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MALIGNANT FAITH AND COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING: REALISM IN *ADAM BEDE*

By Jon Singleton

> "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."
>
> —The Bible, Hebrews 11.1

> "[*F*]*aith has within it a malignant principle.* Christian faith, and nothing else, is the ultimate ground of Christian persecution."
>
> —Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity,* translated by Marian Evans

I BEGIN THIS ESSAY BY QUOTING TWO books that deeply shaped George Eliot's thinking because I want to draw attention to the problem of "faith" in her writings, which I believe illuminates an important aspect of her realist project. I am not so much interested in her well-documented personal loss of faith, or her deconstruction of Victorian Christianity into religious humanism (Knoepflmacher 44–59; Wright 173–201; Dolin 165–89), as I am in her positive theorization of faith, throughout her early writings, as a cognitive structure that shapes perception, interpretation, and action.[1] Faith materializes as beliefs shape perception, perceptions shape belief, in hermeneutical spirals coiling out to exert benign or malignant force on believers' material lives.[2] For Eliot, Christian faith enables social violence, and literature must both expose this malignant relationship and instill more benign (and less totalizing) cognitive patterns for bringing one's faith to bear on materiality. Among other effects, such a transformation changes the way the Bible itself can be read. The realism Eliot articulates in *Adam Bede* (1859) and elaborates for the rest of her career is modeled on her understanding of the cognitive structure of faith – and calculated to infiltrate and eradicate it.

By linking the terms "materiality" and "faith," I mean to signal three connections Eliot draws in her translations, essays, and early fiction, several of which I explore in detail below. First, she holds the subjective experience of religious belief to be based in the material structures of brain, body, and social situation.[3] Second, she assumes an inextricable relationship between one's *a priori* beliefs (faith writ large – a connection Eliot herself explicitly draws) and what one perceives as substantial reality. Third, she sees religious faith as producing material consequences through its influence on social behavior. These premises

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drive her exposition of the phenomenology and sociology of religious belief, which she carries out by displaying the modes of Bible-reading employed by Adam Bede, Dinah Morris, and their fellow residents of Hayslope – and later by Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, Mordecai Cohen, and numerous other characters throughout her oeuvre. Her writings show that her concern with faith stretches far deeper than the problem of organized religion, or even of spirituality, to the cognitive structures that determine what a person is able and unable to perceive, and which therefore partly determine behavior. The same beliefs that shape how one reads a text also shape how one acts toward others. At this level, for Eliot, the social interpretations on which ethics are based are thoroughly imbricated with the problems of textual interpretation of the Bible.

The Bible of Flesh

IN *ADAM BEDE*, ELIOT DEPICTS different Bible-reading practices as indicators of characters' socially-inherited, materially-grounded faith structures, in order to reveal the acts of violence faith can enable. This project emerges only gradually, however. Many Victorian readers, who had first encountered "George Eliot" as the apparently pious author of *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857–58), may have assumed that a shared set of religious values motivated her novel's frequent references to the Bible and biblical texts.[4] Yet Eliot's treatment of the disjunctions between different characters' Bible usage eventually emerges as an empirical, critical method for testing the effects of faith in various socialized and embodied contexts.

Eliot begins *Adam Bede* by using differing views on the Bible to mark certain characters as sympathetic and thus to establish the narrative's moral center of gravity. The initial workshop scene depicts a religious debate between the derisive Wiry Ben Crannage and the otherworldly Methodist, Seth Bede. Adam's sound Christian biblical interpretation and pragmatic Christian reasoning points a middle way between these two. Following a convention at least as old as *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by which earnest or thoughtless readings of scripture mark moral character, Adam's views on the Bible seem to establish the narrative's frame of reference within a traditional Christian worldview. In the second chapter, similarly, Dinah's earnest preaching to a crowd of Methodists is contrasted with the shoemaker Joshua Rann's obviously thick-headed interpretation of scripture. Joshua protests the Methodist incursion by booming out the scripture "Sehon, King of the Amorites, for His mercy endureth for ever" simply because the dignity of the established Church (from which the Methodists are dissenters) is "bound up" in his mind "with his own sonorous utterance" of "the psalm he had read the last Sunday afternoon" (18; ch. 2).

By contrast, Dinah's preaching shows how deeply she feels and understands the words of the Bible.[5] "I think you must have heard the clergyman read these words: 'The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor,'" she says to her listeners:

> Jesus Christ spoke those words – he said he came *to preach the Gospel to the poor*:[6] I don't know whether you ever thought about those words much. . . . "Gospel" mean[s] "good news." . . . [Jesus came] to tell the good news about God to the poor. Why, you and me, dear friends, are poor. We have been brought up in poor cottages, and have been reared on oat-cake and lived coarse. . . . We are just the sort of people that want to hear good news. . . . we are lost, as if we was struggling in great waters. (22–23; ch. 2)

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Dinah turns scriptures over on her tongue, digests them in her mind, absorbs them into her bodily sensations. Just as her listeners feel Dinah's "quiet depth of conviction" to be "in itself an evidence for the truth of her message" (25; ch. 2), the reader, too, is encouraged to view Dinah as one of the novel's protagonists on the basis of her thoughtful interpretation of scripture.[7] Up to this point, the narrative plays according to typical Victorian conventions: it has presented clearly good and bad Bible readings, and these seem to provide a compass by which to orient oneself morally in the story, a scale with which to weigh one's judgment of character. Good Bible readings, it seems apparent, are those which, like Dinah's, attend to the way context limits the range of responsible interpretations.

