Introduction

In Pursuit of Ethics

LAWRENCE BUELL is John P. Marquand Professor of English and chair of the English department at Harvard University. A former member of the PMLA *Editorial Board, he is author of* New England Literary Culture *(Cambridge UP, 1986), The En-vironmental Imagination (Har-vard UP, 1995), and other books and articles on the literature and culture of the United States.*

E THICS HAS GAINED new resonance in literary studies during the past dozen years, even if it has not—at least yet—become the paradigm-defining concept that textuality was for the 1970s and historicism for the 1980s.[1]

As with any groundswell, particularly when the central term of reference already belongs to common usage, the challenge of pinning down what counts as ethics intensifies as more parties lay claim to it. The omnibus character of the call for papers for this special issue of *PMLA*, repeated below in part, acknowledges the de facto heterogeneity:

> The ethics of reading, writing, criticism, interpretation, theorizing, and teaching. The ethical dimensions of particular critical and theoretical orientations [. . .]. The ethics of discourses, genres, and cultural institutions [. . .]. The pertinence to literary study of [. . .] models from moral and political philosophy. [. . .] The rhetoric of ethical writing. [. . .] The ethical ramifications of aspects of professional culture [. . .].

The forty-six submissions demonstrated anew, if further demonstration be needed, that there is no unitary ethics movement, no firm consensus among MLA members who think of themselves as pursuing some form of ethically valenced inquiry. This pluriform discourse interweaves many genealogical strands, six of which I briefly review before commenting on some of the specific emphases in the body of scholarship that has arisen from them, including the five searching and incisive essays that the Editorial Board has selected for publication here.

I

The first and most longstanding of those strands is the legacy of critical traditions that have dwelled on the moral thematics and underlying value commitments of literary texts and their implied authors. David Parker's approach to fiction, for example, seems to a considerable extent a

subtilized, relativized updating of an Arnoldian-Leavisite conception of
literature as ethical reflection (77–78, 120–22, 152). A semianalogous
tradition in United States literary studies has been the intellectual history
of moral thought from Puritanism to transcendentalism to pragmatism
and beyond, a heritage recently "multiculturalized" as African American
thinkers have been positioned in relation to it, starting with William
James's one-time student W. E. B. Du Bois (West 138–50; Patterson
159–97). This tendency is represented in the present symposium by
James M. Albrecht's reassessment of how Ralph Waldo Emerson mat-
tered to Ralph Waldo Ellison. More pervasively influential within tradi-
tional literary studies generally has been ethically oriented theory and
criticism focused on the rhetoric of genre, such as Wayne Booth's oeuvre
extending over several decades on narrative rhetoric as moral imagination
(from *Rhetoric* through *Company*), which continues to be a reference
point for more recent studies (e.g., Phelan; Newton, *Narrative Ethics*; and
Yúdice—to list a range of responses from sympathetic to highly critical).

The reciprocal turn of certain philosophers toward literature, particu-
larly Martha Nussbaum and Richard Rorty, is a second and related stimu-
lus. Nussbaum's argument that the richly contextualized moral reflections
of Henry James's novels afford a necessary supplement to the study of
moral philosophy (*Love's Knowledge* 125–219), a perspective she has
since brought to bear on other writers and on the study of law (*Poetic
Justice*), and Rorty's characterization, as an alternative to what he takes
to be the dead end of epistemology, initially of philosophy as "a kind of
writing" (*Consequences* 90–109) and, more recently and pertinently, of
(certain) works of creative writing as model embodiments of social val-
ues (*Contingency* 141–88)—these have mattered to scholars in the field
of literature less because of any radical originality of method (see New-
ton, *Narrative Ethics* 61–63 on Nussbaum and see Parker 33–35 on both)
than insofar as their example has abetted revival of a moral or social
value-oriented approach to literary studies.

More instrumental in shaping the specific agendas of literary scholar-
ship have been two other developments, perturbations arising from shifts
of thinking by and about the two figures of greatest impact on post-
structuralist literary theory of the 1970s and 1980s, Jacques Derrida and
Michel Foucault.

