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Social Criticism, Moral Reasoning and the Literary Form

Abstract

Widely chosen by students of society as an approach under which to labour, emancipatory, liberatory or, otherwise put, critical social thought occupies a position between knowledge and practical action whose coherence is typically taken for granted on account of the pressing nature of the issues it attempts to deal with. As such it is rarely subjected to scrutiny and the methodological, conceptual and moral challenges it faces are not properly identified. The contribution of this article is to raise these problems into view clearly and unambiguously. This is undertaken via a careful examination of Alice Crary's recent work, in which she attempts, firstly, to defend a left-Hegelian version of Critical Theory by relating it to the work of Peter Winch and, secondly, to issue a set of methodologically radical recommendations on employing the sensibility-shaping powers of the literary form. The article aims to deepen our understanding of the fundamental tensions between the Critical Theory and Wittgensteinian traditions, which Crary attempts to bring together and, ultimately, of those crucial features of our moral practices that frustrate the enterprise of critical social thought.

1. Introduction

While social criticism in the wide sense can be said to be exercised diffusely across society, the social sciences have long aspired to have a professional version enshrined within their activities. Methodological orientations variously dubbed as emancipatory, liberatory or critical, which are conceived as explicitly discharging

such a function, are widely adopted by students of society. Disciplinarily organised forms of social criticism, strands of critical social thought such as Critical Theory (Horkheimer 1982; Adorno et al. 1976; Habermas 1978; Honneth 2009),[1] claim methodological and theoretical advantages that distinguish them from moralising talk, rants, the airing of personal grievances, campaigning or propaganda and tie them to certain cognitive claims that are thought to be pivotal in the moral enlightenment and emancipation of those they seek to engage. The morally charged nature of the issues critical social thought claims to deal with accounts for its significant popularity within the social sciences and humanities, but also for the fact that its methodological, conceptual and moral coherence is seldom given due attention. This is surprising because even by the admission of Axel Honneth, one of the chief contemporary exponents of Critical Theory, it has not been satisfactorily developed or defended to a high standard (2009: Chapters 2 and 3).

In this article, I examine a recent elaboration of Critical Theory by Alice Crary (2018b) who defends a left-Hegelian version and attempts to bolster its metaphysical credentials by relating it to the work of Peter Winch. Crary also complements that defence with a set of methodological recommendations (2016; 2018a) regarding the power of "non-neutral resources", such as the literary form, proposing that they be employed in methodologically radical projects. Considered as one, Crary's recent work presents an intriguing overall attempt to further the aims of critical social thought and to reinforce its authoritativeness by showing that, what she calls, "wide" notions of objectivity, rationality and argument apply to it, particularly in the face of an audience of analytic philosophers who would prefer to withhold these expressions from such forms of inquiry. Crary also claims as an achievement the fact that she combines the left-Hegelian and Wittgensteinian traditions.

In what follows, I will subject all of the above to detailed scrutiny, beginning in **Section 2** by examining Crary's defence of Critical Theory and invocation of Peter Winch. **Section 3** assesses the

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[1] In this article I will use the following terms somewhat interchangeably although I acknowledge that they are only partly overlapping and, for instance, can be seen to relate to each other in a descending order of generality: 'Social criticism', 'Critical social thought', 'Critical social science' and 'Critical Theory' (cf. Fay 1987: 4-5).

methodological import of Crary's discussion of the sensibility-shaping powers of the literary form. In **Section 4** I return to Winch's work in order to provide a clarification of some features of our moral practices that militate against the fascination with form and, further, pose problems for critical social thought.

2. Critical Theory and Its Metaphysical Credentials

In her article "Wittgenstein Goes to Frankfurt (and Finds Something Useful to Say)", recently published in this journal, Crary attempts a complex balancing act of coordinating thinkers that span the analytic and continental traditions in the name of "advancing […] the enterprise of liberating social thought" (2018b: 7). Her point of departure is the assessment that (philosophical understanding and underpinning of) the enterprise suffers from an overly narrow conception of rationality which can be profitably extended with materials gathered from the left-Hegelian and Wittgensteinian traditions. Regarding the latter, Crary particularly points to Peter Winch's work (1990), which she takes as recommending an ontology of the social world as constitutively ethical and, thus, rejecting deeply engrained conceptions that equate 'the rational' with what is backed by universal norms and 'the world' or 'reality' with what remains after morality and values have been subtracted. Once the left-Hegelian tradition is inflected by this ontology, the result is a "widely rational critique", which can include (new) moral perspectives and all kinds of cultural, ethical and historical values as well as display contextual sensitivity without thereby relinquishing its claims to being rationally authoritative, world-directed or objective, in short, to portraying things "as they really are" (2018b: 11).

The payoff of Crary's operations is mostly illustrated via reference to legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, whose work (1991; 1992), although perhaps not within Critical Theory as such, has emancipatory aims and has shed light on the forms of harm experienced by black women by invoking historical, structural and institutional features of U.S. society. Given Crary's adjustments, Crenshaw's work can be dubbed "genuinely rational" and morally charged descriptions can be legitimately offered, such as, for

example, in claiming without any reservation, in an infamous case of a white police officer, Daniel Holtzclaw, sexually assaulting black women, that his selection of victims is vile without having to add that it is so only given how things appear in our social context (2018b: 19–20).

Casting a closer look at Crary's argument, its first part is concerned with responding to the various charges (including paternalism, elitism, ethnocentrism and mere partisanship) that beset different versions of Critical Theory. According to Crary, versions of Kantian inspiration, such as the one propounded by Habermas, struggle to defend the truth of moral beliefs against a world bereft of value, a problem they attempt to solve not by changing their conception of the world but by denying that moral beliefs can be descriptively true and opting instead for "practical universalisability". Yet, the stipulation of a formal method well in advance leaves them vulnerable to charges of ethnocentrism and, thus, leads to the eventual frustration of emancipatory goals. Poststructuralist versions of Critical Theory are also found wanting because they do not challenge the assumption that "neutrality is necessary for true universality" but proceed to deny the possibility of neutrality and universality, thus being limited to various "positive liberating exercises" and obliged to add various qualifications to their claims in order to defeat any strong sense of "rationality" or "objective progress". Crary is dissatisfied with holding back from making strong claims to rationality and progress and considers the poststructuralist position as trading on a misconception, namely, that the impossibility of adopting a dispassionate standpoint is an idea sufficiently well-formed to imply such limitations on our claims. Instead, the left-Hegelian Critical Theory she opts to defend, having developed immunity to charges of elitism, ethnocentrism and mere partisanship, considers the notion of a dispassionate standpoint as incoherent and thus cancels the inference from its denial to the denial of universal authority. This type of Critical Theory can unapologetically pronounce moral beliefs as true, moral arguments as rationally authoritative and progress as just that, and it can do so precisely because it employs what Crary understands to be a "wide" notion of rationality. The problem for Crary, however, is that those

who are in the grip of a certain picture of reality and the relationship between mind and world, that is, mostly analytic philosophers, find this notion difficult to accept.

