Flawed Crystals: James’s *The Golden Bowl* and Literature as Moral Philosophy

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At the centre, the bed of crystalline Love was dedicated to her name most fittingly. The man who had cut the crystal for her couch and her observance had divined her nature unerringly: Love should be of crystal—transparent and translucent. . . . Its roundness inside betokens Love’s Simplicity: Simplicity is most fitting for love, which must have no corners, that is, no Cunning or Treachery.

Gottfried von Strassburg, *Tristan*

No dogs, bicycles, or tricycles allowed in this garden at any time by order. The gardeners are required to conduct from the garden anyone infringing these rules.

Sign in the garden of Cadogan Square, London, 1980

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She wants, this woman, to have a flawless life. She says to her good friend Fanny Assingham, “I want a happiness without a hole in it big enough for you to poke in your finger. . . . The golden bowl as it was to have been. . . . The bowl with all happiness in it. The bowl without the crack” (p. 445) —signaling in this way to us, who know the properties of this remarkable flawed object, that she wishes her life to be (unlike the bowl) a pure and perfect crystal, completely without crack or seam, both precious and safely hard.

Two features of Maggie Verver’s moral life, in the first half of this novel, strike us as salient. One is this assiduous aspiration to perfection, especially moral perfection. The other is the exclusive intensity of her love for her father, the oddness of her marriage to the Prince, which, far from effecting the usual reordering of the commitments
and obligations of childhood, has permitted her to gratify, to an extra-
ordinary degree, her "wish to remain, intensely, the same passion-
ate little daughter she had always been" (p. 293). This wish to be
without flaw and this desire to remain her father's daughter—we
suspect that they must be somehow connected. And yet the nature
of the connection is not altogether obvious, especially since it is far
from obvious that this refusal to move from father to husband is a
perfect way of living for an adult woman. But I believe that a con-
nection, and a deep one, will emerge if we scrutinize more closely the
particular nature of Maggie's moral aspiration. This will be a route
into the novel, by which we can begin to appreciate the ways in which
James is working here with questions about moral ambition, mor-
alism, and the nature of our worldly relation to value. (Since it is in
connection with its exploration of these elements of experience that
I wish to make, on behalf of this novel, the claim that it is philoso-
phical or makes an important contribution to moral philosophy, it will
serve at the same time to broach these further questions.)

Maggie, then, wants to be as good as possible; and when she says
this, it is evidently moral goodness that is uppermost in her thoughts.
If we ask more closely about what, for her, constitutes moral perfec-
tion, we find that the central idea is one of never doing a wrong,
ever breaking a rule, never hurting. "Maggie had never in her life,"
herself reflects, "been wrong for more than three minutes" (p. 187).
The "note of the felt need of not working harm" (p. 343), the
"superstition of not 'hurting' " (p. 135)—these are the concerns
pressed urgently by her "quite heroic little sense of justice" (p. 293)
in every situation of choice. It does not surprise us that her husband
should compare her, in thought, to a Roman matrona, bearing "the
transmitted image of rather neutral and negative propriety that made
up, in his long line, the average of wifehood and motherhood" (p.
244). What sharply sets her apart from this sternly upright figure is,
above all, the intensity, the note of real fear, with which she insists
on the claims of guiltlessness. In a revealing moment, she compares
the requirements of morality (and especially its prohibition of certain
bad acts) to the "water-tight" insides of an ocean liner: "Water-tight—
the biggest compartment of all? Why it's the best cabin and the main
deck and the engine-room and the steward's pantry! It's the ship
itself—it's the whole line. It's the captain's table and all one's lug-
gage—one's reading for the trip" (p. 37). Morality and its rules of
not hurting constitute for her a safe world in which to live and voyage,
protected against nameless dangers. If ever a breach were made in
the walls of that vessel, if even one seam should give way—but she
does not dare to imagine that. She avoids it. She sits in the liner
(perhaps the same vessel that Fanny refers to later as “Mr. Verver’s boat” [p. 206]) and reads only what the captain, or father, has provided for the trip.

So, surrounded by her innocence, she goes about straining to keep herself right, to make her life a flawless crystal bowl holding, as far as pleasures go, “nothing, one was obliged to recognize, but innocent pleasures, pleasures without penalties” (p. 34). The novel is dense with images for this splendid aspiration: images of crystal, of roundness, of childhood—and above all, references to the happy innocence which was, as the Prince says, “the state of our primitive parents before the fall” (p. 253).\(^2\) As innocent as these of any knowledge of evil, either for doing or for seeing, they live, she and her father Adam, sheltered by the immaculate white walls and the placid gardens of “monotonous Eaton Square” (p. 252), a place which is the appropriate embodiment of Maggie’s Edenic longing:\(^3\) “They knew, it might have appeared in these lights, absolutely nothing on earth worth speaking of—whether beautifully or cynically; and they would perhaps sometimes be a little less trying if they would only once for all peacefully admit that knowledge wasn’t one of their needs and that they were in fact constitutionally inaccessible to it. They were good children, bless their hearts, and the children of good children” (p. 252). In this passage, as in Maggie’s speech about the steamer, we have a sense that bulwarks of ignorance are being erected against some threat that presses in from the world; that knowledge of some truth is not simply absent, but is being actively refused for the sake of beatitude. (For Adam’s daughter was not born in Eden; and the “children of good children” must have, in virtue of being this, some connection with original sin.)

Maggie has reached a time in her life at which we might expect her to notice a difficulty attaching to her ideal. She has, specifically, married. She has undertaken to become a woman and to move from her father’s home into a husband’s. This time might be expected to be a time of conflicting obligations. For the daughter of so exacting a father, a daughter who, moreover, has served for most of her childhood and adolescence as her father’s sole traveling companion, friend, and partner, it might be expected to be a time of a painful breaking away from past attachments and commitments. To become a separate woman in her own right and the Prince’s wife, this woman, it is clear, will have to give pain. Even if, as Fanny says, natural attachments “may be intense and yet not prevent other intensities” (p. 293), the nature of this particular blood relation, as deep as any marriage, surely makes claims that would block other, complicating loves.\(^4\) But Maggie’s conscience so shrinks from the guilt of rendered
pain that she cannot bear at all to embark on this job of separation. Her resourceful imagination therefore discovers that in every conflict of loves or of values, one can, by the right sort of effort, reach an allegedly guiltless consistency and harmony—even "that ideal consistency on which her moral comfort almost at any time depended." What is this strategy? "To remain consistent," we are told, "she had always been capable of cutting down more or less her prior term" (p. 303). This image from syllogistic logic means, I suppose, that a promising way to resolve a conflict of obligations is always to rewrite the major premise of the practical syllogism so that the prior term no longer covers the entire extension of the middle term. Instead of "all B are A," we will now have, at most, "some B are A." By this device Maggie can cause a potentially troublesome value term no longer to apply in the given situation. She preserves her comfort by preserving her consistency; she preserves her consistency by "simplifying" her world and even her character, as the Prince observes (p. 243). In the case at hand, she solves the apparent conflict of marital love with filial duty by "cutting back" the claims of marriage, marrying in such a way that she can still remain her father's, "undivided" (p. 244).

