

FROM FICTION TO PHRONÉSIS

**A critical dialogue with Martha Nussbaum on the
importance of concrete fictional literature in
moral philosophy**

By

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**Thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Philosophy (Applied Ethics)**

at

Stellenbosch University

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the entirety of the work contained herein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Abstract

This study finds its roots in the ancient quarrel, as mentioned by Plato 400 BC, between poets (artists) and philosophers on the nature of our ethical existence. The ancient philosophers participating in the ancient quarrel, such as Plato, had a metaphysical understanding of our existence and they believed that we should communicate about our ethical existence through a style which acknowledges the transcendental nature of our human existence. The styles and language used by the philosophers of the ancient quarrel were therefore often very abstract, and mostly concerned with the rationality of human reasoning. The ancient poets participating in this quarrel, however, did not share the metaphysical worldview of their philosophical rivals. They denied the transcendental nature of our existence, and argued that our ethical existence should be portrayed and communicated through a style which acknowledges the fact that we are humans with a concrete existence. The poets of the ancient quarrel also promoted a style which acknowledges humans as beings with both rational and emotional faculties. It is for this reason that we find today in literature concerned with moral matters, both the abstract style of moral philosophy which is concerned with the rational aspects of our existence, and the concrete style of fictional literature which is concerned with the emotive aspects of our existence. The quarrel on how to communicate about the nature of our ethical existence is, however, an ongoing debate which is still prevalent in our modern times.

This study turns to the modern argument of Martha Nussbaum on how to communicate about the nature of our ethical existence. Nussbaum argues that the abstract style of philosophical texts on morality acknowledges the abstract and rational aspects of our human nature and existence, but that it often fails to fully acknowledge the fact that we are concrete human beings for whom emotions play an integral part in our ethical existence. She therefore believes that moral philosophy should be presented in combination with fictional literature in order to give a true and complete picture of our ethical existence. This study thus enters into a critical dialogue with Nussbaum on her proposal to combine fictional literature with moral philosophy.

Accordingly, this study focuses on three specific aspects of our ethical existence, which Nussbaum argues, are acknowledged through fictional literature such as novels, but not through the typical style of abstract moral philosophy. They are; 1) that human values are plural and often incommensurable; 2) that the particulars of situations play an important role in ethical deliberation; and 3) that human emotions and the imagination form a big part of our ethical existence. The fundamental aim of this study is thus to answer the question whether the style of fictional literature actually acknowledges the three above mentioned aspects of our ethical existence. The novel which is used to determine this is Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country*.

Nussbaum classifies the three above mentioned aspects of our ethical existence as 1) *The Non-Commensurability and Plurality of Values*; 2) *Priority of the Particular*; and 3) *Ethical Value of the Emotions and Imagination*. These three aspects are, however, derived from Aristotle's ethics and they form, as Nussbaum has argued, the bases of the Aristotelian ethical position – a position from which practical knowledge can be obtained. The aim of this study is therefore not only to determine whether certain fictional literature acknowledges the three fundamental aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position, but it also aims to answer the question whether the Aristotelian ethical position (and therefore practical wisdom) can be obtained through the reading of fictional literature such as novels.

The study concludes that some fictional literature, such as the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*, does in fact adequately portray the three fundamental features of the Aristotelian ethical position, and that Nussbaum's proposal should receive serious consideration, since the inclusion of some fictional literature into moral philosophy may lead to deeper ethical understanding from which practical wisdom can be obtained.

Opsomming

Hierdie studie vind sy oorsprong in die eeue oue stryd, soos al reeds geïdentifiseer deur Plato 400 vC, tussen digters (kunstenaars) en filosowe oor die aard van ons etiese bestaan. Die antieke filosowe wat deelgeneem het aan hierdie eeue oue vete, soos byvoorbeeld Plato, het 'n metafisiese verstaan van ons bestaan gehad, en het daarom geglo dat ons oor ons etiese bestaan moet kommunikeer deur middel van style wat erkenning gee aan die transendentale aard van ons menslike bestaan. Die style en taal wat deur die filosowe van hierdie eeue oue vete gebruik is, was dus dikwels baie abstrak en uiters bemoeid met die mens se rasonele denkvermoëns. Die antieke digters wat deelgeneem het aan hierdie vete het egter nie, soos die filosowe, 'n metafisiese wêreldbeskouing van ons bestaan gehad nie. Hulle het die transendente aard van ons bestaan ontken, en het daarom daarop aangedring dat ons etiese bestaan voorgestel en oor gekommunikeer moet word deur style wat erkenning gee aan die feit dat ons mense is met 'n konkrete bestaan. Hulle het egter ook aangedring op 'n styl wat erkenning gee dat mense beide rasonele en emosionele wesens is. Dit is weens hierdie rede dat ons vandag, in literatuur aangaande morele kwessies, die abstrakte en meer rasoneel geöriënteerde styl van morele filosofie, sowel as die konkrete en meer emosioneel geöriënteerde styl van fiktiewe literatuur aantref. Daar is egter vandag steeds nie klaarheid oor hoe daar oor ons etiese bestaan gekommunikeer moet word nie, en onenigheid is dus steeds te bespeur in huidige debatte oor hierdie tema.

Hierdie studie ondersoek 'n moderne argument, soos voortgestaan deur Martha Nussbaum, oor die wyse waarop daar oor die aard van ons etiese bestaan gekommunikeer moet word. Nussbaum neem die standpunt in dat die abstrakte styl van morele filosofiese tekste erkenning gee aan die abstrakte en rasonele aard van ons menslike aard en bestaan, maar dat dit nie altyd daarin slaag om erkenning te gee dat ons mense is met 'n konkrete etiese bestaan waarin emosies (eerder as net rasonele denke) ook 'n baie belangrike rol speel nie. Hierdie studie neem dus die vorm aan van 'n kritiese dialoog met Nussbaum aangaande haar voorstel om

fiktiewe literatuur te kombineer met morele filosofie. Gevolglik fokus hierdie studie op drie spesifieke aspekte van ons etiese bestaan, wat Nussbaum glo wel deur fiktiewe literatuur aangespreek word maar nie altyd deur tekste van morele filosofie nie. Hierdie drie aspekte is 1) dat menslike waardes uiteenlopend en dikwels onversoenbaar is; 2) dat die partikuliere elemente van situasies 'n belangrike rol speel in etiese besluitneming; en 3) dat ons menslike emosies en verbeelding 'n groot deel uitmaak van ons etiese bestaan. Die fundamentele doel van hierdie studie is dus om te bepaal of die styl van fiktiewe literatuur wel erkenning gee aan die drie bogenoemde aspekte van ons etiese bestaan. Die fiktiewe werk wat gebruik is om dit te bepaal, is Alan Paton se *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

Nussbaum klassifiseer die drie bogenoemde aspekte van ons etiese bestaan as 1) *Onversoenbaarheid and Pluraliteit van Waardes*; 2) *Prioriteit van die Partikuliere*; en 3) *Etiese Waarde van die Emosies en Verbeelding*. Hierdie klassifikasie vind egter sy oorsprong in die etiek van Aristoteles, en vorm dus volgens Nussbaum die basis van die Aristoteliaanse etiese posisie – 'n posisie van waaruit praktiese wysheid geput kan word. Die doel van hierdie studie is dus nie net om te bepaal of fiktiewe literatuur erkenning gee aan die drie fundamentele aspekte van die Aristoteliaanse etiese posisie nie, maar die doel is ook om te bepaal of die Aristoteliaanse etiese posisie (en dus praktiese wysheid) bekom kan word deur die lees van fiktiewe literatuur.

Die studie kom tot die gevolgtrekking dat sekere fiktiewe literatuur, soos die werk *Cry, the Beloved Country*, inderdaad wel bevredigende erkenning gee aan die drie eienskappe van ons etiese bestaan, soos veronderstel deur die Aristoteliaanse etiese posisie, en dat Nussbaum se voorstel ernstige aandag behoort te geniet, aangesien die insluiting van sekere fiktiewe literatuur in morele filosofie 'n dieper etiese verstaan teweeg kan bring, waaruit praktiese wysheid geput kan word.

Acknowledgements

- Aan my Hemelse Vader wat Homself elke dag so in my konkrete bestaan aan my openbaar, wil ek dankie sê vir Sy genade wat Hy so ryklik oor my gestort het. Ek wil vir Hom opreg dankie sê vir die talente en liefdes waarmee Hy my geseën het. Mag ek dit altyd tot eer van Sy naam gebruik.
- Aan my ouers, Pierre en Surene Lourens, wil ek dankie sê vir al die blootstelling en geleenthede wat hulle in my kort lewe al vir my gegee het. Dit is deur julle dat ek toegang tot die wonderlike wêreld van godsdiens, filosofie, reis en die kunste gekry het – ek sal julle vir ewig dankbaar wees daarvoor.
- Aan my broers, Dirk en Deon Lourens, wil ek dankie sê vir die ondersteuning en belangstelling wat hulle nog altyd in my studies en kunste getoon het.
- Aan Gustav van der Westhuizen, wil ek dankie sê vir al die “ophemelings,” veral op dae wat my gemoed maar laag was.
- Aan Wilken Calitz, wil ek dankie sê vir al die filosofiese gesprekke wat ons al oor ‘n koppie koffie gehad het.
- Aan my studieleier, Prof. Johan Hattingh, wil ek dankie sê vir die leiding, alhoewel ook ruimte, wat hy vir my in hierdie studie gegee het.

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'Physics is a way of trying to cope with various bits of the universe, ethics is a matter of trying to cope with other bits. Mathematics helps physics do its job, literature and the arts help ethics do its.'

Richard Rorty

(Consequences of Pragmatism – Essays 1972-1980)

Introduction

A Philosophical-Literary Inquiry

1. Introduction and Problem Statement

One of the most ancient and fundamental questions about morality is the question about the nature of our ethical existence. Different answers to this question constitute an ancient quarrel which can be traced back as far as the conversations of Socrates, the dialogues of Plato, and the lectures of Aristotle. The question about the nature of our ethical existence is, however, not a question which belongs to the ancient past alone. It is an ongoing quarrel, and it still forms the basis of our conversations and contemplations on moral conduct today. The reason why this ancient question still plays such a fundamental and determining role in our ethical inquiries, is because once we have determined the nature of our ethical existence, appropriate ways to communicate about our ethical existence can be found. Insight into the nature of our ethical existence can therefore enable us to both investigate our ethical inquiries and express our moral findings in more adequate ways – and all of this, in turn, can hopefully help us to better understand how we should live, and how to act on this better understanding.

The investigation into the nature of our ethical existence has, for a great part, found its expression in the texts of moral philosophy. The texts of western moral philosophy reach from the ethics of Plato and the virtue ethic of Aristotle, as far as the deontological ethics of Kant, and the consequentialist moral theories of those such as Mill. The texts of western moral philosophy serve as important commentary on both how we live as humans, and how we are supposed to live as good humans and proper citizens. It is for this reason that people with a serious commitment towards the investigation into the nature of our ethical existence, enroll for degrees in moral philosophy all over the world. As a student of moral philosophy, I did however always had the following concern: The texts of western moral philosophy deal with a matter so real, so concrete – namely the conduct of human beings (the ethical existence of

human beings), yet the style of western moral philosophical texts often portrays our human ethical existence as something rather abstract. The inspiration and motivation of this study has thus grown from a personal experience that the often abstract style of western philosophical texts, does not always coincide with the concrete nature of our ethical existence. In this experience I felt that the style of philosophical texts often neglects to acknowledge three very important aspects of our concrete human existence – namely that we are 1) all unique human beings with unique value systems, 2) that our ethical situations and contexts differ from each other, and 3) that we are people with not only rational thoughts but that we are also people with emotions.

I share my concern to acknowledge the above mentioned characteristics as important aspects of our human ethical existence with many thinkers, of which the most prominent one is undoubtedly Aristotle. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle gives great priority to the fact that we have unique value systems as humans, that our ethical situations often differ from each other, and that we are not only rational beings but also beings with emotions. Aristotle even believes that we can obtain practical wisdom from a position where we acknowledge the importance of these aspects and carefully give consideration to them in our concrete, every-day moral deliberations. I do, however, also share my conviction that the style of western moral philosophy does not always coincide with the concrete nature of our ethical existence, with some more contemporary thinkers. The most prominent figure with whom I share this conviction, and whose works have captured much of my own concerns and beliefs regarding the discrepancy of style and content in moral philosophy, is Martha Nussbaum. Through her works Nussbaum does not merely identify a discrepancy between the above mentioned style and content, but she also leads us to ask whether *“certain forms might not be more appropriate than others for the true and accurate depiction of various elements of life.”* (Nussbaum 1990:6) Nussbaum has rooted all her works of this investigation in the Aristotelian conception of our ethical existence, because she believes, like Aristotle, that the true nature of our ethical existence refers to concrete human conducts, and not abstract principles. Nussbaum does, however, go beyond the basic conception of Aristotle by expanding her argument by stating

that “*certain truths about human life can only be fittingly and accurately stated in the language and forms characteristic of the narrative artist.*” (Nussbaum 1990:5) Only through the form of the narrative arts, she argues, can we adequately deal with (and portray) the true nature of our ethical existences – since forms of concrete narrative fiction, such as the novel, acknowledge the fact that we have different value beliefs as human beings, that our ethical situations differ from each other, and that we are human being with emotions. She therefore claims that it is not possible to depict the complete picture of our concrete moral existence through the style of philosophy alone, and that it is crucial to combine abstract philosophical attempts at self-understanding with concrete narrative fiction. For the concrete and vivid style of narrative fiction can relate more to our attempts to imagine and assess possibilities for determining how to live (Nussbaum 1990:288).

In this research paper, I will address the problem that the style of philosophical texts does not always give ample recognition to three important aspects of our ethical existence – namely, 1) that human values are plural and non-commensurable¹; 2) that the particularities of ethical situations have priority above universal rules, 3) and that emotions and imagination form an integral part of our ethical existence. Since these three aspects form the basis of Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence, the problem can only be addressed if a clear understanding of Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence has been established. The study will thus start with an exploration of Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence², with specific reference to the three above mentioned aspects. The main aim of this study will however not be to determine whether the style of philosophy fails to acknowledge the three important aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position or not. The study will rather take as its point of departure the notion of Martha Nussbaum that the style of philosophy does not always show adequate recognition to these three aspects of our ethical existence, and accordingly, it will be an attempt to determine whether the style of fictional literature has the ability to acknowledge these three

¹ I make use of the word “non-commensurable” rather than “incommensurable” - as it is an indirect reference to Nussbaum’s use of the word “non-commensurable” throughout her works.

² Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence will at times in this study also be referred to as the Aristotelian ethical position, as done by Nussbaum.

aspects of our ethical existence, while in certain of its manifestations, the style of philosophy has not.

In order to determine whether the style of fictional literature, in some of its manifestations, can serve to acknowledge the three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence, the study will turn to a concrete example of a fictional work, namely – Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* (1987; first published in 1948). The first aim of this study will thus be to determine whether certain works of fictional literature, such as *Cry, the Beloved Country* have the ability to portray and acknowledge the three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence in their concreteness – namely, that 1) human values are plural and non-commensurable; 2) that the particularities of ethical situations have priority above universal rules, 3) and that emotions and imagination form an integral part of our ethical existence.

The reason why this study would like to engage with the problem of the inability of some philosophical texts to give acknowledgement to the above mentioned aspects of our ethical existence, is, however, not only to determine whether the style of fictional literature can serve as more sufficient means to acknowledge these aspects, but it is also in order to investigate whether practical wisdom can be obtained through the reading of fictional literature. The Aristotelian ethical position³ suggests that better moral judgments can be made from a position where the three above mentioned aspects of our ethical existence are carefully taken into consideration. This study will thus follow the reasoning that if practical wisdom can be obtained from the Aristotelian ethical position, and if the study shows that the Aristotelian ethical position can be reached through exposure to the style of fictional literature, then it can be concluded that practical wisdom can be obtained through the reading of fictional literature⁴.

³ A more in-depth discussion of the Aristotelian ethical position will be given in Chapter 1.

⁴ Never in this paper should the investigation into the relationship between practical wisdom and narrative art (such as fictional literature) be seen as a relationship between two things equal in nature. It is clear from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* that "practical wisdom is a virtue and not an art." (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI 1140b) Because, while practical virtue is concerned with "action," art is concerned with "making." (See *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book VI 1140a) It does not mean, however, that this intellectual virtue can not be obtained through art.

The aim of this study will thus be 1) to determine whether certain novels (fictional literature) have the ability to acknowledge the three important aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence, and 2) to determine whether practical wisdom can be obtained through the reading of novels. If the study shows that fictional literature can acknowledge the three aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position, and that practical wisdom can be obtained from fictional literature, then it will be possible to conclude that Nussbaum's proposal to include fictional literature into moral philosophy should receive serious attention.

Chapter 1 will thus be both a discussion of the three main aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence, and his notion of practical wisdom. This chapter will be a close reading of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. The three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence will fall under the headings as allocated by Nussbaum – namely, 1) *The Non-Commensurability and Plurality of Values*; 2) *Priority of the Particular*; and 3) *Ethical Value of the Emotions and Imagination*. This discussion should, however, not be read as an attempt to give an all-inclusive study of Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom. Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom is an elaborate subject which occupies his entire ethics and a comprehensive study of this nature, I will argue, falls beyond the scope of this study. By taking my study back to Aristotle's ethics, I only attempt to create a basic comprehension of his conception of our ethical existence and his notion of practical wisdom, in order to determine at a later stage of my study whether narrative fiction might acknowledge and portray these conceptions more adequately.