Then Peter Winch appears to provide an alternative picture. Particularly with reference to *The Idea of a Social Science and Its Relation to Philosophy,* he is taken to argue that the generality involved in concept use is dependent on context-sensitivity, a "feel" for similarities and dissimilarities of context and, thus, on kinds of sensibilities and inclinations that encode values or are shaped by normativity. The import of Winch's arguments for Crary is that understanding, using and extending such concepts is an "ethically charged" matter and that what shapes our sensibilities in a way necessary for handling concepts may be seen as belonging to the objective world and not as being merely subjective.

This concludes my exposition of Crary's argument. Most charitably, it can be seen as trying to break free from the constricted grasp of a rigid notion of rationality and move beyond the options of contextualism and universalism or the entailed exclusive disjunction between universal rational authoritativeness and contextual sensitivity. Moreover, Crary is trying to warn against what she calls an attitude of "obligatory abstraction" of any ethical features and our "subjective endowments" (2018b: 33) from the notion of world. On the other hand, Crary's use of 'world', 'objective' and 'subjective' already serves as an indication that not all is well with her invocation of Winch (and Wittgenstein). In fact, there are significant problems, which I would like to examine in the remainder of this section. I will contend that Crary's project imposes metaphysical theses on Winch and Wittgenstein (2.1), falsifies the nature of moral reasoning by tying it to metaphysical credentials (2.2) and bypasses the real methodological problems with Critical Theory (2.3).

2.1 Wittgenstein's Conversion on the Road to Frankfurt

It seems that the Wittgenstein that Crary has taken to Frankfurt had a revelation along the way and, like Saul on the road to Damascus, from persecutor became a disciple of metaphysics, taking for granted the well-formedness of metaphysical questions on objective reality

and subscribing to the attending rigid vocabulary that is indispensible in their posing (Stenlund 1996). Crary not only takes Winch and Wittgenstein as postulators of an alternative ontology, rather than as withdrawing their own stakes when it comes to what philosophers understand as ontology (Tsilipakos 2015) but she also throws in her lot in handling expressions such as 'objective', 'how things really are', 'the world', 'reality' and 'rationality', not by embedding them in the stream of practical life and seeing what they actually amount to, but rather by referring them to philosophical pictures, such as that of world and mind, or the offered alternative, improved but no less metaphysical, which conceives reality as constitutively ethical.

Crary takes it that "Winch […] is giving us an image of a region of objective reality as intrinsically an ethical realm […] placing himself in opposition to the sort of engrained conception of reality on which it is in itself bereft of ethical value" (2018b: 31). But it should be remembered that it is no part of Winch or Wittgenstein's project to produce any kind of composite picture of objective reality. If anything, both would point out that the very expressions 'objective' and 'reality' obtain different senses across various domains of life and activity. This, for example, is the import of remarks such as "The point is that it is within the religious use of language that the conception of God's reality has its place" and "What is real and what is unreal shows itself *in* the sense that language has" (Winch 1964: 309) as well as reminders on the notion of rationality directed against Pareto's implicit judgement of religious and other activities as irrational via the imposition of scientific logico-experimental criteria (Winch 1990: Chapter 4), which is precisely why no metaphysically singular sense can be obtained of the expression 'objective reality'. Moreover, it is worth remembering that 'the world' as in 'the mind and the world' and 'the world' as in 'the social world' are hardly similar in sense: the former is philosophically understood as a mind-independent reality and thus as having in that sense an objective existence, whereas this understanding and the connotations of objectivity cannot be retained in speaking of 'the social world'. The implication is that 'the social world' is not a part or region of 'the world' nor will it become one by pretending that 'world' is more capacious than it actually is.

Following Winch and Wittgenstein does not lead to a "wider notion of objectivity" (cf. Crary 2016: 211–2) but to giving up the metaphysical project and instead paying attention to the various ways in which the relevant expressions are used.

Thus, Crary's use is not only contrary to the Wittgensteinian spirit, which also animates Winch, but, as regards the latter's work and her attempt to render it compatible with the concerns of Critical Theory, she ends up being somewhat selective, for – yet another – example in not taking into account Winch's objections against Karl-Otto Apel's transcendental pragmatics and its presupposition of universal agreement (1979). The objections raised therein might seem to be directed at a version of Critical Theory Crary has rejected, but they arguably also apply to the version she favours. Finally, there is a large part of Winch's later work in which he examines, as he puts it in *Ethics and Action*, "the way in which moral concepts may enter into a man's understanding and assessment of his own life" (1972: 2), which raises further problems for Critical Theory. I will come back to this in Section 4.

2.2 Does Social Criticism Need Metaphysical Credentials?

Crary's noted rigid commitment to a basic philosophical vocabulary ('rationality', 'objectivity', 'reality', 'the world', etc.) is indicative of the idea that its retention is imperative if any credibility is to be attached to social criticism. In other words, her idea is the metaphysical credentialing of social criticism, which is thought incapable of standing on its own two feet unless supplemented by an ontology or a certain conception of rationality.[2]

The idea seems to be that Crenshaw does not speak with enough of an authoritative voice unless such a voice can be dubbed genuinely rational under a "widely rational" conception; or that her work

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[2] The point is well put by Nigel Pleasants (1999: 182) who correctly perceives the incompatibility between Wittgensteinian work and Critical Theory in noting that: "The kind of philosophy practised by critical social theorists serves only to obscure the nature of real social and political problems by attempting to solve them through transcendental theoretical representation. This mode of explanation seems to suggest that problems cease to be problems when they are accurately represented in a theoretical system. Wittgensteinian deconstruction of pseudo-explanations is merely the prolegomenon to thinking about urgent social, political and ethical issues." See also Hertzberg (2002).

would end up being pronounced as merely partisan and thus as devoid of rational authority, unless the kinds of features that she invokes are metaphysically grounded. As we saw, this securing is conceived with reference to Winch who, according to Crary, "as a rule represents social understanding […] as genuine – not merely subjective – understanding, it follows that he is asking us to regard such understanding as both irreducibly ethical and objective" (2018b: 31). But, surely, the use of such considerations to allay the charge of partisanship conflates an epistemological with a political charge. Partisanship as a problem for social criticism has to do with the latter and with the defence of particular values which are controversial when pitted against other kinds of values, whereas the epistemological sense is one of being "subjective" as opposed to "objective" or "world-guided", as Crary puts it. Yet, as we will have reason to note in what follows, even if the world-guided character of Crenshaw's work is granted this does nothing to defend the values against other equally world-guided kinds of values.

Thus, one may wonder precisely what is gained for social criticism by playing into ontological pictures and insisting on the need for metaphysical credentials to secure the assertion that a critic describes things as they really are, or is genuinely rationally authoritative or objective. Not only is there no need to provide a licence for the use of expressions such as 'objective', 'rational', 'authoritative', for example, in the realm of political discourse, where they can be used in appropriate senses in support of all kinds of programmes, together with which they stand or fall, but there is also no genuine support provided by these expressions in their metaphysical inflection. If that move is supposed to establish, by unreservedly speaking of the truth of critical claims, that there is a truth of the matter in the sense of there being no room for disagreement, or, by locating any debate as having to do with objective matters, that any such disagreement can be resolved, it runs in the face of social life where disagreements do exist and determinations as to rationality are never an all-or-nothing matter. Most importantly, Crary's proposal does not raise the right questions

about what rationality[3] or authoritativeness or reality[4] amount to in these matters, since the attempt at metaphysical credentialing takes us away from appreciating the role of these expressions in practices of moral reasoning.

