

Hesse's Steppenwolf as Modern Ethical Fiction

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Volume 17 Issue 5 (December 2015) Article 13**Michał Koza,****"Hesse's *Steppenwolf* as Modern Ethical Fiction"**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss5/13>>Contents of ***CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 17.5 (2015)**Special Issue ***Fiction and Ethics in the Twenty-first Century*. Ed. Zhenzhao Nie and Biwu Shang**<<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol17/iss5/>>

Abstract: In his article "Hesse's *Steppenwolf* as Modern Ethical Fiction" Michał Koza discusses the significance of "ethical fiction" in modern literature. Such fiction, according to Kant, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche, are not only milestones of ethical thinking, but more importantly offer a narrative for self-creation as an ethical subject. Harry Haller, the protagonist of Hermann Hesse's *Steppenwolf*, is a man living on the border of modern subjectivity embodying a cultural and existential crisis. Koza argues that "ethical reading" enables one to see the relation between philosophy and literature that not only enter in a dialogue with each other, but also share their crises, with the crisis of *mimesis* at the fore.

Michał KOZA

Hesse's *Steppenwolf* as Modern Ethical Fiction

In the context of axiology, one of the threads most frequently referred to when discussing Nietzsche's thought is his conviction of the fictional nature of morality. This view is usually interpreted thus because in Nietzsche's many other theses he wrote in terms of separating ethics, being an illusion, from the new, post-Christian order of values. Still, it is possible to follow a different, hermeneutical path (which was explored by Martin Heidegger while interpreting Nietzsche) and to examine morality as one of many distinct kinds of fictions which construct existence that seeks a project for itself as in the existential understanding of narrative and hermeneutics (e.g., Ricoeur; Rosner). What is crucial here is the departure from the fiction/reality opposition in favor of the difference between the actual position of the subject (i.e., Heidegger's "factuality") and the project which a given narrative presents. By means of distinguishing the category of such fiction, which I call "imperative" because of its compulsory nature, it becomes possible to identify similar structures in other philosophical thought and to treat their texts as a specific kind of literature interpreted ethically and proposes diverse assumptions on subjectivity, imperative (which regulates one's existence), and community. These very elements act as crucial problems in modern philosophy.

Ethics understood as fiction features an essential constituent which became an object of frequent reflection only as late as in the twentieth century thanks to Husserl and still compels philosophers' attention. This element is the "event," an unpredictable otherness, namely what escapes the expectations of the subject in experience. According to Jacques Derrida: "There are those of us who lean toward the assumption that an event worthy of the name cannot be foretold. We are not supposed to see it coming. If what comes and then stands out horizontally on a horizon can be anticipated then there is no pure event. No horizon, then, for the event or encounter, but only verticality and the unforeseeable. The alterity of the other – that which does not reduce itself to the economy of our horizon – always comes to us from above indeed, from the above" (Derrida 6; see also Currie). In many ethical approaches in philosophy one can observe a desire to come up with a formula that will allow an entity to respond to what indeed is unexpected, incoming, unknown. This fictional "if" frame (appearing in many different forms) is directed toward the unexpected future that in general philosophical formulas is subject to representation: *mimesis*. Hence also the inalienable place of literature in the discussion of ethics, which not only becomes the medium for this representation in various ways, but is also able to undermine its own ability to represent. The following philosophical approaches are then not solely different responses to otherness which ethics tries to control, but simultaneously turn out to be philosophies of representation which in modernity becomes, similarly to ethics, an increasingly weakened and uncertain category. These constructs are the basis for an ethical interpretation, an "ethical reading" of literature (see, e.g., Attridge; Fernando; Attridge; Hillis Miller). Such an interpretation should consist not only in showing various moral obligations, imperatives, norms, or values of characters, but also in discovering the structure of subjectivity, the concept of community, and the attitude to an event.

