

## Henry James - Aristotle's ally, an exclusive pact?

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### 1. Introduction

Many claims are advanced for the importance of narrative art works in philosophy. This paper will concentrate on one specific thesis put forward by Martha Nussbaum about the relationship between certain works of literature and moral philosophy. Although Nussbaum explores many roles for narrative artworks in philosophy<sup>1</sup>, I shall concentrate on those works where she argues for a close connection between the novels of Henry James and Aristotle's ethics. These are Love's Knowledge<sup>2</sup>, where other authors other than James are also considered, and "Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism", an article that formed part of a debate with Richard Posner and Wayne Booth in 1997 and 1998 in Philosophy and Literature<sup>3</sup>. It is this latter work that provides the central thesis to be considered.

I argue that there are least four possible attributes or combinations of them that Nussbaum might be suggesting are present in James' novels when she claims that James is an ally of Aristotle. My claim will be that James can only be regarded as an ally of Aristotle with respect to some of these attributes. It is a second question to determine precisely how the legitimate attributes isolated in James' novels are to be used to provide an ally for Aristotle's ethics. I shall claim that in any sense in which it is legitimate to regard James as an ally of Aristotle, he

could also be regarded as an ally of a generalist theory. This is an important point to emphasise since Nussbaum explicitly enlists James as an ally of Aristotle because of the normative primacy that he gives to the particular. I shall use Kant's theory as an example of a generalist theory. Henry James, I argue, can be an ally of both Aristotle and Kant but both can adopt an isolationist policy.

## **2. Nussbaum's 1998 Thesis**

The specific thesis put forward by Nussbaum in 1998 is as follows:

My claim is that in order to investigate this Aristotelian ethical view fully and fairly, we need to turn to texts in which the case for that sort of rationality is made out in a powerful and convincing way--and this cannot be done if we confine ourselves to works written in the abstract style characteristic of most contemporary theory...Aristotle's conception is much more dependent on "allies" who will make out the force of such obscure claims as the claim that "the discernment rests with perception," and that correct action "lies in a mean". Because Aristotle's conception leaves so much to particularized contextual judgment, one cannot well assess the conception without studying complex examples of such particularized judgment; and of course Aristotle's text does not supply such material. I claim that Henry James is a

powerful ally of Aristotle, and one whom Aristotle badly needs if he is to convince us of his claims ("ER," pp. 347 - 348).

It is the clarification and discussion of this that provides my point of departure. I shall then consider the four possible characteristics of James' novels that I have isolated. These are: exemplars of good choice, illustrations of the direction of thought to follow for the discernment of the particular, vehicles for developing imagination and sources that enable us to develop an understanding of and engagement of emotions. In each case I shall consider how, if at all, these characteristics enable James to be an ally of either Aristotle or Kant.

## **2.1 Clarification of Nussbaum's Thesis**

Nussbaum's thesis is limited to the late novels of James. "I assert that there is a distinctive type of ethical view...that requires literary works of a very specific type, primarily exemplified by the late novels of James, for its complete investigation" ("ER," p.348). These include The Wings of the Dove (1902), The Ambassadors (1903) and The Golden Bowl (1904). I shall use examples from each of these although, as Posner notes, The Wings of The Dove, is one book that Nussbaum does not discuss in the article.<sup>4</sup>

What attributes or characteristics do these late novels of James possess? They all have in common the detailed examination over time of the intricacies of the relationships between the main characters and they all require the resolution of some sort of complex conflict or problem that arises in the context of these relationships. There are rich pictures of the inner life of the characters and their emotions and the connection between this and what they decide to do. We do not read these descriptions in some detached way but in some sense, to be explained in 3.4 below, our emotions are involved in reading the story. Presumably, it is these characteristics that enable these books to "make out the force of" the Aristotelian claim that "discernment rests with perception" and that action "lies in a mean" that was suggested in the opening quotation.

The Aristotelian claim that "discernment rests with perception" also emphasises the normative primacy of the particular in the Aristotelian view and this is one of the central or possibly the central moving force behind Nussbaum's view that these sorts of novels that contain a detailed description of particular cases are to be Aristotle's allies. As she writes in the opening quotation of this paper, "Because Aristotle's conception leaves so much to particularized contextual judgment, one cannot well assess the conception without studying complex examples of such particularized judgment; and of course Aristotle's text does not supply such material" ("ER," pp.347 - 348). This overarching view

is present in the four attributes of James' novels distinguished below.

