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Learning from Tolstoy: Forgetfulness and Recognition in Literary Edification

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Abstract Philosophers have often applied a distinctively epistemic framework to the question of how moral knowledge can be derived from fictional literature, by considering how true propositions, or their argumentative support, can be the cognitive fruits of reading works of fiction. I offer an alternative approach. I focus not on whether readers fail to assent to the truth of a proposition or fail to provide it rational support. Instead, I focus on how readers fail to accord a truth (which they already accept) adequate importance in their web of beliefs about living a good human life. This is a form of ignorance, but in the form of neglect, or failure to pay proper regard – which is one sense of the term 'forgetfulness'. I argue that works of fictional literature may, at times, stimulate audience members to overcome their own particular forms of forgetfulness in this respect. And I use Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* as a case in point.

Keywords Literary edification · Moral improvement · Learning from fiction

A Physician's Story

I have long been intrigued by a report I read in the *New York Times* some years back.[1] It concerned a young American doctor struggling to deal with survivors of the catastrophic nuclear accident at Chernobyl in 1986. The story told how Dr Robert Peter Gale, just before embarking on a visit to Moscow to care for his hospitalized patients, sought a copy of a book that had a special appeal to him. Given the gravity of the challenges facing him, one might have expected the object of his search to be some illuminating medical text, promising new treatments for the radiation injuries

[1]Eric Lax, "The Chernobyl Doctor," *New York Times Magazine*, 13 July 1986, 22.

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that afflicted his patients. Surprisingly, Dr Gale felt drawn in a different direction. He remembered a book he had last read in college some 20 years earlier, one that this specialist in bone marrow transplantation believed suggested important lessons for anyone who had witnessed the disastrous results of Chernobyl, as he and his colleagues had in recent months. The book was neither a work of scientific fact nor theory, but a work of art – of narrative fiction – written by a master of story telling. It was Tolstoy's haunting novella *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*.

Now what exactly did this upstanding member of the scientific community expect to learn from a mere fabulist, whose text was about as far removed from the rigors of testing and peer review as can be imagined? Skeptics, who might view the doctor as having taken leave of his scientific senses and yielded to the indulgences of sentiment, may want to remind us of Socrates' famous excoriation of Homer: The fact that Tolstoy writes effectively about medicine and human illness in his story should not lead us to conclude Tolstoy really knows anything about these matters. This is because Tolstoy (like Homer) only needs to give the surface appearance of the subjects he describes, employing just enough poetic facility to charm an audience into accepting the illusion that he knows what he is talking about; but he has no need to provide knowledgeable descriptions of what really counts, namely the internal structure or true workings of his subject matter.[2] For this, one must consult the work of scientists and other genuine seekers of the truth.

Yet in the *New York Times* article Dr Gale registers an important reservation to this positivist sentiment. It is a reservation that readers of the *Republic* might well wish Glaucon to have voiced, if for no other reason than to slow the steamrolling Socrates, on his way to ill-gotten rhetorical gains through zealously reciting only one side of the cognitivist debate. In Gale's words:

> More than most people, a physician deals with life and death every day. Yet, with us, death is a biological event. We don't think of our own death. The events of Chernobyl made me focus on my own mortality – on all our mortality. Ivan Ilyich realizes just before he dies that his small son loves him. Which is what life boils down to, a few people loving you – your spouse, your kids, parents. Unfortunately, it takes these tragic events to impress this on us.[3]

There is a directness and honesty to this statement that is quite compelling. It not only challenges the hegemony of technical expertise, a hallmark of Plato's attack on literature.[4] It also appears to grow from the deeply held sentiments of someone involved in a real-life situation – a crisis, in fact – and is not just the concoction of a remote philosopher of literature eager to come up with a case to test a theory. Of

[2] Plato *Republic* 598d–601b

[3] Lax, p. 22.