So in a funny way, what began as the noble idea of failing in no duty and cherishing every value ends, consistently pushed through, in an enterprise that cuts back, cuts down, alters values to fit the claims of consistency. Any claim that seems capable of conflicting with her primary duty to her father—a duty which to this good daughter looks identical with morality itself—can be allowed to have validity only insofar as it accords with his requirements, consents, as she and her father say, to be "round" rather than angular, harmonious rather than discordant. She and her father are, she imagines, in a boat together, sailing away from "luxuriant complications" (p. 471).

Maggie's attachment to moral simplicity brings with it some disturbing consequences. The first is, plainly, an avoidance or suppression of her own adult sexuality. If she allows herself to mature and to experience marriage fully, then she opens herself immediately to complication and to the possibility of a break. She and her father will no longer be "undivided." Therefore Maggie, as she ostensibly matures, has cultivated, increasingly, an androgynous and even an ascetic persona. "Extraordinarily clear . . . in her prettiness" (p. 33), she is even described as "prim." Her father recalls that "when once she had been told before him, familiarly, that she resembled a nun, she had replied that she was delighted to hear it and would certainly try to" (p. 154). Later she is compared to "some holy image in a procession" (p. 494); her character is said by Fanny to be like "that little silver cross you once showed me, blest by the Holy Father, that you
always wear, out of sight, next your skin” (p. 376). This deliberate suppression of her womanliness is evidently promoted by her father, who associates womanliness with weakness, the absence of judgment, and the inability to give genuine companionship, and who, on the other hand, thinks of his daughter as his first companion in his spiritual adventures. He is an intellectual and artistic pioneer, a Cortez discovering a new world. When he asks himself whether his wife might have accompanied him in this adventure, he comes quickly to a conclusion that rules out the womanly (or at least women of his own class) altogether: “No companion of Cortez had presumably been a real lady: Mr. Verver allowed that historic fact to determine his inference” (p. 123).

To become a “real lady” is, then, to abandon her father, to wound him by ceasing to be his companion in all things. It is, I think, this moral claim, and not merely some vague girlish fear, that leads Maggie, even in marriage with a man to whom she is deeply attracted, so to repress her womanly responses that Fanny can confidently and, we feel, correctly assert that she has never really “had” the Prince (p. 285).6 This link is confirmed by James’s subtle use of water imagery in connection with both sexual passion and moral conflict or complication—frequently the two of these together. We have already noticed Maggie’s “water-tight” steamer, secured against a harm or a violation, and Mr. Verver’s boat, which sails safely away from complication. What we can now point out is that the first image is closely joined by Maggie herself to an admission that she does not respond to her husband’s “particular self”; in the second case, the complications from which Maggie imagines father and daughter sailing away are “husbands and wives” who had “made the air too tropical” (p. 471). Maggie even asks herself at this point, “Why . . . couldn’t they always live, so far as they lived together, in a boat? She felt in her face, with the question, the breath of a possibility that soothed her; they needed only know each other, henceforth, in the unmarried relation.” Sexuality is seen and feared as a ground of conflict, a threat against the moral safety of not harming. Maggie’s fear of water expresses the link between these two refusals—just as, in the passage in which the Prince and Charlotte renew their relationship, imagery of flooding (linked with a picture of breaking through or out of a perfect circle) indicates at once both their mutual sexual response and their acceptance of moral guilt: “Then of a sudden, through this tightened circle, as at the issue of a narrow strait into the sea beyond, everything broke up, broke down, gave way, melted and mingled. Their lips sought their lips, their pressure their response and their response their pressure; with a violence that had sighed itself
the next moment to the longest and deepest of stillnesses, they pas-
sonately sealed their pledge" (p. 237). This willingness to burst out
of the tight circle of harmony, to risk the ocean, is what we know
Maggie has so far lacked. In the case of her father's parallel avoidance
both of moral guilt and of a full sexual life, we are told in no uncertain
terms that the consequence has been physical impotence with his new
wife. With Maggie this is less clear and perhaps less important; what-
ever takes place physically, we are clear that there is a failure, on the
level of imagination and emotion, to respond as a separate adult
woman to her husband's own separate sexual presence. She is still
intact in her innocence; nothing is damaged. "She had been able to
marry without breaking, as she liked to put it, with her past" (p. 302).

Another consequence of Maggie's innocence is, plainly, an inability
in any area of her life to see values, including persons, emerge as
distinct ends in their own right. In every case they are rounded,
accommodated, not recognized insofar as their claims collide with
other claims. But this is plainly a way of viewing persons—those
recalcitrant, inveterately "angular" objects—that leads to a certain
neglect. First, there is the neglect of what Maggie calls her husband's
"unknown quantity, [his] particular self" (p. 33). She even tells him,
"You're not perhaps absolutely unique" (p. 35). And in the famous
image of the pagoda at the beginning of Part II she betrays for the
first time a curiosity about her situation, of which the Prince is so
prominent a part. She desires for the first time to peer inside this
odd, towerlike object which for so long has oddly occupied a place at
the center of her garden, and into which "no door appeared to give
access from the convenient garden-level" (p. 301). It is no wonder
that at this point she begins to see, too, that her moral imagination
is rather like an unsorted storeroom, full of "confused objects," "a
mess of vain things, congruous, incongruous," tossed in, in a heap,
and shut behind a locked door. "So it was that she had been getting
things out of the way" (p. 309).

And it is not only personal qualitative uniqueness that goes into
Maggie's storeroom; it is also, we need to add, personal separateness,
the value of each person and each end as a distinct item generating
its own claims. In the romance of Tristan, whose praise of love's
crystalline simplicity James very likely had in view, the lovers' cul-
tivation of simplicity makes them blind to the way in which each
commitment and each value is separate from and liable to conflict
with each other; in the same way, Maggie sees only roundness where
in real life there is angularity, and therefore misses the distinct claims
of each particular value. This is, strikingly, true even of her love for
her father, as we see from a brief, proleptic scene early in the novel.
Returning from church, Maggie finds her father besieged by Mrs. Rance, an irritating woman who wants to marry him. For the first time Maggie perceives that her own marriage has begun to entail for Adam the pain of abandonment and of harrassment from would-be companions. And strangely, this idea suddenly gives her, also for the first time, a sense of her father as a separate person: “He was on her mind, he was even in a manner on her hands—as a distinct thing, that is, from being, where he had always been, merely deep in her heart and in her life; too deep down, as it were, to be disengaged, contrasted or opposed; in short objectively presented” (p. 131). Moral objectivity about the value of a person (or, presumably, any other source of moral claims) requires, evidently, the ability to see that item as distinct from other items; this in turn requires the ability to see it not as a deep part of an innocent harmony but as a value that can be contrasted or opposed to others, whose demands can potentially conflict with other demands. In making her father’s law normative for a world of harmlessness, Maggie has, ironically, failed to see him. It is not until much later that she really takes this in; her next move here is to resolve the conflict and restore the “harmony” by giving him Charlotte as a wife. But because of this scene, we are aware of her maneuvers as self-deceptive and false. Knowledge of a good, that is to say a value, in the world requires, we see, knowledge of evil, that is to say of the possibility of conflict, disorder, the contingent necessity of breaking or harming. Without eating this fruit she is just a child, ignorant of the value of the good as well.