## **2.2 The Limitation to Aristotle**

The limitation of Nussbaum's thesis to the Aristotelian ethical view is important in the light of my thesis that James can also be an ally of Kant. In Love's Knowledge, a collection of papers written before this article, Nussbaum claimed that "...certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist" (LK, p.5). It is clear that Nussbaum would consider that these truths include ethical claims since her project is the examination of "the ethical, very broadly and inclusively construed" (LK, p.22), the question of how one should live. Consequently, any ethical theory that did not allow the addition, in some sense, of works of narrative art would not be able to fully consider ethical questions. Whilst it is not being claimed that the works of the narrative artist are sufficient for the exposition of an ethical view, this quotation clearly indicates that they are indispensable. They are also essential because they could not be paraphrased in an abstract philosophical text because of another claim that Nussbaum makes in Love's Knowledge where she writes, "Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself a part of content - an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth" (LK, p.3).

As an example of what she is suggesting we have what Nussbaum suggests in her essay, "Perceptive Equilibrium". The stance that Lambert Strether takes in William James' novel, The Ambassadors, is one where he determines how a human being should live by being finely tuned to new situations and being open to the perception of new situations rather than confronting them with closed principles. Nussbaum comments, "the life of perception feels perplexed, difficult, unsafe. (Strether's sentences here have the awkwardness and riskiness of which he speaks.)... Strether delivers this speech 'slowly and sociably, with full pauses and straight dashes'" (LK, p.181).

Strether has come to Europe as an ambassador for his fiancée, Mrs. Newsome, to bring her son back to America. The character of Mrs. Newsome is represented as being one where principles govern her sense of duty incorporating a view where others are viewed in a general way as autonomous wills without regard to their particularity. Her language is represented as employing sentences that "are crisp, 'straight' and, as Strether says, 'pat'" (LK, p.185).

What exactly does this claim amount to? Well, as Nussbaum herself admits, "a paraphrase in a very different form and style will not, in general, express the same conception" (LK, p.5). Literary form

is not confined to linguistic style. The dress, for example, that Mrs. Newsome is described as wearing reflects her view of life.

In Love's Knowledge Nussbaum also claimed that certain ethical views could not be supplemented by works of narrative art. For example, she writes of Kant's ethical view, that it "could never find its fitting expression in novels or tragic dramas" (LK, p. 19). She is not claiming that characters exemplifying a Kantian view cannot appear in novels but that "these characters are not likely to fare well with the readers. And we are made aware that if the events in which we, as readers, participate had been described to us by those characters, they would not have had the literary form they now do, and would not have constituted a novel at all" (LK p.26).

For example, in The Ambassadors<sup>5</sup> Mrs. Newsome is presented as a character who holds a Kantian view. Nussbaum writes, "It is because Mrs. Newsome is no mere caricature, but a brilliantly comic rendering of some of the deepest and most appealing features of Kantian morality that the novel has the balance and power that it does. We see the Kantian attitude as one that gives us a special dignity and exaltation; we see it, too, as a deep part of our culture" (LK, p.179).

Nussbaum's point then is not that these characters cannot appear in novels but that if a piece of work was written from the

perspective of James' Mrs. Newsome then it would not have been a novel. She writes of both Kantianism and Utilitarianism that their ethical views "were so inhospitable to any possible relation with imaginative literature that dialogue was cut off from the side of ethics as well" (LK, p.172). That is, dialogue with literature was cut off because of the content of these ethical theories. If Nussbaum's 1998 claim is understood in the context of the views that she expressed in Love's Knowledge then the limitation of Nussbaum's 1998 claim to the Aristotelian view is extremely damaging for other ethical views. Since if the 1998 claim is coupled with the two claims that novels are indispensable for a full statement of an ethical view and second that this is denied to Kantianism and Utilitarianism, then this will be strong argument against these theories and any others that it is not possible to combine with works of narrative art.

Certain novels are then essential for the explication of the Aristotelian view for two reasons. First, certain truths about human life can only be stated in this form and second, these truths cannot be paraphrased and added to the statement of the theory since the form of their statement is part of the philosophical content that is being expressed. The sense of "allies" is then, according to Love's Knowledge, not that of an optional extra but an indispensable element in the statement of the theory.