[4] Actually, a persuasive position could be developed supporting the view that for all his lack of conventionally recognized (that is, scientific) expertise in the psychology of dying, Tolstoy had a good deal of knowledge of the subject, particularly given the range of experiences he had undergone – from fear to despair to indifference – in encountering the deaths of his children and in confronting his own obsessions with death and the meaning of life. See Ronald Blythe's suggestive introduction to the Bantam Books edition of *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* (New York, 1981). This is one more reason to question the *Republic*'s view that the artist lacks genuine knowledge about the subject matter depicted or described through his representation.

course, the sincerity of the expression is not enough to guarantee its legitimacy as a genuine case of learning, for there may only be the illusion of learning here and not the real thing. But I do not think it is only an illusion – and I hope to show why.

The Many Faces of Ignorance

The most easily recognized form of ignorance is not knowing the truth of a proposition. We are ignorant, for example, about the cures for some of the dreaded diseases afflicting human beings, and we are ignorant about the negotiating formulas that may finally resolve the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Present us with a proposition related to either of these two subjects and even the most expert of us could not state correctly whether it is either true or false, since the evidence for rational assent is far from in yet. The hope is that in due time enough events will have occurred and enough supporting data will have been gathered to enable these experts to make such a rational judgment. At that point the rest of us will be able to follow their lead and make a judgment of our own, albeit based on our trust in the certifying authority of these experts.

Ignorance, however, has many faces, and this way of characterizing ignorance is only one of them. What is striking about this sort of ignorance is its distinctively *epistemic* configuration: its emphasis on truth and rational support, conceived on the model of a formal argument, where premises and conclusion are arranged according to standards of truth and proper inference pattern. In addition, there is a presumed universalism to this kind of ignorance: it is the entire community of human knowers that is in its scope, not just one subcommunity or one subset of individuals. But other forms of ignorance emphasize different sets of failures, many of which are not primarily epistemic at all. While still involving a person's cognitive capacities, these forms of ignorance have a decidedly psychological and moral dimension, to the extent that they express failures to marshal the mental and moral resources to work what we already know into our actions and attitudes. This is ignorance with a practical slant, where a person disregards or otherwise gives short shrift to what he knows, as he conducts his behavioral life. Furthermore, these forms of ignorance are not universal in scope, but have limited ranges extending only to particular persons at particular times and in particular settings. In focusing on such alternative kinds of ignorance, we have some of our best opportunities to show the power of fictional literary works to improve a person's moral understanding. One, in particular, shall absorb our interest here: it is a certain kind of forgetfulness.

Two Forms of Forgetfulness

If at a certain time I know that a proposition is true, but fail subsequently to remember it as a true proposition, then I can no longer be said to 'know' it; for I am no longer able to give my honest assent to it, or to believe it is true – and assent, or belief, is a required condition for conferring the status of *knowing* it is true. (I assume, of course, that no other source of belief has stepped in to replace the one lost through failed memory.) And so, if I knew that Carson City is the capital of Nevada,

but at some point simply failed to remember this (owing possibly to the persisting prominence enjoyed by Reno and Las Vegas in the public eye), then my inability to identify correctly the capital city of Nevada indicates I no longer know this fact. Memory, or the access I have to the set of propositions I know or believe, is like most human systems imperfect, and one that is always vulnerable to decay. For all sorts of reasons, I simply *forget* quite often what I once knew.

But this is only one sense of 'forgetting'. There is another use of 'forgetting', which refers us not to a proposition to which I had formerly given assent and for which I have now lost that capacity. Under this second sense of 'forgetting' – call it *forget*$_2$ – I assent to the proposition's truth (as I had done so previously), but do not accord it the value or importance that is its proper due. *Forgetting*$_2$, here, refers to a kind of neglecting, or disregarding, or failing to treat with proper care or respect.[5] It is the sense of *forgetting* often associated with historical events – *forgetting* the horrors of the Vietnam War, *forgetting* the vicious rise of European Fascism, or *forgetting* the sacrifices of the American civil rights movement – where what is involved is not an erosion in memory of a proposition's truth-value as it is a slippage in the level of importance that is properly accorded a proposition.[6]