2.3 The Real Problems with Critical Theory

The issues we have encountered so far are not unrelated to the fact that Crary is defending the Critical Theory tradition; in fact, they derive in large part from the weight that tradition places on notions of (immanence to) social reality and rationality. It is worth noting, however, that while the former notion can receive a rather strong formulation – e.g., Honneth claims that "there must be in social reality itself normative ideas" (2009: 49) – which is retained in the kinds of concerns Crary raises, there is also an instructive interpretation of the importance of immanence and "immanent critique" as a methodological principle. Precisely as a measure of preventing the elitism that would follow from a stark separation of the critical theorist from participants, it can have to do with locating

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[3] Lars Hertzberg and David Cockburn first raised this type of concern in response to Crary's presentation of an earlier version of her article at the conference "Truth, Politics and Metaphysics: Celebrating the Work of Peter Winch" at King's College, London, in June 2017.

[4] One way to appreciate the sense of 'reality' in moral understanding and to see the disjoint between that and its metaphysical use is to consider Raimond Gaita's discussion of the formulaic distinction between appearance and reality in the context of what it is for moral understanding to deepen (2004: Chapter 15), a discussion which is tied to a wide vocabulary of critical appraisal and not the limited one of metaphysical pictures.

　　Another case of looking at the use of 'reality' within a moral context, is given by Iris Murdoch who writes the following in connection with her classic example of M and D: "I can choose within the world I can *see*, in the moral sense of 'see' which implies that clear vision is a result of moral imagination and moral effort. There is also of course 'distorted vision', and the word 'reality' here inevitably appears as a normative word [which, she elaborates on p.64, means that it is better to know what is real than be in a state of illusion]. When M is just and loving she sees D as she really is" (1985 [1970]: 37).

　　But note that 'reality' here is sensitive to the specifics of interpersonal relationships. The force of seeing D as she really is has to do with removing what stands in the way, i.e. those obstacles of prejudice and particular vices that, in this case, obstruct M's view, not to say that everyone will come to see that D is this, that and the other – as Murdoch herself notes: "That *of* which [freedom] is knowledge, that 'reality' which we are so naturally led to think of as revealed by 'just attention', can of course, given the variety of human personality and situation, only be thought of as 'one', as a single object for all men, in some very remote and ideal sense" (1985 [1970]: 38).

normative beliefs in particular groups of agents, as opposed to their introduction by the theorist. According to Honneth, starting from "experiences of injustice and misrecognition" (Boltanski et al. 2014: 573) can be seen as a methodological solution to the danger of the imposition of the critical theorist's own values. This contrast furnishes the expression 'social reality' with a very specific methodological sense.[5]

Before expanding further on Critical Theory's methodological concerns, I would like to turn to the concept of reason or rationality, which is seen as central in furnishing a context-transcending justification of norms. As Honneth notes, "the critical model of the Frankfurt School presupposes, if not precisely a philosophy of history, then a concept of the directed development of human rationality" (2009: 51) and proceeds to elaborate that this concept of "historically effective reason" descends from a left-Hegelian account of progress and social rationalisation capable of picking out those ideals that are the "embodiment of social reason". This is necessary because there is thought to be a further problem of justification, which requires that "Critical Theory [use] a concept of reason that can justify the normative validity of the immanently raised ideals" (2009: 50).[6] Yet it is implausible to claim that any satisfactory account of the development of human rationality has been, or, considered in light of Winch's observations I quoted in 2.1, could actually be offered. In fact, the very idea that immanently described moral beliefs require this kind of justification is highly dubious because it

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[5] Immanence in the sense of "moral values which are capable of being understood by others" (Beardsmore 1969: 62) can be seen as a condition of relevance or even intelligibility, not only for the audience of critique but even for the moral rebel or revolutionary herself.

[6] Honneth's summary formulation of the tasks for Critical Theory is as follows: "The constructive justification of a critical standpoint is to provide a conception of rationality that establishes a systematic connection between social rationality and moral validity. It is then to be reconstructively shown that this potential rationality determines social reality in the form of moral ideals. And these moral ideals, in turn, are to be seen under the genealogical proviso that their original meaning may have socially become unrecognizable." (Honneth 2009: 53). See also Marcelo (2013: 216-8).

An alternative or, depending on one's conception, different version of this account of rationality can be found in Geuss's explication of Habermas's Critical Theory (1981: 55-95) where justification of those ideals is thought to consist in their being deemed "reflectively acceptable" in so far as they have not been formed under conditions of coercion. I do not think that this account is any more satisfactory. For one it does not seem capable of addressing conflicts between ideals (cf. Winch 1979).

falsifies the fabric of moral life by finding it faulty, unless it can be premised on an account of the development of human rationality. Yet we already act and argue and have things to say and things to say about the things we do and say, "we" here including Critical Theorists, whose moral practices are arguably cut from the same cloth as everyone else's.

The metaphysically inflected debate that Crary draws both from analytic philosophy and the critical theoretical tradition is only incidental to the most difficult questions that Critical Theory (see Geuss 1981, Keat 1981, and Fay 1987), and more generally a critical social science (Fay 2015: Chapter 5), has to answer. As a stark example consider the characteristic claim that critical social science produces knowledge, albeit a very particular kind of knowledge, which is scientific in a certain sense, but also intended to guide practical action. It is far from clear what it means to claim such a status, which is why this conception generates the following irresolvable tensions:

The figure of the critic claims to be in an epistemically asymmetric position to those for whom critique is being produced. But it remains unspecified whether such asymmetry is a) occasion or topic-dependent or, on the other hand, an invariant matter, b) systematic or irregular, c) irreversible or potentially reversible and, thus, ruling out monopoly of the function.

Reversibility is in effect denied by embedding the exercise of critique within social science, a fact which not only institutionalises the asymmetry but also implies that the disciplinary background provides some kind of (uniquely) appropriate support and that those who rely on such support have a special claim to knowledge and expertise. Yet the paternalistic relationship between experts and lay people is actually declared undesirable by proponents on the grounds that it involves control over persons (cf. Lesnoff 1979) (whereas in cases of genuine expertise it would be difficult to completely rule out paternalism). Regardless of how one conceives the relationship to the lay person, there remains the burden of specifying exactly the corpus of knowledge and specialist methods which serve as a basis for the critic. The absence of such backing strains the application of the concepts of knowledge and expertise, and leaves one wondering

why social science is thought to be so particularly well-equipped to discharge a specialised critical function.

The concept of knowledge is stretched towards the other direction in the conception that knowledge is being validated in the self-understanding of agents and that actors "help to determine the truth" (Fay 2015: 108). This seems to deny paternalism but, once again, the denial is contradictory because, firstly, the range of options allowed to the agent is limited by the theory and, secondly, the initial intervention by the critic is based on her perception of a lack of awareness by the agent, which, ultimately, need not be confirmed by the agent herself. Moreover, the fact that the determination of truth is treated as exchangeable with practical aims, typically described as the agent's liberation, emancipation or enlightenment, suppresses the difference between the validation of truth and notions such as effectiveness, persuasion, propaganda, deceit or self-deception, conversion and also being sincere, deciding for oneself, attaining wisdom or moral understanding which, in truth, are much closer to the range of phenomena in question than are notions of knowledge or truth.