However, there are indications that this thesis might have been weakened in the 1998 article in two respects. First, in terms of the indispensability of novels to the statement of the Aristotelian position and second, in terms of the indispensability of novels for any ethical view. In the quotation given from the 1998 article at the start of this paper, she talks about consulting novels to "investigate" the Aristotelian view "fully and fairly", to make out the "force" of certain claims in Aristotle's ethics, to "assess" Aristotle's conception and to "convince" us of Aristotle's claims. The suggestion might be taken to be here that the Aristotelian view can be stated fully without novels but that these "allies" are necessary to enable us to understand Aristotle's claims better. They might almost be viewed as illustrations of the Aristotelian view. This weaker claim is one that Nussbaum clearly disassociates herself from in Love's Knowledge where she writes, "One might, of course, hold that the truths in question can be adequately stated in abstract theoretical language and also hold that they are most efficiently communicated to readers of a certain sort through colourful and moving narrative...This is not the position...taken by this book. Literature may indeed have an important instrumental role to play in motivation and communication...but far more is claimed for it."<sup>6</sup>

Also, in the 1998 article there is no longer any suggestion that other views will necessarily be deficient if they cannot be combined with novels. Nussbaum writes, "Utilitarian and Kantian

ethics can probably be well and completely studied in abstract philosophical texts..." ("ER," p.348). Possibly the suggestion now is that the theories are not deficient because they are lacking something essential to any ethical theory. Rather, it is something specific about the Aristotelian view that requires these allies and is not something that all moral views require. My view will be that both Kant and Aristotle can make use of works of narrative art but neither are dependent on these allies in the sense that both theories can be set out without narrative artworks. However, the application of both theories can be assisted by novels but this particular form of assistance is not essential for their application.

### **3. What attributes make these novels allies?**

#### **3.1 Exemplars of good choice**

One suggestion that is explicitly made by Nussbaum is that these novels are indispensable, in some sense, because, "...good choice is so highly particularized that one cannot say what choice is correct, in advance of knowing all the parties and their tangled history" ("ER," p.349). Nussbaum makes this claim in discussing a criticism made of her work by Richard Posner<sup>7</sup> where Nussbaum claims that Posner appears to be attributing to her the view that Maggie Verver in The Golden Bowl should be viewed as an exemplar of how

to maintain a marriage. Nussbaum's reply to this is that we cannot take simple, general lessons from the case of Maggie because of the highly particularized nature of any situation. In "Finely Aware" she writes, "in our very articulation of what is right in Maggie's and Adam's responses we have strongly implied that two people who had a situation with all the same contextual features, in all of their historical specificity, ought to act, in many cases at least, in the same way" (LK, p.166). She is not, therefore, denying that Maggie's decision is an exemplar of good choice but just arguing against using this case in the way that Posner suggests. Rather, we have a principle that can be taken from this case, albeit a highly particular universal principle. Whilst accepting her reply to Posner about the use of the case of Maggie's choice, I shall argue that Maggie's choice is not an exemplar of Aristotelian "good choice".

Maggie's "good choice" is to deny to Charlotte, her father's wife, that Charlotte's behaviour has been any cause of concern to her.<sup>8</sup> This is not true and there is a complex set of reasons that can be seen to be at play in the particular situation as it is described in the novel that might explain why Maggie tells this lie. Presumably, though, it is an exemplar of good choice and I want to examine what Aristotle might have said about this in terms of what his ethical theory tells us about "good choice". Would Aristotle be happy to have this characterised as "good choice"?

For Aristotle good choice consists in getting it right and this is described by him as "to be affected when one should, at the things one should, in relation to the people one should, for the reasons one should, and in the way one should, is both intermediate and best, which is what belongs to excellence."<sup>9</sup> The normativity of this account is clearly emphasised. It is not about how someone might actually be affected or the reasons that someone might actually give but how they should be affected and the reasons that they should have. This is not something that can be determined in some general formula but needs to be ascertained in the particular case. Aristotle writes, "But as to how far and to what extent one has to deviate to be worthy of censure, it is not easy to fix in words, any more than anything else that belongs to the sphere of perception; for such things depend on the particular circumstances and the judgement of them lies with perception" (EN, II,9,1109b21 - 24).

An examination of the particular case is therefore essential and this examination is a matter of perception. It is about how the particular case should be viewed and this is not something that can be unpacked from a series of general rules. Aristotle writes:

...wisdom has as its object what comes last, and this is not an object of systematic knowledge but of perception - not perception of the sensibles special to each sense, but like that by which we grasp that the last element in mathematical

analysis is the triangle; for things will come to a halt in that case too. (However, this is more a case of perception than of wisdom, but a different kind of perception from the one of the special sensibles) (EN, VI,8,1142a27 - 31).