We are now in a position to appreciate one of the oddest and most striking features of James’s portrait of this idealistic pair of Americans: the inveterate tendency of both father and daughter to assimilate people, in their imagination and deliberation, to fine objets d’art. This matter is given considerable emphasis in James’s design. One of the most striking incursions of the authorial voice into a narrative told, for the most part, through the consciousness of one or another of its characters begins, “Nothing, perhaps, might affect us as queerer, had we time to look into it, than this application of the same measure of value to such different pieces of property as old Persian carpets, say, and new human acquisitions” (p. 160). And such a strange way of valuing is present too in our very first glimpse of Maggie, where she speaks of her husband as “a rarity, a beauty, an object of price. . . . You’re what they call a morceau de musée” (p. 35). We are, of course, invited to take the time ourselves to look into this odd matter.

We soon realize that this propensity for the aestheticization of persons does not precisely indicate that the Ververs neglect the moral,
or reduce the moral to the aesthetic. Indeed, it is agreed all round that they are distinguished for their keen moral sense, even for their strict moralism. It is rather that the peculiar nature of their moral aim, with its extreme emphasis on flawless living and, because of this, on consistency and harmony, is best supported by a view of persons that tends to assimilate their properties to certain salient properties of works of art. Works of art are precious objects, objects of high value. And yet it is a remarkable feature of our attention to works of art that it appears to spread itself round smoothly and harmoniously. I can, visiting a museum, survey many fine objects with appropriate awe and tenderness. I can devote myself now to one, now to another, without the sense that the objects make conflicting claims against my love and care. If one day I spend my entire museum visit gazing at Turners, I have not incurred a guilt against the Blakes in the next room; nor have I failed in a duty toward Bartok by my loving attention to Hindemith. To live with works of art is to live in a world enormously rich in value, without a deep risk of infidelity, disloyalty, or any conflict which might lead to these. It is the Ververs’ brilliantly resourceful idea that the moral life, too, can be flawless and innocent of violation, while remaining full of value, if only persons can be made to resemble aesthetic objects, things to be displayed in a gallery for innocent attention. Closely linked with Mr. Verver’s aestheticization of Charlotte is a wish “for some idea, lurking in the vast freshness of the night, at the breath of which disparities would submit to fusion” (p. 166). This idea—that he should marry Charlotte so as to restore the general harmony—comes to him during the very moment at which he sees the precious Damascene tiles “successively, and oh so tenderly, unmuffled and revealed,” until they “lay there at last in their full harmony and their venerable splendor” (p. 172). It is surely the splendid order and harmony of these aesthetic objects (each tile lies uncompetitively side by side with its neighbors; the demands of tender attention to all can be faithfully met) which Mr. Verver covets for his human life; and coveting it, he turns Charlotte, by marriage, into the finest piece of all. For Maggie as well, the wonderful idea is that a husband who resembles a “fine piece” can be packed and unpacked, stored and brought out for show—or, if he should become too “big,” be sent to American City to be “buried” (pp. 36–37); in none of these circumstances will its presence place a strain on the deliberation of the collector or spoil the harmony of the museum, or life, which testifies to his rare powers of perception.11

In short, then, we have begun with a noble and venerable moral ideal—not just the fancy of a childish girl, but a picture of personal conduct and personal rightness that has very deep roots in the moral
tradition of our entire culture. (It is not fortuitous that this combination of moralism and excessive simplicity is attributed to the American characters in this novel—nor that these Americans should be as resourceful in technical deliberation as they are naive in emotional response.) We are shown that this ideal, followed out to its strictest conclusion, generates an extraordinary blindness to value and ends by subordinating the particular claim of each commitment and love to the claims of harmony. And that is, we see, the fancy of a childish girl. It does not work on its own terms, since it does wrong to persons and commits acts of blindness and cruelty. (It is not inappropriate that Maggie and her father, as well as the other pair, are, in effect, charged with disloyalty and adultery [see p. 231]—for each has been unfaithful to the commitments involved in making a marriage just because of this childlike unwillingness to break away or to experience guilt.) And it is morally objectionable in that it commits the holder to a systematic neglect of certain features of persons—namely, both their separateness and their qualitative uniqueness—on which their specific personal value might be thought to rest. The richness of the novel's moral vision lies in the way in which it both shows us the splendor of a rigorous moralism (for this simple vision attracts not only the Americans but to some extent every major character in the novel) and at the same time erodes our confidence in this ideal by displaying the guilt involved in such innocence. There is, as Maggie later says, an "awful mixture in things" (p. 497).

The world of The Golden Bowl is a fallen world—a world, that is, in which innocence cannot be and is not safely preserved, a world where values and loves are so pervasively in tension one with another that there is no safe human expectation of a perfect fidelity to all throughout a life. (This novel works out this idea in the sphere of human personal love, but The Princess Casamassima shows us that James is ready to extend it more broadly to include nonpersonal commitments and values.) In this world our first choice as adults is the choice to pursue our personal goals at the expense of a separation from and a break with the parent. And we cannot ever count on the fact that our love of a husband will not require the spiritual death of a best friend and mentor, that fidelity to a wife will not require cruelty to a former lover. There are better and worse choices, naturally, within this tangled world; but it is childlike to refuse to see that it is in this way tangled, for this is a feature of our situation as creatures with values operating in the world of nature. As James wrote in the preface to What Maisie Knew: "No themes are so human as those that reflect for us, out of the confusion of life, the close connexion of bliss and bale, of the things that help with the things that hurt, so dangling
before us for ever that bright hard metal, of so strange an alloy, one face of which is somebody's right and ease and the other somebody's pain and wrong."

I am claiming, then, that this novel works out a secular analogue of the idea of original sin by showing a human being's relation to value in the world to be, fundamentally and of contingent necessity, one of imperfect fidelity and therefore of guilt; by showing us ourselves as precious, valuing beings who, under the strains imposed by the intertwining of our routes to value in the world, become cracked and flawed. Guilt toward value is here, if not literally a priori, still a feature of our humanness which attaches to us as a structural feature of our situation in nature and in the family, prior to the specific choices and failures that we enter upon in a particular life. The Prince says about crystal, "Its beauty is its being crystal. But its hardness is certainly its safety." On this analogy, human beings, like the golden bowl, are beautiful but not safe: they have ideals, but they split. Charlotte's question about the bowl was, "If it's so precious, how comes it to be cheap?" The answer to this question is the story of four human lives.

This novel, I have indicated, is about the development of a woman. To be a woman, to give herself to her husband, Maggie will need to come to see herself as something cracked, imperfect, unsafe, a vessel with a hole through which water may pass, a steamer compartment no longer tightly sealed. Later, as her perception is shifting, she will in fact see herself as a house not perfectly closed against the elements: "She saw round about her, through the chinks of the shutters, the hard glare of nature" (p. 504). And in the world of nature, what Maggie sees is the suffering of Charlotte, caused by her act. Her guilt has entered her vision.

The second half of the novel is the story of Maggie's initiation into knowledge of her fallen world. Beginning to live (see p. 287) is, for her, beginning to see that meaningful commitment to a love in the world can require the sacrifice of one's own moral purity. To regain her husband she must damage Charlotte. We are fully aware, as is she, that her cruelty and dishonesty to Charlotte are in no way purified or effaced by the fact of Charlotte's own offense. Her love, unlike the ideal of the Tristanic lover, must live on cunning and treachery; it requires the breaking of moral rules and a departure from the comfortable garden.