Ethical fiction that can be treated as a sort of founding fiction for modernity is Immanuel Kant's categorical imperative which generates moral tension between factual existence as opposed to the ideal (see, e.g., Paton). The bond between an individual and a wider community is established thus embracing the whole rational humanity. In terms of existential hermeneutics, the categorical imperative becomes a model narrative for humanity. The protagonist of the narrative is an individual who, in terms of this fiction, functions as an ethical subject who is to comply with the universal law of reason and realize it. Not only is Kant's thought about the subject's obligation, it also renders a comprehensive vision of the world which it tries to create: no ethical event can appear that would not be subject to the categorical imperative. This is expressed in a holistic vision of a reality not only possible to be attained, but also to be described beforehand. In these terms, Kant believed in the cognitive capabilities of his own ethics, as well as in the mimetic abilities of the narrative medium. Kant's optimistic belief in the possibility of translating the objective, universal order into fiction and this in turn into an individual existence (which would imply a perfect transparency and consistency of such translation, and, as far as the order of values is concerned) is also a specific "transaction." It is all the more crucial owing to the fact that posterior modern visions will try to complicate this picture by pointing out to the disproportionateness of these realities: the individual and the general, as well as the difficulty of communication between them (mainly mediation through interpretation). The ethical order would never be as clear and obvious as the Enlightenment suggested. This pattern can be applied to literary interpretation. Kant's schema of rational fiction can be observed in situations when the protagonist faces the need to discover the already existing hierarchy of values which his/her good will has only to comply to by means of discarding cognitive errors which disturb rational judgement. Obvious examples here are the Enlightenment philosophical tales such as Voltaire's *Candide* which present rational utopia as a nearer or farther horizon of reference. A more contemporary instance that could serve here is Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* where Schlink seems to suggest that despite the overwhelming presence of evil in the world there is a way to clear away the obstacles that obscure the image of rational law (see Kaniowski). It is not hard to guess

that literature would typically depart from this optimistic view and that the Kantian schema would have to face philosophical, as well as literary criticism.

Imperative fiction in Kierkegaard distinct from the Kantian one, manifests itself in the story of Abraham and reflections which accompany it. It conjures up an image of a man who tries to discover a universal ethical rule in the Biblical story, but finds it unfeasible: "Every time he returned from a pilgrimage to Mount Moriah, he sank down wearily, folded his hands, and said, 'No one was as great as Abraham. Who is able to understand him?'" (Kierkegaard, *Fear* 14). For Kierkegaard, this way of reading the story of Abraham is appropriate and as a negative example he mentions the attitude of preachers, who, following the Kantian schema, confine the meaning of the story to an unambiguous universal rule that is translatable into individual existence. Nevertheless, it is the first approach -- the one which exposes the moment of interpretational failure -- that is more authentic for Kierkegaard. He also distinguishes a particular type of literature that provokes a kind of ethical reading "doomed to fail": "I am not unfamiliar with what the world has admired as great and magnanimous. My soul feels its kinship with it and in all humility is certain that the cause for which the hero strives is also my cause, and when I consider it, I cry out to myself: *jam tua res agitur*. I think myself into the hero; I cannot think myself into Abraham; when I reach that eminence, I sink down, for what is offered me is a paradox" (Kierkegaard, *Fear* 33). I emphasize the two directions in which ethical (or perhaps anti-ethical?) reading of Kierkegaard is going. On the one hand he tries to reverse the Enlightenment tendency to include the existential project into a rational order to confront it directly with the Absolute which in turn is linked to the establishment of a new kind of subjectivity referred to as the "knight of faith." It is radically opposed with Kantian "universal human" subordinate to "universal rule" to create a "universal kingdom": "Faith is precisely the paradox that the single individual as the single individual is higher than the universal, is justified before it, not as inferior to it but as superior -- yet in such a way, please note, that it is the single individual who, after being subordinate as the single individual to the universal, now by means of the universal becomes the single individual who as the single individual is superior, that the single individual as the single individual stands in an absolute relation to the absolute" (Kierkegaard, *Fear* 55-56).

On the other hand, one cannot fail to notice that subjectivity in Kierkegaard's thought becomes undermined. A relation of faith is only possible in terms of experiencing paradox and absurdity and the truly ethical choice (such that implies "teleological suspension" of rational ethics) demands the acceptance of one's own impotence to reconstruct the holistic moral meaning of his life. Further, it is also connected with the burden of uncertainty and lack of grounding in a community. A "knight of faith" is a radical individualist who faces diverse incomparable existential projects (this correspond to Kierkegaard's "stages") which prevent him/her from a rational judgement and evaluation. An entity is deprived of the dimension of utopian community, a finite end to which it would approach together with other people. In consequence, the burden of justification of the moral choice is shifted on the subject and his individual, unique relation with the absolute: "A human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, of freedom and necessity ... Such a relation which relates to itself ... must either have established itself or been established by something else ... The self is such a derived, constituted relation, a relation that relates to itself, and in relating to itself relates to another ... The self cannot by itself arrive at or remain in equilibrium and rest by itself, but only in relating to itself by relating to that which has established the whole relation" (Kierkegaard, *The Sickness* 43-44).