Yet in quoting "Sehon, king of the Amorites" Joshua Rann *does* attend to context, in a manner of speaking. He merely privileges the text's reception context – the way it is quoted as part of Anglican ritualized liturgy in a stone church building, in contrast to the purely personal selection of scriptures quoted by Methodists meeting on the green – over its context as verses 19 and 20 of Psalm 136. As the unfolding narrative quickly demonstrates, Dinah's use of scripture is really just as subjective.

As the narrator reveals Dinah and Hetty in their bed-chambers, for example, we are offered a typical reading of one as spiritual, the other as worldly: Hetty studies her own physiognomy in the mirror, trying to imagine how she appears to would-be lovers, while Dinah pores over the pages of her Bible looking for divine guidance. The narrator deconstructs the worldly, desirous point of view that would read Hetty's outer beauty – "The dear, young, round, soft, flexible thing!" – as signs of inner virtue: "Her heart must be just as soft, her temper just as free from angles, her character just as pliant" (138; ch. 15). This would be mere projection, the narrator gently admonishes:

> I find it impossible not to expect some depth of soul behind a deep grey eye with a long dark eyelash, in spite of an experience which has shown me that they may go along with deceit, peculation, and stupidity. But if, in the reaction of disgust, I have betaken myself to a fishy eye, there has been a surprising similarity of result. One begins to suspect at length that there is no direct correlation between eyelashes and morals; or else, that the eyelashes express the disposition of the fair one's grandmother, which is on the whole less important to us. (139; ch. 15)

This explosion of the meanings a lover attributes to beautiful body parts lines up quite nicely with the Victorian convention of privileging soul over body, inner virtue over superficial appearance. One might expect that Hetty serves here as a foil for Dinah, whose authentic inner virtue seems to be demonstrated by the fact that she is studying her Bible while Hetty is strutting and preening in the next room. Yet the narrator subtly links the two girls' self-centered modes of searching signs for meaning. Like the lover whose point of view Hetty imaginatively occupies, who considers himself "a great physiognomist . . . adept in the language [of her beauty]" (138; ch. 15), Dinah knows "the physiognomy of every page" (144; ch. 15) of her beloved Bible. Dinah studies scripture, as Hetty studies the mirror – to know herself better. Opening her Bible at random and taking "the first words she look[s] on" as divine guidance is "enough for Dinah," the narrator says (144; ch. 15). In its own way, her practice is no less foolish, egocentric, or arbitrary than is the way a lover jumps to conclusions about a beautiful girl's character. Like the lover, Dinah finds in the Bible what she expects to see.

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Dinah displays the same egocentric arbitrariness while searching for God's leading regarding Seth's and Adam's marriage suits. This narrative strand is reintroduced at regular intervals throughout the novel, making the problem of discerning God's will for the individual life leap in great arcs over the mundane acts of love-making, kowtowing, and guilt-hunting that lie in its shadow. Twice Dinah interprets her intense passion for ministry as a sign not to marry Seth. "It was no use," Seth reports to Adam after being rejected the second time; "Dinah's heart wasna turned towards marrying" (326; ch. 35). Even after her heart turns toward Adam, Dinah distrusts her own feelings and "must wait for a clear guidance" (456; ch. 52). This attempt at objectivity is futile, however. The only evidence she can imagine that would disprove the "guidance" of the emotions that have always shown her the way would be the disappearance of those emotions. In the end, it is the *absence* of any divine communication that she finally chooses to accept as a message from God: "it is the Divine Will. . . . this moment, now you are with me, . . . I feel that our hearts are filled with the same love, I have a fullness of strength to bear and do our heavenly Father's Will, that I had lost before" (475; ch. 54). The failure to prove a case false does not prove it true, however, and Dinah's ultimate marriage to Adam is tainted by a slight sense that she has compromised her spiritual principles.

In these ways the narrative gradually demonstrates that even earnest Christians like Dinah cannot prevent their desires from shaping their perceptions of God's word and will. In doing so it suggests that religious acts of interpretation tend to be just as shortsighted and egocentric, say, as the scattered musings of churchgoers on their walk home from church: as subjective as Mr. Poyser's decipherment of the hieroglyph in his almanac depicting a large-spurred cock knocked on the head with an anchor (186; ch. 18), or Mr. Craig the gardener's weather prophecies (187; ch. 18), or Adam's construal of Hetty's feelings towards him. "Poor fellow!" says the narrator, "that touch of melancholy [on her face] came from quite another source; but how was he to know? We look at the one little woman's face we love, as we look at the face of our mother earth, and see all sorts of answers to our own yearnings" (188; ch. 19). Earnest piety produces readings no less self-centered, Eliot suggests, than those Arthur Donnithorne finds when he perceives "Pharaoh's daughter and her maidens, who ought to have been minding the infant Moses," staring admiringly at his body from a tapestry on his dressing-room wall (112; ch. 12). Together these passages suggest that the "meanings" the faithful reader finds in scripture are drawn in large measure from the social contexts in which scripture is employed, and in many of these the Bible becomes less a dispenser of morality than a conductor of social and interpersonal conflicts.

