**Lesson Note.**

**School: Bigard Memorial Seminary**

**Class: Philosophy Three**

**Course: Philosophy and Literature**

**Topic: Fiction and Morality**

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Fiction is a form of literary composition that is forged, that is, it originates from nowhere other than from the mind of the author. Morality of course is always about practical human action: whether an action or character is right or wrong, good or bad. It is an interesting and extensive problem in philosophy and religion. Philosophy is always bothered by whether something in human action is right or wrong. It is also concerned with the nature and sources of the principles of morality of human action.

For today, there are three ways to answer the question posed above of whether fictitious literature has moral value. First one can review the characters in a fable, a novel or a drama and make moral judgements about them. If a certain character be called villain or brave for instance, it is a form of moral judgement about such a character. In the book of *Genesis*, Cain is a villain. We all react with moral repugnance when he kills his own brother Abel out of envy. There are many fictitious stories we read that will get a moral grip on us and cause us to make a judgement quite swiftly about the character that is unfolding in the plot. Sometimes we are so worked up emotionally that we feel like punching the author, were he or she close enough. This particularly happens when our hero in a prose become victim, rather than victor. I leave you to find the best examples of the such characters in some fictitious books you have read.

Care must be taken, however, not to confuse the moral value of fictions with the moral value of actual characters. The Apostle Judas Iscariot for instance is a villainous and treacherous man, but the moral value of his character is a different thing from what we are dealing with here. Unlike the story of Genesis which is a fable, the story of Jesus and his apostle Judas is factual. So, while the gospel (I did not say the entire bible) is a form of literature, it does not fit the kind of fictitious literature that we are discussing today. Take note of this distinction. Of course, we all know and accept that figures like Judas who was at some point a living follower of Jesus, should not be emulated. Unlike Judas therefore the moral value of Cain’s character is of a different kind, philosophically speaking. Such subtle distinctions are the character of philosophical sagacity. Some people might say, ‘does it matter, such hair-splitting distinctions?’. Well, it does.

The second way that we can answer the question posed above is to look beyond specific characters and see if we can draw principles of action and morality, in a general sense. This time, it is not just that the character in question is condemnable or praiseworthy, the question is whether we can build a moral theory from it. And why? So, it is not just that you like or hate that character, it must be drawn now to a higher level of philosophical generalization or abstraction. Take for instance Cain the brother of Abel. It is not just that Cain’s envious character is bad. Can we, by the same token, erect a theory of envy from that story. It is true that it might appeal to us as individuals or that we might decide to adopt the lessons in the story as our guidelines. But then, we move from applying it to ourselves and seek to make it a standard for everyone. Can it stand? Why? What is it that gives the theory of envy its moral power? Where does that power come from? What is it in that story that can make it effectively connect to everyone?

But there is a third point to note, before we end. If envy is obviously bad, why do people frequently engage in it? Is envy a wilful action? Can we decide not to be envious? Is it beyond us? Does it just happen? We are only making examples with envy. It can be with lust, greed, wickedness, drunkenness, sloth etc. But the point is, is it within the power of man, to grow beyond these so-called vices? Are they anthropologically fixed? Are we as humans inexorably vulnerable towards them? If one man can overcome it, does it follow that every other man is supposed to do so? What is the validity of moral generalizations? If one person can live up to it, does it follow that everyone should live up to it? These and similar questions are what we should grapple with in today’s lesson.