But is the modern subject able to bear this burden? Despite Kierkegaard's effort, with the weakening of the subject the possibility to anchor it in the Absolute has faded. This problem will have its postmodern continuation in, for instance, *Against Ethics* by John D. Caputo confessing his inability to perform a "leap of faith" and, consequently, to inscribe his individual story into a religious narrative. A mere recurrence to faith is not enough since it turns out that the individual is not capable of accepting it, or, speaking in terms of faith, of hearing the voice of god. For humans, in circumstances defined by Kierkegaard this means remaining in a state of permanent indecision or assuming one of the moral ideologies. This is remindful of Hans Castorp from Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* being forced to choose between visions of the world offered to him on one side by Naphta, and by Settembrini on the other. However, neither of these is distinguished, neither is presented as more rational or reasonable, although under the influence of emotion Hans leans towards one or the other. Being deprived of a rational ethical criterion does not lead him to assume the attitude proposed by Kierkegaard, which means the choice that would not demand a justification other than personal faith. Instead, the significance of passivity of the individual is lost together with the tangible meaning of the moral decision. The individuality of *Magic Mountain's* principal protagonist is simply being extinguished as the plot progresses expressed by his consumptive illness and, eventually, anonymous death on the battlefield. There is no positive moral sense that can be drawn from his experience neither for him nor for the reader. Pessimism about a better world which he could build if he took one of the sides (both adversaries present him their own version of utopia) leads him eventually to losing his life in somebody else's battle.

Together with the subject and utopian purpose, what becomes undermined is the very basis of ethical reading: the belief that the act of interpretation leads to the discovery of a comprehensive moral meaning. In Kierkegaard's thought, the meaning of the moral sacrifice is a mystery kept between Abraham

and god and remains obscure to the reader. Thereby Kierkegaard uproots the conviction of literature's importance for ethics, eliminating its parenetic dimension. One cannot fail to notice that it is a gesture aimed at the traditional genre of devotional writing that put emphasis on personal examples such as one of the best recognized handbook for spiritual life, *The Imitation of Christ* by Thomas à Kempis. Still, there is something more to it: in Kierkegaard's optics, ethics is non-representable and escapes *mimesis* by definition, similarly to god, his relation with humanity and the otherworldly destination of an individual. Thus, the belief in the inability to represent turns out to be the highest imperative of Kierkegaard's ethics, thereby making him an "iconoclast" of his times (see Zawadzki). Nevertheless, this radicalism contributed to weakening ethics not only in terms of disbelief in the voice of the Absolute, but also due to a paradox that closes the very access to ethics: the necessity of imitation without *mimesis*, ethics without parenthesis, and ultimately a moral sense without literature struggling with the possibility of its representation.

The problem of subject not being rooted in the Absolute is featured notably in Nietzsche's thought. It appears that the answer to the undermined position of ethical subject is the introduction to another kind of imperative fiction, that which involves the story of Eternal Recurrence, in which in turn elements referring to Kantian categorical imperative are identified: "What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence ... Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: 'You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine?'" (341). Here, the distance between existence and fiction, a potential project of "what, if some day" is visible, as well as a hypothetical design of the world formed by ethical action. Yet it is no more the "kingdom of ends," but individual life, transposed on the overall plane, as Kant does it: in this case it is the ever-recurring world that turns out to be the only "law." In reference to the categorical imperative, one can define this fiction in other words: "act as if you were through your maxims a law-making member of your own existence."

Recognizable in Nietzsche's thought is an attempt more radical than in Kierkegaard to distance himself from Enlightenment ethics and to reconfigure it in such a way as to introduce a double independence. First, it is the independence of the subject towards universal projects (because of the disappearance of the element of rational human community, in fact any community at all) and external ends (like in Kierkegaard, the teleological suspension of ethics is here involved). Second, it is independence from the external foundation: what is the reason for action for Nietzsche (and what helps him escape Schopenhauer's pessimism), is the will of power that is created by the subject itself and is subject-oriented. Then again, formulating a new imperative fiction (which can be called "nihilistic") requires also the creation of a new type of ethical subject, the *Übermensch*. Its primary value is one's life, existence, which, according to the imperative of eternal recurrence, should be fulfilled with authentic actions, without basing on any human community. The individual stands here against anonymous stream of life, of eternal recurrence.