Reverend Irwine does not emphasize doctrine for this very reason: he intuitively grasps that "the only healthy form religion could take in such minds [as his rural parishioners'] was that of certain dim but strong emotions, suffusing themselves as a hallowing influence over the family affections and neighbourly duties" (63; ch. 5). The reader may choose to take this passage as an indictment of rural minds only, but other passages are less coy. "[R]eligion's something else besides notions," Adam says elsewhere. "It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing – it's feelings" (163; ch. 17). He goes on, "I began to see all this weighing and sifting what this text means, and that text means . . . was no part o' real religion at all. You may talk o' these things for hours on end, and you'll only be all the more coxy and conceited for 't" (165; ch. 17). If all religious interpretations are at some level egocentric, the narrative hints, then every part of religion that requires interpretation – that is, every part which requires anything to be put into words: every

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articulation of belief, reading of scripture, or avowal of doctrine – is potentially immoral and threatening.

In other words, the "truth" of an interpretation lies in the way words or objects invested with religious meanings are put to interpersonal use by each individual consciousness. And in this sense, even without any fixed literal meaning, the Bible is immensely valuable to Eliot for its capacity to reflect the characteristic structures of thought and feeling that different characters bring to it. The act of interpreting scripture leaves the reading ego's imprint on the text, which subsequently may serve as a representation of the character's cognitive structure.

The diction of the passages Dinah chooses to quote, for example – "affliction," "hardness," "stretched," "heavy," "parched," "burning," "bitterness," "darkness," "horror," "pain," "sweat," "blood," "tears," "bleeding," "watching," "dark," "thirst," "heat," "light," "eat," "drink," "feel," "feast," "bearing," "rejoicing" – communicates much about the visceral way she experiences her faith. Other characters' use of the Bible likewise serves as an index for their character traits and perceptual frameworks. Ben Crannage uses the Bible as a "jest-book" (8; ch. 1), Joshua Rann as an indicator of his own self-importance, and Adam as a justification for his strong work ethic. The Methodist Will Maskery accuses Joshua Rann of being "a blind Pharisee" and the local Anglican clergyman, Rev. Irwine, of being a "dumb dog" and an "idle shepherd," which the affronted Rann considers using "the Bible . . . to find nicknames for folks as are his elders an' betters" (54; ch. 5).[8] Irwine's mother finds it equally insolent, though for reasons that display her aristocratic chauvinism as utterly distinct from Rann's workshop loutishness (58; ch. 5). But Maskery's aspersions are tame in comparison with the acid judgments of Mr. Roe, the travelling (read, nonconformist) preacher, who derides the local Anglican clergy in a shower of scriptural vituperance. They are, he claims,

> men given up to *the lusts of the flesh and the pride of life* [1 John 2.16]; . . . asking *what shall we eat, and what shall we drink, and wherewithal shall we be clothed*? [Matt. 6.31] – *careless of dispensing the bread of life to their flocks* [Ezek. 34.2, John 6.35, 51], preaching at best but a carnal and soul-benumbing morality, and *trafficking in the souls of men* [Rev. 18.13]. . . . (62; ch. 5, emphasis mine)

In the same way the narrator delineates Mr. Irwine's social attitudes (63; ch. 5) and Mrs. Poyser's no-nonsense practicality (172; ch. 18) by presenting their idiosyncratic views of scripture.

With undeviating consistency, Eliot gives the reader insight into Lisbeth Bede (127; ch. 14), Hetty (128; ch. 14), Martin Poyser the Elder (169; ch. 18), Bartle Massey (217–18; ch. 21), and even "Brimstone" the brickmaker (212; ch. 21) by the way each one interprets the Bible or puts it to use.[9] Yet she differs from the common Victorian literary convention of using the Bible as an index of characters' morals – the usage one finds in *Jane Eyre*, for example, where Mr. Brocklehurst's view of the Bible as something akin to a disciplinarian's switch unequivocally signals moral corruption (Brontë 33; ch. 4). By contrast, the characters in *Adam Bede* are not judged as being any better or worse by an objective biblical standard, though readers might read with such assumptions in place. Rather, they are characterized – that is, their particular configuration of character traits is conveyed to the reader – by what they see in the Bible. As Eliot presents an array of different modes in which people read, interpret, invoke, manipulate, appropriate, and rework scriptures, she grounds religious meanings in an intensely material, particularized, and embodied sense of context. The body's situation

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delimits the mind's signification. In the interface between mind and body, belief is translated into social force – and social violence. Word becomes flesh with a vengeance.

The Language of the Soul

IN EXPLORING HOW FAITH structures impinge on perception and action, Eliot uses biblical texts, scenes of religious practice, and spiritual terminology to describe the semi-cognitive, semi-affective processes by which meaning is produced in the bodies and minds of her characters.[10] *Adam Bede* contains numerous such passages. The deep meaning Adam finds in the church service comes not from the inherent meaningfulness of religion, nor from the trueness of the sermon being preached, but from the way the external sensations he experiences during the service resonate with his internal sensations, thoughts, feeling, and memories:

> to Adam the church service was the best channel he could have found for his mingled regret, yearning, and resignation; its interchange of beseeching cries for help, with outbursts of faith and praise – its recurrent responses and the familiar rhythm of its collects, seemed to speak for him as no other form of worship could have done. (180; ch. 18)

Passages like this one conceptualize the interface between the material world and the psyche, an interface I have been calling each character's mode of egocentric interpretation but which might more precisely be termed *perceptual schema*: the individualized structures of thought and feeling that lie before perception, that filter what is perceived, and that are then responsible for interpreting and acting on those perceptions.[11] These passages are sparks of theoretical brilliance in which one glimpses the "Physical Basis of Mind" that G. H. Lewes (and ultimately Eliot herself, as his posthumous editor) would later articulate at length in *Problems of Life and Mind*. Yet even though she insists on the material basis of subjectivity, Eliot finds the spiritual terms of "faith" and "soul" most convenient for expressing this idea.