Chapter 2 of the investigation will explore whether narrative fiction has the ability to depict the three main characteristics of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence, as mentioned above, in a more appropriate way than the abstract style of philosophy alone. In this chapter attention will be given to the specific works of Martha Nussbaum which argue for the inclusion of narrative fiction (or fictional literature) in moral philosophy. This chapter will be a close reading of her work *Love's Knowledge* (1990), with occasional references to *The Fragility of Goodness* (2001a). In *Love's Knowledge* Nussbaum refers to novels by Marcel Proust (such as *Sodome et Gemorrhe*, 1941) and Henry James (such as *The Golden Bowl*, 1909) to illustrate how

narrative fiction acknowledges the three features of the Aristotelian ethical position. In my discussion of Nussbaum's arguments, I will therefore also briefly turn to the works of Proust and James, as she has done. Chapter 2 can also be regarded as a critical reading of Nussbaum's works and ideas, since acknowledgement will be given in this chapter (although mostly in the conclusion) to my own and other readers' agreement and disagreement on certain aspects of her argument. The aim of this chapter is, however, not to give an in depth discussion of *Love's Knowledge* in its entirety, since the focus will mainly be on Nussbaum's Aristotelian approach.

In Chapter 3, the investigation will turn to Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The aim of this chapter will be to determine whether *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges all three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence. *Cry, the Beloved Country* will thus be discussed according to the three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence. I am, however, aware that my procedure to analyze *Cry, the Beloved Country* through this lense, might not do justice to the richness of this novel, and that it may leave my reader with incomplete knowledge of the full scope of the moral issues dealt with in the novel. It is, however, important to note that my strategy to discuss *Cry, the Beloved Country* in terms of the three aspects of the Aristotelian position, is merely to determine whether the novel acknowledges the three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence, and not to provide a definitive elaboration of the moral issues addressed by the novel.

However, the reason why I have chosen *Cry, the Beloved Country* as literary work to investigate Nussbaum's claim for the importance of narrative fiction in moral philosophy, is because the text proves to be a good example of the combination of a narrative with philosophical explanation that she has called for in her philosophical-literary inquiry. Here it is important to note that Nussbaum's claim for the importance of narrative fiction in moral philosophy does not refer to all fictional literature and all novels. She is aware that not all novels will contribute to our moral understanding of the world, or coincide with Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence, and she therefore limits her claim to novels that enhance explanatory philosophical

reflection. Therefore only novels⁵ with the requisite combination of emotive material with reflection – that promote moral knowing and understanding – will form part of her literary-ethical inquiry. (Nussbaum 1990:281)

Before the main investigation into Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence can commence, a brief historical overview will be given in order to sketch the background of the ancient quarrel between poets and philosophers. This will be followed by a clarification of what I respectively refer to as 1) the style of moral philosophy; and 2) the style of narrative fiction – in order to determine what exactly the ancient quarrel entails, and what Nussbaum supposes when using these two terms. In order to understand the true nature of the ancient quarrel, and specifically Aristotle's stance towards fictional literature, a method will be followed by drawing the opposing view of Plato, as presented in his *Republic*, in comparison with the position held by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The reason why I would like to turn briefly to Plato and Aristotle's opposing views towards narrative fiction, is not to open a discussion on their different views on narrative fiction, but it will serve as means to illustrate their different views toward the nature of our ethical existence. The limited illustration of their different views on narrative fiction will thus solely serve as introduction to the more in depth discussion in Chapter 1 on Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence. It is therefore important to remember that the nature of this investigation is not to serve as a comparative study between the different viewpoints of Plato and Aristotle towards the use of fiction in ethical studies (for a study of this magnitude falls beyond the scope of this investigation). The main aim of this investigation will thus be to investigate Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence, in combination with Nussbaum's

⁵ It is important to note that Nussbaum's reference to narrative fiction (with the necessary philosophical reflection) does not only have to be applicable to the novel as literary form. Her claim for the importance of narrative fiction in moral philosophy, I will argue, may be applied just as effectively to other forms of narrative fiction, such as movies or stage productions - as long as it contains the required reflective as well as emotive material. Nussbaum's investigation does not, however, go beyond the novel as form of narrative fiction. She explains her claim, like this study will do as well, solely through the examples of novels. It will, however, be naïve to limit narrative fiction to the novel as only relevant form in a time where movies play, and can play, such a prominent role in our philosophical-ethical understandings of our world. Although this study will also use a novel as an example of a narrative form, I would like to remind the reader to also consider other forms of narrative fiction, such as movies, when exploring the role of narrative fiction in moral philosophy. The fact that this study will focus mainly on a novel as example of narrative fiction therefore does not mean that it excludes other forms of fictional literature.

notion of how narrative fiction acknowledges the main aspects of Aristotle's conception. Mentioning of Plato's opposing views will thus just be to highlight Aristotle's conception and to put the Aristotelian conception into the required context.

Let us now turn to the ancient quarrel between philosophers and poets – for it will clearly demonstrate Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence.

2. The Ancient Quarrel

“Let it then be our defense now that we have recurred to the subject of poetry, that it was only to be expected that we should expel poetry from the city, such being her nature. The argument compelled us. And let us tell her also, in case she should accuse us of brutality and boorishness, that there is an ancient quarrel between philosophy and poetry.”

(Plato – Republic Book X)

To the Greeks of the fifth and early fourth century BC, the notion of a quarrel between philosophy and poetry⁶ would have been a rather distant idea. As Nussbaum has noted, *“before Plato's time there was no distinction between philosophical and literary discussion of human practical problems.”* (Nussbaum 2001a:123) The Greeks in the time before Plato have turned to both poets and philosophers for ethical guidance, since both the aesthetical approach of the poet and the moral-philosophical approach of the philosopher in their inquiry in human choice and action, addressed the question – *How should one live?*

However, things changed during the time of Plato. Both Plato and the Poets believed that their work should provide answers to the question of how to live. Yet, Plato believed that the Poets'

⁶ The reference to *“poetry”* or *“the poet,”* as used in this context, should be read as an inclusive term which refers to all fictional literary forms of the ancient Greeks, such as poetry, prose, tragedy, comedy and epic verse. Since the ancient Greeks did not have the modern fictional forms we have today, such as the novel or movies, the inclusive term *‘Poetry’* (as used in this context) should also be regarded as the ancient Greek equivalent of the fictional literary forms of today.

answers to this question are false and obscure. He writes: *“The imitative man has no knowledge of any value on the subjects of his imitation ... For [the poet] will imitate without knowing wherein each thing is bad or good ... ”* (Republic X: 602) The reasoning behind Plato’s objection against the use of poetry (or fictional literature in general) to answer and reveal ethical truths is thus as follows: He believes poetry is an imitation of appearance which is too far removed from reality to serve as proper means to comment on the reality of ethical matters⁷. Because poetry is only a diluted imitation of reality, it does not speak to the upper and most important part of the soul, namely reason – but it appeals to the lower part of the soul – namely, that of the imagination and emotions⁸. Therefore poetry should be banned from the good city, because only the faculty of reason, (according to him) should be consulted in order to draw reliable ethical conclusions⁹. Plato thus draws a clear distinction between reason and the emotions. He denies fictional literature the right to provide ethical commentary in his Republic, since it obscures our ethical understanding by evoking the emotions. Knowledge derived from this lower order of emotion and passion should thus, according to him, not be given much credibility – since true knowledge of our ethical existence can only be derived from the transcendental realm of the rationality of pure reason (which is distant from the obscurities of the emotions). For, *“Poetry feeds and waters the passions instead of drying them up; she lets them rule, although they ought to be controlled – if mankind are ever to increase in happiness and virtue.”* (Republic X:606B)

Plato’s student Aristotle, on the other hand, granted the use of emotions, (to accumulate knowledge about our ethical existence) a much more prominent and deserving role. While Plato regarded the emotions as that which pollutes the soul, Aristotle sees it as not only a means to purify the soul, but also as a means to deepen our understanding of the practical nature of our existence. He writes in his *Poetics* that *“tragedy is a representation of action that is worthy of*

⁷ *“Those who write tragic poetry in iambics and hexameters are all imitators in the highest degree.”* (Republic X:602)

⁸ *“imitation is a beggar wedded to a beggar and producing beggarly children.”* (Republic X:603)

⁹ *“If you receive the pleasure-seasoned Muse of song and epic, pleasure and pain will be king in your city instead of law and the principle which at all times has been decided by the community to be best - [namely, reason]”* (Republic X:607)

serious attention, complete in itself and of some magnitude – bringing about by means of pity and fear purging of such emotions". (Poetics, 1449b) Other than Plato who regarded fictional literature as imitations of reality which offer an obscure picture of our ethical existence, Aristotle thus believes that although not reality itself, fictional literature can serve as an adequate (if not more adequate) means or form to present our ethical existence, since (as Henry James has noticed) "*art deals with what we see ... it plucks its material in the garden of life.*" (James 1970:312) The best manifestation of the ancient quarrel between philosophy and literature, and the different conceptions of how to communicate about our ethical existence, can thus be seen in the different stances towards fictional literature of Plato and Aristotle, as presented by the *Republic* and the *Poetics*, respectively.

The main reason for Plato's and Aristotle's respective stances towards the ways our ethical existence should be depicted, is, however, due to their different views on the nature of our ethical existence. For Plato truth about our ethical existence can be derived from reason alone – since our ethical existence is abstract and transcendental in nature. However, for Aristotle our ethical existence is concrete in nature and truth about our existence is thus obtainable through practical knowledge. Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence thus acknowledges the fact that human values are not always as commensurable as portrayed by Plato, and that the particulars of situations, as well as the emotions of people, play an integral part in our concrete existence. Aristotle's practical approach to the nature of our ethical existence, as opposed to Plato's transcendental approach, thus brings us to his conception of practical wisdom. Aristotle believes that he who has the ability to see our ethical existence for what it really is, (the person with practical wisdom), is he who has acquired practical knowledge about our ethical existence. The person with practical wisdom is thus the person who has knowledge about the concrete and practical matters regarding our ethical existence. Aristotle therefore promotes the idea of portraying ethical content through fictional literary form (while Plato opposes it) because

fictional literature provides practical knowledge about our ethical existence, from which practical wisdom can be obtained¹⁰.

However, before I will give a more detailed discussion of Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom, and how this conception contributes to Nussbaum's conception of narrative fiction as "vehicle"¹¹ for practical knowledge, I shall first turn to the opposing two styles presented by the ancient quarrel – namely; 1) the "*pale*"¹² style of philosophy; and 2) the "*vivid*" style of fictional literature. It is however important to remember, when dealing with these two styles individually, that we should not regard these two styles of writing "*as vessels into which different contents could be indifferently poured ...*" (Nussbaum 1990:15) Although the styles of moral philosophy and fictional literature differ in form, their contents still remain the same – since the contents of both forms consist of the fundamental question of how one should live.

2.1. The Abstract Style of Philosophy

The Oxford Dictionary describes the term '*philosophy*' as the use of "*reason and argument in seeking truth and knowledge of reality, especially of the causes and nature of things and of the principles governing existence, the material universe, perception of physical phenomena, and human behavior.*" A term is, however, never detached from its context and seldom so neutrally charged as presented by dictionary definitions. In order to broaden our understanding of the

¹⁰ In a stylistic context, it is rather ironic that Aristotle was the one who promoted the use of fictional literary art as form to ethical content while Plato was the one who opposed it – since Plato's style of writing is much more lyrical and poetical in comparison to Aristotle's scientific style. (For a detailed discussion of this irony see Gould 1990:258.)

¹¹ A more detailed discussion of Nussbaum (and my own) use of the word "vehicle" will be given in Chapter 2.

¹² The use of the words "*pale*" and "*vivid*" (to describe the nature of the styles of philosophy and narrative fictional art respectively) is a distinction which I have drawn from Shelly Kagan. (See *The Limits of Morality*, 1989 p. 283 - 290) The descriptive word 'pale' (as drawn from Kagan's conception of "pale beliefs") will refer to knowledge which is obtained purely through reason/the intellect. The descriptive word 'vivid' (as drawn from Kagan's conception of "vivid beliefs") will refer to knowledge which is obtained through styles which consulted the faculty of reason/the intellect, as well as the faculty of the emotions/imagination. These styles (which are more colourful in their representation of ethical contents) will in this context specifically refer to narrative fiction. The descriptive use of the words 'pale' and 'vivid' (for the styles of moral philosophy and narrative fiction, respectively) will be a distinction which will be used throughout this philosophical-literary investigation.

term *philosophy* as used in the context of this study, I would commence this section with a discussion of Martha Nussbaum's conception of the word.

Nussbaum regards the style of western moral philosophy as a style which is "*correct, scientific, abstract, hygienically pallid, a style that seemed to be regarded as a kind of all-purpose solvent in which philosophical issues of any kind at all could be efficiently disentangled, any and all conclusions neatly disengaged.*" (Nussbaum 1990:19) It is clear from Nussbaum's conception that she takes in a rather antagonistic¹³ stance towards the style of moral philosophy. The reason for her attitude towards this "all-inclusive" term is because she believes that ethical inquiries (based on the fundamental question – *How should one live?*) differ from other inquiries such as scientific inquiries to such an extent, that the forms or methods used to obtain scientific truths can not be appropriate for obtaining knowledge about our ethical existence – for it does not only differ in subject matter, but the norms of rationality differ greatly as well.¹⁴ Nussbaum is therefore against the method of taking a style which has been appropriate for the investigation and description of, for example scientific truths, and applying the same style (without the necessary reflection and alternations) to ethical inquiries which operate in a very different sphere of human life.

Nussbaum's critical references to the style of moral philosophy thus serve as the basis for her philosophical-literary inquiry. She argues that the philosophical style in which we communicate about our concrete ethical existence is sometimes too abstract. She agrees with Aristotle that knowledge about our ethical existence is not scientific knowledge, but that it is rather practical knowledge which should refer to people's everyday conducts – people with emotions, with imaginations and often conflicting value beliefs. Since the pale and abstract style of moral philosophy does not always accommodate the practical and more diverse dimensions of our ethical human existence, Nussbaum's main aim is thus to incorporate into moral philosophy a style which is less abstract, and which can portray our diverse and practical ethical existence

¹³ By using the word 'antagonistic' I do not imply that Nussbaum is against philosophy per se. She is merely against the use of moral philosophy in exclusion of narrative fiction.

¹⁴ A more detailed discussion of the different norms of rationality will be given in section 1.2.2. of Chapter 1.

through a more concrete and vivid manner. Only a style which is *“less abstract and schematic, more respectful of the claims of the emotions and imagination, more tentative and improvisatory, than philosophy has frequently been”*, she argues, will serve as an appropriate style to portray our ethical existence, and can therefore serve as complementary form for moral philosophy. (Nussbaum 1990:239)

For Nussbaum, this required style is to be found in the approach of those who lived in the time before the style of philosophy became so abstract as evident in moral philosophy today – namely, the Greeks of the fifth and early fourth centuries BC (the time before the ancient quarrel). As mentioned earlier, the Greeks of the fifth and early fourth century BC made use of styles which acknowledged the concrete nature of our ethical existence. They portrayed the concrete nature of our ethical existence through tragic and comic dramas, as well as poetry, and hardly ever considered these forms as something apart from philosophical investigations. The separation of ethical inquiries through philosophical and fictional literary forms, respectively, (as introduced by Plato) has however led to many of the abstract characteristics which the style of moral philosophy has today. It is therefore of no surprise that Nussbaum turns to Plato in her investigation to determine where ethical inquiries have become so abstract – for it is Plato who did not only introduce the separation between ‘poetry’ and philosophy, but it is also he who created the (still prevalent) negative conception of the use of fictional literary forms to obtain and portray ethical truths.

In Nussbaum’s proposal to include the vivid style of fictional literature into moral philosophy, Plato thus serves as the antagonist in Nussbaum’s story. Plato stands for everything which Nussbaum has against the pale and abstract representation of philosophy. In order to understand what is truly meant by the style of philosophy, one should thus determine what the proper *“Platonic bedtime story”* will be. (Nussbaum 1990:249) Nussbaum comes to the conclusion that the abstract style of philosophy, as approved by Plato, will be a style whose *“own speech would be ... lucid, spare and pure, unmixed with expressions of emotionality or passionate desire. It would strive to activate the intellect of the reader or hearer, while*

discouraging the engagement of appetite and emotion. This means ... forging stimulating stylistic devices, such as stirringly rhythmical language, avoiding the use of pictorial or sensuous language that would tend to activate the feelings and the imagination, and above all, eschewing the representation of intense emotionality, or of anything that would be likely to set off a train of associations or memories leading the reader into something disturbing or arousing in his own experience." (Nussbaum 1990:249) The abstract style of philosophy is however a style which should not be recognized only by the demand it sets for the intellectual involvement of its reader – for many other characteristics have sprung from this abstract style's obsession to obtain ethical truths through the intellect alone. As Nussbaum has noted, the abstract style of philosophy will, due to its intellectual superiority, seldom draw its sources from concrete human experience or present its reflections from a human perspective. The abstract style of philosophy speaks mostly from an anonymous, and almost omnipresent and omniscient position. From this position in which reason governs at all times, the abstract style of philosophy should therefore always apply the rules of pure reason – rules such as the rule of non-contradiction. The abstract style of philosophy thus seldom leaves space for contradictions which might occur in reality. The intellectual approach of the abstract style of philosophy will therefore always justify its position with rules such as the rule of non-contradiction, or other predetermined criteria. Nussbaum does however note, like Aristotle, that the abstract style of philosophy makes it rather difficult to observe the particularities of specific ethical situations. One of the main characteristics of the abstract style of philosophy (as introduced by Plato) is therefore, that it is often rather concerned with the universal structures and general characteristics of its subject matters, and hardly ever concerned with the particularities of an ethical situation.¹⁵

Nussbaum agrees with Aristotle that our ethical existence is not always one which is free of contradictions and which can be expressed in rigid rules or set criteria. Neither can the complete picture of our ethical existence be depicted, nor can we get to the roots of our ethical dilemmas, if we treat ethical situations in a universal/general manner or disregard entities other

¹⁵ For a more complete discussion on the characteristics of the Philosophical (Platonic) bedtime story (the style of abstract philosophy) namely; 1) *vehicle of communication*; 2) *Point of View*; 3) *Consistency, Generality and Precision*, see Nussbaum 1990:249-251.

than our intellect (such as emotions and the imagination) as important parts of our ethical existence. Nussbaum is therefore strongly against the abstract style of ethical writing which has governed moral philosophy for so long, as the only form to depict our ethical existence. She believes that moral philosophy should again, like the Greeks of the fifth and early fourth century BC, adopt the more vivid styles of fictional literary forms in the obtaining and portraying of ethical truths. Because only if moral philosophy operates in combination with fictional literary forms, she believes, will we be able to depict our ethical existence as one that consists of concrete and particular human dimensions, such as emotions, imagination and conflicting value beliefs.