There is a broader point to which this sense of *forgetting*$_2$ alludes and that serves as the basis on which it is built. It is the hypothesis that our cognitive frameworks are not just sets of propositions bundled as individually accepted truth claims in a sort of encyclopedia of the mind. These propositions form webs of connected beliefs, where the rank of one, in terms of its evaluated importance, is not always evenly matched by that of another. Keeping a proper perspective on the relative importance of the various truths to which one assents, therefore, is as important for being *true to* the facts and values of various aspects of reality as is the capacity to assent correctly to propositions when these are considered as separate logical vehicles.[7]

A candidate for this sort of *forgetting*$_2$ is the proposition appearing at the end of Dr Gale's statement in the *Times* article: that life boils down to a few people loving you – your spouse, your kids, parents. Interpreted roughly, I take this statement to mean that the nourishing love of family or close friends is a basic value in a good human life and that at the close of such a life, when other legitimate values (such as one's work accomplishments or social reputation) lose a great deal of their meaning,

[5] We can discern two subgroups to *forgetting*$_2$. First, I may incorrectly assess the proposition's importance in relation to other true propositions. Second, I may correctly assess the proposition's relative importance, but express this assessment only in thought or assertion; in practice I simply fail to act in ways that are consistent with my avowed evaluations – a form of not practicing what I preach. (In a more vernacular idiom, I talk the talk but do not walk the walk.) Whichever kind of *forgetting*$_2$ it is, it is not an epistemic failure to assert a true proposition, but a moral and psychological failure either to assess the proposition's relative worth or to put these assessments into action.

[6] Cf. Santayana's famous statement when interpreted with this form of *forgetting*$_2$ in mind: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (*The Life of Reason* 1.12 [1905–06]). That is to say: Those who *forget*$_2$ the past (through paying the known facts inadequate regard) are condemned to repeat the past.

[7] See Nelson Goodman's claim that truth is only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for understanding; a grasp of which truths are important, which truths "effect some telling analysis or synthesis" is just as crucial (*Languages of Art*, 2nd ed. [Indianapolis, Ind.: Hackett, 1976], pp. 262–65; quote is on p. 263).

it is this humble one that still retains its power to sustain us. It is precisely the sort of proposition that many people do in fact believe, yet either fail to assess its proper importance in relation to these other values (that is, of work or reputation), or fail to apply the proposition to their own conduct in ways that are consistent with the high evaluation they themselves accord it – or at least *would* accord it were they to think about it more carefully. Too distracted by the ego satisfaction, social climbing and careerism that mark modern life (whether in the nineteenth-century Russian culture of Ivan Ilyich or in the culture of our own times), many people simply neglect, or *forget*$_2$, the place the affection of friends and family should be accorded in a proper hierarchy of values and conduct. It is Tolstoy's novella that serves to remind them of their own neglect, of what they have *forgotten*$_2$.

If this analysis and application of *forgetting*$_2$ are plausible, they will appeal to those alternative kinds of ignorance discussed previously in "The Many Faces of Ignorance". First, the failures here are moral and psychological, rather than epistemic. It is not that we are shocked by the truth that the affection of friends and family is of ultimate worth; nor do we need proof that this is so. We just do not give this truth the attention needed to ensure its influence in our practical ways of acting and responding. Compounding the deficiency is the insidious way the deficiency develops. As we become distracted by competing values (such as career or social standing) and ultimately succumb to their draw on our time and energy, we hardly register what is taking place. Our neglect or failure to pay due respect becomes not so much the product of a willful or deliberate set of choices as of a *cognitive drift*, where our inadequate attention to the values of family and friendship is the accidental and unrecognized byproduct of an overwhelming absorption in the interests of these other legitimate values.[8]

The second reason *forgetting*$_2$ conforms to an alternative form of ignorance is that the self-referring "we" in our admission of neglect is not universal in scope, but particular. There are, after all, many people who clearly do pay proper regard to the truth that close interpersonal relations are central tenets of a good human life.[9] Many other people, however, find ways to neglect this truth, and it is to them that this aspect of Ivan Ilyich's story may appeal and also edify by reminding them of the truth they are *forgetting*$_2$. Presumably Dr Gale, based on his selecting this truth as the salient feature of Tolstoy's novella, is one of these people.[10]

And we get a further hint as to why. It is not just the careerism, or the commitment to professional excellence, or the hurley-burley of a busy social life that make Dr Gale vulnerable to this kind of *forgetting*$_2$: these might be the sorts of

[8] There is something similar here to the failure (some might call it a character defect) of procrastination, where instead of steeling oneself to do the undesired deed (such as writing a boring report), one finds oneself drifting from one project to another, all the while recognizing the importance of the deed still undone, and never wavering in one's resolve to complete the deed at some suitable time in the future.