As an interpretational tool, the fiction offered by Nietzsche is applicable wherever becomes exposed the moment of establishing and legitimizing the value of moral choices exclusively on the base of an existential project of the subject. Modern literature used this model (Rilke's *Malte*, Woolf's *Orlando*, or Bataille's *Story of the Eye* are a few examples among many other), which played an ambiguous role if confronted with Nietzsche's purpose. On the one hand, it brought the subject's ability of auto-creation to the foreground, yet on the other, it contributed to its metaphysical weakening, revealing the mechanisms of, as Michael Foucault put it, "subjectification." By switching the focus to the Ego, Nietzsche strengthened the tendency to scatter the one, universal ethics among various, individual, incommensurable existential projects. This thread would be taken up in the twentieth century especially by existentialists, who, like Sartre, would emphasize the entirely individualistic quality of ethics. According to Sartre, an authentic, personal action is fully subject to auto-creation. By definition, ethics remains conflicted with every generality, which fact is expressed by the dialectic opposition of "things-in-themselves" (objects) and "things-for-themselves" (persons). However, by radicalizing the alienating quality of ethics, existentialists lost its community dimension. It can be said that in comparison to the ethical fictions described, they excluded the horizon of social utopia (which Sartre himself states clearly, saying: "hell is others") in which the new ethics could be fulfilled.

In Nietzsche's thought the question of individualism and community is even more problematic. He enforced the notion of *Übermensch* as a universal measure. In this regard he can be seen as the last ethical metaphysician of Eastern philosophy (as Heidegger pointed out in other areas) (see Heidegger 4-6). On the other, the idea of *Übermensch* was by definition exclusive: Nietzsche criticized forms of commonality (headed by democracy) that led to the development of man as a "herd animal," subordinate to duty: "Given that at all times, so long as there have been human beings, there have also been herds of human beings (racial groups, communities, tribes, peoples, states, churches) and always a

great many followers in relation to the small number of those issuing orders, and also taking into consideration that so far nothing has been better and longer practiced and cultivated among human beings than obedience, we can reasonably assume that typically now the need for obedience is inborn in each individual, as a sort of formal conscience which states "You should do something or other without conditions, and leave aside something else without conditions," in short, "Thou shalt" (*Beyond Good* 198).

However, Nietzsche's idea of *Übermensch* is accompanied by an ethical aporia. On the one hand he is a man independent of his conscience and on the other, one who follows the imperative stemming from the story of the eternal return: a man free of the oppression of duty, but at the same time cultivating his "nobility of the spirit." Thus, the *Übermensch* is in terms of ethics a utopian figure and also paradoxical similarly to the projected ideal community. Here is another matter that differs Nietzsche from Kant: it is not only the community that is shifted to the domain of the future as something that is to be constructed; this shift also includes the subject itself. A man who would like to follow Nietzsche's ethics is in the position of a seeker, an experimentalist suspended between the actual ethics of man as "herd animal" and still not *Übermensch* ethics. In comparison with Kierkegaard, however, Nietzsche's idea is more optimistic, since he encourages, using Zarathustra's words and in spite of everything, to "rethink" the *Übermensch*. Being aware of the fictional stand of morality of his times, Nietzsche intends to inscribe in it his own story of the *Übermensch*. He provides a utopian, but attainable goal: he intends for humanity to become someone better: this "someone" remains an understated figure, which nevertheless, as opposed to Kierkegaard's idea, demands expression and representation. This opens up the field for literature, which, in times of modernity and postmodernity, has become the space for exploration and a experimentation with alternative, often mutually exclusive existential projects. The space left by the understated ideal is simultaneously an opening for what is not to be predicted, the incoming event, "existential surprise." That is why the *Übermensch* is ever presented by Nietzsche as someone who escapes the modern human's predictions. It is someone whose "kingdom" (community and society) are inconceivable and maybe cannot exist at all.