It would be an important and fascinating task to trace the details of this development: the way, for example, in which exposure to conflict and a womanly exposure to sexuality are linked, here as be-
fore, in the imagery of water, as Maggie the passenger becomes a swimmer; the way she comes to see that the value of persons and objects is partially constituted by the risk they bring of pain and opposition—that “any deep-seated passion has its pangs as well as its joys, and that we are made by its aches and anxieties most richly conscious of it” (p. 304); the way in which the departure from Eden brings with it the possibility of certain moral emotions which were unknown in that garden—among them shame, jealousy, tenderness, and respect; the way in which, from having seen only clear, splendid objects, Maggie learns, inhabiting a human world, to be a “mistress of shades” (p. 396), a reader of nuance and complexity. (There are no books in Eden.)

But although we do not have space to go into all of this, what we now must notice is that these new dimensions of perception and response begin to amount, strangely, for us and for Maggie, as things go on, not so much to a way of living with imperfection as to a new way of getting at perfection. Maggie, still as exigent and idealistic as ever, discovers a way of remaining a splendidly pure and safe object within this fallen world, “as hard . . . as a little pointed diamond” (p. 398). (The alert reader will have noticed that the quotation with which this paper began came not from the novel's early chapters or later reflections on them, but from a very late point, at which Maggie is already deliberating in the newer and riskier way.) We might describe the new ideal this way: See clearly and with high intelligence. Respond with the vibrant sympathy of a vividly active imagination. If there are conflicts, face them squarely and with keen perception. Choose as well as you can for overt action, but at every moment remember the more comprehensive duties of the imagination and emotions. If love of your husband requires hurting and lying to Charlotte, then do these cruel things, making the better choice. But never cease, all the while, to be richly conscious of Charlotte's pain and to bear, in imagination and feeling, the full burden of your guilt as the cause of that pain. If life is a tragedy (see pp. 510, 502), see that; respond to that fact with pity for others and fear for yourself. Never for a moment close your eyes or dull your feelings. The ideal is summarized by James in his preface to The Princess Casamassima as one of “being finely aware and richly responsible”; it is nowhere more fittingly and fully embodied than in the long passage of deliberation in which Maggie, picturing vividly Charlotte's silent suffering, decides to urge her husband to speak to Charlotte once more before her departure (pp. 519–22). Here we feel that Maggie's keen sensitivity to the values of love and friendship, which she herself is violating, redeems and transfigures the cruelty of her act. If she acts badly of
necessity, at least she takes upon herself the conscious guilt for that badness and, by her sense of guilt, shows herself as a person to whom badness is odious. It is not surprising that Maggie repeatedly imagines herself as a sacrificial figure who bears the pain and guilt of the situation through the fine responsibility of her consciousness. This idea of bearing guilt for love's sake is evidently the source of the comparisons of Maggie to the scapegoat of ancient Greek religion, who saves the community by bearing its pollution (p. 457), and also to Christ, who took upon himself the sins of the world (p. 378). The difference in her case is that she assumes this world's burden of sin not by going into exile or dying but by sinning, and by seeing that she is sinning, and by bearing, for love, her own imperfection.

But as the end approaches, we are troubled by our sense that this is, after all, a new way of being innocent. We are troubled by Maggie's comparison of herself to a diamond, more angular than the original crystal, but even more safely hard.\textsuperscript{15} We note that she is still fond of the language of moral absolutes: "‘consummate’ was [a] term she privately applied" (p. 540). She has not so much altered her moral categories as rearranged the items to which she attaches these favored terms; not so much accepted evil in herself as seen a new way to be (internally) safely innocent. We have been put on our guard against projects of safety and projects of perfection, so we wonder whether Maggie's new ideal has itself a crack in it.

And now, as we reflect in this way, it should strike us that in fact, according to the last scene of the novel, Maggie has not yet, as she approaches the final parting with Charlotte and her father and the final confrontation with Amerigo, eaten the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. It is still hanging before her, just before the end, "the golden fruit that had shone from afar" (p. 546). So the new moral ideal cannot really have been the fruit of that eating, and Maggie, until the very end, is still in some significant sense an innocent, though more responsive and more womanly than before.

What is, then, Maggie's innocent failure of recognition, and what can we discover in the final scene that will explain to us why here, and only here, James presents her as falling from purity? We notice, in her last encounter with Adam and Charlotte, some significant signals. Aesthetic images for persons reappear and multiply. There is talk of the "human furniture required, aesthetically, by such a scene" (p. 541); there is talk of the emptiness of a house with "half of its best things removed" (p. 543). There is, above all, a marked aestheticization of Charlotte as "incomparable," "too splendid." We are forced to ask why, at this point of triumph for Maggie's new ideal rightness, she should reimport the techniques of the old innocence—
why, after so deeply responding to Charlotte's solitude and pain, and after urging Amerigo to do the same, she should suddenly retreat behind these old refusals. An answer begins to emerge along with the question; we begin to sense the discovery for which James is preparing us.

Amerigo has refused Charlotte not only his love, but also his response and his vision. He refuses to see her pain; he allows it to remain at a distance, receiving her as “Royalty” rather than as a woman who has arranged her life around her passion for him. What we now begin to see is that Maggie was wrong to think that it could, should be otherwise. The demands of his love for Maggie will not, in fact, allow the moral luxury of clear sight and generous response. To love one woman adequately he cannot always be tormented by a consciousness of the other. He must, then, of necessity banish the other, wronging her not only, like Maggie, in act, but also in the depths of his imagination and his vision. The demands of the new ideal of seeing are not always compatible with an adequate fulfillment of each of our commitments, for some loves are exclusive and demand a blindness in other quarters. Instead of being “finely aware and richly responsible” we may, in fact, have to become, as lovers, grossly insensitive and careless with respect to other, incompatible claims. The mere fact of being deeply engaged forces a blindness. The moment at which Maggie finally tastes the “golden fruit” is such a moment: on both sides, obtuseness feeds the triumph of love.

’Isn’t she too splendid?’ she simply said, offering it to explain and to finish. ’Oh, splendid!’ With which he came over to her.

’That’s our help, you see,’ she added—to point further her moral.

It kept him before her therefore, taking in—or trying to—what she so wonderfully gave. He tried, too clearly, to please her—to meet her in her own way; but with the result only that, close to her, her face kept before him, his hands holding her shoulders, his whole act enclosing her, he presently echoed: ‘ “See”? I see nothing but you.’ And the truth of it had, with this force, after a moment, so strangely lighted his eyes that, as for pity and dread of them, she buried her own in his breast. (P. 547)

The Prince, then, sees nothing but Maggie. And Maggie, seeing this singleness of vision, reacts to her sight of Amerigo as to a tragedy—with “pity and dread.” For she sees, in truth, that he does see only her, that she and he together have brought about, within his imagination, an extinction of vision and a failure of response; and that this has happened of tragic necessity because of the requirements of his commitment to her. Long ago, Maggie did not see that choice among competing values could ever be tragic. Then she saw
that it could be tragic, but thought that a heroine of tragedy could still avoid tragedy inwardly by being richly responsible to everything in intellect and feeling. Now she sees in her husband the genuine, unredeemed article, a "hero" violating love for the sake of love, purified by no inner sympathy, no note of higher consciousness.