[9] On the other side of the coin, some of these people may be rating this truth too highly, if other worthwhile values are not given their proper due.

[10] To show the particularity of the audience member's response: I and others might not zero in on this truth as the one we are *forgetting*$_2$ as much as some of the other truths the novella exposes, such as the one that recommends our critically thinking about how to live (or *lead*) a good human life, rather than just aimlessly drifting on the winds of social conformity, as Ivan seems to have done.

conditions that affect a wide range of people who are not physicians. In his case there is something about the peculiar role of the medical doctor in dealing with death merely as "a biological event" (an event occurring routinely and mechanically to every biological organism), which screens Gale and his colleagues from dealing with what he knows would appear significant were he to think of death from the viewpoint of "[his] own mortality." It takes disasters like Chernobyl, where we witness people alive one moment and dead or dying of radiation poisoning the next, to pierce the screen of denial. In a similar vein, it takes a fictional portrait of Ivan Ilyich, facing his own unexpected and unrelenting terminal illness, to "impress...on us" (that is, those persons who are prone to *forget*$_2$) the value of close personal relationships when all else has diminished. It is this value, which we appreciate more sharply now, that "life boils down to."

Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror[11]

How does Tolstoy's novella generate this process of reminding some of its audience about what they have *forgotten*$_2$? Let me start with the negative first, and suggest two ways in which the story does *not* accomplish that result.

First, it does not achieve that result through presenting a supporting argument: we neither find an empirical social scientific study buried within the pages of the story, nor do we find threads of a logical argument offering analyses of concepts from moral philosophy. Second, the novella does not produce the result through either proposing or suggesting a proposition, such as the aforementioned statement that the love of family or friends is of ultimate and long-lasting value.[12] One reason for this is that even if a proposition of this sort could be distilled from the story, it is the well-known – even banal – character of this statement that would make it impossible for it to be something audiences could be said to learn from the novella. Even a minimally reflective person is bound to have run across this statement (and given it his or her assent) in the process of living a human life; so this statement, which seems so exalted in content and tone, reduces, in Jerome Stolnitz's critique of the propositional version of literary cognitivism, to something that is merely "slight, dull [and] obvious."[13] And one cannot learn what is "obvious"; for what is there to learn, if it is already readily apparent?

So if it is through neither argument nor propositional suggestion that readers are reminded of their own neglect, how is it then? There may be a number of ways to

[11] This section's title is taken from the title of a John Ashbery poem, which is included in a collection under the same title (New York: Viking, 1972).

[12] For some propositional accounts of what audiences supposedly learn from fictional literature, see John Hospers, "Implied Truths in Literature," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 19 (1960), reprinted in Francis J. Coleman, ed., *Contemporary Studies in Aesthetics* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), pp. 233–47; Morris Weitz, 'Truth in Literature', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* IX (1955): 116–29, reprinted in John Hospers, ed., *Introductory Readings in Aesthetics* (New York: The Free Press, 1969), pp. 213–24.