2.2. The Concrete Style of Narrative Fiction

Nussbaum's reference to concrete narrative fiction can best be understood in the comparison she draws between the style promoted by Plato and the style used by the writer Proust, respectively. While Plato is the personification of the abstract style of moral philosophical texts, towards which she has taken such a skeptical stance, Proust becomes the personification of the concrete narrative fictional style which she so keenly promotes. Proust thus becomes the protagonist of the philosophical-literary inquiry of which Plato is the antagonist. The more vivid and concrete narrative fictional style of Proust is, however, just an example of the style under investigation, and I believe Nussbaum will be just as willing to replace her protagonist with any other writer whose style adheres to the characteristics of the concrete narrative fictional style she proposes. The question is however, what are the characteristics of this concrete narrative fictional style which she so keenly promotes? Nussbaum's reference to the concrete style of *narrative fiction* stands in strong contrast with her reference to the abstract style of philosophy. When using the term *Narrative Fiction*, Nussbaum refers to a style which, other than the abstract style of moral philosophy, consist of the following characteristics:

When talking about the style of narrative fiction, Nussbaum firstly refers to a style which, other than the style of philosophy, does not only speak to our rational and intellectual faculties, but

also to our faculties of feeling and imagination¹⁶. Narrative fiction, she argues, has the ability to “*call upon and also develop our ability to confront mystery with the cognitive engagement with both thought and feeling.*” (Nussbaum 1990:143) By representing a reader with a fictional ethical situation (with fictional characters who hold certain values and viewpoints, and who experience different emotions) the reader can, through the style of narrative fiction, consider the different values, viewpoints and emotions of those in the story, and feel compassion for the characters by imagining him in the position of the characters. Other than the style of philosophy which mostly operates from a superior omnipresent and omniscient position towards which the reader stands emotionally apathetic, Nussbaum thus also refers to narrative fictional literature as a style which is deeply rooted in our concrete human existence, and which is spoken from a concrete human position. Because as Nussbaum has noted in her discussions on the novels of Proust, the “*narrative never moves away from the specific circumstances and conditions of human life.*” (Nussbaum 1990:252) However, because narrative fiction represents a style which communicates about the non-commensurable values and emotions held by different human perspectives or viewpoints, it should allow, (different than the Platonic/Philosophical bedtime story) room for contradiction. Nussbaum thus lastly refers to the style of narrative fiction as one which leaves space for contradictions – since novels (such as novels by Proust) “*care to show how apparent inconsistencies can be seen as a part of a unitary true picture.*” (Nussbaum 1990:257)¹⁷ It is thus clear from Nussbaum’s reference to the style of narrative fiction, that it coincides perfectly with Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence.

¹⁶ For Nussbaum’s appeal for the importance of emotional and imaginative activity in ethical deliberation, see *Love’s Knowledge* p. 40-42, 75-82, 262.

¹⁷ At this point it is important to note that Nussbaum is not defending a relativistic position through her philosophical-literary inquiry – for she does not want to discard the guidance of general principles in her defense for the non-commensurability of values. It is just that she believes (like Aristotle) that the concrete doings and imaginings portrayed by this more vivid style should take on a universal significance which should provide us with a direction in which we can focus our thoughts and imagination, rather than bestowing us with rigid principles. (See Nussbaum 1990: 156-67)

3. Conclusion

The aim of the introductory chapter was to provide some historical background of the ancient quarrel between poetry and philosophy, as well as to give a brief description of Aristotle's and Plato's different stances towards the use of fictional literature to portray our ethical existence. The aim of the introductory chapter was also to clarify what is meant by Nussbaum's references to the abstract style of philosophy, and the concrete style of fictional literature.

The following chapter will be a more in-depth discussion of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence. The discussion will be given in order to fully understand Nussbaum's argument for the inclusion of narrative fiction in moral philosophy, as well as to eventually see whether the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges the three aspects of the Aristotelian conception of our ethical existence, and whether practical wisdom (as suggested by the Aristotelian ethical position) can be obtained through the reading of certain novels such as *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

Chapter 1

Aristotle's Conception of our Ethical Existence and his notion of Practical Wisdom (Phronésis)

1. Introduction

In his *Nicomachean Ethics*,¹⁸ Aristotle draws a clear distinction between *phronésis* and *sophia*. Both his conceptions of *sophia* and *phronésis* refer to intellectual virtues. However, where *sophia* is a virtue to deliberate about universal thoughts, *phronésis* is a virtue of practical thought¹⁹. Aristotle's notion of *phronésis* thus refers to the virtue closest related to his "non-scientific conception of the procedures by which good judgments of value are reached." (Nussbaum 2001a:291) The person with practical wisdom (*phronésis*) is, as Nussbaum has noted in her book *The Fragility of Goodness* (2001a), a person who "does not attempt to take up a stand outside of the conditions of human life, but bases his or her judgment on long and broad experience of ... [concrete human] conditions." (Nussbaum 2001:290) Practical wisdom is thus "a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human goods." (EN 1140b) However, in order to get to the true nature of Aristotle's conception of practical wisdom, one should thus ask, how does the Aristotelian agent with practical wisdom concern himself with things human and with things about which can be deliberated? How does he base his judgments on the conditions of life? How does he act with regard to human goods? Nussbaum describes the Aristotelian agent with practical wisdom as follows:

"The perceiving agent can be counted on to investigate and scrutinize the nature of each item and each situation, to respond to what is there before her with full sensitivity and imaginative vigor, not to fall short of what is there to be seen and felt because of evasiveness, scientific abstractness, or a love of simplification. The Aristotelian agent is a

¹⁸ Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (or *Ethica Nicomachea*) will from here onwards be referred to as EN.

¹⁹ Practical wisdom is ... "concerned with things human and things about which it is possible to deliberate." (EN 1141)

person whom we could trust to describe a complex situation with full concreteness of detail and emotional shading, missing nothing of practical relevance.” (Nussbaum 1990:84)

Nussbaum believes that a close reading of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* will show us that there are three aspects which should be adhered to in order to not only engage adequately with the practical nature of our ethical existence, but also to develop practical wisdom. These are 1) to regard major human values not as single and commensurable, as suggested by Plato, but to acknowledge the non-commensurable and plural nature of human values; 2) to give priority to particular perception above universal rules in ethical deliberation; and 3) not to underestimate the responses of emotions and the imagination in ethical situations. Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence will now be discussed according to these three aspects.

2. Three aspects of our Ethical Existence as acknowledged by the Aristotelian Ethical Position

2.1. The Non-Commensurability and Plurality of Values

“Now if what is healthy or good is different for men and for fishes, but what is white or straight is always the same, any one would say that what is wise is the same but what is practically wise is different; for it is to that which observes well the various matters concerning itself that one ascribes practical wisdom, and it is to this that one will entrust such matters.”

(Aristotle EN 1140b)

The Aristotelian ethical position holds that the person with practical wisdom will respect values or virtues (such as courage, honour, temperance and pleasure), as values that are distinct and unique in their own manner. Aristotle wrote: *“But of honour, wisdom, and pleasure, just in respect of their goodness, the accounts are distinct and diverse. The good, therefore, is not something common answering to one Idea.”* (EN 1096b) This claim goes strongly against Plato’s

conviction that all human values are commensurable and that all values refer to the one fundamental Idea of the good. Aristotle argues that human values (or virtues) are unique and distinct from each other, since it is clear from life that we often evaluate and chose a virtue on grounds of what is valuable for its own sake. In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides his reader with different definitions (although still broad and general definitions) of the different virtue excellences. In this it is clear that courage differs from temperance in nature, and that what is valued in friendship differs from that which is valued in pleasure. To treat these values as if they were the same, and as if they were valued for the same purpose, will thus, according to Aristotle, be to disregard the true nature of our ethical existence. For it is only the unwise person who would truly believe that courage is the same as temperance, is the same as honour – or holds the same values in friendship as he holds for justice. The virtues also differ among different people. Like Aristotle has noticed ...: *“What is terrible is not the same for all men.”* (EN 1115b)²⁰ Therefore courage (or what it is to be courageous) will differ from person to person. From the quotation at the beginning of this section, it is furthermore clear that what is valued by humans differ from what is valued by animals or what is valued by the divine. However, since ethics is a practical matter which is *“concerned with things human and things about which it is possible to deliberate”* (EN 1141b5) it will (or should) only engage itself with concrete and human matters. The person with practical wisdom is thus someone who would focus his attention on our diverse human values and grant them their unique contributions.

Aristotle’s argument for the non-commensurability of values, however, brings us extremely close to his claim that we should be sensitive to the particular and contextual aspects of our situations, when making ethical decisions. The reason why these two claims are so tightly interwoven is because, if excellences such as courage, temperance, friendship or justice differ in what they are valued for, it also means that certain situations will call for the specific application of a certain virtue or excellence. To apply my virtue of courage to a situation which called for the application of temperance, thus means that, although granted with the “virtue”²¹ of

²⁰ Just as ... *“different things are pleasant to different kinds of people.”* (EN 1118b)

²¹ I place my use of the word “virtue” in inverted commas – since Aristotle will argue that you do not have the virtue of courage if you apply it to the wrong situation.

courage, I did not know how to apply it in accordance with the specific situation and therefore did not show any insight of practical wisdom. The claim for the non-commensurability of values is furthermore closely related to the claim to grant priority to particulars above universals, since values are not always the same in different situations. To apply bravery in a specific situation where you rescue someone from the dangers posed by a wild animal, might be regarded as the application of the virtue of courage. However, to apply this same bravery to attack a wild animal instead of running away in a context where nobody should be rescued, Aristotle will not charge you of being courageous, but rather as being *“a sort of madman or insensible person [who is] ... boastful and only a pretender to courage.”* (EN 1115b) Such a person will thus lack all evidence of one who has practical wisdom, since he was not able to rightfully apply his distinct virtue to the specific situation. The universal rule to be courageous can thus not be applied regardless of the situation.

It is therefore important to understand Aristotle’s argument for the incommensurability of values (or the *“non-commensurability”*, as referred to by Nussbaum) in close proximity with his argument for the importance to be sensitive to specific contexts, and to rather apply virtues in accordance to what is expected in the specific situation than to apply universal rules regardless of the specific situation. In the next section I would thus turn to Aristotle’s second claim – namely, the claim for the priority of particulars above universals. In dealing with this claim, it would be advisable to remember that it is built on the basis of human values as non-commensurable.

2.2. Priority of the Particular

“Nor is practical wisdom concerned with universals only – it must also recognize the particulars; for it is practical, and practice is concerned with particulars. This is why some who do not know, and especially those who have experience, are more practical than others who know; for if a man knew that light meats are digestible and wholesome, but did not know which sorts of meat

are light, he would not produce health, but the man who knows that chicken is wholesome is more likely to produce health.”

(Aristotle EN 1141)

From the above quotation from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, it is clear that Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence and practical wisdom is concerned with particulars, or concerned with how to act in particular situations, rather than universal and general rules. As Nussbaum has noted ... *“the standpoint of perfection, which purports to survey all lives neutrally and coolly from a viewpoint outside of any particular life, stands accused already of failure of reference: for in removing itself from all worldly experience it appears to remove itself at the same time from the bases for discourse about the world. Our question about the good life must, [thus] be asked and answered within the appearances.”* (Nussbaum 2001a:291) Aristotle’s claim for the importance to grant priority to particulars above universals in our ethical inquiries, thus stands in strong contrast with Plato’s conception that what is intrinsically valuable is only that which is removed from particular contexts, and which solely adheres to the universal principles of the single conception of the good.

Aristotle refers to the faculty which enables the person with practical wisdom to discriminate between the concrete particulars of situations and universal principles (and which enables him to acknowledge the importance of the former alongside the latter) as the faculty of *perception*. In encouraging the person of practical wisdom to acquire the faculty of perception, Aristotle thus encourages him to look beyond the rigid constraints which universal principles often provide, and to rather see the fine details and shadings of the concrete situation – in order to adjust judgment according to what is required by the specific situation²². The reason why

²² Aristotle’s claim for the priority of particulars above universals thus requires a certain measure of flexibility – for the universal rule should adjust to what is required by the specific situation in order to establish good deliberation. The person of practical wisdom must thus *“be prepared to meet the new with responsiveness and imagination, cultivating the sort of flexibility and perceptiveness that will permit him ... to improvise what is required.”* (Nussbaum 2001:303) For a beautiful metaphor on this flexibility of judgments within universal principles, see Nussbaum’s description of Aristotle’s metaphor on p.301 of *Love’s Knowledge*.

Aristotle discourages us to only consult universal principles in ethical inquiries, is because these principles often prevent us from acknowledging the more subtle nuances of certain situations – and in turn prevent us from adjusting our judgments according to the specific situation at hand. This inability makes good deliberation difficult, if not impossible. The man of highest practical wisdom is thus ... *“the man who brings to bear upon a situation the greatest number of genuinely pertinent concerns and genuinely relevant considerations commensurate with the importance of the deliberative context.”* (Wiggins 1980:234) It is, however, important to note that Aristotle does not deny the importance of universal principles, but puts specific emphasis on the faculty of perception since *“these variable facts are the starting-points for the apprehension of the end, [and] since the universals are reached from the particulars.”* (EN 1143b)

Aristotle’s proposal to grant priority to particulars above or a posterior to universal principles, is very closely interwoven with his third recognition of our ethical existence – namely, that human emotions and the imagination (other than just pure intellectual reasoning) play an important role in our ethical existence and ethical deliberations. One manifestation of this interconnection can be seen in the way Aristotle’s claim for the priority for particulars concern itself with the value specific people (and not just people in general) have in our ethical existence and ethical deliberations. Plato regards the love one feels for a specific person as a value which forms part of the greater and more general value or conception of *love*. Plato’s conception of values as general entities therefore implies that a loved one can at any time be replaced by another loved one, since the love we feel for a specific person refers to one idea of the value love. This eliminates all possibility of sadness or grief, because as Nussbaum has noted, *“if the world does something to one of the items you love, there is a ready supply of other similarly valuable items.”* (Nussbaum 2001:298) Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence (and how we value things in this existence), differs greatly from Plato’s conception of how we value specific people. Aristotle’s conception implies that we love individual persons for who they are, and not merely for the general value they represent. Not to feel any sense of grief or remorse when experiencing the loss of a loved one is, according to Aristotle, highly unlikely – since the

specific love we feel toward a specific person cannot be replaced by a universal conception of love. In a case where a person does not feel remorse or grief during the loss of a specific loved one, Aristotle will argue that the person does not grasp the full scope of the situation. Aristotle would therefore like to encourage us (in order to become people with practical wisdom) to acknowledge emotions, such as sadness or grief, in our deliberations. The person with practical wisdom (with true perception) will thus incorporate both the faculties of reasoning and emotions in his deliberations, since perception is *“a complex response of the entire personality [of both the intellect and the emotions], an appropriate acknowledgment of the features of the situation on which action is to be based, a recognition of the particular.”* (Nussbaum 2001:309)

In the next section a discussion will be given of Aristotle’s third claim – namely, that recognition should be given to the integral role emotions and the human imagination play in our ethical existence and ethical deliberations.

2.3. Ethical Value of the Emotions and Imagination

“People who fall short with regard to pleasures and delight in them less than they should are hardly found; for such insensibility is not human. Even the other animals distinguish different kinds of food and enjoy some and not others; and if there is any one who finds nothing pleasant and nothing more attractive than anything else, he must be something quite different from a man.”

(Aristotle EN 1119)

According to Aristotle, what the emotions (or the faculty of feeling) and the faculty of the imagination have in common, is that both the faculties of emotion and the imagination have in their internal structures the ability to either feel or imagine in reference to the particular. Neither does one feel broadly about things, nor does one imagine about things both what has been and what is still to come, in general terms. What I feel is a certain emotion towards a certain person or value, and my imaginings consists of very vivid and concrete images of the

specific circumstance or person about which I imagine. Aristotle thus believes that the person with practical wisdom is one who does not only draw from his intellectual faculty to make ethical judgments, but who also incorporates the insights given by his emotive and imaginative faculties, into his ethical deliberation. Aristotle therefore does not deny the role of the intellect, but argues that it should be applied in combination with our emotive human faculties. Aristotle's moral theory should thus be seen, as L.A. Kosman will argue, as a theory "*not only of how to act well but also of how to feel well; for the moral virtues are states of character that enable a person to exhibit the right kinds of emotions as well as the right kinds of actions*". (Kosman 1980:105)

Aristotle's claim to direct the emotive and imaginative appeals in combination with the intellectual appeal (in other words – the whole soul) towards the particularities of a situation, thus implies that he wants us to both grasp and experience the full scope of situations. This can only be done if the whole soul participates – because someone who has been confronted by, for example, the death or suffering of a person and who understands it intellectually but feels no sadness or grief, or who is unable to imagine what another who experiences such loss or suffering would feel, is not only ignorant about the full scope of the situation, but (as Aristotle will argue) immature, if not inhuman. On the other hand, as Nussbaum has noted: "*By cultivating our ability to see vividly another person's distress, to picture ourselves in another person's place ... we make ourselves more likely to respond with the morally illuminating and appropriate sort of response.*" (Nussbaum 1990:339)

It is for this reason that Aristotle turns to tragedy in his *Poetics* – tragedy which is "*a representation of action that is worthy of serious attention, complete in itself and of some magnitude, [and which brings] about by means of pity and fear purging of such emotions*" (*Poetics*, 1449b) For he needs us to feel pity when sad and fear when threatened, (or to imagine these emotions of others) to both understand ethical situations of our own and of others more fully, and to acknowledge our ethical human existence in a more complete manner.