Aristotelian wisdom involves more than knowledge of universal truths such as "One ought to tell the truth". It requires perception to know what is a case of, for example, truth telling. The sort of perception required is contrasted with the sort of perception that we are talking about when we talk of, for example, seeing through our eyes or hearing through our ears. The perception is rather a matter of grasping how a case is to be viewed or classified; a matter of seeing what sort of case it should be seen as. However, this is not to be seen as a purely classificatory task but one that involves knowing what to do in this particular case(EN,VI,8, 1142a23 - 24).

Connecting the points about normativity and perception of the particular, the perception that is right is the one that would be made by the virtuous person. However it is not sufficient that the particular person has the same perception that the virtuous person would have but that this perception is arrived at being aware of the reasons for it and that it results from an unchanging virtuous disposition. Aristotle writes, "...the excellences count as done justly, moderately not merely because they themselves are of a certain kind but also because of facts about the agent doing them

- first, if he does them knowingly, secondly if he decides to do them, and decides to do them for themselves, and thirdly if he does them from a firm and unchanging disposition" (EN, II, 4, 1105a29 - 33). Therefore, for this to count as a good choice, the choice must be made by a virtuous person.

Is Maggie's choice in *The Golden Bowl* an exemplar of good choice? First, there is no evidence that Maggie is a truly good person. For example, there is evidence of jealousy of Charlotte since she, Maggie, is no longer the main focus of her father's affection. James writes, "Not yet, since his marriage, had Maggie so sharply and formidably known her old possession of him as a thing divided and contested."<sup>10</sup> At least part of her reason for telling the lie to Charlotte is to maintain the perceived harmony of the relationships between herself, her father, Charlotte and Amerigo. James writes, "Side by side, for three minutes, they fixed this picture of quiet harmonies, the positive charm of it and, as might have been said, the full significance - which, as was now brought home to Maggie, could be no more, after all, than a matter of interpretation, differing always for a different interpreter."<sup>11</sup> In order to maintain this perception of a picture of harmony, Maggie has to deny that Charlotte's behaviour, in particular with Amerigo, Maggie's husband, has been any cause of concern to her. In this sense the lie could be viewed both as a means to a further end and the end is something that is itself a falsity. The harmony between the main characters is a false or apparent harmony.

There is no compelling evidence that this is, therefore, a "good" choice in the Aristotelian sense. After all, it involves concealment and a direct lie and the ensuing relations between these characters will be based on this falsity. This is not surprising in the light of some remarks made by Nussbaum herself in a recent paper.<sup>12</sup> Here she argues that in the absence of explicit theories we are likely to make mistakes in our perception of situations. Our perceptions are likely to be coloured by theories that underpin, implicitly, our ordinary life. For example, she writes, "In the absence of philosophical theory, people live their lives, to a great extent, in accordance with unphilosophical theories, some of them very ill-conceived and crude, many of them impeding the sensitive perception of the individuals."<sup>13</sup> There is no evidence that the character of Maggie as described by James is one where her judgements are made from within the framework of an explicit ethical theory. In other words, there is no reason to view James as an ally of Aristotle in the sense that his works contain exemplars of Aristotelian good choice.

### **3.2 Novels as illustrations of the direction of thought to employ for the discernment of the particular**

Another suggestion for the sense of "allies" that we find in Nussbaum's work is when she discusses what we can learn from Maggie in The Golden Bowl. She writes, "'All daughters should treat their fathers with the same level of sensitivity to the father's concrete character and situation, and to the particularities of their histories, that Maggie displays here'. The universalizing in the latter case, provided not a principle, but a direction of thought" (LK, p.167). How precisely are we to use this direction of thought in our real lives? Why should James' novels be thought to provide this direction of thought rather than real life, for example?

In Love's Knowledge Nussbaum indicates the sort of advantages that she takes these novels to have over real life. First, they provide what she describes as a horizontal extension of life. Our everyday lives are too parochial and confined and these works of literature make "us reflect and feel about what might otherwise be too distant for feeling" (LK, p.47). Second, they provide a vertical extension of life, "giving the reader experience that is deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life" (LK, p.48). Third, reading novels, although it involves an emotional involvement with the characters, gives at the same time a certain distance. "Since the story is not ours, we do not find ourselves caught up in the 'vulgar heat' of our personal jealousies or angers or in the sometimes blinding violence of our loves" (LK, p.48). Finally, novels can be read together and are



therefore unlike each person's scrutiny of life which is too private. "We need, then, texts we can read together and talk about as friends, texts that are available to all of us" (LK, p.48).