The "soul," mentioned over one hundred times in the novel, is Eliot's term for the interface between the psyche and the material world that shapes conscious and preconscious perception. The soul is something fluttering and insubstantial, an invisible essence of character that is supposed to undergird coherent identity. As Eliot describes it, though, it is actually neither more nor less than a transient, evolving cognitive structure – socially constructed, chained to physiology, and tossed about by historical contingency. The souls of Eliot's characters are nothing but combinations of socially-inherited perceptual schema. Their bodies are a different matter: suffering, beautiful, hungering, laboring, susceptible to nurture, violence, or love. It is "the flesh and blood folks are made on," as Mrs. Poyser puts it, "that makes the difference" (86; ch.8). Yet terms of soul and spirit are valuable to Eliot insofar as they are able to draw the reader's attention back to man and woman and material circumstance, the inconvenient singularities that serve (in Eliot's view) as the true basis of their meaning.[12]

The "soul" often appears in *Adam Bede* as a way of conceptualizing the manner in which materiality can produce seismic, identity-altering shifts in perception. "There's things go on in the soul," Adam reflects, "and times when feelings come into you like a rushing mighty wind, as the Scripture says, and part your life in two a'most, so you look back on yourself as if you was somebody else" (164; ch. 17). These souls are subject to the material world.

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They can be transformed or deformed by intense sensations like pain – suffering is "a long and hard lesson" that the "strong determined soul can learn," as Adam learns "the alphabet of it in his father's death, which . . . sent a sudden rush of thought and memory over [his past]" (190; ch. 19) – or erotic pleasure: "Such young unfurrowed souls [as Arthur's and Hetty's] roll to meet each other like two velvet peaches that touch softly and are at rest; they mingle as easily as two brooklets that ask for nothing but to entwine themselves and ripple with ever-interlacing curves in the leafiest hiding-places" (120; ch. 12). The perception of a shared world, held in common by souls thus blended, is all the more violently demolished by separation. Lisbeth after her bereavement, much like Hetty after her abandonment,

> look[s] round with blank eyes at the dirt and confusion on which the bright afternoon's sun shone dismally; it [is] all of a piece with the sad confusion of her mind – . . . the poor human soul is like one who has been deposited sleeping among the ruins of a vast city, and wakes up in dreary amazement . . . not knowing why and whence came this illimitable scene of desolation, or why he too finds himself desolate in the midst of it. (95; ch. 10)

As the medium through which whatever "we" are interacts with the world, Eliot is suggesting, our souls are engraved upon by sights and sounds, pain and pleasure.

These stimuli set up patterns through which a person becomes receptive to future sensations, or anaesthetized to them. "[S]ome of those cunningly fashioned instruments called human souls have only a very limited range of music," the narrator observes, "and will not vibrate in the least under a touch that fills others with tremulous rapture or quivering agony" (88; ch. 9). And just as the soul through which one experiences the world is structured by material and historical actualities, so too does the "reality" of the soul exist as much in the observer's interpretation of physiological signs as it does in the subject's body. Thus, "Seth's soul rushe[s] to his eyes and lips" when Adam mentions Seth's unacknowledged love for Dinah (111; ch. 11). Adam's interpretation of the unspoken essence within Seth is based on the expression he sees on his brother's physiognomy.

This is one of the novel's key themes: that what we call the "soul" is actually a projection, into someone else's body, of our own egocentrically-structured perception of the meaning of his or her superficial features. As the narrator notes elsewhere, "There are faces . . . charge[d] with a meaning and pathos not belonging to the single human soul that flutters beneath them, . . . just as a national language may be instinct with poetry unfelt by the lips that use it" (258; ch. 26). The inner essence of a person is much the same substance, from this perspective, as the latent meaning of language before utterance: it is only virtual. The features of the body form a kind of alphabet, and just like other forms of language, much of the meaning we find there depends on what we bring to it – our familiarity with wide-ranging networks of intertextual reference, and, by extension, our sensitivity to resonances in each particular instance of expression. "Beauty has an expression beyond and far above the one woman's soul that it clothes," claims the narrator in another place, "as the words of genius have a wider meaning than the thought that prompted them":

> It is more than a woman's love that moves us in a woman's eyes – it seems to be a far-off mighty love that has come near to us, and made speech for itself there; the rounded neck, the dimpled arm, move us by something more than their prettiness – by their close kinship with all we have known of tenderness and peace. (319; ch. 33)

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Soul, language, meaning: Eliot's point is that we "read" souls, just like we read the words of the Bible or any other text, through a perceptual and interpretive framework that is based on our past experiences. As the narrator concludes the above passage, "The noblest nature sees the most of this impersonal expression in beauty" – i.e., its resonance with wider networks of significance and experience – "and for this reason, the noblest nature is often the most blinded to the character of the one woman's soul that the beauty clothes" (319; ch. 33). "Yes! Thank God," says the narrator; "human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: it does not wait for beauty – it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it" (162; ch. 17).