3. Conclusion

It is clear from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, that the person with practical wisdom is someone who acknowledges the concrete nature of our human ethical situations. However, in order to show acknowledgment to the concrete nature of our ethical existences, one will have to acknowledge the fact that human values are accompanied by emotions (for we feel angered by the violation and loss of something which has value to us), and that our values are often plural and non-commensurable in nature (for humans do not value all things equally). To show sensitivity to the concrete, practical and human nature of our ethical existences, one should furthermore show acknowledgement of the particularities of ethical situations. According to Aristotle, one can therefore only obtain practical wisdom if one acknowledges the concrete, practical and human nature of our ethical existences through the acknowledgement of the 1) non-commensurability and plurality of human values, 2) the particularities of ethical situations, and 3) the ethical value of the emotions and moral imagination.

The argument made by Nussbaum is that the abstract style of moral philosophy on its own, does not always serve as a sufficient means to create awareness for the three above mentioned acknowledgements, through which awareness of the practical and concrete nature of our ethical existence can be established. My aim in Chapter 2 will thus be to closely follow Nussbaum's argument for the inclusion of narrative fiction in moral philosophy, in order to set the platform from which there can be determined whether the style of fictional literature engages more adequately with the human, practical and concrete nature of our ethical existence.

Chapter 2

Nussbaum's Conception of the Aristotelian Ethical Position and the role of Narrative Fiction.

1. Introduction

What does the art of the novel (or narrative fiction) and practical wisdom have in common? Aristotle will argue that what they have in common is the fact that both ... *"art and practical wisdom deal with things that are variable."* (EN 1141) Both art and practical wisdom are rooted in, and concerned with, our concrete (and variable) human existence. It is exactly for this reason that Nussbaum promotes art (more specifically narrative art) as a more appropriate means to portray the concrete nature of our ethical existence. She writes: novels *"speak about us, about our lives and choices and emotions, about our social existence and the totality of our connections."* (Nussbaum 1990:171) She furthermore argues that the role of narrative art, to portray our ethical existence, is both empirical and practical. *"Empirical because it is based on and responsible to actual human experience ... and practical in that it is conducted by people who are themselves involved in acting and choosing and who see the inquiry as having a bearing on their own practical ends."* (Nussbaum 1990:173) Nussbaum furthermore realizes that the novel's engagement with our concrete existence might give us insight into concrete ethical situations which we might get confronted with in real life. The confrontation with a literary ethical situation can thus enable us to obtain practical wisdom which can later be applied to real situations. Nussbaum therefore believes that practical wisdom can be obtained through both the moral content of a novel and through the actual activity of reading a novel²³, since both can

²³ When referring to the actual activity of reading, Nussbaum argues that the experience of reading a novel is a moral activity in itself which develops our imagination for moral activity, such as judgment, in real life. (See Nussbaum 1990:339) Because ... *"To work through these sentences and these chapters is to become involved in an activity of exploration and unraveling that uses abilities, especially abilities of emotion and imagination, rarely tapped by philosophical texts."* (Nussbaum 1990:143)

heighten our sensitivity towards the non-commensurability of human values, to the particularities of certain situations, and the importance of emotions in our ethical existence. Accordingly, in this chapter a discussion will follow which shows how Nussbaum believes narrative fiction can serve as “vehicle” for the Aristotelian ethical position (as suggested by the title of this chapter), from which the above mentioned sensitivity can be obtained.

However, before commencing with a critical reading on Nussbaum’s texts and ideas, I would like to comment on the use of the word “*vehicle*”. I have drawn my use of the word “*vehicle*” directly from Nussbaum’s use of the word and therefore place it in inverted commas, since it is a reference to the word she uses throughout her works (especially in the essays of *Love’s Knowledge*). There is, however, also a second reason why I place this word in inverted commas. The reason for this is because, although using the word myself, I take a critical stance towards Nussbaum’s use of the word. My use of inverted commas thus also implies that I do not completely agree with Nussbaum’s use of the word, and that I would like to encourage my reader to read the word within the right context and therefore with a deeper understanding.

Nussbaum’s use of the word “*vehicle*” can easily lead to the assumption that she promotes the instrumentalization of fictional literature (or other forms of narrative art) in the sphere of ethical contemplation and communication. In other words, the word “*vehicle*” (which Nussbaum uses in her references to narrative fiction) may seem as if she implies that narrative art should be created and used for the sole purpose of acknowledging and communicating about the true nature of our ethical existence. It may therefore seem as if she implies that narrative art forms (such as fictional literature) are artworks not in their own right, but that they merely act as servants for the communication of the practical nature of our ethical existences, and the obtainment of practical wisdom. I can however, only criticize Nussbaum’s use of the word “*vehicle*” (which I argue can lead to the assumption of the instrumentalization of the narrative arts). A close reading of Nussbaum’s works will, however, show that she acknowledges the works within the narrative arts, as artworks with an aesthetical value in their own right regardless of the contribution it can make to our ethical understanding of our worlds. She

therefore acknowledges fictional literature, such as novels, as creations which can operate independently from the uses we might have for them. By referring to narrative art as a “vehicle” through which we can communicate about our ethical existence (as understood by Aristotle), and through which practical wisdom can be obtained, she does not deny the independent aesthetic nature of narrative art. She only suggests that narrative art may help us, within its independent and aesthetic status, to come closer to the true nature of our ethical existence.

2. Three aspects of the Aristotelian Conception of our Ethical Existence as acknowledged by Narrative Fiction

2.1. The Non-Commensurability and Plurality of Values

To agree to the non-commensurability and plurality of values is to agree to the notion that values are not perceived the same by all humans. What is pleasurable for one is not necessarily pleasurable for another, and what is valued by one is not necessarily valued equally by another. Isaiah Berlin has noted:

“What is clear is that values can clash – that is why civilizations are incompatible. They can be incompatible between cultures, or groups in the same culture, or between you and me. You believe in always telling the truth, no matter what, I do not, because I believe that it can sometimes be too painful and too destructive. We can discuss each other’s point of view, we can try to reach common ground, but in the end what you pursue may not be reconciled with the ends to which I find I have dedicated my life. Values may easily clash within the breast of a single individual, and it does not follow that, if they do, some must be true and others false.” (Berlin 1991:10)

Nussbaum argues that to adequately acknowledge and express the non-commensurable, plural, and often conflicting nature of our human values, requires that we use a style which shows sensitivity to the different viewpoints of people. She therefore promotes the style of fictional

literature, since it is a style which vividly expresses the values of characters from the specific viewpoints or positions they hold. Nussbaum refers to several novels in her study to demonstrate how the style of narrative fiction shows sensitivity to different viewpoints in specific ethical situations of life. One of the authors towards which Nussbaum shows the greatest acknowledgment is Marcel Proust. Because as earlier mentioned, while regarding Plato as the antagonist in the story of the ancient quarrel between fictional literature and philosophy, Nussbaum sees Proust as the protagonist of her ethical-literary inquiry.

One of the works by Proust which she refers to in her claim for the acknowledgement of non-commensurable and plural human values, is *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (1941). Through this work she demonstrates how Proust introduces his reader to the values of certain characters by portraying them from the specific and concrete human viewpoints of these characters, as well as presenting the reader with his own personal viewpoint.²⁴ On this Nussbaum writes: “*We are ... carefully told what particular perceptions and responses led Marcel [the narrator] to his general reflection. What is more, the moment he has briefly formulated a general psychological principle he moves back to dwell upon his own case, to the particular words of Albertine [the character] that opened his heart.*” (Nussbaum 1990:252)

Through her reading of Proust’s novel Nussbaum thus acknowledges how the novel treats specific human viewpoints with great sensitivity. I do however think that a more thorough discussion of Proust’s work would also have shown how Proust shows acknowledgement to not only the unique character of value perceptions, but also the non-commensurable and often conflicting nature of particular human values themselves. My critique on Nussbaum’s treatment of Proust’s works is thus that she does not mention how the novel acknowledges the non-commensurable and plural nature of the values which are accompanied by these unique viewpoints.

²⁴ See Nussbaum’s discussion on the “Point of View” in Proust’s work in *Love’s Knowledge*, p. 252.

Nussbaum does, however, through her discussion of Proust's work, fully acknowledge the notion that a viewpoint or value perception can change within a single character or person over a period of time. Our viewpoints and value perceptions therefore does not only differ from each other, but it also changes within the lifespan of a single human being. On the value perception of the narrator [author] which changes in Proust's work, Nussbaum writes:

"This means that when the central psychological truth it contains is presented to us, conveyed in the odd spatial metaphor, we explore it and assess it, first of all, from the point of view of Marcel: that is, we are led up to it by assuming his experiences and responses. We are led to feel and see that picture by the very processes that led him. Our situation, however, is still more complex than this. For the narrative presents us not only with the Marcel to whom this picture occurred, but also with the older Marcel ... So we are asked to alternate between assuming Marcel's original perspective ... and assuming a perspective that remembers [reliving and responding to] his experience ... " (Nussbaum 1990:252)

The style of fictional literature can thus contribute to our moral understanding of our own worlds and the worlds of others, because, as Nussbaum has noted: by presenting different value perceptions through different characters, fictional literature can *"give us understanding of the human good through a scrutiny of alternative conceptions of the good."* (Nussbaum 1990:142) Fictional literature can thus (and this is what Nussbaum will argue for) become a means through which one can have access to different value conceptions, and so gain thorough insight about a specific situation in order to become one who can make judgments from a well informed position of practical wisdom.

Nussbaum does not claim that the novel can give one access to all existing viewpoints, but she does believe that the structure of a novel, in the way it is committed to qualitative distinctions, can give us better insight into the different viewpoints or value perceptions involved in specific ethical situations than the abstract style of philosophy and even life itself. On this she writes: *"The novels show us the worth and richness of plural qualitative thinking and engender in their*

readers a richly qualitative kind of seeing. The novelist's terms are even more variegated, more precise in their qualitative rightness, than are the sometimes blunt vague terms of daily life; they show us vividly what we can aspire to in refining our understanding." (Nussbaum 1990:36) By reading a novel which acknowledges the diverse viewpoints and values of characters, we can thus become people who do not only have a better understanding of specific situations (from which a self-understanding can be generated), but we also have a better understanding of the value perceptions of others.

2.2. Priority of the Particular

When referring to the demand for the priority of the particular above the universal, Nussbaum returns to the Aristotelian conception of *perception*. As previously mentioned, perception refers to the faculties which enable one to show a sensitivity towards the salient features of concrete situations. As the title of one of her essays suggests, perception enables and demands one to become more "*finely aware and richly responsible*". (Nussbaum 1990:148) As it is a characteristic of the one with practical wisdom to "*describe a complex situation with full concreteness of detail and emotional shading, missing nothing of practical relevance*" (Nussbaum 1991:84), the question is thus: How does one become more finely aware and richly responsible towards the salient features of concrete situations? As may be expected, Nussbaum promotes narrative fiction (or the style of the novel) to also fulfill this role. She argues that narrative fiction operates on three levels to create this more fine-tuned responsibility to the particularities of an ethical situation. By portraying a concrete ethical situation through the eyes of characters with unique viewpoints, histories and social contexts (instead of communication through vague general principles) the reader can, she argues, 1) read (and grasp) specific aspects of the situation in relation to other aspects of the complex situation, 2) read (and grasp) specific aspects of the situation in relation to specific persons or relations, and 3) draw

conclusions from the specific aspects of a situation which might provide insight into uncontrolled, as well as not yet foreseen, situations.²⁵

Nussbaum refers to the first claim for the novel's role to heighten our responsibility to the particularities of ethical situations (although not presented in this order), as the "*Context-embeddedness of relevant features*". (Nussbaum 1990:38) With this she implies the notion of grasping ethical situations in their full contexts, since a specific feature of a specific situation seldom operates in isolation. A specific value perception is embedded in the specific person's (character's) background, history, religion, nationality, even current location. In order to fully understand the specific value perception at stake (say, for example justice) one should thus read it in relation to these relevant features. The style of narrative fiction, however, (other than the abstract style of philosophy), does not only focus on the value at stake, but it gives its reader through vivid descriptions, a look into the character's background, history, religion, nationality, and current location. A character (or a specific value perception) can therefore be introduced to a reader in its totality. It is this increasing of "*background knowledge*" which M.J. Pardales believes "*informs our process of moral judgment ... [and which] heightens our capacity to recognize morally relevant situations.*" (Pardales 2002:434)

In her article, "*Finely Aware and Richly Responsible*" (Nussbaum 1990:148), Nussbaum acknowledges the ability of novels to provide readers with the background features of characters, in her discussion of *The Golden Bowl* by Henry James. In this article Nussbaum turns to the character of Maggie. In her discussion of Maggie, as well as in the novel itself, much rests on the moral goodness of the character Maggie. Like her father has stated in the novel: "*Maggie had never in her life been wrong for more than three minutes.*" (James 1909:I.236) Nussbaum shows how much about Maggie's morally sober life (as well as the complex relationship she has with her husband) can be understood due to the "commitment" of the novel to inform the reader about her background – especially the relationship she had with her father. Throughout the novel the reader is informed of Maggie's childhood relationship with her father, which

²⁵ See Nussbaum's *Love's Knowledge* p. 38 for both the discussion on these three characteristics and their connection with universalizability.

forms the basis of her loyalty to her father and the disloyalty to her husband. The painfulness of Maggie's separation from her father (in marrying the prince) can therefore be ascribed to that which she has shared with her father in the past. In her discussion of Maggie's situation and behaviour Nussbaum asks:

"Could it be anything but a matter of the most serious pain, and guilt, for her to give up, even for a man whom she loves passionately, this father who has raised her, protected her, loved her, enveloped her, who really does love only her and who depends on her for help of future happiness? In these circumstances she cannot love her husband except banishing her father. But if she banishes her father he will live unhappy and die alone."
(Nussbaum 1990:150)

We therefore understand why Maggie acts as she does, by taking the context-embeddedness of relevant features into consideration. The insight given into certain value perceptions through the embeddedness of relevant features need not, however, be restricted to the insight of the value perceptions of others alone. This feature of the novel can also lead to a more thorough understanding and clearer depiction of our own convictions. As Nussbaum has realized in her reading of Proust's novels, *"the readers become, in Proust's words, the readers of their own selves. And this judgment tells the reader ... to go beyond the described features and to consider the particulars of one's own case."* (Nussbaum 1990:39) By being vividly introduced to the value perception of a certain character, through the character's specific background, culture or religion, we can thus determine our own perception regarding certain values and matters, in finding that which we both differ in, and have in common with the character.

Through her discussion of *The Golden Bowl* in *"Finely Aware and Richly Responsible"* (Nussbaum 1990:148-167), Nussbaum thus shows (although indirectly) how the "commitment" of the novel to present its readers with the context-embedded features of its character, can grant the reader insight into the actions and behaviour of people in certain situations (as well as insight into our own actions). Nussbaum's close reading of the father-daughter-relationship in *The Golden Bowl*, also proves to be a good example of the ability of novels to show sensitivity to the particularities

of specific people and relationships. Nussbaum's second claim for the novel's role to highlight our awareness of the particularities of ethical situations, therefore falls under the heading – *Ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships*. (Nussbaum 1990:38) With this she implies that novels give a certain priority to the specific positions specific people have in our lives. Novels make us aware, (by introducing us to concrete characters and concrete relationships), that the importance of a value such as love, does not lie in vague abstract principles, but rather in the loving relationship between two specific people with their specific qualities and characteristics, with their specific backgrounds and social make-ups. The relationship between Maggie and her father in *The Golden Bowl* is a good example of this. As Nussbaum has noticed, James makes it clear throughout his novel that the significance of the fatherly love in the novel, does not rest on an abstract principle of love, but on the special relationship between Maggie and her father specifically. (Nussbaum 1990:39,151) In the novel we come across sentences such as: *“Oh it's you father, who are what I call beyond everything”* (James 1909:II 263-64), and *“His hands came out, and while her own took them he drew her to his breast and held her. He held her hard and kept her long ...”* (James 1909: II 275). In instances where James portrays the particular nature of love (or a specific relationship) in such vivid terms, Nussbaum writes: *“The account of Maggie's relationship to her father suggests that the describable and universalizability properties are not all that is of relevance. For we sense in Maggie and Adam [her father] a depth and quality of love that would not tolerate the substitution of a clone, even one who had all the same describable features.”* (Nussbaum 1990:39) With her discussion of the relationship between Maggie and her father, Nussbaum therefore wants to demonstrate to her reader how a novel, such as *The Golden Bowl* by Henry James, can show acknowledgement to the particularity of special people and relationships (Something which is not always acknowledged by the abstract style of philosophical texts).

Nussbaum's third claim, about the ability of the novel to heighten our awareness of the particularities of ethical situations, falls under the heading – *“new and unanticipated features”* (Nussbaum 1990:38). With this she implies that novels, through their “commitment” to portray the particular features of human situations, do not only grant us insight into the immediate

features of a specific situation, but they also give us insight into future judgments. By dealing with an ethical situation in all its complexity (with all its relevant background features) one can thus develop a certain practical wisdom which can in future be applied to other similar, although not necessarily identical, situations. The practical wisdom obtained through previous encounters of particular “literary” situations, will thus imply that one has also acquired a certain ability of “improvisation,” with which one can apply previously gained knowledge about a specific “literary” situation to new “real life” situations.

However, the ability to develop an intuition of judgment for not yet foreseen ethical situations requires a certain emotive involvement in the ethical situations at hand. Nussbaum will therefore argue that you can only become more “*finely aware and richly responsible*” for the finer nuances of ethical situations, if you turn to the emotive faculties, such as emotions and the moral imagination. She believes that these emotive faculties often pick up the finer nuances of ethical situations, such as the specific value beliefs, backgrounds and emotions of those in these situations, which reason alone cannot. In the next section a discussion will thus follow of Nussbaum’s claim that narrative fiction has the ability to emotively engage its readers in specific ethical situations. The questions whether novels acknowledge the role of emotions in our ethical existence, and whether the emotional engagement through novels can lead to the cultivations of a moral imagination, will also be investigated.