One of these explorations is Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf*. The novel illustrates the critical moment of axiology: the departure from the rational ethics of imperative and the difficulties in filling up the void that emerges with new constructs. Hesse's protagonist, Harry Haller, finds himself in a situation where the old Kantian man has already been overcome, but the new man has not yet arrived: "A nature such as Nietzsche's had to suffer our present ills more than a generation in advance. What he had to go through alone and misunderstood, thousands suffer today. I often had to think of these words while reading the records. Haller belongs to those who have been caught between two ages, who are outside of all security and simple acquiescence. He belongs to those whose fate it is to live the whole riddle of human destiny heightened to the pitch of a personal torture, a personal hell" (22). By deciding to follow the Nietzschean paragon of commitment only to himself Harry deprives himself of "all security and innocence." It is the consequence of embracing the paragon of subjectivity which differs completely from those existing in the society to date. Thus, the protagonist excludes himself from the community; but is he able to survive without any other? Apparently, that is not easy since "for now it was his wish no longer, nor his aim, to be alone and independent, but rather his lot and his sentence. The magic wish had been fulfilled and could not be cancelled, and it was no good now to open his arms with longing and goodwill to welcome the bonds of society. People left him alone now. It was not, however, that he was an object of hatred and repugnance. On the contrary, he had many friends. A great many people liked him. But it was no more than sympathy and friendliness. He received invitations, presents, pleasant letters; but no more. No one came near to him. There was no link left, and no one could have had any part in his life even had anybody wished it" (46-47). Therefore, it appears that a happy life requires more than a detached ethical model, even if it meant living every moment according to one's own project. A subjectification not accompanied by creation of a community that assumes a new form of existence results in the exclusion from the collective life. Nietzschean ethical fiction conceived by Hesse as radically divergent from the bourgeois world in which the protagonist takes no part whatsoever and leads him/her to lose contact with social rituals. The subject embracing a new story about himself/herself is in fact capable of creating it, yet does not (and even does not want to) find listeners for it. He/she remains virtually on the level of fantasy, excluded from any social realization of imagination whatsoever. From the perspective of others Harry is a person, but a hollow person, with no content, "a man without qualities." This is not only about external alienation to other people, but also the internal sense of otherness. By divesting himself of the comfort of a story shared with others, Harry is compelled to a constant struggle for acknowledgement of the sense of his new way of existence. Hence, the repeated temptation of suicide that accompanies him, "the 'suicide,' and Harry was one, need not necessarily live in a peculiarly close relationship to death. One may do this without being a suicide. What is peculiar to the suicide is that his ego, rightly or wrongly, is felt to be an extremely dangerous, dubious, and doomed germ of nature; that he is always in his own eyes exposed to an extraordinary risk, as though he stood with the slightest foothold on the peak of a crag whence a slight push from without or an instant's weakness from within suffices to precipitate him into the void" (47).

One can consider this attitude heroic. However, there lurks a significant contradiction (which Sartre would name "bad faith"), an apparent love of life that would be expressed by acting solely in consonance

with what one needs for himself appears to be in fact a rejection of life. The subject is back in the ascetic position that was so criticized by Nietzsche. Living only in accord with one's own, completely idiomatic project requires absolute control over one's existence. In this way it precludes the very possibility of life as the occurrence of things unexpected, other, transforming the previous model of experience. He remains inert, existentially silent, which perversely drives him towards an urge of death, of which he fantasizes: "as thousands of his like do, he found consolation and support, and not merely the melancholy play of youthful fancy, in the idea that the way to death was open to him at any moment" (48). Harry's external asceticism, followed by an internal conviction about the superiority of his own way of existence, becomes visible in its entirety during the meeting with Hermine. Harry tells her about his suffering and his sense of having already known everything that life has to offer him. But it soon turns out that the basis for his conviction was the rejection of pleasure: "'Wait a bit,' she cried. 'So you can't dance? Not at all? Not even a one step? And yet you talk of the trouble you've taken to live? You told a fib there, my boy, and you shouldn't do that at your age. How can you say that you've taken any trouble to live when you won't even dance?'" (88). It is a symbolic failure, since it was the dance that was for Nietzsche the basic metaphor for the superhuman attitude towards life. Haller intended to build a new, superhuman identity on old foundations, leaving no space for the unpredictable. The Kantian foundation is visible, after all, in the rejected need to be recognized by others, which is ironically pointed out to the protagonist by Hermine.