Eliot's account of beauty here is reminiscent of Kantian aesthetic philosophy as presented in the *Critique of Judgment* (1790), which Eliot may have read.[13] According to Kant, when one recognizes beauty one expresses a belief in a transcendent standard that one is claiming is valid for everyone. The judgment that something is beautiful is not merely the claim "I find it pleasing," but rather the demand that all others agree (56–60). For Kant, this makes aesthetic judgment very close to moral judgment, which likewise depends on a disinterested universal standard (52). Crucially, Kant claims that for the standard invoked to carry any universal validity, one's judgment must be completely disinterested; one must have no will or desire for the moral or aesthetic object being judged (46–53). Eliot draws a similar relationship between beauty and ethics – the "noblest nature" has the most refined sense of beauty (*Adam Bede* 319; ch. 33) – and she too advocates the *attempt* to be disinterested and unbiased, yet she absolutely denies one's judgments can ever be truly disinterested.[14] According to Eliot, the meaning, virtue, or beauty that one perceives to come from some transcendent source – say, from God or the soul – is actually a product of the historically, socially, and materially determined schema by which one perceives the world.

The "soul," then, is repeatedly used as a metaphor for language, and specifically for the vast and ambiguous fields of meaning that seem – only ever *seem* – to anchor themselves to words on a page, or to a body's actions. Thus when the narrator describes Hetty's soul as a tiny thing knocking about in a great big body – a "little butterfly soul" (122; ch. 13), a "little trivial soul . . . struggling amidst the serious, sad destinies of a human being" (307; ch. 31) or looking out through a "round childish face" as if through a window from "narrow" rooms within (349; ch. 37) – she emphasizes that a person's supposedly essential character is actually subject to the material limitations and capacities of her body, and, by extension, to the material pressures of the world around her. The same is true of language. "[S]light words and looks and touches are part of the soul's language," the narrator reflects;

> and the finest language, I believe, is chiefly made up of unimposing words, such as "light," "sound," "stars," "music" – words really not worth looking at, or hearing, in themselves, any more than 'chips' or 'sawdust': it is only that they happen to be the signs of something unspeakably great and beautiful. (441; ch. 50)

Eliot is not giving an essentialist account of the meaning of words here, but rather one based on the histories of material and affective experiences that each of us associates with specific words.[15] "I am of opinion that love is a great and beautiful thing too," she continues,

> and if you agree with me, the smallest signs of it will not be chips and sawdust to you: they will rather be like those little words, 'light' and 'music,' stirring the long-winding fibres of your memory, and enriching your present with your most precious past. (441; ch. 50)

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In other words, the spirit of any text we read has little meaning for us until we lend it the weight of the material circumstances in which we have read before, and in which we read now, all of which shape the cognitive structure through which we see and understand the text now before us. "The secret" of meaning, says the narrator, "never lies in the bare object, but in its subtle relations to our own past" (180; ch. 18). And as the narrator observes elsewhere, "[N]o story is the same to us after a lapse of time; or rather, we who read it are no longer the same interpreters" (472; ch. 54). Linguistic signification is a function of embodied souls.

For Eliot the crucial point here is that whenever meaning is produced, other meaning (literally, others' meaning) is always, necessarily, irrevocably shut out. One person's soul is a perceptual schema bound to the particularities of her own situation. Those particularities shape her schema in ways that determine and to some extent limit her perceptions. Anything she perceives, anything she interprets, has already been filtered through her particular schema: what her soul finds no delight in, so to speak, what it codes as insignificant, it filters out. This first person then makes judgments based on her perceptions, and is able to act according to her judgments. However, a second person observing the first sees her outward signs – her facial features and expressions, her body, her behavior – and projects into her what he perceives as her soul (essence) but which, of course, is only a virtuality based on the structure of his own perceptual schema which has shaped or distorted his view of everything he has seen in her. Whether seen from the outside or from the inside, then, whether as inhabited or projected, the "soul" produces situated meanings predicated on the exclusion of meaning. At the same time, the religious connotations of salvation and perdition associated with the term "soul" suggest how infinitely much is gained through its existence (the whole perceivable world) and how irrevocably, how eternally, it can put others' realities out of reach.

The Violence of Belief

THE VIOLENCE THAT TAKES PLACE when faith occludes social perception is the central ethical problem of *Adam Bede*, and that problem centers on Hetty. Although she carries out her act of criminal negligence (abandoning her child to die) by her own free will, she claims that it is motivated by fear of the moralistic ostracism she knows she would receive were she to return home with her baby:

> "I didn't know what to do. I daredn't go back home again – I couldn't bear it. I couldn't have bore to look at anybody, for they'd have scorned me. . . . I thought I should get rid of all my misery, and go back home, and never let 'em know why I ran away." (405; ch. 45).