But at this moment, with the "golden fruit" of knowledge hanging there before her, she discovers, too, that she cannot gaze on this tragedy like the perfectly responsive and responsible spectator, seeing and feeling for everyone, and still have the knowledge of love for which she has sacrificed. Aristotle argued that tragedy brings illumination concerning values: through the "pity and dread" inspired by tragic events, we learn about what matters to us, and we are clarified. Maggie, in the last sentence of the novel, recognizes that the keen vision and acknowledgment of the good tragic spectator are themselves values which can, in the world of nature, collide with other values. To see all, to be present to all, requires of the spectator a narrowness of love; to surrender to love requires an infidelity of the soul's eyes. To look will be to judge him; to judge him is to fall short of the fullness of his passion. "'Thank goodness, then,' said Charlotte, 'that if there be a crack we know it!'" (p. 109). Here Maggie sees beyond her, seeing that the gifts of love require a gentleness that goes beyond, and covers, knowledge.

So she makes for him the last and greatest sacrifice of all. She gives him her purity of vision, her diamond hardness—as he had given up, for her, his vision of Charlotte’s humanity. Once he had, long before, asked Fanny Assingham to give him her eyes, meaning to lend him the higher keenness of her American moral sense (p. 47). Now his American wife gives him her eyes in fact, burying her own vision, therefore her perfect rightness, in his body.16

And does one, as Charlotte asked, make a present of an object which contains, to one's knowledge, a flaw? To that Maggie herself has had, in the deeper moments of her connoisseurship, an answer: "The infirmity of art was the candour of affection, the grossness of pedigree the refinement of sympathy; the ugliest objects, in fact, as a general thing, were the bravest, the tenderest mementos, and, as such, figured in glass cases apart, worthy doubtless of the home, but not worthy of the temple—dedicated to the grimacing, not to the clear-faced, gods" (p. 406).

What are we to say about this? Is there, then, a moral ideal in this novel, or isn't there? Do the insights of the prefaces and of Part II stand or fall? I want to say that they stand, that there is an ideal here. It is not altogether undermined; it is still precious. It is only shown to be, like everything human, imperfect. (And perhaps, as the passage
just mentioned suggests, this flaw in it is partly constitutive of its specifically human value and beauty.) The end of the novel does not tell us that it is pointless to become “finely aware and richly responsible”; it only warns us against turning this norm into a new form of watertight purity by showing us that a deep love may sometimes require an infidelity against even this adult spiritual standard.

Well, how do we know? When are we to pursue this ideal and when to let it go? How much is a deep love worth, and under what circumstances is it worth a blinding? What boundaries are we to draw? What priorities can we fix? These, I take it, are the little girl’s questions, resurfacing now, again, at yet another level—as they will resurface so long as the nature of little girls is still the same. She wants to be told ahead of time exactly what’s right and when. She wants to know exactly how much she loves this person, and exactly what choices this entails. To counter her insistent demand, James repeatedly, in the second half of the novel, holds up to us a different picture: that of an actress who finds, suddenly, that her script is not written in advance and that she must “quite heroically” improvise her role. “Preparation and practice had come but a short way; her part opened out, and she invented from moment to moment what to say and to do” (p. 322). The final understanding to which his criticism of little girls transports us is that this is what adult deliberation is and should be. And there’s no safety in that, no safety at all.

II

Suppose that this novel does explore, as I claim, significant aspects of human moral experience. Why, it may still be asked, do we need a text like this one for our work on these issues? Why, as people with an interest in understanding and self-understanding, couldn’t we derive everything we require from a text that stated and argued for these conclusions about human beings plainly and simply, without the complications of character and conversation, without the stylistic and structural complexities of the literary—not to mention the particular obliquities, ambiguities, and parentheses of this particular literary text? Why do I wish to enter on behalf of this text the claim that it is philosophical? And even should this claim be granted, why should we believe it to be a major or irreplaceable work of moral philosophy, whose place could not be fully filled by texts which we are accustomed to call philosophical?

There are really two questions here. One is a particular question about the claim of this particular novel; another is a more general question about the philosophical importance of literary works gen-
erally—that is, of works which share with this work certain general features in virtue of which they are commonly classified and studied apart from admitted philosophical works. I shall not really attempt to answer the second question here, insofar as it ranges beyond the first. Among the particular features of this text on which I shall stake its claim to philosophical importance, some are, indeed, shared with other related novels and with tragic dramas; others are peculiarly its own, or belong to it in a particularly high degree. I therefore shall speak only about *The Golden Bowl* and James's later style; I leave to the reader the job of exploring the wider consequences of what I shall say for our conventional distinction between philosophy and literature.

First, to prevent confusion, we must have some rough story about what moral philosophy and the job of moral philosophy are—for on some accounts of these things, particularly the Kantian account, this text obviously falls entirely outside of moral philosophy in virtue of the empirical and contingent character of its content. We would like to find some way of characterizing the aims of moral philosophy that would be generally enough agreed not to prejudice the answer to our question about this text, and yet specific enough to give us some purchase on our question. I propose, therefore, that we begin with the very simple Aristotelian idea that ethics is the search for a specification of the good life for a human being. This is a study whose aim, as Aristotle insists, is not just theoretical understanding but also practice. (We study not just for the sake of learning but also to see our "target" and ourselves more clearly, so that we can ourselves live and act better.) Nor can the theoretical aims of this study be accomplished in isolation from the practical aspect, for the working-through of the alternative theoretical conceptions is itself a Socratic process, which demands the active engagement of the interlocutor's own moral intuitions and responses. The aim of the study will be to produce an intelligent ordering of the "appearances"—the experiences and sayings of human agents and choosers. It cannot, then, in any way be cut off from the study of the empirical and social conditions of human life; indeed, ethics, in Aristotle's conception, is a part of the social study of human beings.

I choose this conception of moral inquiry not only because I find it appealing and broadly correct, not only because I hope that it will be sufficiently inclusive to command wide agreement, but also because James describes his conception of his own authorial task in language which brings him into intimate connection with the Aristotelian enterprise. In the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, he describes his end as the production of an "intelligent report" of
human experience, i.e., of "our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures." We can then hope to be assessing James's text against the background of a conception of moral writing that is at once powerful and one to which he himself lays claim.

I can here do no more than to sketch out the very general lines along which I would like to argue the case for *The Golden Bowl*, but I hope that the programmatic character of these remarks will prove suggestive rather than frustrating. The first claim concerns the moral content of this text, as I have elucidated it in Part I; the second centers on the nature of the moral abilities involved in reading and interpreting it. (This does not, as I hope will soon become evident, really amount to any claim that one can sever this novel's form from its content.)