These features certainly appear to be present in the late novels of James. If we take The Wings of The Dove, we have the transition through time all the way from our introduction to Kate, Densher and Milly to Milly's death in Venice and the aftermath for Kate and Densher. The vertical extension is there with the analysis from the different perspectives of the central characters of their feelings and views of the situation. Although our emotions are involved in reading the book, we are clearly not directly involved in the relationships between Kate, Milly and Densher and the book is publicly accessible.

However, Aristotle's ethics is concerned with the practical question of how we should live our lives and the characteristics present in these novels are precisely what, as Nussbaum herself points out, distinguishes these novels from real lives. We cannot emulate this procedure when we seek to discern what to do in the particular situations with which we are faced since we do not have past situations sufficiently close for feeling. Also, the majority of us do not have the sort of leisure that James' characters have to examine situations in this amount of depth. We are also clearly involved in the situations where we have to take decisions.

However, in connection with the last feature, there is probably an

advantage in real life. In James' books we are relying on one person's imaginative identification with each of the characters in the situation. In real life, we have our own actual feelings and these do not have to be as private as is suggested by Nussbaum since we are not debarred from communicating these feelings to others and also from having their feelings communicated to us.

This reliance on an author in fact highlights a disadvantage of the novel as opposed to real life. A narrative, whilst relating events that occur over time, tells a story about these events. The telling of this story from a particular perspective will necessarily involve the inclusion of certain events and the exclusion of others and those included will also be described in such a way to fit the perspective that is being narrated.<sup>14</sup> At least there is room, in real life for genuinely divergent narratives and not just alternative views invented by an author. For these reasons they do not seem particularly suited for providing a direction of thought to be copied in some way in real life.

Perhaps the above is too literal an interpretation of how these novels might provide a "direction of thought" to be used in our real lives but no explicit alternative suggestion appears to have been made by Nussbaum. If the only lesson to be learnt from this "direction of thought" is that we should pay careful attention to

particular cases then this seems something that we do not require a novel to tell us.

It is also not something that is distinctive of a particularist view. A generalist theory such as Kant's ethics requires that careful attention be paid to the particular case in order to determine precisely the sort of case we are considering. This is important to emphasise since it is not correct to assume that if one adopts a generalist theory then moral reasoning just consists of bringing principles to bear on some easily determined facts of the case. Generalists can also recognise the moral thinking that goes on to ascertain what are the facts of the particular case.

Specifically, in the case of Kant's ethics, The Categorical Imperative provides grounds for certain general prohibitions and respect for Humanity indicates certain general positive duties that we have. We come armed with these considerations when considering the particular case but far from precluding our observation of the features of the particular case there is an ineliminable element of judgement that is required for the application of the theory to the particular case. For example, Kant writes, "Is it murdering oneself to hurl oneself to certain death (like Curtius) in order to save one's country? - or is deliberate martyrdom, sacrificing oneself for the good of all humanity, also to be considered an act of heroism?"<sup>15</sup> This is just one example of the many casuistical questions that Kant raises.

Also, we require judgement to determine, for example, in a particular case what talents to perfect. Kant writes, "No rational principle prescribes specifically how far one should go in cultivating one's capacities...the different situations in which men may find themselves make what a man chooses as the occupation for which he should cultivate his talents very optional."<sup>16</sup> Similarly, when it comes to the duty to further the happiness of others, Kant writes, "How far it should extend depends, in large part, on what each person's true needs are in view of his sensibilities, and it must be left to each to decide this for himself."<sup>17</sup>

In general, judgement is always needed when principles are applied to particular cases since the particular cases do not stand ready as "certain facts of the case". In fact Kant makes this point in a quite general way with respect to the application of principles. They essentially require judgement of the particular case and this cannot be explained in terms of a further principle. He writes, "So judgment itself must provide a concept, a concept through which we do not actually cognize anything but which only serves as a rule for the power of judgment itself - but not as an objective rule, to which it could adapt judgment, since then we would need another power of judgment in order to decide whether or not the judgment is a case of that rule."<sup>18</sup>

If it is supposed that judgment is not necessary to determine the applicability of a principle to a particular case, then we shall be involved in an infinite regress of principles as Kant makes clear in the following passage:

It is obvious that between theory and practice there is required, besides, a middle term connecting them and providing a transition from one to the other, no matter how complete a theory may be; for, to a concept of the understanding, which contains a rule, must be added an act of judgment by which a practitioner distinguishes whether or not something is a case of the rule; and since judgment cannot always be given yet another rule by which to direct its subsumption (for this would go on to infinity).<sup>19</sup>

Therefore, generalists exemplified in Kant's ethics also require to look very carefully at the particular case so the necessity for this "direction of thought" suggested by James' novels is important for them as well as particularists.