In sum, the central problems with critical social science have to do with the tensions between its self-conception as a form of inquiry (see Hammersley 1995), its stated emancipatory aims, and its relation to practices of moral reasoning. Crary's metaphysical credentialing approach leaves those problems intact, including the latter aspect which, having to do with a sound conception of what it is to reason about moral ideals with authority and to enlighten others, could be seen to have a pronounced relation to Winch's work on ethical reasoning. Section 4 will detail some aspects of this relation. For now it is important to reiterate that Crary's appeal to Winch as showing that "social concepts trace out patterns in a ground that is essentially structured by practical normativity or, in other words, in a ground that is essentially ethically non-neutral" (2018b: 30) does not lead to any methodological proposition that bolsters Critical Theory, because it does nothing to differentiate between the various values in that non-neutral ground or to recommend some of them. This means that although Crary wants to dub Crenshaw's efforts at shifting our sensibilities and "what strikes us as important" as

rational, in the wide sense, this merely saves them from exclusion and does nothing to recommend them over anybody else's efforts. Thus, "rationally authoritative" is actually equated with "admissible for consideration" so in that attenuated sense of "rationally authoritative" nothing stops us from calling, e.g., Donald Trump rationally authoritative, for his own non-neutral efforts at shifting our sensibilities are admissible for consideration.

I will now turn to consider aspects of Crary's earlier work that might be taken to offer, at least in part, a way out of this conundrum by distinguishing, not the favoured content of our sensibilities, but the particular kinds of non-neutral means that are effective in shaping them.

3. The methodological employment of literary form

My focus in this section will be on the methodological import for critical social thought of Crary's attempt (2016) to widen a notion close to that of rationality, i.e. the notion of argument, in order to include the shaping of our sensibilities by what she contends are particularly powerful means, namely artistic and, more specifically, literary forms. Before discussing Crary's conception, it should be noted that the notion of form is particularly tricky when used in a generalising way because it does not mark only one kind of distinction: there are wide and narrow conceptions depending on what they include and leave out. In philosophy, the notion of form as logical form has been used prescriptively with regard to practices of human reasoning which have been found ultimately underpinned by and, for that reason, inferior to particular ways of speaking tied to formal logical calculi (Stenlund 1996 and 1997). There is a danger of retaining this orientation, for example, when speaking of the form of moral reasoning – not only in the temptation to hold up some standard that is appealing to the philosophical imagination, but also in tying reasoning to particular linguistic or textual features, as part of the idea that there are some such general features which can help us identify, in a context-independent way, when we are dealing with a case of moral reasoning. In other words, the idea is that moral reasoning possesses an identifiable logical form, which, although not

sufficient to ensure soundness, is necessary in that any departures from it are doomed to be invalid.[7]

Whilst it may be objected that this picture has exhausted its appeal, there is an only apparently more enlightened understanding of form that takes it that since it is hardly appropriate to go searching for the form of moral reasoning as something additional to different forms of writing, for example, novels, academic papers, speeches, editorials and letters to the editor, we ought, instead, to choose one of these forms as *the* vehicle of moral reasoning. Importantly, the notion of form here is not specified with reference to the full range of features of activities that these kinds of writing play a part in, but is understood as types of texts with particular characteristics that render those texts appropriate in expressing and addressing moral concerns. In the context of this picture, the widely acknowledged fact that one can find moral illumination in works of literature is attributed to the literary form in a narrow sense, one that does not include reference to the kinds of wider logical features, besides certain textual ones, that make literature, literature. Once such powers are conceived as attached to narrow literary form, then the latter can be employed in the service of purposes that are actually incompatible with artistic activities, or extracted and inserted into other kinds of activities with discrepant aims. As we will see, it is this conception that underlies Crary's methodological recommendations on using literature in ethics and in the service of practical projects.

Crary is not alone but one in a series of scholars to point to the relationship between literature and ethics. She is in fact in the good company of philosophers such as Iris Murdoch, Peter Winch, R.W. Beardsmore, Martha Nussbaum, Raimond Gaita[8] and Cora Dia-

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[7] If one still wants to talk about the form of moral reasoning then one needs to do so in a broad sense that goes beyond lexical, grammatical, syntactical, textual or discursive features but identifies features which are dependent on content, context and biography. Accordingly, the question of moral force should not be understood as separate to and as hinging on a strict notion of form, but as another way of getting at the features that contribute to the sense of a piece of reasoning, and to its nature as compelling or otherwise.

[8] Gaita perceives writing about human life as closer to art than to science and notes that "reflection on the human condition must respect the inseparability of form from content if it is to avoid reductionism", adding that "had philosophy been more attentive to the understanding of life offered by literature rather than by science or metaphysics (of a kind that also aspires to separate form from content), then we would be better able to cope with

mond.[9] Crary's particular aim is to explode restrictive philosophical conceptions of what learning about human life and reality can amount to, and at the very least to open up the possibility that "insofar as they shape our ethical conceptions of human and animal life, literary works can internally inform the sort of empirical grasp of human beings and animals that is relevant to ethics" (2016: 6).

the tensions generated by the acknowledgement that thought about life and morality is inescapably *in medias res*, and the aspiration to a universal ethic based on a sense of the commonness of human experience" (2002: 283-4). He connects the latter to the "universality we attribute to great literature" which allows for an instructive comparison with Boltanski's take on critical social science: "The entanglement between description and critique requires a *complex exteriority*, which makes it possible to assess a particular state of affairs and thereby take a *normative stance*. *Real sociology must always be critical*. What would be the point of producing a merely descriptive theory? People expect from sociology that it facilitates critique and that, by doing so, it contributes to the betterment of society. The normative underpinning of this critique cannot consist of a locally anchored – cultural, religious, or moral – viewpoint (which is often the case in everyday criticism). For sociology makes a claim to being universal" (Boltanski et al. 2014: 572).

[9] Diamond raised the issue of the relation between literature and moral philosophy in her *The Realistic Spirit* (1991), where she is concerned to discredit the idea that the notion of rationality should be withheld from cases of imagination and creativity outside a fixed system (1991: 7) and, going beyond ideals of ethical rationality (8), affirms that ethical thought goes on in stories and images (1991: 9). She is also concerned with the distinction between what effects conversions and what holds up to appropriate standards (1991: 9). In "Anything but Argument" she reiterates (1991: 297) that a story resists being put in argument (premise and conclusion) form and notes that a convincing novel is not one that convinces everyone or gets them to change (1991: 306), adding some faults readers may have that prevent this from happening, for example having limited moral imagination or lack of a sense of irony (1991: 292). We are shown how (1991: 292-294) Dickens may have written novels with moral aims in view and how what is aimed at is not mere conversion – Dickens, for example, has tried to get us to see the world from the point of view of children (299). "Having a rough story about moral philosophy" introduces and responds to a number of articles, most notably one by Martha Nussbaum who herself has advocated the value of literature in moral philosophy and prompted the title of the piece: it indicates what is necessary before any discussion of literature and philosophy can take place. There are of course different views of the aims of moral philosophy: clarification, which is portrayed as moribund at the time, providing answers to questions such as what to do or what is the good life, and a different conception of the field which includes the role of the reader of moral philosophy (1991: 369). Seeing the moral significance of literature is "seeing gestures, manners, styles […] as morally expressive" (1991: 378). How is literature to be positioned with regard to philosophy? D.D. Raphael, one of the contributors to the issue Diamond is commenting on, conceives of it as evidence, which she sees as a restrictive conception of the story mattering as narrative sequence and as setting, but not as the form of its telling (1991: 378). Following Nussbaum the novel is seen as a moral discovery of a form of describing life. Presumably elaborating on a theme from Murdoch, not only action but thought and imagination too are to be seen as important (1991: 377).