The reevaluation of the ethics of deconstruction is the more dramatic
of these two developments insofar as it is connected with the "fall" of
its prominent American exemplar Paul de Man, following the posthu-
mous republication of his wartime journalism, which included Nazi-
collaborationist passages. In an essay whose circumstance of production
is itself an index of the recent ethical turn,[2] Geoffrey Harpham seriocomi-
cally remarks of this "event" that "[o]n or about December 1, 1987, the
nature of literary theory changed" ("Ethics" 389). De Man's *Wartime
Journalism* indeed unleashed a flood of controversy within and outside
the academy over whether deconstruction was morally evasive or iniqui-

tous. It intensified criticism of the Derridean postulate of "nothing outside the text" (or textuality) as ethically myopic, and possibly it may also have had something to do with Derrida's increasing engagement of social, political, and ethical issues in recent years (e.g., "Force"; *Other Heading*; *Specters*; *Gift* 1–34). Yet deconstruction and poststructuralism more broadly had already evinced a distinct ethical perspective—even if not typically called such and even if typically placed in the service of negation—particularly by "compel[ling] us to reflect on the costs of moral absolutism, the violence latent in trying to construct fully realized ethical forms of life" (M. Jay 46–47). Two specific preexisting ethical currents within the deconstructive movement that gathered momentum during the late 1980s were a defense of "rigorous unreliability" in critical reading as itself an ethics (Johnson 17–24; Miller, *Ethics*) and particularly a dialogue over several decades between Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas that ended, on Levinas's death, in Derrida's affirmation that "the thought of Emmanuel Levinas has awakened us" to a conception of "an 'unlimited' responsibility that exceeds and precedes my freedom" (Derrida, "Adieu" 3), after Levinas (between *Totality and Infinity* [1961] and *Otherwise Than Being* [1974]) had complicated his argument for "ethics as first philosophy" (meaning the priority of ethical obligation for the other to ontology, to being itself) in response to Derrida's critique of *Totality and Infinity* ("Violence"). If Levinas should become the most central theorist for the postpoststructuralist dispensation of turn-of-the-century literary-ethical inquiry, for which there is mounting evidence (Critchley; Nealon; Newton, *Narrative Ethics*; Eaglestone; as well as the essays here by Derek Attridge and David P. Haney), a good deal of the credit must go to Derrida for having called the attention of literary scholars to Levinas's work.

Just as the shift within deconstruction, motivated by whatever combination of external and internal pressures, has given new prominence to thinking about ethical responsibility for the other, so the intensified attention recently given subjectness and agency has been emboldened by a redirection of emphasis in the later work of Michel Foucault. In the course of his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault shifted from his longstanding concentration on the power-knowledge problematic and on the construction of social selves by discursive macroinstitutions to the care of the self conceived as an ethical project, a movement quickened by the perception that for privileged men of Greek and Roman antiquity "reflection on sexual behavior as a moral domain was not a means of internalizing, justifying, or formalizing general interdictions imposed on everyone" but "an aesthetics of existence" (*Use* 252–53), indeed an "ethics of pleasure" (*Care* 239).[3] Here again the trajectory is not quite the reversal it might seem, since the spirit of Foucault's work was always one of irony and at times Nietzschean outrage against institutional constraints on selfhood, but certainly his later writing not only underscored retrospectively the seriousness of his prior interest in the fate of the self but also marked a new receptivity on his part to the ethical as a

semiautonomous arena, "not related to any social—or at least to any legal—institutional system," and to imagined power relations as "mobile, reversible, and unstable" (*Ethics* 255, 292). This self-recalibration anticipates—and probably has encouraged—later writers' propensity for deploying a critical vocabulary of "ethics" in rivalry to "politics" as a way of theorizing principled social engagement.