2.3. Ethical Value of the Emotions and Imagination

2.3.1. Emotions

Nussbaum reminds us that the Aristotelian view of the role of the emotions in ethical deliberation implies that practical wisdom about specific ethical situations is not only unobtainable without acknowledging the presence of emotions as integral to our ethical existence, but that ethical deliberation is also irrational if it denies the presence of emotions in ethical situations. The Aristotelian view in fact holds that emotions are often more valuable to

ethical deliberation than purely intellectual reasoning. As Nussbaum has noted: *“Emotions embody some of our most deeply rooted views about what has importance – views that could easily be lost from sight during sophisticated intellectual reasoning.”* (Nussbaum 1990:42) The role of emotions in our ethical existence can clearly be seen in the relationship between human emotions and human beliefs. In claiming to have adopted a belief that (and I use Nussbaum’s example) something like racial injustice is wrong, and then not to experience and show anger when witnessing an incident of racial injustice, is in fact irrational. (Nussbaum 1990:41) True beliefs therefore seldom operate unaccompanied from our emotions. From Nussbaum’s Aristotelian claim for the ethical value of emotions, one can thus assume that someone who has adopted a value belief would grieve, or get angered when experiencing a violation of the adopted belief. From this it can be concluded that if a person’s emotions do not correspond with his beliefs, it might be that the person has not truly adopted the belief. Because, only one who has not really adopted the belief that, say, racial injustice is wrong (although pronouncing that he does) can stand emotionally untouched by a clear instance of racial injustice. There is thus an undeniable relationship between emotions and value beliefs – since our emotions correspond to our adopted value beliefs. Nussbaum therefore argues that it is of the highest importance to listen to our emotions in ethical deliberation and to develop our emotional intelligence, in order to become more emotionally receptive and vigilant in ethical situations. (Nussbaum 1990:40-42)

The opinions about the means to obtain this emotional intelligence vary. Aristotle, for example, has argued that what is required is a long and thoroughly lived life. Because, only by being confronted with actual experiences in life (which demand this emotive involvement), can we develop and adequately apply this emotional intelligence and sensitivity. It is for this reason that Aristotle believes that a young person cannot be practically as wise as an older person, because a young person (due to his/her short lived life) has not yet been confronted by enough such emotional situations. (EN:1142a) To learn from life (to become emotionally more sensitive and receptive in ethical situations), is a very slow and gradual process. Nussbaum, who does acknowledge the importance of emotional intelligence in ethical deliberation, agrees with Aristotle that what is required in order to know what love or grief or anger is, (and to become

one who can love, or grieve when sad, or become angered by injustices), requires that one should be confronted by such situations. Nussbaum, however, disagrees with Aristotle that the only means to obtain this emotional maturity should be through life itself, exactly for the reason that it is a too slow and time-consuming process. She believes there must be a means to obtain and acknowledge this emotional sensitivity through a procedure which is less time-consuming – for *“we have never lived enough.”* (Nussbaum 1990:47)

This brings us to Nussbaum’s last claim for the importance of fictional literature in moral philosophy. This claim I would argue is in combination with the cultivation of a moral imagination the most fundamental claim of her literary-ethical inquiry. Nussbaum believes that the vivid and emotionally engaging style of fictional literature can serve as a better means to obtain this emotional sensitivity than both philosophical reading and life itself. It is better than philosophical readings because it engages its reader emotionally more intensely, and better than life itself because it is a less time-consuming process. As an example of where a novel engages its reader with the emotions of a character, Nussbaum again refers to Proust’s *Sodome et Gemorrhe*. (Nussbaum 1990:246) In this work, she argues that the novel not only communicates about suffering, but in fact enables the reader to suffer with (through) the characters. The novel, as she has noticed, therefore *“shows the central psychological truth being grasped not through calm cognition but by and in the suffering itself. To get the truth it conveys, as we perform the activity of the imagination we have described, we will ourselves not only be responding to Marcel’s suffering with a spectator’s pity; we will also be taking up, within Marcel’s viewpoint, his violent pain, following the path by which pain shows something about his soul.”* (Nussbaum 1990:253-54) By accentuating the reality of feelings and emotions through the characters of a book, and to share as reader in the emotions of these characters, a novel can thus become a means to not only emphasize the reality of emotions in our ethical existence, but it can also become a means for the reader to practice, experience and develop an emotional sensitivity in a relatively short duration of time. Nussbaum thus praises novels for both *“representing emotional responses as valuable sources of information about practical value and*

as of high practical value themselves,” as well as praising them for the narrative aspect’s *“ability to evoke emotional activity in the reader.”* (Nussbaum 1990:291)

The way the narrative and emotive aspects of fictional literature correspond to the narrative and emotive aspects of our human existence, therefore enables readers of novels to gain both a better self-understanding and a better understanding of the values of others. Nussbaum firstly claims that self-understanding can be enhanced, since sharing the grief or anger experienced by a certain character enables one to determine one’s own position regarding the violation of a certain value. Narrative fiction can thus play a very important role in our moral philosophy, if you agree with Nussbaum, as well as Mark Johnson, that an adequate moral theory *“must acknowledge the way we try to construct narrative unities that give us the means to criticize our present situation, explore avenues of possible action, and transform our identity in the process.”* (Johnson 1993:154)

Secondly Nussbaum claims that the emotional engagement through novels (and the acknowledgment given to the presence of emotions by novels) does not only lead to better self-understanding, but it also leads to the better understanding of the value beliefs of others.²⁶ Good ethical deliberation requires that one should have a good understanding of the emotions and value beliefs of the other people involved in ethical situations. Nussbaum will thus argue that the novel can become a wonderful means to gain understanding and sensitivity for the beliefs and emotions of others – since a rich and well written novel can give a reader access to the beliefs and the emotions of others, (through the representation of specific characters), which would not have been accessible through the pale and abstract style of philosophy in which these values are not communicated through characters. By learning to know the emotions and beliefs of others through those in which these values are embedded (by portraying it through characters and not through a means which does not communicate through characters, such as philosophy) the reader can become both more emotionally involved with,

²⁶ *“By cultivating our ability to see vividly another person’s distress, to picture ourselves in another person’s place ... we make ourselves more likely to respond with the morally illuminating and appropriate sort of response.”* (Nussbaum 1990:339)

and more informed of the values of others. The role novels can play in our better understanding of the emotions and beliefs of others can best be seen in Nussbaum's example of her reading of Dickens' *Hard Times* (1995). Although she realized that the conditions and the reality of factory workers in her own town differ from the factory workers' conditions in the novel, the confrontation with the emotions and beliefs of the factory worker characters enabled her to become more informed about their conditions, emotions and beliefs, which enabled her to develop a sensitivity and compassion for the beliefs of not only factory workers in general, but also for the factory workers in her own town. (Nussbaum 1995:7) The structure of the novel (in the way it vividly presents the reader with the emotions attached to the specific beliefs of the factory workers), thus led her to an understanding and sensitivity for the emotions and value beliefs of factory workers, which she did not have previously.

Knowledge about the values and emotions of others is, however, not knowledge which can be derived apart from ourselves. Because, as Nussbaum has noticed, "*the human being is the being who cannot depart from himself, who knows others only in himself.*" (Nussbaum 1990: 271) The ability to understand the emotions and values of others within ourselves, rests in the faculty of the imagination. The ability to understand the relationship between the emotions and value beliefs of others, requires a certain shift in perception in which the position of the other can be imagined. The faculty of the imagination can therefore become a very valuable means to generate sensitivity and to gain an understanding of the emotions and value beliefs of others. It is for this reason that Nussbaum will argue that priority should be given to not only to the role of emotions in the existence of others, but also to the imagination – since the only means to experience and understand the emotions of others (and to feel real compassion for those who suffer in complex moral situations) is through the faculty of the moral imagination.

2.3.2. The Moral Imagination

Why are kings without pity for their subjects? It is because they count on never being human beings. Why are the rich so harsh to the poor? It is because they do not have fear of becoming poor. Why does a noble man have such contempt for a peasant? Is it because he never will be a peasant?

(Rousseau, *Emile*, Book IV)

Various definitions have been given for the term *Moral Imagination*. Recent writers, like M. Johnson, have described the faculty of the moral imagination as “*an ability to imaginatively discern various possibilities for acting within a given situation and to envision the potential help and harm that are likely to result from a given action.*” (Johnson 1993:202) J. Jacobs has defined it as something which involves the “*articulating and examining [of] alternatives, weighing them and their probable implications, considering their effects on other plans and interests, and considering their possible effects on the interests and feelings of others.*” (Jacobs 1991:25) Others, like Lawrence Blum, again associate it with the faculty to generate compassion for another. He does, however, acknowledge that “*compassion is not a simple feeling-state, but a complex emotional attitude towards another, characteristically involving imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other person [...] The degree of imaginative reconstruction need not be great ... But [for another person to feel compassion towards me] she must at least dwell in her imagination on the fact that I am distressed. So some imaginative representation is a necessary condition for compassion.*” (Blum 1980:509-10)

Most of the definitions, however, are derived from Adam Smith’s treatment of the moral imagination. Smith refers to the ideal point of view (which is obtainable through the moral imagination) as the viewpoint of the “Judicious Spectator.” He writes: “*... the spectator must ... endeavor, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other, and to bring to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer. He must adopt the whole case of his companion with all its minutest incidents, and strive to render as perfect as*

possible, that imaginary change of situation upon which his sympathy is founded." (Smith 1976:l.i.4.6)

What is thus generally understood under the term *moral imagination* (or which will be implied when referring to Nussbaum's use of the word), is the faculty to imagine oneself in the position of the other, in which the feelings, beliefs and circumstances of the other can be taken into serious consideration, and from which feelings of compassion can be generated. The cultivation of a moral imagination is normally promoted on the terms that better understanding of the other, through feelings of compassion, will lead to better ethical deliberation. The term thus implies a strong connection with moral judgment. Both the writings of Nussbaum and Adam Smith acknowledge this connection. Yet, they both realize that it is not always easy to put oneself in the position of the other. Although Rousseau's question, as quoted above, may thus imply that true understanding and respect for the servant and the peasant can only be obtained if the king and nobleman imagine themselves in the position of the servant and peasant, respectively, it still does not imply that it is always easy to do so, for it requires a cultivated 'moral' imagination. In her ethical-literary inquiry, Nussbaum therefore attempts to find a means through which we can more easily imagine ourselves in the positions of the other, through which insight and feelings of compassion can be established.

For Nussbaum this means lies in the concrete and vivid style of fictional literature. She believes that the way a novel introduces its reader to concrete characters with specific emotions and beliefs, and the way it invites the reader to become part of that character's life for the duration of the novel, enables the reader to imagine himself in the position of a character with certain circumstances and with a certain value belief. This, she argues, will never be possible through the abstract and emotional unengaging style of philosophy, because the way philosophical texts communicate about values without acknowledging the people (characters) in whom these values are embedded, often leaves the reader untouched by the emotions accompanied by certain value beliefs. The abstract style of moral philosophy therefore often leaves the reader uninformed about the full complexity of the circumstances and value position of others. The

novel's concrete and rich descriptive style thus enables the reader, Nussbaum will argue, to "*imagine and describe with greater precision.*" (Nussbaum 1990:47) By dealing with a value (such as *justice*) by reading about a certain character who has suffered a severe injustice, and by placing oneself through one's reading in the position of that character, a deeper understanding of the implied value of justice, as well as a deeper sensitivity towards those who embody the value, can be established.²⁷ Nussbaum therefore writes: "*It cannot be emphasized too strongly that what I am advocating, what I want from art and literature is not erudition; it is empathy and the extension of concern.*" (Nussbaum 2001b:432)

Nussbaum, however, makes it clear that the knowledge about sensitivity for the value positions of characters, obtained through the novel's greater precision of description, need not only be applied to those who share the values of the characters in real life. The development of a moral imagination (by imagining one in the position of a character) will also enable us to imagine ourselves in the position of others who are in situations different from those portrayed in the novel. (Nussbaum 1990:166) Because, as Nussbaum has noted, "*the moral imagination is encouraged by the very activity of novel-reading itself.*" (Nussbaum 1990:166) By developing the faculty of imagining oneself in the position of a character by reading a novel concerned with, say racial injustice, one therefore does not only have more insight into racial injustice, but this more developed faculty leads to a more cultivated moral imagination which can be applied to situations where one has to imagine oneself in the position of someone who suffers in real life under another vice, such as dishonesty or untrustworthiness. Through the reading of fictional literature we can therefore become persons with both more compassion for others, and a deeper understanding of ethical situations (practical wisdom).

²⁷ Here we can again refer, as example, to Nussbaum's reading of the factory workers in Dickens' *Hard Times*.

3. Conclusion

Nussbaum's proposal to include fictional literature in moral philosophy, is a challenging project. There are however, quite a few critics who are in favour of her argument. Most critics agree that it is a conversation which (as argued by Mary Sirridge) "*... is bound to start up fresh debate on some old issues and start some discussions which are long overdue.*" (Sirridge 1992:65) Personally I have to admit, like Jesse Kalin (and many other such as William Casement²⁸), that I find myself in the "*perhaps odd position of sharing Nussbaum's sense of what is important for moral philosophy and reflection, including the need to take literature and the narrative arts in general as partners in a common enterprise and the view that emotions (affectivity) and love are key moral phenomena ...*" (Kalin 1992:135)

Through my reading of the critical literature on this specific argument of Nussbaum, I did, however, come to the conclusion that most of the critique (or the points specifically raised against the essays in *Love's Knowledge*) does not so much disagree on the fundamentals of Nussbaum's argument, but rather on the way she presents her argument. Some, like Jennifer Rike, has criticized her work for overstating the argument. She argues that the reader often "*longs for a single, systematically developed statement of her view at which to level questions.*" (Rike 1993:845) Others, like Mary Sirridge, complained about her poor referencing of sources other than her own and the absence of a bibliography. (Sirridge 1992:65) And I agree that both points are well made, since it causes much frustration when working closely with her texts. There are, however, critics who take in a rather critical and offensive stance, such as Jenny Teichman. Teichman, for example, writes: "*Ms. Nussbaum, a professor of philosophy and classics at Brown University, criticizes academic philosophers for not writing about literature-and-philosophy.*" (Teichman 1991:24) Later in the same New York Times review she writes: "*There is no such thing as a special British and American philosophical style. There are nearly as many styles as philosophers. Thus Philippa Foot is careful, Mary Midgley intense, Elizabeth Anscombe difficult and involved; Arthur Prior is terse, J. J. C. Smart is elegant; Edmund Gettier is*

²⁸ Casement made the same argument in his article "*Literature and didacticism*" in the 1987 edition of the *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 21(1).

*lucid, W. V. O. Quine is self-conscious and Saul Kripke is conversational; Robert Nozick is rhetorical and interrogative, David Lewis is boyish and Peter Geach is deliberately outrageous.”*²⁹

About critique like this I will argue that the critic did not fully grasp (or preferred to obscure) the fundamental aspects of Nussbaum’s argument. Nussbaum’s argument is not that the abstract style of philosophy is always the same. She does, however, argue that most philosophical texts (in their diversity) fail to acknowledge the particularities, emotions and non-commensurable values of our ethical existences. Nussbaum neither argues that philosophy should be more about novels, but she argues that philosophy should include, or more often turn to novels in order to cover broader and deeper dimensions of our ethical reality. Nussbaum is furthermore aware that there are several critics who have objected to the priority she has given to the importance of emotions and the moral imagination in philosophy. Against these critiques (in which it is argued that emotions have no cognitive content) Nussbaum argues that it is a superficial view and that you will not find traces of this argument in the works of major thinkers. (Nussbaum 1990: 386)

There are, however, critics who made more significant contributions to the debate. Many of the more significant and most recent concerns about Nussbaum’s argument, I will argue, come from the psychoanalytical field. The element in Nussbaum’s argument for the inclusion of social novels in moral philosophy which received the most critique from psychoanalytical writers, is the priority she has given novels to cultivate a moral imagination. Nussbaum’s claim for the cultivation of a moral imagination through fictional literature implies that the novel enables a reader to take in the position/perspective of a character, through which he [the reader] can generate feelings of compassion for the specific character. Bruce Maxwell, in one of his recent psychoanalytical articles, refers to this proposal as the “*perspective taking/compassion hypothesis*.” (Maxwell 2006:339) The critique of Nussbaum’s perspective taking/compassion hypothesis is that the process to generate feelings of compassion for another, is more multi-

²⁹ Do, however, note that she refers to the styles of these philosophers and not to the philosophers themselves.

dimensional than merely placing yourself in the position or perspective of another. People like Bruce Maxwell, therefore argue that *“the unrivalled educational value that Nussbaum ascribes to the study of novels in this regard is compelling only when one fails to appreciate that rich imaginative involvement in another’s aversive state is only one of the many other psychological routes to compassion.”* (Maxwell 2006:335)

Maxwell’s study shows that there are many cognitive means to generate compassion towards the other, and that perspective-taking cannot be treated (as Nussbaum does) as the most important means, since it is just one of the many cognitive capacities through which compassion can be generated.³⁰ The reason, Maxwell argues, why it is dangerous to treat perspective-taking (through novels) as the only means to activate an imagination towards compassion, is that *“it makes observers susceptible to a wide variety of cues, enabling them to respond emphatically to whatever ‘distress cues’ happen to be available in a set of circumstances.”* (Hoffman in Maxwell 2006:347)³¹ Maxwell’s other concern is that by failing to acknowledge the multi-dimensionality of empathic arousal, Nussbaum’s proposal may not be very accessible to people (such as children) who do not yet have the cognitive capacity to generate feelings of compassion (or to take in another’s perspective) through a language-mediated means, such as the reading of novels. (Maxwell 2006:347-9) Maxwell also noticed that people have different psychological capacities for compassion and that the single process to generate compassion through the

³⁰ Maxwell provides a list of seven other cognitive means through which compassion for the other can be generated. He labels them as: 1) *Conditioning* (when a person’s own distress in the past links with another person’s distress through certain stimuli, such as the sight of blood); 2) *mimicry* (the physical imitation of another person’s emotional expression); 3) *Direct association* (when feelings of compassion are triggered via an associative connection between a particular feeling and experience; 4. *Language mediated association* (the triggering of compassion through vivid descriptions of a person’s feelings through written and spoken language); 5) *Cognitive networking* (the process where the *“observation of social stimuli such as another person’s behaviour in a given setting initiates cognitive processes in which the observer attempts to match the observed event with some pre-stored chunk of stereotyped knowledge.”* [See Kariol 1982:169]; 6) *Labeling*; and lastly 7) *Perspective Taking*. (Note that perspective taking is only one of the many ways to activate feelings of compassion.)