### **3.3 Vehicles for developing imagination**

Another suggestion for the role of these allies that is made by Nussbaum is that they, in some way, develop our imagination. Nussbaum writes, "Moral knowledge...is perception. It is seeing a

complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there, with imagination and feeling" (LK, p.152). Here Nussbaum is discussing the passage in The Golden Bowl where Adam is attempting to convey in the right way to Maggie his decision to go to America with Charlotte. James indicates how Adam now perceives his daughter - her sexuality and free maturity - and this illustrates an employment of imagination to see the situation and Maggie in this particular way.<sup>20</sup>

Gregory Currie develops a similar suggestion for imagination. He takes imagination to be "a process of role taking, or emphatic enactment...it can lead in particular to knowledge of how to act so as to achieve outcomes that are morally better than those you would have achieved without the imaginative exercise...this kind of imaginative process is capable of being enhanced by works of fiction."<sup>21</sup> In terms of the first part of this thesis, there is undoubtedly a role for imagining different scenarios that might ensue if we make a particular moral choice. For example, by using our imagination in this way we might come to see that a certain moral choice might, for example, compromise someone's freedom. In support of the second part of his thesis, Currie argues that fiction both acts as "aids to the imagination - holding our attention, making a situation vivid for us, and generally drawing us along in the wake of the narrative...And by doing this in imagination rather than by simply trying out values in the real world we avoid the costs of bad choices."<sup>22</sup>

However, although these works of literature might aid us in developing our imagination about different perspectives, this role is not necessarily one that will be fulfilled by literature and it might be better fulfilled by other means. For example, Posner writes:

It does not follow that because some people use literature as a source of insight into human nature and social interactions, other people,...should be encouraged to do so. There is neither evidence nor a theoretical reason for a belief that literature provides a straighter path to knowledge about man and society than other sources of such knowledge, including writings in other fields, such as history and science, and interactions with real people.<sup>23</sup>

Currie responds to this sort of criticism by making a stronger claim for the unique access that good works of fiction give us to imagination. He writes, "...good fictions give us, through the talents of their makers, access to imaginings more complex, inventive, and instructive than we could often hope to make for ourselves."<sup>24</sup>

In James' novels it is undoubtedly true that we have rich examples of the relationships between characters developed over time in which their response to moral dilemmas that they face can be

understood in this context. This undoubtedly assists our imagination in examining these dilemmas since they are viewed as emerging from the previous interactions between the characters which have been described in rich and subtle ways in these novels.

These are undoubtedly fertile sources and in this respect Currie's claim could be supported. However, these novels need to be consulted with care. As I have argued above, they cannot be assumed to exemplify correct choice but they could be used as a way of increasing our understanding of a general theory that might be held. So, for example, if one adopted Kant's Ethics we could interrogate the narrative and ask whether or not, for example, Maggie's lie that she tells Charlotte counts as in any way denying Charlotte's humanity.

One of Kant's explicit suggestions about the role of judgement in his ethics is the need to consider a situation from the perspective of everyone else. "We compare our judgement not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgements of others, and [thus] put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that [may] happen to attach to our own judging."<sup>25</sup> This exercise of the imagination could be assisted by consulting works such as those exemplified in the late novels of James but this, in itself, does not involve the claim that they are necessary for the development of the



imagination but could contingently be seen to assist this strategy for judgment suggested by Kant.

### **3.4 Provide understanding/engagement of emotions**

As I have mentioned previously, the Aristotelian view involves not only acting well but having the right emotions in a situation. By emotions Nussbaum makes it clear that she does not mean "blind surges of affect, recognized, and discriminated from one another, by their quality alone; rather they are discriminating responses closely connected with beliefs about how things are and what is important" (LK, p.41). Beliefs and emotions are closely related such that " a change in the relevant beliefs, either about what has happened, or about its importance, will be likely to alter or remove emotion" (LK, p.41). With this view of emotions, Nussbaum claims that "Aristotle holds that the truly good person will not only act well but also feel the appropriate emotions about what he or she chooses...also correct reactive or responsive feelings are constitutive of this person's virtue or goodness. If I do the just thing from the wrong motives or desires,...that will not count as virtuous action...I must do the right thing without reluctance or inner emotional tension" (LK, p.78). This last characteristic is what marks the distinction, for Aristotle, between the truly virtuous person, the temperate person, as opposed to the merely continent who still experiences struggle with emotions that are opposed to what virtue requires.