Another symptomatic ethical turn evinced by late Foucault was his incipient critique of his earlier evaluation of "the idea of truth as nothing more than a ruse in the service of an epistemic will-to-power," as a mere discursive artifact (Norris 124, 126). This strain of recent theory concerns itself with exposing the intellectual reductionisms and moral hazards of the "out-and-out cognitive skepticism" that supposedly characterized poststructuralism (Norris 3), while avoiding old-fashioned models of mimetic realism. Satya Mohanty, in an independent critique, passionately decries the tendency of "postmodernist skepticism" "to deny experience any cognitive value," arguing that particularly in narratives by authors from oppressed peoples "we need to explore the possibility of a theoretical understanding of social and cultural identity in terms of objective social location" (234, 216). The strongest impetus for those seeking to work through the issue of whether discourse can yield truthful or reliable representation, however, has been Derridean rather than Foucauldian (see Mohanty's formulation of a "post-positivist" realism [176–216]); and so far the most characteristic position has been the argument—advanced especially by students of postcolonial and "minority" discourse—that truth, authenticity, or historical facticity is concealed within, by, or behind discourses resistant, opaque, or elliptical (Chow 39–41). This seems the purport of Gayatri Spivak's paradoxical assertion that "ethics is the experience of the impossible": an ethical representation of subalternity must proceed in the awareness that (mutual) understanding will be limited. "No amount of raised field-work can ever approach the painstaking labor to establish ethical singularity with the subaltern" (Preface xxv, xxiv)—but proceed it must. A correlative insight is Doris Sommer's conception of an ethics of withholding by which resistant minority writers create strategic opacities and misrecognitions for mainstream readers ("Resisting" and "Textual Conquests"): a "poetics of defense," as George Yúdice calls it in his discussion of one of Sommer's proof texts, *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (229).

A sixth strand of influence is increased self-consciousness about professional ethics, which has stimulated discussion throughout the university about standards of conduct. In law, works of literature have for some time been offered pedagogically as more full-blooded instantiations of legal thinking and conduct than standard intradisciplinary sources afford (e.g., Weisberg; Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice*; cf. the critique by Posner 305–32)—a tendency, mirrored in other professional fields, that has helped prepare the way for, even if it has not directly influenced, Wai Chee Dimock's bold and important argument that literature's "tex-

tualization of justice" constitutes a deeper ethical reflection than the "reification of commensurability" to which the legal discourse of justice is committed (10, 6). At an instrumental, administrative level, literature programs and associations have moved toward their own reifications of disciplinary-ethical concerns in the form of codes of ethical conduct (e.g., Mod. Lang. Assn. of Amer.). Finally and most prominently, concerns about the ethics of critical theory and practice have been brought together with concerns about the ethics of professional conduct—although by no means always under the sign of ethics per se—in studies of the conceptual, historical, and pedagogical dimensions of canon formation and change (Smith; Lauter; Guillory; G. Jay).[4]

II

The foregoing review is, of course, an incomplete sketch.[5] But it should suffice to show that as *ethics* has become a more privileged signifier it has also become an increasingly ductile and thereby potentially confusing one. Ethics as thematics of moral representation manifestly does not equal ethics as self-care, nor does either have the procedural cast of professional ethics ("The appropriate faculty members should inform candidates for promotion or tenure of their rights [. . .]" [Mod. Lang. Assn. of Amer. 76]). In part, this disparity of focus may reflect the relative lack of grounding that ethically valenced literary inquiry has in ethics as a subdiscipline and tradition within philosophy. No major ethical philosopher from Aristotle to John Rawls has attracted anywhere near the attention among those currently linking literature and ethics that Derrida and Foucault have attracted (neither of them ethicists in any strict sense), with the exception of Levinas, who might rather be called a metaethical thinker than an ethicist proper. In any event, since no specific model for inquiry into ethics is shared by more than a fraction of the scholars working in the various domains of literary theory and criticism, it is more than ordinarily perplexing when, as often happens, avowed practitioners of "ethical" criticism neglect to relate their brand of ethics to its alternatives or to antecedent traditions of moral thematics, the ideology of genre, the deconstructive ethics of reading, the politics of canonicity, and so forth.

To date, nobody seems to have worried much about a problem of cacophony, however. Perhaps rightly so. Perhaps a certain desultoriness is to be expected of an emerging discourse, or congeries of discourses, struggling with self-definition. A matter of more open dispute is whether the ethical turn, to the extent that it offers something substantively new, is an advance or a retrogression. The swift rise of ethics as a more admired pursuit than it had been for several decades can be and has been conceived both honorifically (e.g., as a reactivation of scholarly and pedagogical conscience, as a revival of a once distinguished humanistic sensibility unfairly stigmatized in recent years, as a substantial retheorization of alterity) and pejoratively (e.g., as a copycat moral majoritarianism or as a

retreat from a politics of social transformation to privatism, as with Teresa L. Ebert's dismissal of "ethical feminism" as "ludic mystification" that only pretends to honor alterity in a de facto indulgence of its own class privilege [301, 230]).[6]

Regardless of whether one is inclined to be hopeful or suspicious about the promise of ethically valenced literary inquiry, its burgeoning and its increasing currency behoove one to take stock of its distinctive contours. Five seem salient.