For a more in-depth discussion of these seven psychological capacities for compassion, see Maxwell’s article (2006).

³¹ For Hoffman’s assessment on this matter (as referred to and referenced by Maxwell), see Hoffman, M.L. (2000) *Empathy and Moral Development*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

reading of a novel, can be a very inaccessible means to compassion for someone with a less “linguistic-verbal” mind, but who has more of a logical or mathematical mind, or who is perhaps more inclined to visual representations. (Maxwell 2006:349)³² Maxwell also raises two other points of critique. He firstly argues that we cannot assume from Nussbaum’s argument that readers who feel compassion for or through characters will necessarily have compassion for people in real life. The second concern he raises is that people do not necessarily always have the right judgment about which novels will contribute to moral understanding and sensitivity.

The last two points raised by Maxwell, I will argue, are two valid concerns. There is no scientific certainty that the reading of novels will lead to compassion for people in real life. Neither is there any certainty that people will apply the right judgment in terms of which novels they should read. However, if the Aristotelian ethical position is understood as a position in which the three aspects of Aristotle’s conception of our ethical existence are taken into consideration, and if the Aristotelian position is understood as a position from which practical wisdom can be obtained, then it must be concluded that practical wisdom can be obtained through at least some novels which acknowledge the concrete nature of our ethical existence, as referred to by Aristotle. This study, therefore, does not imply that practical wisdom can be obtained through all novels, neither does it imply that people will necessarily apply this practical wisdom to situations in real life, or that people will always make right judgments about which books may lead to practical wisdom. I would however argue that if some novels can lead to practical wisdom in at least some people, and if guidance can be given to people to choose these novels, then Nussbaum’s proposal to include fictional literature into moral philosophy should still be considered (regardless of the lack of scientific proof) – for our society is still better off with a few more people with practical wisdom than with none at all.

On Maxwell’s claim that there are many cognitive means to generate compassion towards the other, and that perspective-taking cannot be treated as only means, I will argue that it was never Nussbaum’s intention to imply that perspective taking through a language-mediated

³² It is for this reason that I will argue that not only the role novels can play in our ethical awareness should be considered, but also the role of films.

means is the only means to trigger feelings of compassion. Neither do I think she argues that it is the only important means, but she does argue that it is a very important means (even if one of several other means) and it therefore needs to be considered very seriously. There are however, other means to the deepening of ethical understanding which others have been arguing for, which Nussbaum will argue, are not as effective as the understanding gained by novels. One of these means is life itself. Many have asked why awareness of non-commensurable values, the particularities of ethical situations, the emotions involved in our ethical existences, and the activation of compassion through a moral imagination, cannot be obtained directly through life itself. Why should it be obtained through a medium such as novels? One of the responses Nussbaum has given to this question (as mentioned earlier in this study) is that we have never lived enough and that the process to deepen moral understanding through life itself is therefore just a too slow and time-consuming procedure. (Nussbaum 1990:47) The reading of vivid texts on the ethical existences of characters, Nussbaum will argue, can thus serve as a means to expand our lives both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally because it puts the reader into contact with *“events or locations or persons or problems that he or she [will] not otherwise [have] met”* and vertically because it gives the reader an experience which is *“deeper, sharper, and more precise than much of what takes place in life.”* (Nussbaum 1990:47) Nussbaum does, however, also give some other valid reasons why a deepening and expanding of ethical understanding can be more effectively established through the reading of vivid texts such as novels, than through life itself. One of these reasons is that life is sometimes too close to us to really draw moral insight (practical wisdom) or compassion from, since we are often blinded by our personal passions in real life. On this she writes:

“When we examine our lives, we have so many obstacles to correct vision, so many motives to blindness and stupidity ... A novel, just because it is not our life, places us in a moral position that is favorable for perception and it shows us what it would be like to take up that position in life ... most of us can read ‘James’ better than we can read ourselves.” (Nussbaum 1990:162)

The big question is, however, why should fictional literature concern itself with ethical inquiries? On this question Nussbaum answers: “*Because each of us is not only a professional, but a human being who is trying to live well, and not simply a human being, but also a citizen of some town, some country, above all a world of human beings, in which attunement and understanding are extremely urgent matters.*” (Nussbaum 1990:192) In statements like this, it is clear that Nussbaum’s argument slowly moves from the role of fictional literature in moral philosophy, to the role fictional literature can play also in our public lives. Nussbaum’s attempt to expand her claim for the inclusion of fictional literature in moral philosophy to a claim to include fictional literature also in our political and public lives, can best be seen in her later work, *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (1995). Nussbaum therefore hopes that moral philosophy will turn to fictional literary texts in order for philosophical scholars to gain deeper and more real ethical insight, but she also hopes that the importance of fictional literature will be acknowledged in our political and public lives, so that all citizens (not only philosophical scholars) will have access to the Aristotelian ethical position.

In the next chapter I will turn to Alan Paton’s novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* as literary example, to determine whether the novel acknowledges the three aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position, and whether the reading of this novel can make of us (if not all citizens, then at least scholars of moral philosophy) people with a deeper ethical understanding – people with practical wisdom.

Chapter 3

A Textual Analysis of Alan Paton's novel *Cry, the Beloved Country*

1. Introduction

Cry, the Beloved Country is a South African novel first published in 1948 – a few months before the Apartheid regime has officially been announced and implemented in South Africa. The novel addresses issues around racial inequalities and injustices in South Africa, and can thus be seen as a protest against the social structures (such as the segregation of land use³³) which led to, and formed part of, the apartheid system. More specifically, the novel also addresses issues such as the unequal distribution of land reserves, the disintegration and moral decay of South Africa's tribal communities, white people's fears of urbanization and "native crime," and the ethical questions around labour procedure in the mining industry of Johannesburg.

Apartheid is something which is indissolubly part of South Africa's past. Since it is something of the past (not necessarily the enduring consequences of the era, but the era itself) the Apartheid era can become either a vague and uninformed memory in the minds of South African citizens, a mere factual description in a history book, or a bleak example of an abstract moral principle in a philosophical text in which much of the finer nuances of the ethical situation lack. Racial justice is however not just an abstract principle, because for those who suffer under racial injustices (like those who suffered under Apartheid) it is a very real and concrete experience. Fictional literature, and maybe specifically *Cry, the Beloved Country*, can thus be a means to communicate about racial injustice, while acknowledging the concrete contexts in which these injustices occur. The proposal to incorporate fictional literature in moral philosophy, is therefore not to keep the painful memories of Apartheid alive, but rather to portray the content of moral

³³ The segregation of land use refers to a regulation implemented by the Apartheid government in which certain areas were allocated to Black people, in which they may lived and farmed. Black people were, however, only allowed to farm and establish housing in these allocated areas. The areas were referred to a *tuislande*.

philosophy through a style which is more true to our human and concrete nature – since it acknowledges the particularities and finer nuances of our ethical situations. Philosophical texts on justice, therefore do not have to remain conversations on a mere vague and abstract principle, but by depicting matters around racial injustice within the context of a particular situation, through the eyes, mind and hearts of characters, one can become more aware of the complexities of both the specific ethical situation and the ethical complications of racial injustice in general.

The question is however, whether certain novels that communicate about our ethical existence through concrete situations, acknowledge the three aspect of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence. In other words, do novels, as argued by Nussbaum, truly acknowledge the diverse and conflicting nature of our human values, the particularities of ethical situations, and the importance of emotions in these situations? In the next section a textual analysis will be given on *Cry, the Beloved Country*, in order to see whether Paton's novel acknowledges the three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence. Whether *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges the three aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position or not, does not mean that this acknowledgement will apply to all novels. However, if *Cry, the Beloved Country* proves to acknowledge the three aspects of the Aristotelian ethical conception, even without doing so self-consciously, it can be concluded that there are novels which acknowledge the Aristotelian ethical position, and that there are at least some novels from which practical wisdom can be obtained. If there are thus novels which give more acknowledgement to the concrete nature of our ethical existence than the abstract style of moral philosophy, and if there are novels from which practical wisdom can be obtained, then Nussbaum's proposal to include fictional literature in moral philosophy should receive serious attention.

In order to determine whether *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges the Aristotelian ethical position, the next sections will respectively be discussed under the headings of the three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence as listed by Nussbaum – namely, 1) *The*

Non-Commensurability and Plurality of Values; 2) Priority of the Particular; and 3) Ethical Value of the Emotions and Imagination.

2. Three aspects of the Aristotelian Conception of our Ethical Existence as acknowledged by *Cry, the Beloved Country*

2.1. The Non-Commensurability and Plurality of Values

In order to adequately express and acknowledge the non-commensurable and plural nature of our human value beliefs, one should turn to the value positions of different individual persons through which unique value beliefs are manifested. The values of people are often communicated through the views they hold on certain things. It can therefore be an adequate means to observe and express people's diverse (and often conflicting) beliefs through the specific viewpoints they hold. In the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* the reader is introduced to several characters who all find themselves in the ethically difficult situation of racial inequality. These characters have different views on matters regarding the situation and therefore also have different value beliefs. The novel portrays these different and unique value beliefs very vividly by presenting them to the reader from the viewpoint of each character.

Value beliefs are represented from many viewpoints in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The two main viewpoints are those from a black perspective and a white perspective, respectively. To portray the different value perceptions of the black people during racial inequality in South Africa, Paton uses characters like the protagonist Rev. Stephen Kumalo (an Anglican priest of St. Mark's church in the small valley of Ndotsheni, Natal), Theophilus Msimangu (a generous young minister in Sophiatown, Johannesburg), Absalom Kumalo (Rev. Stephen Kumalo's son who has received the death penalty for killing a white man), as well as John and Gertrude Kumalo (Rev. Kumalo's brother and sister who have both been corrupted by the moral decay of the urbanization and disintegration of traditional native communities). The different value perceptions of the white people in South Africa during apartheid, are represented by the viewpoints of Arthur Jarvis (a writer and activist against South Africa's injustices, who is killed

due to “native crime”³⁴), James Jarvis (Arthur’s father who grows from being ignorant about South Africa’s injustices to someone who is against the injustices of racial inequality, and who wants to make a difference in his community), and Mr. Harrison (the father-in-law of Arthur Jarvis, who supports the doctrines of Apartheid).

The first view (value belief) in the ethical matters of racial inequality in South Africa, is represented to the reader through the protagonist Rev. Stephen Kumalo. Rev. Kumalo is not a modern or intellectual man, (although well trained in his profession) and therefore does not engage with the inequalities of Apartheid in a rational or political manner. He is however a humble and religious man who lives close to his God, as well as his family and neighbours (people of his village). Rev. Kumalo has thus strong values regarding religion, family and fellow men and he conducts his life in order to live ethically in correspondence with these values. The injustices of Apartheid, however, start to play a role in Rev. Kumalo’s life when it begins to affect these values. The injustices of Apartheid have caused the men and the young people of Rev. Kumalo’s village to migrate to Johannesburg, which left the structures of the traditional village disintegrated. Due to the disintegration of family and other traditional structures, limited work opportunities for black people even in the cities, and the terrible conditions of underpaid black labor in the mining industry of Johannesburg at the time, many of Kumalo’s people turned to prostitution and other crimes to earn a living. Kumalo feels the injustices of Apartheid when he loses his sister to prostitution and his son to the death penalty (due to the crime he committed). Rev. Kumalo is therefore against the inequalities of apartheid, since it led to the moral decay and disintegration, both traditionally and religiously, of his loved ones. Paton thus presents one side of the ethical dilemma of Apartheid to his reader, by introducing it through a character that holds dear the values of moral virtue, religion, tradition, love and family.

However, Rev. Kumalo’s values and views are in strong contrast with those of his brother John Kumalo – who also opposed the injustices of Apartheid. John Kumalo does not share in the values of Rev. Kumalo. He neither shares Rev. Kumalo’s values of tradition, religion and family,

³⁴ “Native Crime” is a word used in the novel to refer to the criminal actions of black people in South Africa during the time of racial inequality in South Africa, which would later officially be implemented as “Apartheid.”

nor does he share with him the value of honesty. John Kumalo therefore rather fights a political battle against the injustice of racial inequality than a personal or religious battle, and is therefore often willing to go through dishonest and corrupt means to escape the injustices bestowed by racial inequalities. Throughout the novel the non-commensurability of the values of Rev. Stephen Kumalo and his brother John Kumalo is clear. Their conflicting values and different views on things, also has the result that Rev. Stephen Kumalo's son has been prosecuted for murder (due to his honesty to admit to the crime) and that John Kumalo's son's charges for the crime has been dismissed (due to his dishonesty to deny his involvement in the crime). Paton gives some very vivid descriptions of the conflicting values between the two brothers – such as the confrontation which took place in John Kumalo's shop just before Rev. Kumalo returned to his village after searching for his son in Johannesburg:

“He [John Kumalo] kicked over the table in front of him, and came at Kumalo, so that the old man had to step out of the door and into the street, and the door shut against him, and he could hear the key turned and the bolt shot home in his brother's anger. Out there in the street, he was humiliated and ashamed. Humiliated because the people passing looked in astonishment, ashamed because he had not come for this purpose at all. He had come to tell his brother that power corrupts, that a man who fights for justice must himself be cleaned and purified, that love is greater than force ... He turned to the door, but it was locked and bolted. Brother had shut out brother, from the same womb had they come.” (Paton 1987:182)

Rev. Kumalo's value beliefs also stand in strong contrast to his sister Gertrude who has fallen into the immoral world of prostitution and liquor, and his son Absalom who offered no resistance to become a victim of the moral decay accompanied by the injustice of racial inequality. However, another character whose values stand in strong contrast to those such as John, Gertrude and Absalom Kumalo, is that of Priest Msimangu. Msimangu has a very high regard for the value of Christian love, and therefore does not only conduct his life according to it, but he also believes that Christian love is the solution to the inequalities and moral dilemmas of South Africa. He believes that only through the selflessness of Christian love, can the vicious

circle of white people fearing the power of black people, and black people being oppressed by this fear, be broken. Msimangu's value belief of selfless Christian love (and his belief that moral strength lies in a nonviolent approach) therefore does not only conflict with John Kumalo's belief of selfish love, but it also conflicts with the values of many white traditional beliefs during the Apartheid regime.

The best manifestation of the value beliefs of white people during the time of racial inequality in South Africa, is through the character Mr. Harrison. He can be regarded as one with a more orthodox white belief (that was widely shared by many of the white people who supported the government during Apartheid), since it is clear that he fears the numbers and power of black people, and the increase of "native crime". He therefore does not go against the system which limits the power of black people. For he says: *"I try to treat a native decently, but he's not my food and drink. And to tell you the truth, these [native] crimes put me off. I tell you, Jarvis, we're scared stiff at the moment in Johannesburg."* (Paton 1987:122) Mr. Harrison's view on the inequalities of an apartheid South Africa stands in strong contrast not only to his son-in-law Arthur Jarvis (who fought against the racial inequalities, and who believed that racial injustice is the cause of native crime) but it is also non-commensurable to his own son's value beliefs. For we read that John Harrison (Mr. Harrison's son) admits to James Jarvis: *"My father and I don't see eye to eye on the native question either, Mr. Jarvis."* (Paton 1987:119)

Paton does, however, make it clear that values are plural and non-commensurable not only between Black and White, or between fathers and sons, but that there were many conflicting values during the time of Apartheid, also among white people. Paton refers to the non-commensurability of white value beliefs as the *"divided mind of white South Africa."* The best representation of the divided mind of white South Africa can be seen in Paton's vivid descriptions of town meetings and crime prevention forums held by white communities. As Edward Callan notes in his reading of these white gatherings, as portrayed by Paton in *Cry, the Beloved Country*: *"The first speaker demands more police protection and is applauded. The second speaker responds that, except temporarily, more police cannot be the answer; [black]*

people must first have worthy purposes and worthy goals to work for. The fact that both speakers are applauded shows that the hearers also are hopelessly divided and uncertain." (Callan 1991:69) Paton continues his description of the non-commensurability of the values of white people by writing:

"And some cry for the cutting up of South Africa without delay into separate areas, where white can live without black, and black without white, where black can farm their own land and mine their own minerals and administer their own laws. And others cry away with the compound system, that brings men to the towns without their wives and children, and break up the tribe and the house and the man, and they ask for the establishment of villages for the laborers in mines and industry. And the churches cry too. The English-speaking churches cry for more education, and more opportunity, and for a removal of the restrictions on native labour and enterprise. And the Afrikaans-speaking churches want to see the native people given opportunity to develop along their own lines, and remind their own people that the decay of family religion, where the servants took part in family devotion, has contributed in part to the moral decay of the native people. But there is to be no equality in church or state." (Paton 1987:70)

Through his novel, Paton does not only make it clear that values were often non-commensurable between black and white people, as well as among black and white people respectively, but through his vivid sketches of character behavior he also introduces his reader to the inner conflicts of certain characters. The matter of inner value conflict within a single person was something which interested and confused Paton greatly. In an autobiographical essay written for a symposium titled *"What I Have Learned"* Paton wrote that he was bewildered by the discovery (which he believed contributed to the complexity of humanity) that ... *"one could love and hate simultaneously, be honest and cheat, be arrogant and humble, be any pair of opposites that one had supposed to be mutually exclusive."* (Paton 1968:253) The inner conflict of values and emotions, as can be experienced within a single person, are beautifully portrayed through Paton's protagonist.