[13] Jerome Stolnitz, "On the Cognitive Triviality of Art," *British Journal of Aesthetics* 32 (1992): 191–200. Quote is on p. 200.

show this; one in particular is based on a notion of experiential recognition by the audience. Aristotle in the *Poetics* offers an analysis that, with some modifications, can serve as the basic theoretical pattern. Aristotle proposes that we think of the audience member not as an ideal observer, a viewer from nowhere (as it were), simply registering the narrative's conceptual and inferential connections in a personally detached manner, but as someone who is positioned in a particularly human form of life, bearing certain values, hopes and fears. So when a protagonist in a work of tragic literature is seen going down to defeat as the combined result of a tragic mistake and sheer bad luck, a chill of fear is supposed to run imaginatively up the spine of the audience member, who thinks: I too could be in a position analogous to the predicament of the protagonist and I too could suffer that kind of defeat.[14]

Admittedly tragic mistake and bad luck mark a rather circumscribed group of works and most literary works (including the *Death of Ivan Ilyich*) do not conform to this narrow Aristotelian paradigm.[15] What is generalizable to other literary genres, however, is Aristotle's broader characterization of the audience member as one who recognizes his own attitudes and behavior in the characters of the narrative and, in particular, experiences a fear of sorts in the wake of such recognition. For what the audience member recognizes is that the morally defective life the protagonist is living – with its foolish obsessions, imbalanced priorities and distorted value scheme – could just as well be his own life. In contrast to tragic fear, which is driven by the sense that our happiness is vulnerable to externally caused bad luck (and not just our moral failings), here the fear is entirely self-referring and self-critical: its object is a

[14] Aristotle *Poetics* 13. There are two points worth noting. First, the fear is a self-regarding fear: although the intentional object of the audience's fear is the character in the fictional work, since he or she is described as "like ourselves" (in terms of our similar moral experiences and understanding), "we are in effect also fearing our own related possibilities" (M.C. Nussbaum, "Tragedy and Self-sufficiency: Plato and Aristotle on Fear and Pity," in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, ed., *Essays on Aristotle's* Poetics [Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992], p. 275). Second, the fear (and pity) have a strong cognitive dimension. For an audience member to recognize a likeness between himself and the character requires judgment, not just a "purely spontaneous or unreflective" affective response; that is, there must be an understanding of the similarities in how events came to be, whether the origins derived from external forces or psychological internal motives (Stephen Halliwell, *The* Poetics *of Aristotle: Translation and Commentary* [Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1987], pp. 125–26).

[15] A standard for Aristotelian tragedy is the eliciting of pity from the audience. But tragic pity requires a relatively good character who, although participating causally in his own downfall through an act exhibiting *hamartia* (or a mistake in judgment), fails to reach a level of culpability that leads us to say the downfall was a just retribution for the error's commission. In Aristotle's view pity can only be elicited if the audience recognizes the character did not entirely deserve the bad end he suffers (*Poetics* 13). But in Ivan Ilyich's case that may be exactly what is in question, for Ivan's own indifference toward the psychological needs of others is clearly paralleled by their indifference to his: in the emotionally cold society Ivan inhabits, that is just how people treat one another. So in the last analysis, Ivan, who had distributed insensitivity to others so freely throughout his life, is getting exactly what he deserves. With one exception, that is: toward the end of his struggle with dying, Ivan is treated to the comfort offered by Gerasim, the pantry boy. But this violates Aristotle's tragic schema even more perversely, since Ivan, who had exhibited no act of compassion toward anyone (and least of all to Gerasim), is shown a) on the receiving end of a benefit, in contrast to catastrophic suffering, and b) receiving it in an entirely undeserved manner. Aristotelian tragic pity cannot be elicited from the audience when it witnesses undeserved acts of goodness.

perceived threat – coming from the way one has conducted one's life – to one's own moral integrity and personal identity.[16] Add to this fear the sense that the deficiencies the audience member notes spring from his own *forgetting*$_2$, or neglecting in practice, to give proper due to what he already accepts in his cognitive beliefs, and the fear is doubly menacing insofar as it is the audience member's own perversity that he perceives as a significant source of the threat.

Metaphorical Recognition

I have proposed that Tolstoy's novella be viewed as a verbal self-portrait, where the audience member "recognizes himself in the fiction." This should lead, in turn, to his reflection on the way he is *forgetting*$_2$ (or failing to apply) the truth he already knows, and ultimately to his reordering his priorities in attitude or behavior.