For one thing, the new ethical inquiry tends to favor recuperation of authorial agency in the production of texts, without ceasing to acknowledge that texts are also in some sense socially constructed: to argue like Attridge in this issue, if not so pointedly, for the importance of "authoredness" to the theory of writing and accordingly, "*pace* Roland Barthes," for thinking "work" over thinking "text." In several of the other essays, not only authoredness but also the figure of the historical author is directly relevant. This is especially true for Albrecht, understandably so given the empirical cast of his literary-historical contention. More telling as indicators of directional momentum are the essays by Bradley Butterfield and Mary Beth Tierney-Tello, both of whom seek to diagnose the ethical valence of postmodernism. In Butterfield's adjudication of Baudrillard vis-à-vis Ballard, the case for "a critique of late capitalist forms of morality in favor of a deeper sense of personal liberty and justice through aesthetic revolution" rests in no small measure on the establishment of a distinction, especially in Baudrillard's work, between the deceptive appearance of the "immoral" text and the inferred position of the writer. In Tierney-Tello's pursuit of the same general question of whether a progressive politics of postmodern discourse is possible, the evidence of Diamela Eltit's writing itself stands to a greater extent as the chief exhibit, but Tierney-Tello adduces the historical author's motives and ethnographic scrupulousness as important contributory evidence.

More central to ethically valenced theory and criticism overall than the issue of authorial agency, however, is that of readerly responsibility, which indeed is often linked, as by Attridge, to recuperation of authoredness. Key to many such accounts of reading ethics is a conception of literature as the reader's other, a view of the reading relation sharply different from that of traditional reader-response criticism, which tended to celebrate (as did Barthes) readerly appropriation or reinvention. The newer ethical criticism generally envisages reinvention not as free play or an assertion of power but as arising out of conscienceful listening. Attridge proposes the model of "the work as stranger, even [. . .] when the reader knows it intimately": a stranger to whom one owes respect. In this Levinasian view, the work is an other in the form of a creative act for which readers are called to take responsibility, to allow themselves to become engaged even to the point of being in a sense remade. Tierney-Tello offers a similar argument from a different critical model, derived from minority and postcolonial resistance theory, about Eltit's avant-

gardist versions of *testimonio*: they make an "ethically grounded call for solidarity" to the reader partly by their very resistance to standard generic expectations that require the reader to hear subaltern voices and see subaltern faces but not fully to grasp, process, or understand them.[7]

Indeed, one of the most provocative dimensions of Attridge's theoretical essay and Tierney-Tello's exegesis is their readiness to push as far as they do the image of engagement with text (work) as encounter with virtual person. The hesitancy with which Booth proceeded a decade ago when reviving the long-dormant Victorian metaphor of the book as friend (*Company* 168–96), another version of the general notion of reading as an interpersonal act, now seems less necessary. Haney makes no bones about claiming "genuine ethical significance" for metaphors like "friend" used to characterize literary works and about pressing the inference, drawn from Hans-Georg Gadamer's "On the Contribution of Poetry to the Search for Truth," that "the process by which the truth of a poem is revealed is instructively similar to the unconcealing that goes on in the ethical hermeneutics of being open to [. . .] the truth of another person."

The image of textual encounter as personal encounter is not without its perils, three of them being the temptation to reify the metaphor, the implication that reader resistance is unethical (a symptom of obtuseness, of insensitivity, of ethical underdevelopment), and an astringency toward aesthetics as such like that displayed by Levinas—the most influential recent theorist of self-other relations.[8] Yet the model of reading experience as a scene of virtual interpersonality that enacts, activates, or otherwise illuminates ethical responsibility may nonetheless prove one of the most significant innovations of the literature-and-ethics movement. If so, two important reasons will probably be the antiauthoritarian valorization of alterity flowing into this body of reflection from Levinas and from postcolonial criticism and the model's insistence, as Attridge puts it, on the self-other dynamic as "an active or eventlike relation."