Although Rev. Kumalo is one of the characters portrayed by Paton to be, like Msimangu, greater in moral strength and stronger in his moral convictions, he is still introduced to the reader in all his complexity. For Paton does not only present him as a virtuous man of God, but also as a man of human failures whose values, due to his human nature, are often conflicting in nature. Paton invites his readers to the human and complex nature of his protagonist through several incidences where Rev. Kumalo's values, and his resulting behavior, are conflicting. Examples of this can be found in the scene on the train to Johannesburg where Rev. Kumalo's sense of pride forced him to lie about his knowledge of Johannesburg – an event which goes strongly against the high regard he has shown to honesty elsewhere in the novel. A second event where honesty can be found in conflict with another value is in Rev. Kumalo's confrontation with his brother before his return to Ndotsheni. Here Kumalo lies out of love for his brother – for the lie served as warning to his brother to discontinue his dangerous political behavior. There are also times in the novel where Rev. Kumalo wants to hurt those he loves out of anger, such as the girl who carries his grandchild. The reader is furthermore constantly aware that Rev. Kumalo's journey and strong urge for moral regeneration are not without inner conflict, since Paton gives several descriptions of how Rev. Kumalo loses faith and experiences feelings of despair during the darker moments of the novel.

The last acknowledgment of the non-commensurability and plurality of human values in *Cry, the Beloved Country* can be found in the development of the value beliefs of James Jarvis. Through this character Paton shows an acknowledgment that values can sometimes change over a period of time within a single person. In the beginning of the novel, James Jarvis (father of the murdered Arthur James) is rather ignorant about the racial inequalities of his country. He is therefore initially a character whose values coincide with the conservative values of many white people at the time, and has therefore not incorporated values such as racial equality in his personal belief system. However, as the novel progresses (after several events, such as the death of his son and the reading of his son's writings on racial equality) Paton makes it clear that there is a change in James Jarvis's value beliefs. In fact, Jarvis's value beliefs change in such a dramatic way at the end of the novel that he becomes not only a firm supporter of racial

equality and the wellbeing of all South African's regardless of skin colour, but he also becomes a person who wants to establish this wellbeing in his own community. This change can be seen in Jarvis's benevolent behaviors, such as the sending of milk to the hungry children of Ndotsheni, the building of a dam and the appointment of an agricultural expert to solve Ndotsheni's erosion problems, as well as the money he has given to renovate the church of Ndotsheni.

Cry, the Beloved Country can thus be seen as a true representation of the diverse and conflicting nature of our human values. For the novel acknowledges that values are non-commensurable between different groups of people, as well as often conflicting within certain groups. *Cry, the Beloved Country* can furthermore be a vivid example of how values are often not only non-commensurable and conflicting within a single person, but also of how the values of a single person can change over time. However, to truly understand the complex nature of values, one should know exactly where these values are derived from. This will require, as previously mentioned, sensitivity for the particularities of people in ethical situations. The next section will thus investigate whether the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges the particularities of the situation of racial inequality, during (and just before) the implementation of Apartheid in South Africa.

2.2. Priority of the Particular

The situation of racial inequality just before the official implementation of Apartheid, as described by Paton in his novel, was for the people involved in the ethical situation and affected by the ethical repercussions, not merely a case of general principles and vague concepts. It was a very concrete experience which took place in the lives of black people in South Africa (such as the characters of Stephen, John, Absalom and Gertrude Kumalo), as well as white people (such as James and Arthur Jarvis.) Some were black fathers (like Stephen Kumalo), others were white fathers (like James Jarvis.) Some were in the ministry (like Stephen Kumalo), some were farmers (like James Jarvis), some were in politics (like John Kumalo.) Some people lived honest lives in spite of the injustices (like Stephen Kumalo), others lived honest lives by standing up against the

injustices (like Arthur Jarvis), while others lived corrupted lives to survive the injustices (such as John and Gertrude Kumalo.) *Cry, the Beloved Country* addresses fundamental ethical principles. It is a story about racial injustices. It is about the disintegration of traditional black communities as well as the moral decay of black communities. It is about white people's fear of black people. It is about too little love between different races, as well as a country's desperate need for reconciliation. However, by addressing these general principles not through vague and general means, but by portraying it through specific characters (each with their unique makeup) and specific contexts, the novel shows great sensitivity to the particularities of the ethical situation.

The novel opens with a very particular description of the valley in which the protagonist Stephen Kumalo lives: *"There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke, and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa."* (Paton 1987:7) Shortly after Paton's lyrical prologue the focus shifts to a vivid description of the village in the valley, and the people who live in the village: *"Down in the valleys women scratch the soil that is left, and the maize hardly reaches the height of a man. They are valleys of old men and old women, of mothers and children. The men are away, the young men and the girls are away. The soil cannot keep them any more."* (Paton 1987:8) The opening pages of the novel therefore do not only directly introduce the reader to the physical world of the protagonist, but they also introduce the reader immediately to the first and most fundamental concrete issue with which the people of the valley are confronted – namely, the disintegration of their traditional community due to the enforced urbanization of Apartheid's land segregation acts. After vividly introducing the reader to the physical world of the protagonist, and to the first matter which will become one of the main ethical issues addressed by the novel, Paton's opening descriptions become even more vivid and particular as he describes the path of the girl who runs with a letter to the place where the protagonist is for the first time to be found: *"The small child ran importantly to the wood-and-iron church with the letter in her hand. Next to the church was a house and she knocked timidly on the door. The*

Reverend Stephen Kumalo looked up from the table where he was writing, and he called, Come in.” (Paton 1987:8)

From the very first opening pages the novel thus shows sensitivity to the particularities and relevant features of those in the midst of a complex ethical situation. Through the vivid descriptions of the landscape of the valley and the village itself, acknowledgment is given to Rev. Kumalo’s background and culture. For it has been made clear that he is a black man, coming from a small and poor rural village. Immediate acknowledgement is also given to the protagonist’s profession and religion, as one is introduced to him as a Reverend who lives in a humble home (although it seems like a grand house to the poor girl who delivers the letter) next to the village church. Paton does however make it clear that Rev. Kumalo is a man educated in his profession, although living a simple life – for the reader is told, through the observations of the little girl, that there are many books in the house ... *“more even than the books at the school.”* (Paton 1987:8) All ethical principles and values manifested through Rev. Kumalo are thus communicated by Paton with sensitivity toward these relevant features.

The sensitivity and vivid descriptions of Rev. Kumalo’s background, also give the reader insight into the background of other agents involved in the ethical events of the novel, such as Absalom, Gertrude and John Kumalo – since they are all from the same village, and therefore from the same initial background, culture and religion. However, the values manifested through these characters differ from those of Rev. Kumalo, since the relevant features which determine their values changed through the course of their lives. Paton shows sensitivity to these relevant features by describing these characters’ values through the particular contexts in which they are embedded.

The reader’s first confrontation with the particular contexts of those who represent the moral decay of the black traditional community, is through Msimangu’s very vivid description of Gertrude Kumalo’s social context on page 23 of the novel:

“Msimangu said gravely, Yes, she [Gertrude] is very sick. But it is not that kind of sickness. It is another, a worse kind of sickness. I sent for you firstly because she is a woman that is alone, and secondly because her brother is a priest. I do not know if she ever found her husband, but she has no husband now.

He looked at Kumalo. It would be truer to say, he said, that she has many husbands.

Kumalo said, Tixo! Tixo!

- She lives in Claremont, not far from here. It is one of the worst places in Johannesburg. After the police have been there, you can see the liquor running in the streets. You can smell it, you can smell nothing else, wherever you go in that place ... And that is her work, she makes and sells it ... These women sleep with any man for their price. A man has been killed at her place. They gamble and drink and stab. She has been in prison more than once.”

Paton continues his vivid description of the particulars of Gertrude’s social context, through the encounter where Rev. Stephen Kumalo enters her house for the first time.³⁵ In this scene the reader experiences everything said by Msimangu to be true. Through the detailed description of Gertrude Kumalo’s house, the evil laughter in her house, the strange men in her house, and the fear in her eyes, the reader is thus directly introduced to the relevant features which form part of her value beliefs.

The reader’s first confrontation with the particular context in which John Kumalo’s values are embedded, (which also represents the moral decay of the Black traditional community) is through the scene where John Kumalo is visited by his brother, Rev. Stephen Kumalo, in his carpentry shop. John Kumalo’s shop is in one of the many streets of Johannesburg, and there is a big sign with his name on it in front of the store. As Rev. Stephen Kumalo came closer to the shop, he could see his brother where he sat like a fat chief with his hands on his knees. Although many of these descriptions (such as the city environment, the sign with his name on, the way he sits) contribute to the context embeddedness of John Kumalo’s value of selfish love, the most

³⁵ Read of this encounter on p. 28 of the Penguin Classics Edition of *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

vivid and sensitive treatment of John Kumalo's particular values are to be found in the conversation between the two brothers on page 33 of the novel:

- *"Is your wife Esther well, my brother?"*

John Kumalo smiled his jolly knowing smile.

- *My wife Esther has left me ten years, my brother.*

- *And have you married again?*

- *Well, well, not what the Church calls married, you know. But she is a good woman.*

- *You wrote nothing of this, brother.*

- *No, how could I write? You people in Ndotsheni do not understand the way life is in Johannesburg. I thought it better not to write."*

Paton lastly also shows great sensitivity for the particulars of the social context of Absalom Kumalo (Rev. Kumalo's son.) The way Paton introduces his readers to the particular background and social context of Absalom Kumalo is through Rev. Kumalo's search for his son. A big part of the novel consists of Rev. Kumalo's journey to and through Johannesburg in search of Absalom. Through the vivid and detailed descriptions of the journey to all the places where Absalom has lived before, Paton thus gives his reader insight into the world (and the background) of Absalom Kumalo. The reader is told about the context in which Absalom operates through the inhabitants of every place to which Rev. Kumalo has been directed in his search for his son (such as the woman from which Absalom has rented a room, the man at the reformatory, and the girl with whom he lived after his time at the reformatory). Through these vivid and detailed descriptions Paton therefore does not merely describe Absalom as a young black man who has committed what is referred to as a "native crime," but he also provides his reader with a vivid description of the features which contributed to his moral decay.

Paton, however, does not only acknowledge the particular and relevant features of the characters who represent the disintegration and moral decay of traditional Black communities due to the injustices of racial inequality in South Africa (such as Gertrude, John and Absalom Kumalo), but he also treats the particular features of his white characters with great sensitivity

(such as James Jarvis.) Paton opens his description of the world in which James Jarvis lives and operates with the same prologue which served as the introduction to the world of Stephen Kumalo – for they both lived in the same valley: “*There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrook; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa.*” (Paton 1987:112) However, immediately after the description of the environment or physical world which James Jarvis shares with Rev. Kumalo, Paton directs the focus to the particularities of Jarvis’s world. We read that “*up here on the tops is a small and lovely valley, between the hills that shelter it. There is a house there, and flat ploughed fields; they will tell you that it is one of the finest farms of this countryside. It is called High Place, the farm and dwelling place of James Jarvis, Esquire, and it stands high above Ndotsheni, and the great valley of the Umzimkulu.*” (Paton 1987:112) Through descriptions like these, and others in the novel, one thus learns that Arthur Jarvis is a white farmer who is elderly in age, from an English background and a father of one son. The acknowledgment of the particulars of his social context, (such as his profession, race and background) thus also serves as explanation and insight to the values which James Jarvis holds.

By portraying ethical values through specific characters, and by acknowledging the particularities of the contexts of those in which these values are embedded, *Cry, the Beloved Country* can thus serve as a means to more fully understand the complexities of the ethical situation of racial inequality in South Africa, and to acknowledge the salient features of the ethical dilemma. However, the priority given to the particularities of ethical situations (such as given to the ethical situations addressed in *Cry, the Beloved Country*) does not only imply sensitivity to the relevant features of particular situations, but it also implies a sensitivity to the ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships in those situation.

Throughout the novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges the specific positions certain people hold in our ethical existences. For the novel mostly communicates about ethical principles and the ethical existences of its characters, through the relationships they have with

specific people. Throughout the novel it is made clear that the tragedy of the injustices of racial inequality does not merely lie in abstract principles, but that it lies in the grief of a father, such as James Jarvis, whose only son became a victim of “native crime”, or the grief of a father, such as Rev. Stephen Kumalo, whose only son became a victim of “white fear.” Two of the best examples of the acknowledgement of the ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships in the novel, are thus between James Jarvis and his son Arthur Jarvis, and between Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom Kumalo.

The ethical relevance of the particular relationship between James Jarvis and his son, can best be seen in the scene (p. 116) where James Jarvis is told by the police officer that his son has been killed by a black young man (Kumalo’s son) who broke into his house:

- *“Shot dead? He said.*

- *Yes, Mr. Jarvis.*

- *Did they catch the native?*

- *Not yet, Mr. Jarvis.*

The tears filled the eyes, the teeth bit the lips. What does that matter? he said. They walked down the hill, they were near the field. Through the misted eyes he saw the plough turn over the clods, then ride high over the iron ground. Leave it, Thomas, he said. He was our only child, captain.

- *I know that, Mr. Jarvis.”*

The particular relationships affected by the death of Jarvis’s son, are also very vividly portrayed through the list of people who Stephen Kumalo thinks of during his excursion in the mountain the night before his son’s execution. When Rev. Kumalo’s thinks about all those who are suffering, he also thinks of the Jarvis family: *“And there was Jarvis, bereaved of his wife and his son, and his daughter-in-law bereaved of her husband, and her children bereaved of their father, especially the small boy, the bright laughing boy. The small boy stood there before his eyes, and he said to Kumalo, When I go, something bright will go out of Ndotsheni.”* (Paton 1987:235) Through Kumalo’s thoughts Paton thus makes it clear that the results of the injustices of racial

inequality in South Africa, such as the death of Arthur Jarvis, were injustices which affected the loved ones of people.

The best example of Paton's acknowledgment of the ethical relevance of particular persons and relationships is, however, between Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom, as portrayed by the scene (p.87) where Stephen Kumalo visits his son in prison after he has been told that his son has killed a white man.

"They pass through the great gate in the grim high wall. The young man talks for them, and it is arranged. John Kumalo is taken to one room, and the younger man goes with Stephen Kumalo to another. There the son is brought to them.

They shake hands, indeed the old man takes his son's hand in both his own, and the hot tears fall fast upon them. The boy stands unhappy, there is no gladness in his eyes. He twists his head from side to side, as though the loose clothing is too tight for him.

- My child, my child.

- Yes, my father.

- At last I have found you.

- Yes, my father.

- And it is too late."

This is, however, merely one of the many examples in which acknowledgement is given to the specific and particular father-and-son relationship of Rev. Stephen Kumalo and his son Absalom. The descriptions of the several instances where Rev. Kumalo weeps for the moral decay of his son, as well as the search for his son itself, are also clear indications of the special love he has for this specific person. As Callan has noticed, Paton's sensitivity and acknowledgment of the ethical relevance of specific people and relationships, inevitably also implies an acknowledgment of the different dimensions of love. Callan identifies the particular forms of love which Rev. Kumalo feels towards different people as *affection* (the parental love he feels for his son), *passion* (the mutual love between him and his wife), and *piety* (the religious *agapé* love which he feels toward God, and towards which he directs his moral obligations and self

sacrifice). (Callan 1991:100) Paton's acknowledgment of the particularities of the ethical situation, and his sensitivity for the specific feelings of love we feel for special and specific people, enables him to also communicate about more universal principles through these concrete and particular examples. The technique to communicate from the concrete particularities of a situation to more universal principles, is a technique which is constantly used by Paton in *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Paton communicates about both value issues and feelings in this way. An example of this can be found in the five brief chapters after the chapter on Absalom's trial, where (as noticed by Callan) "*the concern for justice widens out from the particular case of Absalom's trial to the more general problem of social justice in South Africa.*" (Callan 1991:87)

Through the priority given to the particular aspect of the addressed ethical situations, Paton can thus communicate about general ethical principles, but he can also show his reader that matters regarding injustice, love, grief or forgiveness are seldom just merely abstract and impersonal principles. For they are matters, as the novel has shown, which affect those involved in a very concrete and particular manner. The concrete and particular manner through which we are mostly confronted with things like justice, love, grief or forgiveness in our ethical existence, therefore also implies (as previously mentioned) a strong presence of emotions. In the next section an investigation will follow on how *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges the undeniable presence and importance of emotions in our ethical existence.

2.3. Ethical Value of the Emotions and Imagination

2.3.1. Emotions

Cry, the Beloved Country is a novel which is rich in not only philosophical and ethical reflections, but also in its portrayal of the emotions which accompany the values of our ethical existence. An undeniable link between the emotions of characters and the values they hold, is to be found throughout the novel. By acknowledging the emotions of the characters in their ethical deliberation (in other words acknowledging some of the finer nuances of the situations) the

novel thus serves as a window into the full complexity of the ethical situations during the injustices of racial inequality in South Africa. Sensitivity to several emotions, derived from characters' values, is to be found in the novel. Among the emotions felt by characters in the novel, are feelings of fear, sadness, love, hatred, anger, hope and despair.

One of the most prominent emotions present in the novel is that of fear. The reader is constantly aware of the fears experienced by the characters – especially those of Rev. Stephen Kumalo. As from the very opening scene where Rev. Kumalo receives the letter which might have news about his son and sister in Johannesburg, Paton introduces its reader to the fear experienced by Rev. Kumalo and his wife. He writes: *"They were silent, and she [Kumalo's wife] said, how we desire such a letter and when it comes, we fear to open it."* (Paton 1987:9) It is, however, only at a later stage, when Kumalo commences his journey to Johannesburg in order to find his son and sister, that one learns the true nature of his fears: *"The journey had begun. And now the fear is back again, the fear of the unknown, the fear of the city where boys were killed crossing the street, the fear of Gertrude's sickness. Deep down the fear for his son. Deep down the fear of a man who lives in a world not made for him, whose own world is slipping away, dying, being destroyed, beyond any recall."* (Paton 1987:15) By introducing his reader to Rev. Kumalo's fears, Paton therefore makes his reader aware of the deep rooted values from which his fears come from. Kumalo's fears are derived from the love and values he has for his family and people. His emotion is therefore rooted in the fear that his family (and the black people of his community) may be in danger – for they are on the brink of moral disintegration and degeneration. The reader is, however, not only introduced to the fears of Rev. Kumalo, but also to the emotion of fear of other characters who suffer under the injustices of racial inequality. We read of the fear in the eyes of both Gertrude and Absalom Kumalo, when Rev. Kumalo finds them in their immoral worlds which the injustices of racial inequality have forced them to inhabit. We also read on page 75 of Absalom's fear when hearing that he will be executed for his crime:

"At those dread words the boy fell on the floor, he was crouched in the way that some of the Indians pray, and he began to sob, with great tearing sounds that convulsed him. For

a boy is afraid of death. The old man, moved to it by that deep compassion which was there within him, knelt by his son, and ran his hand over his head.