First, then, the claims of this text concerning value and imperfection are views whose plausibility and importance are difficult to assess without the sustained exploration of particular lives that a text such as this one makes possible. The claim that our loves and commitments are so related that infidelity and failure of response are more or less inevitable features even of the best examples of loving is a claim for which a philosophical text would have a hard time mounting direct argument. It is only when, as here, we study the loves and attentions of a finely responsive mind such as Maggie's, through all the contingent complexities of a tangled human life, that the force of these ideas begins to make itself felt. When we have before us a consciousness who responds well and keenly, and when we see that even for such a consciousness the golden bowl is broken—then we have something like a persuasive argument that these features hold of human life in general. It is not only, then, the novel's capacity to explore the length and breadth of a life, but the combination of this exploratory power with the presence of a character who will count as a high case of the human response to value, that creates the telling argument. James tells us emphatically that the moral claims of his texts depend centrally on the presence inside them of such high characters, both agents and interpreters of their own lives, whose readings of life we will count as high exemplars of our own. In the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, he writes of his choice of a hero: "The person capable of feeling in the given case more than another of what is to be felt for it, and so serving in the highest degree to record it dramatically and objectively, is the only sort of person on whom we can count not to betray, to cheapen or, as we say, give away the value and beauty of the thing. By so much as the affair matters for some such individual, by so much do we get the best there is of it" (p. 14).
Here we see James deftly, as often, drawing together the good person with the good character, the good reader in life with the good reader inside a text; and both of these in turn suggest parallel norms of response and vision for the reader of this character and this text, who must be a moral being of the appropriate sort or else he (or she) will clearly cheapen the value of the text. Last of all in this assembled group of consciousnesses, and behind them all, stands, James makes clear, the author, whose responsibility it all ultimately is, and whose conscious testimony will either reveal the value of life or by neglect cheapen it. The author’s struggle to express life’s value and also its mystery is, in this preface, closely coupled with and likened to the task of the character who must respond to the confusions of his world; and the author, of course, is the one from whom the character’s struggle and sense of life must flow. Of the author he now goes on to write, “If you haven’t, for fiction, the root of the matter in you, haven’t the sense of life and the penetrating imagination, you are a fool in the very presence of the revealed and assured; but . . . if you are so armed you are not really helpless, not without your resource, even before mysteries abysmal” (p. 23). Similarly, at the end of the preface to The Golden Bowl, he speaks of the author as striving toward a high sort of moral responsibility for the works which are his “acts,” striving with “his active sense of life” (p. 18), which is “the silver clue to the whole labyrinth of his consciousness,” so to express the “general adventure” of that intelligence that a new reading, a renewed confrontation with the completed act or text, will leave no room for “mere gaping contrition” (p. 20).

We appear to have moved by now far beyond our immediate point and into the labyrinth of James’s complex conception of his authorial task. But it is, in fact, not possible to speak about the moral view revealed within this text without speaking at the same time of the created text, which exemplifies and expresses the responses of an imagination that means to care for and to put itself there for us. “Art,” James writes, “is nothing if not exemplary,” “care . . . nothing if not active”; and the “example” in The Golden Bowl is, of course, not merely the adventures of the consciousness of one or another character, as our emphasis heretofore may have suggested. It is the entire text, revealed as the imaginative effort of a human character who displays himself here as the sort of character who reads lives and texts so as not to cheapen their value. I claim that the views uncovered in this text derive their power from the way in which they emerge as the ruminations of such a high and fine mind concerning the tangled mysteries of these imaginary lives. And we could hardly begin to see whether such views were or were not exemplary for us if this mind
simply stated its conclusions flatly, if it did not unfold before us the richness of its reflection, allowing us to follow and to share its adventures.

It is a further fact about the views of this text that they are views very seldom put forward and seriously examined in works of moral philosophy. And this, I claim, is no accident. Any view of deliberation that holds that it is, first and foremost, a matter of intuitive perception and improvisatory response, where a fixed antecedent ordering or ranking among values is to be taken as a sign of immaturity rather than of excellence; any view that holds that it is the job of the adult agent to approach a complex situation responsively, with keen vision and alert feelings, prepared, if need be, to alter his or her prima facie conception of the good in the light of the new experience, is likely to clash with certain classical aims and assertions of moral philosophy, which has usually claimed to make progress on our behalf precisely by extricating us from this bewilderment in the face of the present moment, and by setting us up in a watertight system of rules or a watertight procedure of calculation which will be able to settle troublesome cases, in effect, before the fact. Philosophers who have defended the primacy of intuitive perception are few. And when they have appeared, they have naturally also concluded—as does, for example, Aristotle—that moral theory cannot be a form of scientific knowledge that orders the “matter of the practical” into an elegant antecedent system; and they have also naturally turned to works of literature, as Aristotle turns to tragic drama, for illumination concerning practical excellence. In fact, Aristotle makes it very clear that his own writing provides at most a “sketch” or “outline” of the good life, whose content must be given by experience, and whose central claims can be clarified only by appeal to life and to works of literature.18

To show forth the force and truth of the Aristotelian claim that “the decision rests with perception,” we need, then—either side by side with a philosophical “outline” or inside it—texts which display to us the complexity, the indeterminacy, the sheer difficulty of moral choice, and which show us, as this text does concerning Maggie Verver, the childishness, the refusal of life involved in fixing everything in advance according to some system of inviolable rules. This task cannot be easily accomplished by texts which speak in universal terms—for one of the difficulties of deliberation stressed by this view is that of grasping the uniqueness of the new particular. Nor can it easily be done by texts which speak with the hardness or plainness which moral philosophy has traditionally chosen for its style—for how can this style at all convey the way in which the “matter of the
practical" appears before the agent in all of its bewildering com-
plexity, without its morally salient features stamped on its face? And
how, without conveying this, can it convey the active adventure of the
deliberative intelligence, the "yearnings of thought and excursions of
sympathy" (p. 521) that make up much of our actual moral life?\footnote{19}

Finally, without a presentation of the mystery, conflict, and riski-
ness of the lived deliberative situation, it will be hard for philosophy
to convey the peculiar value and beauty of choosing humanly well—
for we have suggested that the flawed and unclear object has its own,
and not simply a lower, sort of beauty. James himself expresses this
point, again in the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*: "It seems
probable that if we were never bewildered there would never be a
story to tell about us; we should partake of the superior nature of
the all-knowing immortals whose annals are dreadfully dull so long
as flurried humans are not, for the positive relief of bored Olympians,
mixed up with them" (p. 11). It is this idea that human deliberation
is constantly an *adventure* of the personality, undertaken against ter-
rific odds and among frightening mysteries, *and* that this is, in fact,
the source of much of its beauty and richness, that texts written in a
traditional philosophical style have the most insuperable difficulty
conveying to us. If our moral lives are "stories" in which mystery and
risk play a central and a valuable role, then it may well seem that the
"intelligent report" of those lives requires the abilities and techniques
of the teller of stories. (And in this way we might come to see James
not so much as a novelist-by-profession who, because that was his
profession, expressed in that form his moral vision, as an intelligent
maker of a moral vision who embodied it in novels because only in
that form could he fully and fittingly express it.)