A third important dimension of the newer literary-ethical inquiry, more familiar but no less important, is interest in descrying an ethos or incipient ethical teleology implicit in specific discourse modes (Butterfield), genre templates (Tierney-Tello), or formal structures at the level of the individual artifact (Tierney-Tello, Haney). Haney theorizes the underlying idea most fully in his redescription of selected Romantic poetic and critical projects as expressing a bipolarity between Aristotelian phronesis (practical wisdom) and techne, a bipolarity that he correlates with the imagination-versus-fancy distinction, arguing that new historicism overrode this problematic by its conception of "aesthetic thought as cultural labor," a reduction of the aesthetic to techne. The approach to literary texts as arenas of ethical reflection by reason of their formal or generic contours is pursued in much other recent work in literature and ethics as well, especially studies of narrative genres (Booth, *Company*; Nussbaum, *Love's Knowledge* and *Poetic Justice*; Newton, *Narrative Ethics* and "Exegesis"; Harpham, *Getting* 157–82). If there is a mainstream approach

to ethical-critical readings of particular literary works today, this is probably it.

A fourth preoccupation of the newer literary-ethical inquiry appears in Haney's analogy between the semiantagonistic interdependence of phronesis and techne and the ethics-morality distinction, a distinction on which Attridge also comments. Both understand ethics as ethical sensibility or orientation and see morality as codes of rules ("specific obligations governing concrete situations in a social context," according to Attridge). Yet Attridge wants to pry the two notions apart as far as possible by associating ethics with "unpredictability and risk," whereas Haney argues for their ultimate inseparability. This felt divergence despite a shared desire to posit a similar distinction epitomizes a more pervasive concern within contemporary literature-and-ethics conversations to endorse a notion of responsibility not bound to rule while acknowledging some sort of relation between the categories ethics and morality. Booth's effort to affirm plural reader responses without falling into critical relativism (*Company*), Nussbaum's vision of a Jamesian rhetoric as a "dialogue between perception and rule" (*Love's Knowledge* 157), Harpham's idea that discourse confers imperativity without specifying particular obligations (*Getting* 5), and above all Levinas's conception of responsibility for the other as signifying "not the disclosure of a given and its reception, but the exposure of me to the other, prior to every decision" (*Otherwise* 141)—all these seem to work with and through the same problematic: to adjudicate the relation between disposition and normativity, whether it is considered from the standpoint of author, of reader, of language, or of human relations.[9]

The problem, or opportunity, of the fuzzy border that looms up when one considers the ethics-morality distinction is analogous to—some might say continuous with—the even more vexing problem of the relation or distinction between the personal and the sociopolitical. Virtually all parties would agree, whether or not they approve of "postmodern ethics," that "the only space where the moral act can be performed is the social space of 'being with'" (Bauman 185). But that consensus far from resolves the question of whether and how the ethical does or does not entail the "political." Perhaps the touchiest single issue for both exemplars and critics of the ethical turn is the issue of whether it boils down, whatever the nominal agenda, to a privatization of human relations that makes the social and the political secondary. *Ethics* is a gallingly (or excitingly?) ambidextrous signifier that points toward both private and public domains. Whereas Foucault's explicit turn toward ethics marked a shift of attention from structures of domination to practices of self-actualization, for Levinas ethics as first philosophy presupposes the priority of the claim of the other on the self. Again, on the one hand, Julia Kristeva understands ethics "to mean the negativizing of narcissism within a *practice*; in other words, a practice is ethical when it dissolves those narcissistic fixations (ones that are narrowly confined to the sub-

ject) to which the signifying process succumbs in its sociosymbolic rela-
tion" (233). Yet, on the other hand, for Tobin Siebers "the discipline of
ethics remains inextricably fused to the problem of human character,"
such that from the standpoint of ethical criticism even "the desire to elim-
inate the constitutive self of literature has ethical motivations that cannot
be renounced" (5). As in this issue of *PMLA*, the heterogeneous body of
theory that animates contemporary literature-and-ethics talk and informs
the critical readings based on that talk conveys predictably mixed sig-
nals—to the point that some theorists of ethics and the literary have come
to favor terminological hybrids like "ethical/political" (Steele, *Theorizing*
29, 112) or "ethics-politics" (Newton, "Exegesis" and *Narrative Ethics*).