Moreover, echoing Diamond, and in the spirit we have examined in the previous section, she protests against the equally restrictive character of what certain philosophers count as an argument. She contends that works of literature are serviceable in enriching our moral understanding via what she calls their literary qualities, that is, "those qualities that have a tendency to engage readers, shaping their senses of what is interesting and important. Thus understood, literary qualities include things like the use of irony, ambiguity, repetition, metaphor, and other types of figurative language, and […] the selection of particular temporal strategies, vocabularies, narrative voices, and even page layouts" (2016: 205). Against the idea that such qualities are merely ornamental she wishes to recommend, again echoing Diamond, the possibility that "the value of a literary work for moral philosophy might be a direct function of its literary features and that literature as literature might contribute directly to moral philosophy" (2016: 205),[10] and that "the rational moral interest of particular works of literature may extend, beyond any examples and plain arguments that can be extracted from them, to their tendency to engage us and shape our sensibilities" (2016: 206).

Like in the case of rationality made wide so as to extend beyond metaphysical abstractions, one cannot but be sympathetic to Crary's efforts to get certain strands of moral philosophy to loosen their unrealistic restrictions on what is considered to belong to moral argument and, thus, what is (relevant to) its subject matter. It is worth stressing that Crary meticulously documents how particular works, by authors such as Leo Tolstoy and John Maxwell Coetzee, engage us. Analogously to her rendering admissible Crenshaw's efforts at shaping our sensibilities, her aim here too is to establish the very admissibility of the sensibility-shaping features of works of literature as part of a wider notion of (moral) argument. This means that she is not concerned to address when, and to what extent this

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[10] Similarly, Beardsmore (1971: 65) laments: "There is no conception that what an artist can contribute to morality may lie in precisely what makes him a creative artist. On this account, the only function of his creativeness is to enable him to dress up sets of antecedently established moral principles in situations which will bring home their force to his readers. If, however, this account is to be rejected, then it is necessary to show that the general account which provides its rationale, the theory that all learning is the learning of principles."

shaping may occur or how it might be frustrated. Moreover, there is a temptation present here, to which I believe Crary gives in, which is to go after something markedly stronger than advocating mere admissibility for consideration (by near-sighted moral philosophers), and to put forth a thesis as to the appropriateness[11] of literary forms of writing and their repurposing in the design of practical projects. In effect, then, Crary is offering not only an observation about how literary qualities *may* shape our sensibilities but issuing a methodological recommendation about using their power in the social sciences as part of a set of "non-neutral methods" placed in the service of practical aims. If the accomplishment of practical aims requires our sensibilities to shift, then such methods are indispensable, she seems to argue.

This idea is exhibited quite clearly, besides what we have seen already, in a recent piece against the methodologically chosen ethical neutrality of "analytic feminism" where Crary proposes in exchange a "methodological radicalism that involves making use of the practical power of ethically non-neutral resources, conceived as in themselves cognitively authoritative" (2018b: 47).[12] Another instance of this idea can be found in her discussion of non-fictional works against animal testing or using animals as food where she cites Jonathan Safran Foer's *Eating Animals* precisely in respect of his use of "passages that are designed to shape readers' attitudes toward animals" (Crary 2016: 259) in order to attack factory farming. One

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[11] The question of appropriateness can, of course, be inflected in a number of ways, some of which are stronger than others, and tied in various degrees to the justification of such reasoning. For example, a certain form can be seen as a necessary condition for even having a moral discussion or, further, as implying that the reasoning offered is actually compelling or, yet further, that it must be seen as compelling by all exposed to it on pain of irrationality, or, finally, that it must thus effect whatever behavioural changes are warranted by the reasoning. It seems that being appropriate, compelling and effective are not collapsible even if they sometimes do go together.

[12] Consider also Crary's recent discussion of her book in an interview where she explains that "the things I do in ethics directly guide social criticism" and she continues: "Recently I've been working with colleagues in the US and in Europe on traditions of social critique, and in doing so I am making use of the ground covered in *Inside Ethics* […] I am committed to radical, practice-oriented social criticism – social criticism that explores systematic forms of social subordination having to do with, say, race, gender, ability, class, body shape and age – and I see my work as bringing more clearly into view the realm of values to which such criticism is responsible." http://socialresearchmatters.org/2071-2/ (accessed 22/5/2018).

such passage, for example, features shock tactics in the form of the juxtaposition of the author's account of his life with and love for his dog, and a Philippine recipe for making dog stew.

Crary's methodological recommendations are to be understood as bearing significant import for those parts of philosophy and the social sciences, including critical social thought, which have embraced practical aims in exposing structures of domination, in enlightening and, ultimately, emancipating people. The recommendations depend not only on ideas regarding how art can contribute to moral education or debate, or expand the moral imagination (which it undeniably can do on occasion, though, as we will see, not necessarily take aim at), but also on the idea that *using artistic forms can help disciplines likes philosophy or the social sciences achieve practical aims.*[13] I will now attempt to subject these ideas to examination. In the following three sub-sections I would like to reflect on the way in which literary forms of writing manage to achieve moral enlightenment (3.1), the practical use of such forms or their embedding within other kinds of activities, in this case, academic inquiry (3.2) and, finally, the compatibility of practical aims with academically organised inquiry (3.3).

3.1   Art and Moral Enlightenment

I have already alluded to the fact that Crary's use of the notion of literary form or literary qualities as sensibility-shaping takes attention away from the logical features of artistic activity, and thus ends up misconstruing the role that those forms play in terms of being part of the activities they are part of, by extension misconstruing the very character of those activities. Any sufficiently broad account of writing novels ought to include the range of criteria and aims that enter into what a novel is trying to accomplish. This gives the means employed their point and allows that they be appropriately understood and evaluated as to their judicious use.

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[13] As far as the social sciences are concerned this aspiration needs to be understood as a way of stepping back from positivist requirements in the wake of positivism's demise, and towards thinking of the social sciences as closer to art than to science (Lepenies 1988; Sennett 2009).