These remarks suggest, then, that there are candidates for moral
truth which the plainness of traditional moral philosophy lacks the
power to express, and which *The Golden Bowl* expresses wonderfully.
Insofar as the goal of moral philosophy is to give us understanding
of the human good through a scrutiny of alternative conceptions of
the good, this text and others like it would then appear to be impor-
tant parts of this philosophy. But we said at the beginning of this
section that the aim of moral theory was not simply theoretical un-
derstanding, but also something connected with practice—meaning
by this that the theoretical study of the human good is inseparable
from, cannot be conducted in isolation from, a Socratic working-
through of the interlocutor's or reader's own moral intuitions that
will leave this person clearer about his or her own moral aims.\footnote{20} What
we must now take into account, then, is the activity and response of
the reader of this text—an activity to which James makes frequent
and emphatic reference, both by direct remarks about what "we," or some concerned observer, or someone whose attention to the character qualifies the character's isolation (see p. 111) might find to say and to feel about these happenings; and also by the inclusion within the text of two characters, the Assinghams (Fanny alone among the characters is referred to as "our friend" [p. 410]), whose function, like that of the Greek tragic chorus, seems to be that of concerned interpretation of the events to which they bear witness. (The connection between this imaginary reader and the imagination of the responsible author is suggested at several points and brought out most strikingly in the preface, whose main theme is the author's rereading of his own created text.) Our question must be, What sort of activity on the reader's part will best fulfill the aims of the Socratic assessment process?

What I now want to suggest is that the adventure of the reader of this novel, like the adventure of the intelligent characters inside it, involves valuable aspects of human moral experience that are not tapped by traditional books of moral philosophy; in this way as well it would be necessary for the completion of the enterprise of working through all of our moral intuitions. For this novel calls upon and also develops our ability to confront mystery with the cognitive engagement of both thought and feeling. To work through these sentences and these chapters is to become involved in an activity of exploration and unravelling that uses abilities, especially abilities of emotion and imagination, rarely tapped by philosophical texts. But these abilities have, at the very least, a good claim to be regarded as important parts of the moral assessment process. In his preface James speaks of a reading of his novel as "the very record and mirror of the general adventure of one's intelligence" (p. 20). If traditional philosophical texts do not record this whole adventure, call upon all of the abilities that are engaged in it, this would be a good reason to think that a Socratic enterprise requires texts like this one for its completion.

We have spoken so far as if the ideal reader of this text were like the "ideal" Maggie Verver of the novel's second part. He or she would, then, be someone keenly alive in thought and feeling to every nuance of the situation, actively seeing and caring for all the parties concerned—and therefore safely right in the perfection of his or her attention. But we know already that this "ideal" is not the work's entire story about human practical wisdom. We know that where there is great love in one direction there may also be, in another direction, a tragically necessary blindness. We now want to know whether this feature of our moral life also finds its place in the author's way of being responsible to his created story and in the reader's
way of responding to his text. In other words, does the text itself acknowledge the flawed nature of the consciousness that produced it and elicit from us in turn, as readers, an acknowledgment of our own imperfection?

I want to claim that it does, in two ways. First, with this text, as perhaps with no other in English literature, we are struck at every point by the incompleteness and inadequacy of our own attention. We notice the way we are inclined to miss things, to pass over things, to leave out certain interpretative possibilities while pursuing others. This consciousness of our own flaws and blind spots (created in the first place by the sheer difficulty of James's later style) is heightened by Fanny's regular self-criticism, her ongoing revision of her previous, defective "readings." It is nourished, too, by the frequent reminders of the author-reader's "we" that our concern has its limits. Phrases such as "at the moment we are concerned with him" (p. 29), "at the particular instant of our being again concerned with her" (p. 191), "had we time to go into it" (p. 160), "which we have just found in our path" (p. 137) recall to us the fact that our path is only one path and that we cannot humanly follow all paths through these tangled lives at all times. The authorial voice also reminds us that, even when we do attend, our attention, like all human attention, is interested and interpretative. We are told that such-and-such is "the main interest . . . for us" (p. 246) in these events, and we work through an account of "these gropings and fittings of his conscience and his experience, that we have attempted to set in order here" (p. 242). In all these moments, the author places himself humanly within the world of his text and links us to himself as limited and human adventurers.

It is the explicit design of this novel that this should be so. For James tells us in his preface that he has elected to avoid "the mere muffled majesty of irresponsible 'authorship'" and to become a responsible (and, we suspect, therefore guilty) agent in the midst of his work. "It's not," he continues, "that the muffled majesty of authorship doesn't here ostensibly reign; but I catch myself again shaking it off and disavowing the pretence of it while I get down into the arena and do my best to live and breathe and rub shoulders and converse with the persons engaged in the struggle" (p. 8)—persons whom he soon describes as "the more or less bleeding participants." James here implicitly criticizes a tradition in the English novel for having created, in the authorial voice, a persona who is not humanly finite and who therefore does not show us a way to the understanding of our own finitude. The Golden Bowl looks, then, like an attempt to move the novel itself out of the Eden of pure intelligent responsibility.
Central to this task, and of at least as much importance for it as the scattered first-person remarks, is the fact that the intelligence animating this text, in virtue of its choice to engage itself with and, we might say, to care for one or another of the characters, has left beyond itself and, therefore, us certain deep mysteries into which our adventuring consciousness has no access. As we carefully follow and respond to Maggie, seeing this world through her intelligent eyes, we hardly notice that we ourselves are rapidly becoming as distant from Charlotte, and as blind to the inner life of her pain, as Maggie herself. It is sometimes said by critics that the second part of this novel shows Charlotte to be a morally superficial character with an impoverished inner life. It would be more accurate, and more in keeping with the announced spirit of James’s design, to say that it is not so much Charlotte who is revealed as superficial; it is Maggie, and therefore we, who are revealed as superficial and impoverished with respect to Charlotte. Charlotte and her pain are, at the end, not revealed but hidden. Our active care for Maggie and our acceptance of the invitation to see as Maggie sees have brought upon us (upon the “we” composed of author and reader) a blindness with respect to this part of the moral world. (The second and last time we do get a direct feeling for the inner life of this woman, James stresses the oddness of the event by calling this “the particular instant of our being again concerned with her” [p. 191].) James tells us that our responsive attention, when we choose to bestow it, “qualifies” the “isolation” of his characters (p. 111)—much as in life, our solitary separateness is qualified, though never removed, by the fact of another person’s care. Charlotte, lost to our attention, becomes at the end our pagoda: a “splendid” object with its “affirmed presence” (p. 539), “throned” in our midst (p. 540)—and here James significantly adds, “as who should say.” As who, indeed, should say. For into that isolation and pain and silence our intelligent conversation and response do not enter. No door appears to give access from the convenient garden level. The “great decorated surface” remains “consistently impene- trable and inscrutable” (p. 301).

So, as readers, with the author as our guide and accomplice, we eat the golden fruit. With pity and dread we bury our eyes.

NOTES

1 For ease of reference, I cite all page numbers from the Penguin Modern Classics editions of The Golden Bowl (Harmondsworth, 1966), The Princess Casamassima (Harmondsworth, 1977), and What Maisie Knew (Harmondsworth, 1966), which I take to
be the most generally available. In this case there is a small textual discrepancy between the Penguin text and the text of the New York edition, whose origin and authority I have not yet been able to figure out because of the lack of such information in the Penguin. (The New York edition reads, "the bowl with all our happiness in it.") I do not believe that this discrepancy, which serves only to underline Maggie's aspiration toward a general harmony of all features of her world, alters my point. Concerning the fact that this passage comes from the end rather than the beginning of the novel, and concerning its role there, see p. 55.

2 The Prince is here referring to the anomalous innocence to which he and Charlotte are forced to pretend because of the innocence of the other pair. References to the Edenic condition of the Ververs are striking throughout, and too frequent to enumerate. (For only a few examples—in addition to pp. 252 and 546, discussed in the text—see pp. 80, 153, 235–36, 286, 292–93, 375.)