But there are certain conceptual problems that must be faced in this formulation. One of them involves the very notion of an audience member *recognizing himself in the fiction*. Imagine if I were this audience member. Clearly, "recognizing myself in the fiction" cannot result from a literal act of self-portraiture, since Tolstoy's characterizations of Ivan Ilyich, Vasya and the others in the story, are not verbal portraits of me, but are characterizations of the fictional persons who inhabit the fictional world Tolstoy has created for them. Of course as an audience member I could take certain liberties and conceive Tolstoy's characterizations to have a more general application and in some ways characterize a *type* of person, and see myself as one instance of this type. But this would suck the life out of the literary characterization as well as the impression we have as readers that it is the individual person, Ivan Ilyich (with all his vivid idiosyncrasies) who Tolstoy is characterizing, not some abstract class of individuals to which Ivan and I belong as members.

So if "recognizing myself in" the narrative events and characterizations is to have much sense – which one may reasonably assume it should – it must be understood metaphorically, not literally. This is because the grammar of the sentences, and the phenomenology of the audience's experience each leads plausibly to the view that it is *as if* Tolstoy's characterization of Ivan were of me, and *as if* I recognized myself in it. But metaphorical in what way? And in what way related to my cognitive edification, namely my being reminded of what I have *forgotten*$_2$?

The metaphor of *recognizing myself in*, like all metaphors, involves a transfer of labeling terms, or categories, from a realm to which they normally apply (their

[16] In contrast to "tragic fear" perhaps this sort of fear can be called "integrity fear." Although the *Poetics* limits the audience's fear response to the tragic variety, where tragic works of literature show the audience, according to Martha Nussbaum, that our vulnerability to forces beyond our control renders these forces worthy of serious fear (*The Fragility of Goodness* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986], pp. 385–86), Aristotle has other conceptions of what may constitute appropriate objects of fear. One is a "bad reputation," with respect to which, "fear...is actually right and fine, and lack of fear is shameful" (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1115a12–13). Suppose we extend the concept of a bad reputation to a person's internal assessment of his own behavior. Here the person recognizes the disconnection between his own beliefs and practices as an erosion of personal integrity, and therefore as an instance of bad reputation of sorts: only this time the bad reputation manifests itself to the person himself and the content involves his own behavior. Following Aristotle's paradigm on fearing a bad reputation, then – as well as with some modifications – this undermining of personal integrity can also be thought to serve as an appropriate object of fear.

"home realm") to an alternate, unusual or "alien realm."[17] For example, in "Margaret Thatcher ruled with an iron hand" the category, iron, is transferred from its home realm of construction materials to the realm of government leader. The effect is to highlight a feature of Thatcher's rule: iron is strong, sturdy and unbendable in its service as a metallic substance; Thatcher in her resistance to weakened political decisions, was also strong, sturdy and unbendable.

In *recognizing myself in* Ivan Ilyich the transfer of categories is not one of predication (as in the "iron hand" metaphor that attributes a property to Thatcher's way of ruling), but one of identity.[18] Literally, I can only be identical with myself, and Ivan Ilyich can only be identical with himself. So to recognize myself in Ivan Ilyich – to the point of identifying myself *as* Ivan Ilyich (through expressions such as "I *am* Ivan Ilyich!" or "Ivan Ilyich is *me*!") amounts to transferring Ivan Ilyich's identity from a home realm (namely, the life that is Ivan's) to an alien realm (namely, the life that is mine).

Now in one sense there is nothing at all mysterious in such metaphorical connection, since it is just a rhetorical device that draws attention to a certain aspect under which two things are being compared. Ivan Ilyich is *insensitive*, among other things, to the perspective of his wife as she undergoes pregnancy and I become aware through the metaphorical connection that I am equally *insensitive*, among other things, to the perspective of my daughter, who wants the interest and support of her father. In this particular case, however, I may have only a limited interest in drawing attention to one (albeit noteworthy) aspect shared by Ivan Ilyich and me. And there is nothing puzzling about what is intended by the expression.

Let us call this sort of metaphor a *closed metaphor* – because of its assumption of an understanding committing both speaker and audience to a limited comparison and interaction between the two components of the metaphorical relationship (that is, Ivan and me). But sometimes – in what I call an *open metaphor* – there is much more free play and roaming. Here there are no understood constraints between speaker and audience, and the comparisons and projections between the two metaphorical components can range very far, almost to the point of indeterminacy.