Conceiving of moral enlightenment as a function of literary qualities discards this decisive context, which is itself decisively incompatible with predicating moral enlightenment as an aim of artistic activity. The problem is not that moral enlightenment is nebulous and thus fails as an aim because anything not capable of being controlled or guaranteed must do so. Revolution is in a sense incapable of being subject to controls and guarantees, but that does not stop political programmes from being organised with that explicit aim. Rather, the very idea that the aim of literature is moral enlightenment invokes an incoherent conception of the activity. Beardsmore puts his finger on the problem in rejecting the means-ends form when applied to the use of literature in order to effect a moral purpose by pointing out that the "moralist [who] holds that a work of art, a novel or a painting, is an instrument for transmitting some set of moral beliefs […] introduces a radical confusion about *the way in which* a work of art tells us something, that is, about what 'saying' or 'telling' means here, a confusion which blurs precisely the distinction [between purposive and artistic activities]" (1971: 15) (original emphasis) even at the limiting case where one wishes to retain this way of speaking and say that art is done "for the sake of art" (1971: 20).

Now, Diamond (1991: 292–299) seems to be making a contrasting point in stating that Charles Dickens had written novels with moral aims in view, when she lists one such aim as getting us to see the world from the point of view of children. Without wishing to deny the appropriateness of such a description, it can be debated to what extent it identifies a moral accomplishment separable from the artistic accomplishment.[14] Moreover, the cultivation of such moral sensibilities is one among a number of features important for understanding and appraising the novel. Nor will an author's self-avowal render this moral demand overriding, for even if Dickens proclaimed that this was the sole aim of his work, the fact that it took the form of novels still guarantees that it is seen in the light of a range

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[14] Indeed, consider how natural the description "seeing through the eyes of" is for storytelling, not only in the case of literature, but also in film where it can find expression in a "point of view" shot.

of other criteria, a point which applies both to contexts of production and reception.

Even more significantly, it seems that the achievement of artistic goals is a condition for any further virtues to develop, a fact which introduces a potential tension with any explicitly avowed moral aims.[15] For example, a theatrical performance I recently attended had chosen to present fragments from the lives of refugees in the context of the recent influx towards Europe from Syria and other regions in Africa and the Middle East. The issue is one of grave importance indeed, involving war, pain and suffering, power struggles, international jostling for influence in the area, forms of evasion of responsibility, nationalist reflexes and various kinds of potentially indecent profiting. As such, then, it could be thought of as a highly suitable moral target for the performance. Yet, this aim cannot override artistic demands and, on the contrary, can end up placing not weaker but rather stronger requirements on the artistic execution. If elements of directing, plot, acting, etc. are found artistically wanting they are not excused by the gravity of the issue, but rather shown in an even harsher light as failing to do justice to it. Moreover, aiming at such a morally charged and complex issue can detract from the performance, which can be criticized for banking too much on the topical nature of the issue, and thus being lazy or being superficial by taking for granted a certain version of the issue, or being blatantly didactic or resorting to preaching, etc. Cases such as the above invoke precisely the wider set of aims and features of artistic activity, which when found lacking render a work vulnerable to the various charges nicely encapsulated in the following remark by Michael Oakeshott. He perhaps slightly exaggerates the point, yet in completely breaking the connection between practical life and art, manages to provide a salutary warning against the introduction of criteria which disregard artistic demands and

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[15] Stanley Fish makes an analogous point (2012: 102) when he recounts the complaints Mike Nichols encountered by some viewers after having the character played by Dustin Hoffman in *The Graduate* drive across the Bay Bridge on the wrong side of the road (when compared to actual traffic) and points out that they were misplaced given the artistic demands of lighting, camera angle, etc. that warranted that decision. Placing the character on the correct side would not have served the artistic goals of the film any better, in fact the opposite would have been the case.

misunderstand the particular ways of "saying" and "telling" available to art (ways which when compared to politics could be described as indirect, derivative, or serendipitous as opposed to programmed or designed for). In his 1959 essay "The voice of poetry in the conversation of mankind" Oakeshott exclaims: "poetry has nothing to teach us about how to live or what we ought to approve […] if it imitates the voice of practice its utterance is counterfeit" (1991: 540). While it is patent that literary writing can on occasion exhibit considerable moral force, it does so by sticking to artistic demands, and not taking aim at anything that can compromise such demands.

3.2 The Non-formal, Non-transportable Character of Moral Features

The above reflections ought to have complicated the sense in which art can take aim at moral enlightenment. It would be a mistake to single out literary qualities as bearers of what literature is about and thus bearers of whatever moral functions literature can serve; rather, it is the position that these qualities hold within artistic activities which renders them logically appropriate to literary and moral effects. Thus, whatever the moral force of literature, if, as both Diamond and Crary contend, it is tied to literature as literature, it requires and does not work in spite of artistic criteria, and for that reason is not a transportable feature. This is half-recognised by Crary herself who does not propose to substitute her discussion of novels for the novels themselves, thus preserving their distinctiveness, and who is also sensitive to differences between genres.[16] What is per-haps not recognised is that this carries an implication against "methodological radicalism", since incorporating literary qualities in academic writing[17] does not get us any closer to literature. Further-more, any proposal to model philosophy or sociology as activities on literature would entail a significant amount of changes in order to ensure alignment in the use of these forms, changes that would

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[16] Beardsmore's following observation is instructive with regard to different literary genres: "If there is a difference in the way in which Dostoevsky and Elkin express themselves, it is not a difference in the words or tone which they employ, but a difference in the importance of these features for an understanding of their writings" (1971: 16).

[17] An idea closely associated with certain forms of social scientific aspiration, and not to be equated with moral philosophy's examination of or drawing upon works of literature.

drastically alter the character of such activities (I will come back to this in 3.3).

Most importantly, one should not forget that there are artistic as well as moral demands placed on the use of literary devices in other, even avowedly practical contexts. Crary commends, for example, the kind of evocative language (Crary 2016: 263) that Foer uses in describing what happens to chickens on their way to the slaughterhouse. However, it is important to remember that besides being profoundly moved by the depiction of suffering inflicted on the animals, an alternative reaction might be to shake our heads and protest at the sentimentality of the description on the grounds that the devices are used in a clumsy, disproportionate or too blatant a way. The unwarranted use of techniques of evocative or shocking language may even be seen as a moral failing in that we may object that the author is being disingenuous, in effect, not using these ways of speaking judiciously but rather abusing them in order to manipulate the reader.

This example ought to make clear that any moral power attaching to the use of non-neutral literary devices is subject to a number of non-formal conditions, not in the least the sincerity and genuineness of the voice telling the story. One cannot claim to harness that power and employ it at will, unless one is also able to control for the conditions that need to be in place; since it is far from clear whether philosophy or the social sciences can do this, it does not make sense to propose that they make methodical use of literary devices.

3.3 Academic Disciplines and Practical Aims

The argument so far has progressed by questioning the sense in which literature can be said to aim at practical ends and, further, whether its morally compelling character can be systematically predicated on literary qualities and thus employed in the context of other activities. I would now like to come back to the central underlying idea in Crary's methodological vision for critical social thought, namely, that philosophy or the social sciences[18] can take

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[18] When the grammatical subject is philosophy or social science the question is precisely about the disciplinary contribution and appropriateness of what the discipline affords. An

aim at practical ends, for instance, moral enlightenment and emancipation.