The ethical significance of the emotions understood in this way is, according to Nussbaum, illustrated in James' novels. For example, in the The Golden Bowl Nussbaum takes as her example James' description of the inevitable separation of a father, Adam, from his daughter, Maggie. The description of their discussion and what they decide to do cannot be expressed simply in propositions. Nussbaum writes, "Moral knowledge, James suggests, is not simply intellectual grasp of propositions; it is not even simply intellectual grasp of particular facts; it is perception. It is seeing a complex, concrete reality in a highly lucid and richly responsive way; it is taking in what is there with imagination and feeling" (LK, p.152). Nussbaum further comments of this position, "I have said that these picturings, describings, feelings, and communications - actions in their own right - have a moral value that is not reducible to that of the overt acts they engender" (LK, p.153).

The novels then are allies here in the sense that they engage our emotions and this engagement is necessary for a full appreciation of the ethical significance of what is taking place. Presumably, their function is somehow to provide vehicles for refining our emotions and for developing the appropriate feelings in real life scenarios. If this is the sense of "allies" that is intended, it might be thought that a theory such as Kant's could not view novels as allies in this sense since there might appear to be no

place for emotions in Kant's account. However, although the emotions don't necessarily have the same role to play in Kant's ethics as in Aristotle's ethics, if novels can be allies of Aristotle's ethics in the sense of conveying emotions, then they can also be allies of Kant.

Although, Kant does allow for the possibility that an action can have moral worth when the maxim from which the action was performed passes the test of the Categorical Imperative but the agent's emotions are not in accord with the maxim<sup>26</sup> this does not preclude him from advocating the development of certain emotions. For example, Kant talks of the duty to develop a feeling of gratitude understood as consisting "in honouring a person because of a benefit he has rendered us. The feeling connected with this judgement is respect for the benefactor... whereas the benefactor is viewed as only in a relation of love towards the recipient."<sup>27</sup> He also talks of the duty to be sympathetic which is again described in connection with beliefs "It is called the duty of humanity (humanitas) because a human being is regarded here not merely as a rational being but also as an animal endowed with reason. Now humanity can be located either in the capacity and the will to share in others' feelings ...(this is called) sympathetic...It is a duty to sympathize actively in their fate..."<sup>28</sup>

The Kantian account clearly differs from the Aristotelian one in the case of the third philanthropist in the Groundwork<sup>29</sup> since it

is not essential that feelings are in accord with the maxim of the action. However, like Aristotle, he distinguishes the sort of feelings described above that are under our control from blind surges of emotion. Kant describes these latter as passions and affects where passions are something long lasting in contrast to affects that are short lived and "precipitate or rash"<sup>30</sup> The distinction between the two is represented vividly in the following analogy. "Emotion works like water that breaks through a dam; passion works like a river digging itself deeper and deeper into its bed. Emotion works upon the health like a stroke of apoplexy; passion works like consumption or atrophy...Emotion is like an intoxicant which can be slept off; passion is to be regarded as an insanity, which broods over an idea that is imbedding itself deeper and deeper." (In this translation the word "emotion" is used instead of "affect").<sup>31</sup>

However, the importance of feelings, understood as closely connected with cognition, is recognised in his account. In this respect as well, then, the Kantian account could also gain assistance from novels. Indeed, this is explicitly suggested in the following passage from the Lectures on Ethics:

We may ask here whether books are of any value...they refine our sentiments, by turning the object of animal inclinations into an object of refined inclination. They awaken a capacity to be moved by kindly impulses, and render the indirect

service of making us more civilized, through the training of inclination. The more we refine the crude elements in our nature, the more we improve our humanity and the more capable it grows of feeling the driving force of virtuous principles.<sup>32</sup>

#### **4. Conclusion**

Refinement of our perception of the particular cases which is essential for judgement is an integral part of Kant's account. This perception can be assisted by James' novels but this assistance is contingent. James' novels provide subtle, detailed pictures that enlarge our imagination and engage our emotions and this can assist the exercise of judgement that is an essential part of Kant's theory and also assist us to refine our perceptions on an Aristotelian account. However, in neither case is James an indispensable ally and neither can his novels be assumed to be exemplars of good choice.

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<sup>1</sup> M.C. Nussbaum, The Fragility of Goodness (Cambridge: CUP, 1986).

In this book she pursues an Aristotelian ethical enquiry by studying tragic dramas. M.C. Nussbaum, Upheavals of Thought (Cambridge: CUP, 2001). In this book she argues that emotions have a narrative structure and "Narrative artworks are important for what they show the person who is eager to understand the emotions...They do not simply represent that history, they enter into it." p.236.