This construct is ruined even more strikingly by Harry's encounter with a mysterious woman at the "Black Eagle." The woman encourages Harry to enter her world by making use of the formula that inspired him: an individuality that escapes the inert bourgeois model of life. Her openness to existential "surprises" is accompanied by the ability to share her vision of the world with others. She is neither immersed in the social swamp of mediocrity, nor condemned to the "loneliness of a wolf": she lives in a bohemian community existing outside the margin of the official social life. The ethical fiction that seems to describe Hermine, therefore, does not preclude community, and at the same time does not render its distinct vision. It is an example of a 'weak' utopia which is open to expansion, yet does not impose universality. Together with Harry's ethical order, the narrative border between reality and dream is broken; it is apparent particularly in the final part of the novel. The hero travels through the Magic Theater in phantasmagorical visions. He experiences the breakdown of his personality and the destruction of the Steppenwolf in himself: the part of identity which separated him from the stream of life. Haller gets in contact with different forms of excess from the sensual pleasures and immersion in the sphere of *eros*, up to the fulfillment of the death drive. This experience proves to be a test that would lead Harry to abandoning 'the spirit of gravity', and the still present abstract sense of duty that lays on Harry's shoulders the unbearable burden of existence that prevents him from living his life. However, Harry is not capable of breaking loose from the old world of duty. By killing Hermine he finally suffers an enigmatical defeat, and denies himself the fulfillment. He does it on her prior request, only confirming that by trying to attain the "wolf's independence" he made himself a passive tool in the hands of others. Even at the sight of a dying Hermine he never lets grieve the loss, but gets stuck with self-accusations, turning away from the world and focusing on himself again: "'No,' I cried. 'Don't you understand at all? I evade the consequences? I have no other desire than to pay and pay and pay for them, to lay my head beneath the axe and pay the penalty of annihilation'" (214). Harry's bad conscience throws him back to the fictitious world that spins around the permanent remorse of Nietzscheanism. Fortunately, the story remains open-ended, which leaves a hope that the hero will someday "learn to laugh" and will overcome his fear of otherness and the ascetic attitude to reality. The story of Steppenwolf reflects the history of the modern subject. Reflection on the crucial moments of modern ethics shows how and individual, through experimentation and exploration of the borders of fiction, attempts to escape the abstract 'kingdom of ends' and find a way of living his life with the unpredictability that it carries. This process is accompanied by a dispute around *mimesis* and the possibilities of literature, which restricts or expands its aspiration to gain control over otherness, prediction of future and offering complete formulas. In this dispute literature itself is not passive, but enters into discussion with philosophy, breaking its fictions by means of stories.

It is not difficult to see that common quality of mentioned imperative fictions is their interest in the tension between an individual and a universal scheme. Also, the analysis points to four significant elements, created by an ethical fiction: the subject (such as a rational human, a knight of faith or an *Übermensch*), the universal rule (an imperative), the utopian horizon (a society of universal law, an authentic or fulfilled life), and the Event, otherness (other people, god, personified fate, or some kind of existential surprise). The narrative from Kantian ethical theory has been weakened many times not only in philosophy, but also by other cultural means of "existential storytelling" especially literature. Taking Nietzsche and Kierkegaard as examples we can see how attempts to create a fiction strengthening the idea of subjectivity in the end led to its metaphysical weakening (the fact later exposed grotesquely in postmodernist writing). What is more, thinkers who criticized Kant agreed that new ethics demands an invention of a new kind of the subject, such as the knight of faith or *Übermensch*. The imperative voice of their writings is very strong and most likely neither of them would like to treat their

fictions as mere fictions. Yet, it shows how thin is the line between philosophical and fictional discourse and how important role narrative plays in ethics.

These categories can be used not only for analysis of philosophical theories but also for other cultural texts (as a methodological tool for "ethical reading"). This kind of approach is indispensable because of a number of reasons. First, it offers a vision of a wider ethical framework for literature than those only including values, moral principles, or even different lifestyles present there. Second, it makes it possible to overcome the opposition between ethics and politics, and suggests that the ethical reflection comes from politics and returns to it. The sphere of community determines the conditions for possibilities of individual existential projects; it is on this ground that subjectivity comes into being and the realization of imperatives that shapes the new world takes place. Third, this approach enables one to see the relation between philosophy and literature that not only enter in a dialogue with each other, but also share their crises, with the crisis of *mimesis* at the fore.

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