3 Eaton Square, structurally solid, immaculately white, and "synonymous for respectability" even in and before James's time (Susan Jenkins, Landlords of London [London, 1975], p. 82), represents for the pair a retreat from worldly complication: "The world, by still another beautiful perversity of their chance, included Portland Place without including to anything like the same extent Eaton Square" (pp. 241–42). It should be noticed, too, that Maggie at first attempts, by interior decoration, to make Portland Place embody her moral ambition: "She stood there circled about and furnished forth, as always, in a manner that testified to her perfect little personal processes. It had ever been her sign that she was, for all occasions, found ready, without loose ends or exposed accessories or unremoved superfluities; a suggestion of the swept and garnished, in her whole splendid, yet thereby more or less encumbered and embroidered setting, that reflected her small still passion for order and symmetry, for objects with their backs to the walls, and spoke even of some probable reference, in her American blood, to dusting and polishing New England grandmothers" (p. 403).


5 See pp. 118–20, especially: "No visibility of transition showed, no violence of adjustment in retrospect, emerged" (p. 118); "Oh, if he had been angular!—who could say what might then have happened" (p. 119). Adam associates the Prince's "roundness" with the claim that "for living with, you're a pure and perfect crystal" (p. 120).

6 See p. 295, where Fanny says of Adam, "But the whole point is just that two years of Charlotte are what he hasn't really—or what you may call undividedly—had," and Bob responds, "Any more than Maggie, by your theory, eh, has really or undividedly had four of the Prince? It takes all she hasn't had . . . to account for the innocence that in her, too, so leaves us in admiration."

7 Both Leon Edel in his biography (The Master [New York, 1972], pp. 222–23) and Stephen Spender in his essay on this novel have suggested that this passage indicates a new acceptance, on James's part, of the fact of physical intimacy. Spender writes that we see in the author "a person who, profoundly with his whole being, after overcoming great inhibition, has accepted the idea of people loving" (quoted in Edel, pp. 222–23). See pp. 45–47 below.

8 See p. 233, where Charlotte says that she knows now that she and Adam never will have any children and asserts positively that it is not her fault. (I assume that she could be so positive at this date only if impotence, and not sterility, were the reason.)

9 Compare Freud, "Three Essays on Sexuality," p. 227: "At every stage in the course of development through which all human beings ought by rights to pass, a certain number are held back; so there are some who have never got over their parents'
authority and have withdrawn their affection from them either very incompletely or not at all. They are mostly girls, who, to the delight of their parents, have persisted in all their childish love far beyond puberty. It is most instructive to find that it is precisely these girls who in their later marriage lack the capacity to give their husbands what is due to them; they make cold wives and remain sexually anaesthetic."

10 The golden bowl itself recalls a bowl given by George I to a newborn child of the Lamb family, which much impressed James on a visit to Sussex in 1902 (see Edel, p. 209). There are also, doubtless, allusions to Ecclesiastes 12:6–7 ("... or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, ... then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it"), and to Blake's "Can wisdom be kept in a silver rod, / Or love in a golden bowl?" But the fact that the bowl is a flawed crystal, and the repeated allusions to the perfect simplicity of crystal elsewhere, are not explained by any of these allusions, and we may very well have an allusion to the well-known symbolism of this great love legend. (For other aspects of the bowl's complex symbolism, see Quentin Anderson's *The American Henry James* [New Brunswick, N.J., 1957].)

11 It is instructive to examine the many places in the novel where a person is praised with the aesthetically linked word "splendid." It usually emerges that to call a human being that is to refuse that person a properly human tenderness and care.

12 One might ask whether to show that certain strains inhere in the structure of the family as we know it is in any way to show that they are an essential feature of human life. This question is nowhere more courageously pressed than in the *Republic*, where it is indeed argued that the most troublesome and pervasive of our moral conflicts have their roots in the family and could be eliminated by eliminating the family. But Plato is also aware that this would involve making the human being, especially human attachments and emotions, something radically different from anything that we have known.

13 See pp. 302, 316, 328, 477; compare the descriptions of Fanny at pp. 273–82. It is worth noticing that during the period in which Maggie is "beginning to live" in the human world, her images for herself are frequently these images linked with birth or the wish to be born. Cf. Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), Standard Edition, V, ch. 6, sec. E.


15 Compare Adam's use of the diamond as an image of the angularity which Amerigo allegedly lacks: "I can see them all from here — each of them sticking out by itself — all the architectural cut diamonds that would have scratched one's softer sides. One would have been scratched by diamonds — doubtless the neatest way if one was to be scratched at all — but one would have been reduced to a hash" (p. 120).

16 The moment is prepared for earlier by another refusal of vision that is, like this, an expression of gentleness and opens the way for love: "She sank to her knees with her arm on the ledge of her window-seat, where she blinded her eyes from the full glare of seeing that his idea could only be to wait, whatever might come, at her side. It was to her buried face that she thus, for a long time, felt him draw nearest" (p. 499).


19 There are obvious connections between these thoughts and the line of argument pursued in Iris Murdoch's The Sovereignty of Good (London, 1972), whose view of the moral importance of imaginative work I discuss in The Fragility of Goodness, ch. 2.

20 If one is persuaded that a sharp distinction is to be made between moral theory and moral education, the following remarks can be taken as remarks about the importance of this text for moral education. Since, however, the conception of moral theory with which I am working makes theory’s specification of the good an outgrowth of an educational, Socratic interchange between text and reader, who actively judges how well the text accounts for his or her moral experience, I shall speak as though the activity of the reader is pertinent to moral theory.

21 The interpenetration of imagination, reflection, and feeling in deliberation is revealingly characterized (and called upon) throughout the novel; this would, on further examination, emerge as one of its most fascinating contributions. I discuss these issues further, with reference to Proust, in “Fictions of the Soul,” read at the Conference on Styles of Fictionality at Harvard in March 1982, and forthcoming in Philosophy and Literature (Autumn 1983).

22 It is plain from other writings of James that George Eliot is a primary target.

23 James’s notebooks show that the novel was begun with the tentative title Charlotte (see Edel, p. 572). This paper was also begun, long ago, as a paper about Charlotte. It appears to be a confirmation of the claims advanced here that the paper’s original aim of focusing attention upon Charlotte was frustrated by the ubiquity of the author/reader’s care and concern for Maggie, who more or less inevitably “took over.” Could this have been James’s experience with his own creation? Or did he think of giving a title that would point us to the central importance of the novel’s silences, just as its actual title points us to the flaws in human response that produce these silences?

24 I owe thanks to Daniel Brudney, Stanley Cavell, Arnold Davidson, Guy Sircello, and Susan Wolf for their valuable criticisms of an earlier draft of this paper. (My thanks to Richard Wollheim and Patrick Gardiner, who commented on this paper at the American Philosophical Association Pacific Division and the Oxford Philosophical Society, respectively, are recorded below.) I am especially grateful to David Wiggins for showing me the parts of London in which this novel is set, helping me to learn something about their history, and, in general, giving me a sense of “the fashion after which the prodigious city . . . does on occasion meet half-way those forms of intelligence of it that it recognizes” (The Golden Bowl, Preface, p. 14).