<sup>2</sup> M.C. Nussbaum, Love's Knowledge (New York: OUP, 1992); hereafter abbreviated LK.

<sup>3</sup> R.A. Posner, "Against Ethical Criticism," Philosophy and Literature 21.1 (1997): 1-27. M.C. Nussbaum, "Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of ethical Criticism," Philosophy and Literature 22.2 (1998): 334 - 365; hereafter abbreviated as "ER". W.C. Booth, "Why Banning Ethical Criticism is a Serious Mistake," Philosophy and Literature 22.2 (1998): 366 - 393. R.A. Posner, "Against Ethical Criticism: Part Two," Philosophy and Literature 22.2 (1998): 394 - 412.

<sup>4</sup> Posner (1998) p.397. Posner is of the view that that this novel would not "advance her (Nussbaum's) edifying project to do so. Kate Croy, the central character is a monster..." (my parenthesis).

<sup>5</sup> H. James, The Ambassadors (London: Dent & Sons, 1957).

<sup>6</sup> LK, pp. 6 - 7. In unpublished writings, Dr. John Lippitt has found evidence in Nussbaum's Upheavals of Thought that Nussbaum sometimes argues for the weaker claim there as well. For example,

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when she writes about love she claims that "the disproportionate role, in love, of mystery and particularity; and conventional philosophical texts are usually bad at conveying these qualities." Nussbaum (2001), p.472.

<sup>7</sup> Posner (1997)

<sup>8</sup> H. James, The Golden Bowl (London: Penguin, 1982), pp. 466- 469.

<sup>9</sup> C. Rowe (trans.) and S. Broadie (commentary) Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), II,6 1106b21 - 23; hereafter abbreviated as EN.

<sup>10</sup> H. James, The Golden Bowl, p.464.

<sup>11</sup> H. James, The Golden Bowl, p. 464.

<sup>12</sup> M. Nussbaum, "Why Practice needs Ethical Theory" in B. Hooker and M. Little (eds), Moral Particularism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), pp.227 - 255.

<sup>13</sup> Nussbaum (2000), pp. 248 - 249.

<sup>14</sup> P. Goldie, "One's Remembered Past: Narrative Thinking, Emotion, and the External Perspective," Philosophical Papers Vol.32, No3, (2003) pp. 301 - 319. Goldie argues for the necessity of having a narrative sense of the self which is gained by giving a coherent and meaningful account of a person's life including the emotional response to what happened.

<sup>15</sup> I. Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals in Immanuel Kant Practical Philosophy trans. M.J. Gregor (Cambridge: CUP,1999 [1797]), 6: 423.

<sup>16</sup> I. Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals, 6:392.

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<sup>17</sup> I. Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals, 6:393.

<sup>18</sup> I. Kant, Critique of Judgment trans. W.S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987 [1790]), p.169.

<sup>19</sup> I. Kant, "On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, But It is of No Use in Practice," in Immanuel Kant: Practical Philosophy trans. M.J. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [1793]), 8:275. I have discussed the use of judgment in the application of Kant's theory in more detail in J. Singleton, "Neither Generalism nor Particularism: Ethical Correctness is Located in General Ethical Theories," Journal of Moral Philosophy 1.2 (2004): 155-175.

<sup>20</sup> H. James, The Golden Bowl, p. 477.

<sup>21</sup> G. Currie, "Realism of character and the value of fiction" in J. Levinson (ed), Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 161- 162.

<sup>22</sup> Currie (1998), p. 164.

<sup>23</sup> Posner (1997), pp.9-10.

<sup>24</sup> Currie (1998), p.171.

<sup>25</sup> I. Kant (1790), 5: 294.

<sup>26</sup> I. Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals in Immanuel Kant Practical Philosophy trans. M.J. Gregor (Cambridge: CUP, 1999 [1785]), 4:398. The example of the third philanthropist where Kant argues that the person is "by temperament cold and indifferent to the sufferings of others" but who despite this still helps others.

<sup>27</sup> I. Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals, 6:454-455.



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<sup>28</sup> I. Kant, The metaphysics of Morals, 6:457.

<sup>29</sup> See endnote 26.

<sup>30</sup> I. Kant, The Metaphysics of Morals, 6: 407.

<sup>31</sup> I. Kant, Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View, trans.

V.L. Dowdell (USA: Southern Illinois University Press,1996), 7:  
252 - 253.

<sup>32</sup> I. Kant, Lectures on Ethics, L. Infield (trans), (London:  
Methuen, 1979), p.237.