In the first part of this article I noted the problems in the connection of disciplinary activities with such aims. I focused on the latter's compatibility with academic staples such as concepts of knowledge and expertise, and suggested that the strained application of these concepts in the case of moral enlightenment or emancipation weakens that link. Further to those remarks I would like to observe, somewhat symmetrically to what is the case for artistic activity, that there is considerable difference between doing something *by design*, and, on the other hand, being amenable to a certain effect. The proposition being debated is, of course, the former. It may effortlessly suggest itself when one encounters the commitment and passion exhibited by those who have found moral enlightenment in critical social thought. Yet, it does not follow from the observation that oneself or others have found such enlightenment through the pursuit of philosophy or sociology that such disciplines can legitimately take aim at moral enlightenment.

It is indeed true that philosophy or sociology can transform one's life, but that does not mean that they can be designed to achieve this. For one, consider the kinds of personal commitments, work and devotion that are required in order for someone to say that philosophy or sociology changed their life or changed their thinking. Think, moreover, of how strongly that declaration can actually be taken before it becomes unsuitable as a condition for participation in those subjects; think, for example, of the degree to which one can follow Wittgenstein's way of philosophising and the extreme

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instructive example of a "what philosophy cannot do" argument can be found in Lars Hertzberg's recent article (2017) where he argues (expositing and following Winch) against the idea that philosophy can give a verdict on whether words make sense or whether an action is rational. The question he does not raise explicitly, however, is what he understands by 'philosophy', specifically what he takes the operative contrast to be. Hertzberg's argument pits the local and the personal together against the a priori, so the contrast is not with some other subject of academic learning which can do in some other way what philosophy with its penchant for generalisation and apriorism cannot do. His point must be not to conceive such a task as a matter capable of being discharged in this way, namely in the form of disciplinarily organised enquiry. While philosophers cannot pass judgement in the way they think they can, lay persons in general, we, can pass occasioned judgements, we can make determinations and evaluations in particular contexts as to sense and rationality. Nothing stronger can be claimed by professionals.

personal cost this might entail, taking one precisely outside disciplinarily established ways of doing things. But this cannot be demanded of practitioners, nor of any audience a discipline might reach towards.

Unfortunately, I cannot pursue the matter at the required length here. However, I should like to note that it turns, firstly, on a sober appreciation of philosophy and the social sciences, moderately within the bounds of their past record and achievements, as well as training regimes, research practices and overall institutional organisation. Secondly, it turns on a sound appreciation of our moral practices, for therein cases of emancipation and moral enlightenment are exhibited, authoritative actions undertaken and morally compelling reasons offered. I will now turn to address this second aspect while also attempting to pull together the various strands of argument I have presented throughout this article.

4. Winch on Knowing One's Neighbour and the Parable Form

I have contended that Crary's use of Winch is somewhat selective and that, far from being strongly compatible with critical social thought, Winch's work in fact problematises its central aspirations. His sensitivity, in particular, to crucial logical features of our moral practices can be used to deepen our understanding of what is wrong with critical social thought, pointing to the problems with Crary's defence of its authoritativeness and also deflecting Crary's methodological recommendations around literary form. In what follows I will focus on Winch's remarkable discussion of the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel According to Luke in "Who is my neighbour?" (1987a) and, by way of some supplementary remarks, in "Particularity and Morals" (1987b).

I consider the relevant passage (Luke 10, 25–37) well-known, so I will only provide a brief description. A lawyer appears who, in order "to tempt" Jesus, asks him how he can inherit eternal life. Jesus refers him to the Law (The Old Testament) and the reply given by the lawyer as to how he reads the Law (including "love your neighbour

as thyself") is acknowledged as correct by Jesus. But the lawyer then asks "who is my neighbour?" in an attempt to come back at Jesus, and to justify or defend himself for having asked a question which had not been seen as identifying a problem. The lawyer's riposte can be taken as an attempt to draw on his professional capacity, perhaps already invoked by the fact that Jesus had asked him about the Law, professing not to understand because of a technical issue of interpretation. Jesus meets this with the telling of the parable. It is interesting to note that while Winch seems to treat the lawyer's question as genuine, Phillips (1992: 248) comments that the lawyer is perhaps not asking in earnest and needs to be shaken out of his game-playing, something which, he contends, is accomplished by the parable.

Regardless of how we might interpret the lawyer's intentions, there is a temptation here, namely to focus on narrow features of the parable form and to predicate particular powers of those features, much like the sensibility-shaping powers that Crary attributes to "literary qualities". The temptation should be resisted, however, by, firstly, being sensitive to the setting in which the parable is offered, namely the lawyer's initial questions that lead to Jesus telling the story[19] and, following from this, by focusing with Winch on the kinds of features that not only bypass the potential fascination with form but also bring out what is crucial to the moral point of the story.

First of all, Winch notes that the response given through the parable of the Good Samaritan is not one providing some kind of definitional account of being a neighbour, for example, listing characteristics of a specific type of neighbour or neighbours in

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[19] Despite the general prevalence of parables in the gospels, if we follow Phillips's reasoning we can tie the parable of the Good Samaritan to its local function. This renders Jesus's teaching highly specific in the sense that were he confronting someone else who had a different type of concern (perhaps a more genuine one) he might not have responded in this way. Moreover, we might even broaden the scope yet further in order to include prior passages portraying the return of the seventy-two disciples Jesus has sent out to cities ("rejoice, because your names are written in heaven"), his praising of the Father for withholding from the wise and revealing to the simple minded, and explaining to his disciples that they should consider themselves lucky to be able to see and witness what others cannot. This can provide a wider context for the episode of the lawyer who, in effect, raises doubts as to what can be witnessed.

general; the indexical 'my' establishes that the question concerns a personal relationship between particular individuals and this sets the stage for the kind of response that is appropriate. The importance of this relationship is also reflected in the fact that, according to Winch, if one were given a general impersonal answer, one would not be able to understand it, so the lawyer is asked to provide the right answer himself. By confirming that it was the Samaritan who was neighbour to the injured man, the lawyer demonstrates his understanding, which is at the same time a recognition of the Samaritan's reaction as "an expression of his [the lawyer's] own moral sensibilities" (Raffnsøe-Møller 1997: 346).

By acknowledging that they constitute, perhaps an unattainably selfless, yet still clear expression of his own inclinations, the lawyer confirms that he sees the Samaritan's actions as authoritative. Precisely because it does not make sense to insist on the authoritativeness of the Samaritan's actions independently of this acknowledgement, and in the face of the fact that there are no guarantees that this acknowledgement will take place, we might, once again, be tempted to resort to ideas regarding the power of the parable form, whose function might be taken to facilitate such an acknowledgement. There is nothing wrong with this way of phrasing matters, provided that we keep in mind that "[t]he force of the parable comes from the sight I am asked to contemplate in imagination of *this* wounded man lying here in my path" (Winch 1987b: 174, my emphasis).[20] Winch's remark bypasses any reference to literary form, being instead responsive to a non-formal notion of moral reasoning. The crucial feature is not the means through which one achieves this, but the very fact that I am engaged as a person, speaking for myself, seeing my own reactions and sensibilities in the light of a range of responses to another person's need, among which some were callous and self-serving while others were remarkably pure. In short, Winch invokes the personal dimension as crucial to moral understanding.

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[20] While we may distinguish between the way the parable works on the lawyer, and the way the entire episode is meant to work on the faithful, Winch's point can be taken to cover both cases.