How is this possible? We must first recall that the character Ivan Ilyich is created as a complex, many-faceted, *round* individual, and not simply as a *flat* illustration of a single character trait.[19] So when I notice Ivan Ilyich's indifference to his family, I cannot help noticing a number of other traits anchoring Ivan's particular brand of family indifference to the unique set of traits distinguishing him as the individual (and "round" character) he is: for example, his carefree enjoyment of escapist pleasure, as in card playing; his casual way of making an important life decision, as in whether he should marry Praskovya Fyodorovna; his fantasies of crushing the people who come within his judicial authority; and – most telling of all – his

[17] Goodman, *Languages of Art*, p. 72. Goodman also offers an extensive analysis of metaphor as the transfer of labels or categories (pp. 71–85).

[18] See Ted Cohen, "Identifying with Metaphor: Metaphors of Personal Identification," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57 (1999): 399–409. The distinction between predication and identity forms of metaphor is on p. 407.

[19] The distinction between *flat* and *round* characters is found in E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (San Diego: Harcourt, Harvest Book, 1955), pp. 67–78.

subjective (and wrongheaded) certainty that everything he did complied with living a life that was conducted "properly." Now suppose I see (or simply suspect) that I share more of Ivan Ilyich's demeanor than simply the single trait of family indifference. From this standpoint then, when I say "I recognize myself in Ivan Ilyich" or "I am Ivan Ilyich" I am not limiting my identification to a single set of traits that we both share, but am extending my identification – more mysteriously – to the entire *web* of traits that individuate Ivan Ilyich.

But this really does become logically problematic now, since it surely would be rare if two individuals shared enough of their respective personality webs that one could say, and mean, that one recognized his web in the web of the other. Perhaps what we have here is metaphor in its most challenging and open-ended sense: as an invitation to a form of 'seeing-as', where the effect may simply be to initiate an act of exploratory visualization, where one thing is seen in terms of another just to stimulate the recognition of new or unfamiliar aspects.[20] In contrast to the closed metaphor, where the lines of comparison are narrow and virtually preset, here those lines are less clear and more conducive to the spontaneous exercises of thought characteristic of brainstorming. "Recognizing myself in Ivan Ilyich" in this less constrained way is more a signal that gets a process of reflection off the ground than an indicator of a process already completed. And in this process of exploration and potential discovery what may be unearthed are unexpected truths whose relative importance I have been *forgetting*$_2$.

For example, I may know all too well how the rules of social propriety should not always be the final arbiter in deciding between conflicting alternatives, and yet be drawn by the inevitable compromises marking everyday decision making into adopting the very policies of social conformism I would optimally reject. In exploring Tolstoy's characterization of Ivan Ilyich as an agent wedded to the norms of social correctness, I may see this repugnant form of compliance as psychologically linked to the morally defective drift (in Ivan) away from a demeanor of empathy and care toward family and friends. Compliance with the social rules in fact seems to reinforce the drift toward social indifference. And when this portrait of Ivan Ilyich is projected onto my own personality and history a still further stage of discovery may unfold in terms of my coming to understand similar reinforcing connections in my own ways of living.

I Am Better than I Am: A Second Sense of 'Personal Recognition'

Whether the metaphorical relationship that connects Ivan's life to my own is of the closed or open variety, I can still see it is indifference toward family that is a salient feature shared by both our lives. There is something disturbing about this realization, since by *forgetting*$_2$ (or neglecting to perform what I already knew), I have failed to live up to what I would consider to be my own standards of morally upright behavior. The result is I do not approve of the person I have become and wish in

[20] There are suggestions of this account of metaphor as an open-ended form of visualizing, in Donald Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," in *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 29–45.

some way to dissociate myself from that person. It is for this reason that we can distinguish a second sense of 'recognizing myself in'. This sense refers us not to a configuration of acts and attitudes I acknowledge sharing with someone, such as Ivan Ilyich – which is what the first sense of 'recognizing myself in' refers to, but to a set of acts and attitudes (most likely different from the former) whose configuration I find praiseworthy or admirable to be sharing. Since this second sense is marked by a distinctively normative orientation (in contrast to a mere description of mutually possessed traits), the form of sharing it involves may in many cases amount to an idealization without an embodied counterpart, due to the divide I may note between the way I have in fact conducted my life and the way I conceive an exemplary and edified version of myself to be capable of leading such a life.