After her arrest her fears are realized in the self-righteous judgments of her family and neighbors. "I don't value her a rotten nut – not a rotten nut," says Bartle Massey (374; ch. 40). "I'll not go nigh her, nor ever see her again, by my own will," says her uncle, Mr. Poyser, who is driven to this ultimatum by his sense of sullied religious respectability: "we shall ne'er hold up our heads i' this parish nor i' any other" (371; ch. 40). Their collective condemnation is authorized by their religion and justified, in their own minds, by Hetty's apparent blackness, or blankness, of soul. Whether the narrator (who talks of Hetty's soul as narrow, hard, and trivial) is joining in this unjust condemnation is a contentious point among critics.[16] Immediately after the wandering Hetty thinks of Dinah, for instance, the narrator describes Hetty's "hard unloving despairing soul" (349; ch. 37) with terminology Dinah has

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repeatedly used. Similarly, as Reverend Irwine muses on the past after the wedding of Adam and Dinah, he finds himself "glad at heart":

> For he had seen Adam in the worst moments of his sorrow; and what better harvest from that painful seed-time could there be than this? The love that had brought hope and comfort in the hour of despair, the love that had found its way to the dark prison cell and to poor Hetty's darker soul – this strong, gentle love was to be Adam's companion and helper till death. (477; ch. 55)

It is reasonable to take such narratorial characterizations as free indirect discourse, especially in light of Eliot's acknowledged penchant, throughout her oeuvre, for representing women as silenced in order to criticize the silencing of women (see Dowling). Eliot communicates her disapproval of the hardness of the Hayslope community by forcing the reader to perceive Hetty through the inherently violent religious schema of those around her (Carroll, *Conflict* 76; Creeger 227; Heyns 136–82).

The violence of belief Eliot leaves half-hidden in *Adam Bede* was described explicitly and in detail by Marian Evans in her translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. Feuerbach's text is well known as a more warm-hearted, life-affirming critique of Christian religion than D. F. Strauss's harsher *Life of Jesus*, which Evans had translated eight years earlier, and so it is usually positioned in Evans/Eliot's intellectual history as marking a turn towards the tolerant maturity of her novels. The final third of *Essence of Christianity*, however – a "negative, destructive" Appendix, in Feuerbach's own words – has been neglected in scholarship on Feuerbach's influence on Eliot's fiction, even though her fiction contains a similarly submerged polemic.

In the Appendix, Feuerbach argues that historical religious conflicts reflect a contradiction between Christian Faith and Christian Love. Faith is necessarily the belief in *a priori* judgments that divide the righteous from the infidel, says Feuerbach, and that makes burning heretics at the stake purely rational, at least in terms of religious fidelity. "To faith the basis of all duties is faith in God: faith is the absolute duty; duties to men are only derivative, subordinate. The unbeliever is thus an outlaw – a man worthy of extermination" (321). In this sense faith produces hate. "[I]t was by no means a personal hatred, though this may have been conjoined, – it was a *religious hatred* which brought [heretics] to the stake – a hatred which springs from the nature of unchecked faith" (323–23). Thus, says Feuerbach, "*faith has within it a malignant principle.* Christian faith, and nothing else, is the ultimate ground of Christian persecution" (321).

Feuerbach is indignant at the way religious faith backs up societies and governments that directly or indirectly deprive people of life through acts of violence and exclusion. He develops this idea further in *The Essence of Religion* (1845), an elaboration of his critique's international political implications which Evans likely read while preparing to translate *Das Wesen des Christenthums*.[17] There Feuerbach argues that faith prevents people from seeing the contradictions in faith-based behavior, and so religious faith buttresses the oppressive power of the State. He explains that religion

> is equally favorable to democracy and to despotism. Religion speaks of a God, father of men, who is all Love and Liberty, and an instant afterward it speaks of a God who is absolute master of men, who holds all authority over men his slaves; and that idea of divine fatherhood instantly reinforces

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> the *patria potestas* of Roman law, that extreme antiliberal principle, which in politics means nothing more than blind obedience. (*Religion* 28)[18]

The significance of "God the Father" changes from Love to Wrath instantaneously and, lightning-like, it flashes a transformation of meaning across the whole system of belief, which includes belief in the Fatherland's paternal right over the power of life and death. Like God, the State holds a power exerted through a network of significations that can flash back and forth from benevolent to deadly. "The consequence," Feuerbach continues,

> is that religion makes the eternal well-being of souls hinge on its ceremonies in absolutely the same way that the State makes temporal well-being hinge on its legalities. This one establishes one's duties toward the gods, that one toward kings, but these "duties" contradict what one owes to man. The one sanctions its barbarities under the pretext that they have been committed according to the impenetrable will of the gods. The other justifies the brutalities it permits itself to commit with I don't know what ineffable motives of an unspeakable political importance. The one immolates reason, the other natural rights. . . . [T]he penal code takes God's part in such a lively manner that it doesn't interest itself in the least with Man, who is honored everywhere and always only in direct relation with his veneration of the gods. The result, however, has always been basically the same. In Egypt they drowned anyone who had offended the Sacred Crocodile; in Austria they burned anyone who had spoken against the Triune God. In this way, the Christian political State proves that the eternal flames of Hell are not one bit a fantastic illusion. The blasphemers who suffered the diabolical torments of the criminal law under Léopold I, emperor of Austria, doubtless found a quarter hour to be an eternity. (*Religion* 28–29)[19]

Thus Feuerbach demonstrates how the belief structure of religion and the political structures of the State conspire to deprive people of their humanity and their lives. Feuerbach augments the force of this argument grammatically – a register present in the original German and in the French translation Evans likely possessed, but impossible to convey in English – by using the grammatical gender of the nouns and pronouns of "Religion" ("she"; in German, *die Religion, sie*; in French, *la Religion*, *elle*) and "the State" ("he"; in German, *der Staat*, *er*; in French, *l'État*, *il*) to suggest illicit consorts scheming to commit acts of violence.