- Be of courage, my son.

- I am afraid, he cried. I am afraid

- Be of courage, my son.

The boy reared up on his haunches. He hid nothing, his face was distorted by his cries.

Au! Au! I am afraid of the hanging, he sobbed, I am afraid of the hanging."

Paton furthermore makes it clear, through his vivid descriptions of the emotions of his characters, that the complex ethical situation of racial inequality in South Africa did not only consist of the fears of black people, but that much of the problem of racial inequality in South Africa rested also on the fears of white people. The best manifestation of the fears of white people can be seen in the issue of "native crime" addressed by the novel. On the newspaper article in the novel, which reads "**ANOTHER MURDER TRAGEDY IN CITY, EUROPEAN HOUSEHOLDER SHOT DEAD BY NATIVE HOUSEBREAKER**" Paton writes: "*These were the headlines that men feared in these days. Householders feared them, and their wives feared them. All those who worked for South Africa feared them. All law-abiding black men feared them. Some people were urging the newspapers to drop the word native from their headlines, others found it hard to know what the hiding of the painful truth would do.*" (Paton 1987:165) The reader is also introduced to the fears of white people in South Africa (and to South Africa as a land of fear) through the manuscripts of the character Arthur Jarvis. Through his writings the reader reads: "*No one wishes to make light of the fears that beset us. But whether we be fearful or no, we shall never, because we are Christian people, be able to evade the moral issue.*" (Paton 1987:127) By acknowledging the presence of the emotion of fear during the ethical situation of racial inequality in South Africa, Paton therefore does not only show acknowledgement to the finer nuances of the ethical situation, but he also presents the ethical matter in a more complete and real manner. The emotions evoked by the injustice of Apartheid form such a prominent part of the ethical situation, that by treating and representing the situation in a purely rational manner,

(without acknowledging the emotion involved,) will be to fail to see the situation for what it really is.

A second emotion which plays a prominent role in the novel, and to which acknowledgment has been given, is the emotion of sadness or grief. Many of the injustices of racial inequality in South Africa led to very sad and tragic events. To communicate about the tragedies of racial inequality, and to fail to acknowledge the emotions of grief and sadness accompanied by it, is to fail to see both the full range of the ethical situation and the human context in which it operates. Paton's novel, however, does not only acknowledge the tragic events caused by racial inequality in South Africa, but he also greatly acknowledges the emotions of sadness and grief accompanied by it. The two most heart breaking tragedies of the novel, lie in the events of a black father whose son becomes the victim of the moral decay of the tribal community's disintegration, and a white father whose son becomes the victim of native crime. Both sons are the victims of the injustices of racial inequalities in South Africa, and both fathers lose their sons due to the repercussion of these racial inequalities. However, the reader only grasps the true tragic nature of the racial inequality in South Africa when being confronted with the grief and sadness of these two fathers. We read about both the sadness of James Jarvis when he hears his son has been murdered, and the sadness of Rev. Kumalo when he hears his son has killed a man and that he will receive the death penalty for his crime. Accompanied by the emotion of sadness are also the emotions of love and grief. For love is the cause of sadness, and grief and suffering the result of it. Through the title of his novel, and the acknowledgment of the love, sadness and grief (suffering) experienced by his characters, Paton thus acknowledges a human dimension which played a very prominent role during the injustices of Apartheid.

Through his vivid descriptions of the emotions experienced by his characters (such as fear, love, sadness – as well as other emotions which have not been discussed, such as anger and hate), Paton does not only acknowledge the important role emotions play in the ethical existences of his characters, but he also enables his reader to share the emotions of his characters. In the next section an investigation will follow on how the style of Paton's writing in *Cry, the Beloved*

Country enables the reader to both place himself in the position of the characters and to feel compassion for the characters.

2.3.2. The Moral Imagination

"I should like to predict that in Reverend Stephen Kumalo, Paton has created an immortal figure. If there is a man who can read the tragedy of Kumalo's life with eyes dry, I have no desire to meet him."

(Stern 1948:26)

Through his sensitive treatment of particulars, as well as the emotions, Paton has in *Cry, the Beloved Country* created a novel which can hardly leave a reader untouched. Through the vivid descriptions of the specific circumstances, viewpoints and emotions of his characters, Paton places his readers in the shoes, minds and hearts of his characters. These characters are, however, not mere make-believe fictional characters that resemble nothing of the truth – for they represent people of an event of injustices and racial inequality in South Africa, which did occur. By inviting his readers into the shoes, minds and hearts of characters who resemble a true experience of racial injustice, Paton thus enables his readers to take part, and to become aware of, the full complexity of the ethical situation of racial inequality in South Africa. Paton does this, however, not merely by presenting his reader with the different viewpoints and emotions of his characters, but also through the style of his writing and the use of his language.

Paton's technique to place his readers into the worlds of his characters can be seen in the very first opening paragraph of the novel: *"There is a lovely road that runs from Ixopo into the hills. These hills are grass-covered and rolling, and they are lovely beyond any singing of it. The road climbs seven miles into them, to Carisbrooke; and from there, if there is no mist, you look down on one of the fairest valleys of Africa. About you there is grass and bracken and you may hear the forlorn crying of the titihoya, one of the birds of the veld."* (Paton 1987:7) Here Paton invites

his reader into the world of his characters, by not only allowing his reader to see what his characters see, but also in enabling him to hear what they hear – for “*you may hear the forlorn crying of the titihoya.*” Paton’s use of the word *titihoya* represents the Zulu language, but it is also an onomatopoeic word which resembles the sound made by the bird. By using the Zulu name of the bird, (and other Zulu place names such as Ixopo or Ndotsheni) Paton thus invites his reader into both the culture and the physical environment of the rural Zulu community setting of the novel.

The novel is, however, also rich in other instances where language is used to place the reader in the position of its characters. One of Paton’s most prominent techniques to place his reader in the position of a character through language, is by representing his Zulu characters’ speech and dialogue through a style which resembles the Zulu language. J.M. Coetzee refers to this technique as *transfer*, and he defines it as “*the rendering of (imagined) foreign speech in an English, stylistically marked to remind the reader of the (imagined) foreign original.*” (Coetzee 1988:117) Examples of Paton’s use of *transfer* occur throughout the novel. The best manifestation of this technique can, however, be seen in the language provided to Paton’s protagonist. The lyrical and metaphorical style of the Zulu language can be picked-up in dialogues such as the one Rev. Kumalo has with Father Vincent about the tragedy that people saw the moral decay of his son, but did nothing about it: “*There is a man sleeping in the grass, said Kumalo. And over him is gathering the greatest storm of all his days. Such lightning and thunder will come there as have never been seen before, bringing death and destruction. People hurry home past him, to places safe from danger. And whether they do not see him there in the grass, or whether they fear to halt even a moment, they do not wake him, they let him be.*” (Paton 1987:95) Some of Father Vincent’s speech also resembles the Zulu language. For we read: “*When the storm threatens, a man is afraid for his house, said Father Vincent in that symbolic language that is like the Zulu tongue. But when the house is destroyed there is something to do. About the storm he can do nothing, but he can rebuild a house.*” (Paton 1987:96) About this technique of transfer Coetzee furthermore notes that Paton’s use of the Zulu language style “*seems to belong to an earlier and more innocent era of human culture ...*

the Zulu original implied by Paton's English is both unrelievedly simple ... and formal to the point of stateliness." (Coetzee 1988:128) Through his use of transfer, Paton therefore does not only place his reader in the setting of Zulu speaking environment, but he also places his reader very specifically in the culture of Rev. Kumalo and the people of his traditional rural community. The technique thus enables the reader to gain greater insight and understanding into, as well as compassion for, the value judgments of certain characters – since he is able to imagine himself in the position of the character by whom these value judgments are made.

Paton's sensitive treatment and vivid representation of the emotions of his characters is furthermore not only a wonderful means to acknowledge the full scope and complexity of the ethical situation (as discussed earlier), but it is also a very effective means to enable his reader to feel with his characters. By reading, in Paton's very descriptive style, of Rev. Kumalo's sadness, James Jarvis's grief, Absalom Kumalo's fear and Arthur Jarvis's passion, one can sometimes not help to experience the emotions of these characters in oneself. By sharing the sadness of his son's moral decay with Rev. Kumalo, or to share the grief of the death of his son with James Jarvis (or just to share the sadness of the tragedies of the beloved country with the characters in general) an emotional involvement is established which leaves the reader with more insight and compassion for the emotions and values of those in the ethical situation. This emotional engagement (or the ability to place one in the position of another through the sharing of emotions) is, however, made possible by Paton's treatment of details. We read about Rev. Kumalo's shivering hands, the warm tears that run over his face, and the way his old body bends over during times of sadness and suffering. Paton also gives us vivid descriptions of the suffering of James Jarvis, by referring to his quivering mouth, the way the tears fill his eyes, and the way his teeth bite his lips at moments of severe sadness.

The idea of a cultivated imagination (an imagination which enables one to imagine oneself in the position of another and to feel genuine compassion for the other), is to gain insight and more thorough understanding of the values and circumstances of agents in moral situations. During Rev. Kumalo's visit in Johannesburg Paton writes: *"After seeing Johannesburg he [Rev.*

Kumalo] *would return with a deeper understanding to Ndotsheni. Yes, and with a greater humility ...*" (Paton 1987:79) Through his vivid descriptions and inviting techniques to make the reader share the position and emotions of his characters, one will hope that *Cry, the Beloved Country* will have the same effect on its reader as Rev. Kumalo's experience in Johannesburg had on him. One will hope that after reading *Cry, the Beloved Country* (and after placing one in the shoes of its characters) that one will have a deeper understanding of the era of racial inequality in South Africa, as well as a deeper sensitivity for racial injustices in general. For this will help us to not only better understand occurrences of racial inequalities in the past, but it will also help us to better approach instances of this nature, which may occur in the future.

3. Conclusion

If the style of the Philosophical (Platonic) bedtime story³⁶ can be characterized by the lucid and spare language it uses to communicate about our ethical existence and values (by means of avoiding stylistic devices such as rhythmical, pictorial or sensuous language which may activate emotions and the imagination rather than the intellect) then the novel *Cry, the Beloved Country* is in style everything which the style of philosophy is not. It is clear in Paton's novel that he makes use of pictorial and sensuous language to both intellectually and emotionally engage his reader. His pictorial and sensuous language does however not only emotionally engage his readers with characters of certain value beliefs and in certain ethical dilemmas, but the style of the novel also heightens the sensitivity of readers for the particularity and the non-commensurability of the values of those involved in the certain ethical situations (dilemmas). Through the reading of *Cry, the Beloved Country*, one also develops strong feelings of compassion for the characters in the novel. The novel, however, only differs from philosophy in style and not in content – for the content of the novel deals with themes which form the basis of the content of moral philosophy, such as justice, love, fear, trustworthiness, friendship, suffering, hope, loss, reconciliation and forgiveness.

³⁶ See Nussbaum's definition of the Philosophical (Platonic) bedtime story in *Love's Knowledge*, p. 249. (The term has also been referred to in this study in the Introductory Chapter under heading 1.2.1.)

I will therefore argue that *Cry, the Beloved Country* proves to be a novel which acknowledges the three aspects of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence. *Cry, the Beloved Country* can thus be seen as a protest work against the injustices of racial inequality (as it was seen during the time of publication, and therefore the ban on the book during the Apartheid regime), but it can also be seen as a novel with an important place in moral philosophy today – since it gives one more insight into the particularities and complexities of an ethical matter of racial injustice (from which one can gain a heightened sensitivity and insight regarding matters similar in nature). By claiming that a novel such as *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges the three aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position, it must be assumed that the novel contributes to our moral understanding of our practical ethical nature, and that the reading of this novel can lead to practical wisdom.

One of the most prominent themes of *Cry, the Beloved Country* is the theme of the acceptance of moral responsibility for beneficent change. As Callan has noticed: "*Rather than waiting for time and governments to bring about change, each of these characters sets about doing whatever good is within his power; for each has come to recognize how individual fear and indifference infects society with moral paralysis, and each also realize that the antidote to moral paralysis is individual courage and willingness to go forward in faith.*" (Callan 1991:111) There is thus much to learn from the novel – for it reveals truths about some of the most deeply rooted issues of our moral existence, such as the issue of racial equality and justice. The novel also provides its reader with solutions and truths about how these moral issues can be overcome. The novel therefore deals with some deep rooted issues about how we should live in a rather practical manner. If practical wisdom is taken to be a superior knowledge about our concrete existence and behaviour, which is obtainable only through the sensitive awareness and acknowledgement of the plurality and non-commensurability of human values, as well as through a sensitivity for the particularities and the emotions involved in our ethical situations, then there should be agreed that practical wisdom is obtainable through a novel such as *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The novel has shown to treat the plurality and non-commensurability of

human values, as well as the particularities and the emotions in ethical situations, with more care and acknowledgment than most abstract philosophical texts. The novel has also shown to enable its reader to feel deep feelings of compassion for those in the specific ethical situation – compassion or concern which I will argue with Nussbaum, ethical deliberation is in desperate need of.

Conclusion

The aim of this investigation was to test the validity of Nussbaum's proposal to include fictional literature into moral philosophy. Nussbaum's proposal rests on the assumption that novels show more acknowledgement of the Aristotelian ethical position than the abstract style of philosophy, and that practical wisdom can thus be obtained from the reading of fictional literature which cannot be obtained through the reading of philosophical texts alone. In order to test the strength of her argument this study analyzed a novel according to the three aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position. From this analysis it could be determined that certain novels in fact show more acknowledgement of Aristotle's conception of our ethical existence.

The novel which was analyzed in terms of the Aristotelian ethical position was Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The study concluded that *Cry, the Beloved Country* acknowledges all the aspects of the Aristotelian ethical position. A reading of *Cry, the Beloved Country* can therefore help us to be more aware of plural and conflicting values in ethical situations, the detail and particular aspects of ethical situations, as well as to be more sensitive to the emotions of people in ethical situations (by means of placing oneself in the position of a character). If *Cry, the Beloved Country* proves to acknowledge the three aspects of the Aristotelian position it can then be concluded that certain other novels will also acknowledge the Aristotelian ethical position, and that practical wisdom can thus be obtained through reading at least these novel. The study therefore agrees with Nussbaum that the inclusion of concrete narrative fiction in moral philosophy will in fact serve as a better means to depict our concrete moral existence and portray our ethical inquiries than abstract moral philosophy on its own.

A question that I can venture to answer now, a question that was present throughout the whole of this thesis, is – why is it important to determine the strength of Nussbaum's proposal to include fictional literature into moral philosophy. Why is it important to know that fictional literature communicates adequately about the practical nature of our ethical existence? Why is

it important to know that practical wisdom can be obtained through concrete fictional literature?

I will argue that one of the main achievements of moral philosophy should be to generate a capacity for practical wisdom among those who “practice” it. For is it not students who enroll for degrees and courses in moral philosophy who commit themselves to the prospect to one day fulfill positions in which important ethical decisions would be made? Is the purpose of including modules of moral philosophy or applied ethics in the course framework of degrees in engineering, medicine, business, politics or accounting not to make students of these fields aware of the ethical challenges ahead, and to prepare them for the demands of ethical deliberation which their unique fields may pose one day? I will therefore argue that the sole purpose of moral philosophy cannot just be to communicate about abstract ethical theories and principles, but that it also has a duty to prepare and equip students, who will one day be forced to make ethical decisions, with practical wisdom. For good ethical deliberations can only be made from the basis of practical wisdom.

It is therefore important that students, who will one day find themselves in positions where they will have to make ethical decisions, develop sensitivity for the non-commensurable and plural nature of human values, as well as to develop sensitivity for the particularities of ethical situations and the emotions accompanied by these situations. It is also important that these students develop sensitivity, understanding and compassion for people who are affected by certain ethical situations, in order to ensure better ethical deliberation. If novels (or other forms of fictional literature) thus have the ability to transform us into people who are more sensitive to the finer nuances of ethical situations (more “*finely aware and richly responsible*” – as one of Nussbaum’s titles of her essays suggests) I would therefore agree with Nussbaum that it is our duty to incorporate fictional literature into moral philosophy³⁷.

³⁷ Unfortunately it falls beyond the scope of this study to give an in-depth discussion on the exact methods which should be followed to implement fictional literature into the course frameworks of moral philosophy. This can however become the focus of another study.

In some of her later works, such as *Poetic Justice* (1995), Nussbaum expands her argument for the inclusion of fictional literature in moral philosophy into an argument which promotes the importance of fictional literature in the private and public lives of people in general. Of course it will be ideal if the broader spectrum of the human population could develop a sensitivity for the particularities of ethical situations, as well as compassion for people in ethical situations. For much of the world's ethical problems, I would argue, could have been prevented or been resolved, had more people acquired the virtue of practical wisdom. The project to transform every person into one with practical wisdom is, however, a colossal task. To follow a more humble approach (and maybe a more realistic approach), I will argue that the aim should not be to make someone with practical wisdom out of every person, but that the aim should at least be to equip students of moral philosophy with the means to obtain practical wisdom. If the inclusion of fictional literature into moral philosophy thus proves to be a means through which practical wisdom can be obtained, I will argue, it is a suggestion which demands serious consideration. Nussbaum's argument for the inclusion of narrative fiction into moral philosophy is thus an argument which the world cannot afford to ignore. For never has there been a better time to open those novels, and to roll those films, which will make of us (if not all good citizens³⁸ of society, as Aristotle would have argued, then at least good scholars of moral philosophy) people with a sensitivity towards the finer nuances of ethical situations – people with practical wisdom.

³⁸ On the question what a "good citizen" is I have no short answer to give, and would rather leave it for another thesis to delve into. However, in keeping with the line of argumentation that I have developed in this thesis, I would strongly argue that a thorough reading of a number of good fictional works in which citizenship is thematized, can take us a long way towards answering this question.

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