My experience with Ivan Ilyich's characterization illustrates this. By identifying with the morally defective Ivan, I discover that this is not the person I would have identified with had my better judgments managed to work themselves into my acts and attitudes. There is an inconsistency I detect between the narrative of my life as I have actually lived it up to this point, and the narrative I project of a life I conceive as a worthy version of myself.[21] Paradoxically, this may be expressed by saying that *I am a better person than the person I in fact am*.

Although this statement sounds self-contradictory, the air of paradox is dissipated when we recognize that each instantiation of "I" picks out a different aspect of my biography or self-narrative. The first "I" is forward-looking, picking out what can be called the *prospective self*, or the configuration of acts and traits reflecting what I could become if I were to exercise the mental discipline preventing me from drifting toward the neglectful behavior patterns characterized as *forgetting*$_2$. The second "I" looks rearward to a *retrospective self*, which (in the self-condemning case at hand) reflects a string of shameful compromises with self-control and other ways of resisting the corrosive effects of *forgetting*$_2$. To see myself in this prospective self is to set up an ideal toward which to direct my efforts at realization; yet it is a configuration that is not alien to what are, in my own view, my sincerely and deeply held beliefs and values. The prospective self is therefore a purified and uncorrupted version of myself.

The juxtaposition of these two versions of myself yields two sorts of emotional response. One is a sense of shame, as the prospective self (in accommodating a proper regard for the belief or practice I have *forgotten*$_2$) views with contempt an earlier and lapsed version of itself. This judgment is particularly harsh in view of my having to acknowledge both these two selves as genuine versions of me. Thus the sense of angry denunciation – by my better self – of a self that I did in fact realize but that I do not approve of now.[22]

[21] For the contrast between identifying with, and repudiating, certain desires and actions in my life – based on the way these desires and actions fit "my picture of the sort of person I want to be," see Jonathan Glover, *I: The Philosophy and Psychology of Personal Identity* (London: Penguin Books, 1988), pp. 150–51.

[22] We might recall here Plato's example of Leontius, where one of the tripartite soul's faculties – *spirit* – denounces the pleasure enjoyed by the indecent and difficult-to-resist *desire* to witness some dead bodies (*Republic* 439e–440a). According to Julia Annas (*An Introduction to Plato's* Republic [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981], pp. 127–28]), "Leontius felt shame at giving in to a desire which... did not fit his self-image; he did not want to be the *kind of person* capable of doing such a thing" (p. 128).

At the same time another emotion of self-assessment may follow in the wake of the first. Now that the dust of recognition has settled I can see which self I need to forge and work into the activities and dispositions of my life. Such clarity of vision itself becomes a form of moral edification, since I now have a more perspicuous view of the project of personal transformation I need to adopt in the practices of living my life. Hope – which is a combined desire to realize this prospective self, along with the belief and expectation that it will come to pass – replaces shame, and serves to lift my spirits from the throes of pointless self-flagellation to the consolations of positive moral endeavor.

To summarize: I have tried, in this paper, to view fictional literature as a benefit to moral edification in the following way. Works of fictional literature (and their critical appreciation) may sometimes serve as a context for subjecting oneself to a self-examination process, where acts of thinking about aspects of the literary work issue in edifying clarifications of one's own moral and cognitive frameworks. In particular, such states of illumination involve a reassessment of how true one has been to the maxims whose truth one knows all too well, but whose influence in the ways one has come to live one's life one has failed to accord a proper role or measure. Overcoming such forms of *forgetting*$_2$ is a challenge for personal and moral integrity, whether for physicians confronting life-and-death crises or for the rest of us in our more mundane affairs of life.