Not all faith leads to the chopping block, of course. Feuerbach admits in *The Essence of Christianity* that "Very many Christians rejected the punishment by death, but other criminal punishments of heretics, such as banishment, confiscation – punishments which deprived them of life indirectly – they did not find in contradiction with their Christian faith" (323). The banishments, the indirect deprivations of life, are enacted by society to enforce what Feuerbach calls "antinatural" codes of morality: "As the highest object of faith is that which most contradicts reason, the Eucharist, so necessarily the highest virtue . . . is that which most contradicts Nature." Thus, "Antinatural morality is the twin sister of supernatural faith." And the "summit" of perverted morality, according to Feuerbach, is society's glorification of "'*virginity*, the sister of the angels, the queen of virtues, the mother of all good'" (*Christianity* 327, emphasis mine).[20]

These passages, penned by Evans not long before she began writing *Adam Bede*, hint at the indignation lurking behind the novel's calm and composed depiction of the upstanding parishioners of Hayslope, who turn ferociously on Hetty after her arrest and who see it as a Christian "mercy" that her death sentence is commuted to transportation to Australia. But why doesn't the narrator speak up for Hetty, then? Part of the answer lies in Evans's

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realization – developed in her *Westminster Review* essays and later, as George Eliot, in her fiction – that the problems Feuerbach addresses are more problems of consciousness than ones essential to religion per se.[21]

Evans's essays show her recognition that "faith" is nothing more or less than a perceptual schema, as likely to be morally benign as malignant. "[T]he limited and unsatisfactory character of what we know," she quotes approvingly in her review of Mackay's *Progress of the Intellect*, "leaves a wide and most important void to be filled up by our belief" (357). "True faith" functions in a dialectically progressive relationship with knowledge as "the assigning to certain inferences a hypothetical objectivity," a necessary and healthy complement to what has been verified by reason (358). As she explains in "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cummings," the tenets of faith which a religionist accepts *a priori* and which serve as a basis of his reading of world and scripture alike are merely socialized structures of cognition, the product of "the intellect of human beings who have gone before them, and created traditions and associations which have taken the rank of laws" (442).

Evans's interest in "Evangelical Teaching," however, lies with faith's less benign expression in the "mode of warfare" practiced by Dr. Cumming (441). Dr. Cumming's capacity to "be hard and literal in his interpretation only when he wants to hurl texts at the heads of unbelievers and adversaries" (437) is a symptom of his blindly-accepted beliefs, or – as Evans clarifies – of beliefs which put blinders on perception. "The flagrant unveracity that we find on his pages," she writes, "[is] an indirect result of that conviction . . . a result, namely, of the intellectual and moral distortion of view which is inevitably produced by assigning to dogmas . . . the place and authority of first truths" (441–42). The way faith produces "distortion of view" is part of the larger tendency of *a priori* assumptions to distort perception. And though it can be identified in any religious sect – "No one can have talked to the more enthusiastic Methodists and listened to their stories of miracles without perceiving that they require no other passport to a statement than that it accords with their wishes and their general conception of God's dealings," she writes (442) – it finds peculiarly forceful expression in Evangelicals' reliance on "authoritative" readings of scripture.

> Now, Dr. Cumming, as we have said, is no enthusiastic pietist: within a certain circle – within the mill of evangelical orthodoxy – his intellect is perpetually at work; but that principle of sophistication which our friends the Methodists derive from the predominance of their pietistic feelings, is involved for him in the doctrine of verbal inspiration; what is for them [Methodists] a state of emotion submerging the intellect, is with him a formula imprisoning the intellect, depriving it of its proper function – the free search for truth – and making it the mere servant-of-all-work to the foregone conclusion. (442)

Strongly-held beliefs encourage the Evangelical reader of the Bible to suppress any divergent or dissonant meanings in the text, just as they enable him not to feel any qualms about misrepresenting his interlocutors "if they come under his definition of 'Infidels'" (444). Indeed, Evans continues, "this mental habit blunts not only the perception of truth" but even the perception of concrete physical phenomena:

> [W]e may well suppose that if the Professor had held the [medieval] belief in seven planets, and no more, to be a necessary condition of salvation, his mental vision would have been so dazed that even

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> if he had consented to look through Galileo's telescope, his eyes would have reported in accordance with his inward alarms rather than with the external fact. (443)

Dr. Cumming's Evangelicalism, then, is an especially pernicious expression of a basic principle of consciousness: any act of cognition depends on a prior belief in certain premises about what is real, about the expected shape in which reality will be recognized and decoded.

