicht in Regeln formalisiert werden kann und (3) nur durch Erfahrung erlernt werden kann. Aus kognitiver Perspektive argumentieren wir, dass die drei Eigenschaften der praktischen Weisheit gemäß der entstehenden Psychologie der Weisheit empirische Grundlagen haben können. Aus der literarischen Perspektive argumentieren wir, indem wir Nussbaums Argument, dass Literatur bedeutend für die Ethik ist, kritisch untersuchen und die zuvor erwähnten kognitiven Beweise wieder aufgreifen, dass wir für ein angemessenes Verständnis der Ethik die literarische Form benötigen, um die Mehrdeutigkeiten einer konkreten Situation zu erfassen, was die praktische Weisheit für ein verantwortungsvolles moralisches Urteil erfordert. Insgesamt plädieren wir für die Idee der kognitiven Poetik, bei der es nicht, wie von ihren Gegnern oft behauptet, darum geht, dass die Literaturwissenschaft einseitig von der Kognitionswissenschaft lernt, sondern dass beide Seiten sich gegenseitig befruchten können.

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Zheng, Yi

Name, Vorname

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