Likewise, in the five essays that follow the ethical turn manifests itself
in (re)new(ed) attention, on the one hand, to the interpersonal as the
basis of both reading and sociality (Attridge) and to the rehabilitation of
aesthetic autonomy as "an ethical autonomy" (Haney) and, on the other
hand, to the sociopolitical dimension of a thinker understood until re-
cently to be more narrowly individualistic (Albrecht on Emerson) and to
ethical aesthetics as political intervention (Tierney-Tello).

Nothing is more certain than that the question of the place of the socio-
political will continue to be debated within and around contemporary
ethical criticism. For no matter how strongly literary-ethical inquiry as-
serts the inseparability of social and personal, the starting point of "oblig-
ation" will continue to seem suspiciously privatistic to many social and
cultural constructionists, not to mention neo-Marxist materialists like
Ebert. Ethical critics will therefore likely remain under pressure to dem-
onstrate how exactly obligation might be understood as potent not only
"culturally" but also historically and politically.

In a statement that brings together the two polarities of ethics/morality
and ethical-moral/political, Levinas encapsulates pretty well both the as-
piration of founding a social vision on the conception of obligation to
another and the risks thereof. "Morality," he insists, "is what governs the
world of political 'interestedness'"; but "the norm which must continue
to inspire and direct the moral order is the ethical norm of the interhu-
man," which admittedly "cannot itself legislate for society or produce
rules of conduct whereby society might be revolutionised or transformed"
but which nonetheless is the "foundation" of the "moral-political order,"
without which that order "must accept all forms of society including the
fascist or totalitarian, for it can no longer evaluate or discriminate be-
tween them" ("Ethics" 194–95). As Levinas's extremely brief remarks
on social justice make additionally clear (*Otherwise* 157–61), he con-
siders it an indispensable but derivative codification of interhumanity.
This mode of thinking invites at least three criticisms. First, it is self-
contradictory: it insists on antifoundationalism, but it supplies a founda-
tion (interhumanity) to guard against the inference that, as Niall Lucy
shows (204–10), can be drawn from a purely relativistic conception of
ethics: "fascism *is* an ethics, though it may not be one that many of us

would choose to affirm" (Lucy 236). But forgive that, and Levinas is still vulnerable from at least two directions. From one side (the left, basically) comes this rejoinder: How can moral precepts (e.g., honor the claim of the other) form the basis of social collectives and ensure a reformed society or polity? And even if they can, is there not even something oppressively homogenizing, if not totalizing, about Levinas's "other"? (Irigiray declares, "The other, [as] woman, he does not notice her existence" [116].)[10] From the other side (the right, basically) comes this interrogation: How ethical is the ethos of allowing oneself to be held hostage, without mutuality of personal obligation or a social contract at the foundation of it? From this standpoint, binding oneself to the other annihilates not only moral individualism (Ricoeur; see my n8) but, potentially, the other as well, for "unless you hold others responsible for the ends that they choose and the actions that they do, you cannot regard them as moral and rational agents, and so you will not treat them as ends in themselves" (Korsgaard 206).

Two predictions might be made with some confidence. First, the scene of interpersonality, or interhumanity, to which current ethical criticism has been strongly attracted, will continue to exert its power, as the critique of the paradigms of 1970s textuality and 1980s historicism continues to run its course, while at the same time pressures internal (see Levinas) and external (see Ebert) will continue to push to make ethicity more sociopolitically accountable or else will do away with it altogether. Second, the staying power of literary-ethical inquiry will depend in no small measure on its capacity either to self-correct or to be corrected, its emphasis on interhumanity for example better synthesized with a social and/or political ethics. Meanwhile, there is much to learn, much more than this introduction can encompass, from the literature-and-ethics conversations held so far, as the five essays in this issue show. It is high time for these essays to speak for themselves.

Notes

[1] Significant single-author books of literary theory and criticism devoted entirely or primarily to ethics since 1987 include Miller (*Ethics* and *Versions*), Booth (*Company*), Nussbaum (*Love's Knowledge* and *Poetic Justice*), Siebers, Harpham (*Getting*), Parker, Norris, Newton (*Narrative Ethics*), and Eaglestone. Also notable is the recent increase in books not primarily about ethics per se that include *ethics* in the title or subtitle (e.g., Phelan; Chow).