At this point, it is important to emphasise that the sense in which we speak of "understanding" or "knowledge" in this connection is incompatible with the aspirations of critical social thought. "Understanding" (or "knowledge") here is not something propositional and does not look like a suitable candidate in order to constitute a collective cognitive basis; it is not something which can be possessed as a *fait accompli* as part of a disciplinary corpus, or taken for granted by virtue of training in Critical Theory, or licensed by virtue of membership in a professional association. Rather, it retains an open-ended character attuned to the particularities of persons and contexts being most strongly tied to personal action which, by being itself tied to, one might say, the concept of a life, always remains in principle revisable in light of the future. At the end of the passage the lawyer is exhorted to "go and do thou likewise", but this is hardly to be interpreted in a way that would render reference to the particular person of the lawyer redundant, e.g., "help anyone you find injured without exception" or "act like the Samaritan in every conceivable situation". Rather, what will count as doing likewise is left open, it is something for the lawyer to decide and to justify, if called upon to do so, in each next case with reference to an open-ended set of possible concerns.

With reference to the question of justification in particular, what is striking in Winch's account is his insistence that the description of the Samaritan's response to the injured man, although offered as an exemplification of divine law, makes no reference to any kind of justification or reason for his actions, and that this is something entirely appropriate; that it is not some kind of defect, or indication of an elliptical formulation. There is no justification missing: "That reaction is simply described and contrasted with the behaviour of the priest and the Levite; and we are admonished to go and do likewise" (1987b: 174). That is all! In fact, Winch goes on to say that not only is the Samaritan's response not justified by appeal to what the divine law commands, but that it works in spite of the law:

> [H]is parable did not appeal to the conception (of God as law-giver): it *challenged* it. Or at least it commented on the conception in a way which presupposed that the moral modality to which the Samaritan responded would have a force for the parable's hearers *independently* of their commitment to any particular theological belief. It is the lawyer's own

response to that modality which enables him to answer Jesus's final question and thus to expand his comprehension of the law. (Winch 1987b: 160)

Once again, Winch's remarks cast light on what expressions such as 'understanding' or 'justification', (and to tie the discussion to those coveted terms Crary is after) 'rationality' or 'authoritativeness' can amount to in some cases of moral reasoning. Against the background of the priest and the Levite who both kept on walking, the Samaritan's response to the injured man is seen as an exemplary case of pure kindness, care and love towards someone who, on account of ethnic or religious differences, the Samaritan might have had all sorts of self-serving excuses not to attend to. The fact that he did not allow such considerations to stifle his perception of the injured man's need is what is remarkable about his response, together with the purity afforded by the complete lack of reasons or justifications for acting in this way. To proceed to treat the case as ungrounded unless, for instance, connected to Critical Theory's conception of the social realisation of reason, and thus to offer justification for the way in which the Samaritan acted is *not to bolster* but *to impoverish* what he did. It is also to get the order wrong of what is primary here, for it is this manner of acting that shows the value and, if you will, rationality of love; it does not borrow these qualities from a principle of love or from divine law. Winch's account insists on the primitive character of such exemplars by excluding any appeal to reasons for so acting, and thus puts into perspective what really makes the Samaritan's response authoritative.

Relating this to the cases Crary alludes to, and without wishing to obscure the complexity of the matter, it is worth wondering where the sources of moral authoritativeness are to be found. In cases such as that of Anita Hill or the women victimized by Daniel Holtzclaw, I would contend that the suffering, courage and overcoming present are primitive, and not in need of being metaphysically grounded or channelled through Critical Theory in order to be pronounced authoritative, rational or objective. In fact, the value to be found therein would be in danger of being lost by being made secondary to these kinds of justifications. Moreover, in appreciating and communicating this value to others there might be a place for literary

expression as there undoubtedly is for testimony, hearing about victims' experiences in their own words, and personal involvement, getting to know them or seeing them in the light of another person's love. The fact that these means can on occasion prove particularly powerful, however, does not mean that they can be separated from the lives and actions of those involved and usurped by critical social thought.

5. Conclusion

In this article I have examined Alice Crary's recent defence of critical social thought, comprising an attempt to ground it metaphysically via wide notions of objectivity, rationality and argument, and leading to a set of methodological recommendations centred on the power of literary form to effect moral enlightenment. To maintain a sound perspective on her work, it is important to bear in mind that a large part of her aims has to do with rendering critical social thought palatable to analytic philosophers who have tended not to allow it by relying on a range of inflexible conceptions. Yet, I have expressed reservations regarding both whether Crary herself manages to escape from some of these inflexible conceptions, and whether the imagined rapprochement of the Wittgensteinian and left-Hegelian traditions she attempts is well-conceived, having tried to show that it depends on subjecting the former tradition to a measure of selection and distortion. Equally, as regards the latter tradition and, more generally, projects of critical social thought, by focusing on metaphysics, Crary misconstrues the range of problems they face as well as their relation to our moral practices.

Crary's methodological proposals on the power of literary qualities were found to stumble on the fact that literature does not aim at moral enlightenment but achieves it indirectly, by being literature. As such, whatever contribution to moral understanding literary qualities can make is a non-formal, non-transportable matter. Critical social thought is in no better position to aim at moral understanding for, as Winch's discussion of the parable of the Good Samaritan showed, the latter is unsuitable to receive the form of a disciplinary corpus and cannot be guaranteed by such means. While

the morally charged issues critical social thought focuses on undeniably deserve our attention, this does not imply that philosophy or the social sciences can make a business out of practically addressing them.

By way of conclusion, I want to reiterate that the ontological fascination Crary demonstrates assumes a misleading methodological form in the idea that if the world is constitutively ethical, non-neutral, then we need non-neutral, ethical, means to do justice to that world.[21] Once contextualised within research practice, however, this proves to be a truly idle remark. Crary's endorsement of not being uncommitted cannot be used in order to recommend being committed in one way or another, or to distinguish between a morally revealing case and a debased attempt at propaganda. Moreover, recommending non-neutral methods does nothing to show why these methods, e.g. literary forms, work in the way imagined or can in fact be methodologically repurposed in order to form part of critical social thought. Nor, finally, does it demonstrate the consistency between a disciplinary activity and the aims it sets itself, or the soundness of the relation it claims to have to our moral practices.

Rejection of the methodological ideal of neutrality of the inquirer on ontological grounds is, finally, incoherent because that ideal is actually compatible with recognising that the social world is a word of value. Max Weber's classic position on value-neutrality (1949a; 1949b) entails not shying away from the consideration of problems as dictated by the relevance of values (*Wertbeziehung*) but being free from values (*Wertfreiheit*) in the sense of abstaining from endorsing or expounding ultimate value judgements by pretending that they are capable of scientific justification. His position, which in that respect is compatible with Winch's, thus favours separation between speaking as an academic and speaking as a person. The real question for critical social thought is why it thinks it can do away with that distinction.

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[21] Yet another formulation of this idea can be found in the following passage: "social phenomena are irreducibly ethical and that they therefore reveal themselves to non-neutral modes of thought that only a wider conception of rationality equips us to recognize as rational" (Crary 2018b: 36).

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