[2] The original (1990) edition of Lentricchia and McLaughlin's *Critical Terms for Literary Study* had no entry titled "Ethics"; Harpham's essay was added for the second edition (1995).

[3] Veyne comments plausibly, "Foucault judged it as undesirable as it would be impossible to resuscitate this ethics; but he considered one of its elements, namely, the idea of a

work of the self on the self, to be capable of reacquiring a contemporary meaning"; "the self, taking itself as a work to be accomplished," he surmises further, "could sustain an ethics that is no longer supported by either tradition or reason [. . .]" (7).

[4]G. Jay does not hesitate to frame issues of canonicity and their implications for pedagogical practice as ethical issues, as when he discusses the teacher-student dynamic in an intercultural classroom (e.g., 143). Lauter, however, tends to think of questions involving *ought* as ideological and therefore not to recognize ethics as a distinct, much less a privileged, sphere (e.g., 257). Likewise, Smith and Guillory are both centrally concerned with issues of "value," but especially with regard to the dependence of aesthetics on economics (within the history and discourse of capitalism) rather than to evaluation as an ethical project (although see Smith 158–66). Lauter's, Smith's, and Guillory's shared commitment, albeit very differently expressed, to unpacking the phenomenon of social-institutional controls over interpretation distinguishes their work from that of the ethical turn proper at least as markedly as does the earlier work of Foucault, although by the same token their work seems also in a certain degree to presage that turn, especially if, for example, one's starting point, like that of Jay—who cites all three admiringly—is the pragmatic question of "what to do in the wake of the end of consensus and the advent of multiculturalism" (6). To a considerable extent, Jay's *American Literature and the Culture Wars* might be thought of as the saga of the conscience of a critical-teacherly sensibility who seeks to make practical application of institutions-oriented analyses by precursors like Lauter, Smith, and Guillory. In this framework, "ethics" and "politics" of critical practice easily converge.

[5]Conspicuous omissions include the relation of contemporary literary-ethical study to the destabilization of gender categories by feminist and queer theory, to Bakhtinian dialogism, to Habermasian discourse ethics, and to ecocriticism.

[6]Ebert cites Cornell (113) here, but she includes in the wide sweep of her Marxist critique all theoretical discourses, feminist or not, that she sees as abandoning the possibility of "a socially transformative politics" by "positing history as narrative, as discursive event" (230, 229).

[7]A different version of reading ethics is being developed along the lines of Foucauldian self-care: reading as a praxis of self-discipline or self-improvement. See, e.g., Augst, in a history-of-the-book-studies context.

[8]With regard to the authority Levinas grants the other over the I, Ricoeur is particularly vehement in denouncing what he takes to be "the hyperbole of exteriority" in *Otherwise Than Being*, with its conception of the I as needing to open itself to the persecutions of the other, "who, as an offender, no less requires the gesture of pardon and expiation" (Ricoeur 339, 338). With regard to Levinas's antiaestheticism, on which Haney also remarks, Eaglestone makes a brave attempt (154–70) to redeem Levinas from his expressions of Platonistic distrust for artifacts as substitutions of image for object by working from his valorization of "saying" (in *Otherwise*), which Levinas uses as an honorific metaphor for ethical expressivity. Eaglestone (like Haney) fully recognizes, however, that it is easier to make the case for Levinas as a kind of verbal artist than as a philosopher of an ethical aesthetics.

[9]This is by no means to assert that all forms of contemporary literary-ethical inquiry presuppose commitment to a "postmodern" understanding of ethics (Bauman, e.g., 10–15) as ungrounded in moral codes or laws, save for the postulate of a "moral self constituted by responsibility" (11). Levinas and Harpham would probably accept this premise; Booth and Nussbaum probably would not. All seem keenly interested in the ethics-morality or disposition-codes problematic, however.

[10]See, however, Chalier's defense of Levinas's feminism and Chanter's equivocal appraisal, in the same volume. Spivak is even more categorical than Irigiray, asserting that the whole "subject-ship of ethics is certainly male" for Levinas ("French Feminism" 76).

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