The cognitive model of faith Evans advances here is almost identical to that presented in another essay from the same issue of the *Westminster Review,* possibly penned by her recently "married" husband G. H. Lewes, which elaborates the philosophical implications of the claim that "Mind begins in faith, in holding for true the objective presented to it in sensible perception" ("Theism" 339).[22] Likewise, for Evans, faith consists of a set of expectations about the possible forms external phenomena are likely to take; it helps to determine which details are unconsciously perceived as significant, and therefore consciously perceived. Those coded as insignificant are literally overlooked – they are filtered out of perception altogether. Faith therefore entails the suppression of certain perceptions and at least enables the oppression of people working from different frameworks of perception. "There is no general doctrine," Eliot would later write in *Middlemarch*, "which is not capable of eating out our morality if unchecked" (582; ch. 61). The more thoroughly entrenched the schema (the "faith"), the easier it is to *annihilate* (in the strict etymological sense, *ad nihil*: to reduce to non-existence) perceptions or interpretations – even the heretic interpreters themselves – that do not conform.

Preventing that violence requires loosening the hold of belief-structures on people's perceptions. One way to do this is by attacking faith head on, as Evans did by introducing Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity* to English readers. "If the faith of the present day no longer produces such flagrant deeds of horror" as burning heretics alive, Evans translates Feuerbach, "this is due only to the fact that the faith of this age is not an uncompromising, living faith, but a sceptical, eclectic, unbelieving faith, curtailed and maimed":

> It is not to Christian faith, not to Christian love (i.e., love limited by faith); no! it is to doubt of Christian faith, to the victory of religious scepticism, to free-thinkers, to heretics, that we owe tolerance, freedom of opinion. (323)

But Eliot chooses a more indirect approach in her fiction, using demonstrations of relativity to break open readers' ossified schema so they can read the Bible and the world around them differently.

Thus *Adam Bede* deconstructs perceptions of Hetty instead of defending her. As Hetty tries on her earrings, for instance, the reader is invited to view her as the desirous Arthur might:

> divest yourself of all your rational prejudices, as much as if you were studying the psychology of a canary-bird, and only watch the movements of this pretty round creature as she turns her head on one side with an unconscious smile at the ear-rings nestled in the little box. . . . It is impossible to be wise on the subject of ear-rings as one looks at her. . . . One cannot even find fault with the tiny round hole which they leave when they are taken out; perhaps water-nixies, *and such lovely things without souls*, have these little round holes in their ears by nature, ready to hang jewels in. And Hetty must be one of them. (226–27; ch. 22, emphasis mine)

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The same perceptual framework that renders Hetty an object of sexual desire also makes her, as an object, soul-less or spiritually undeveloped. Once she "falls" through sexuality, the same framework will regard her stunted soul as damning evidence. According to this structure of perception, it does not matter that both sexuality and soullessness have been imposed from without. But in passages like this one Eliot subtly draws the link between the romantic idealization of Hetty in the first two thirds of the novel – by Adam as well as by Arthur – and the unjustly harsh treatment she suffers at its end. We are given almost nothing of Hetty's interiority (unmediated by those frameworks) until after her fall, when, despite the way others read her as blank, insensitive, and unresponsive, it turns out that she too has depths of feeling within her.

Proving the actual content of Hetty's interiority is not so important, however, as suggesting that something in her escapes any schema through which she is seen. This suggestion cannot be proven; Eliot merely demonstrates how so many external perceptions of Hetty go awry. The suggestion must be accepted, on the basis of the seemingly empirical (though actually fictive, hypothetical) evidence Eliot presents, by an inductive leap – a leap of faith that explodes the old totalizing systems of interpretation and illuminates all possible data in a new way.[23]

The Lamp of Faith

ELIOT'S WHOLE REALIST PROJECT hinges on this same explosion of accepted interpretations. As set forth in chapter seventeen of *Adam Bede*, she aims "to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind" – i.e., in the historically and socially determined cognitive schema of the implied author – a "mirror [that] is doubtless defective" (159; ch. 17). She offers pagan, unedifying, and exceptionable characters, instead of the morally impeccable (but to her mind, improbable) Christians she supposes her readers might prefer, in order to compensate for the under-representation, in her readers' minds, of actualities that have been filtered out by their own perceptual schema. "Sixty years ago . . . there is reason to believe that the number of zealous clergymen was small," she claims, "and it is probable that if one among the small minority had owned the livings of Broxton and Hayslope in the year 1799, you would have liked him no better than you like Mr. Irwine" (159; ch. 17). The terms "number" and "probable" are significant: she rejects as false the ideal characters her imagined readers would prefer, not because they have never existed, but because to present them as *representative* of reality would skew her readers' sense of the statistical mean of human fallibility, confirming their egocentric perceptions of the "real breathing men and women" (160; ch. 17) with whom they struggle in life.

For Eliot, the "real" is defined by its difference from whatever the reader perceives to be the norm. This is why Mr. Irwine and so many of her other characters are only undogmatic Christians. A saint or a devil would merely confirm schematic religious perceptions, but a thoroughly mediocre Christian who is presented as thoroughly representative destabilizes the schema. The method of her realism, which she compares to seventeenth-century Dutch paintings' tendency to show sunlight entering the scene from an oblique angle (161–62; ch. 17), is always to reveal another perspective, different from the reader's – another light, besides the candle in the center of the pier glass, by which reality might be read. It forces readers to incorporate previously unassimilated or annihilated evidence into their mental pictures of reality. The ultimate sin – perhaps the *only* real sin according to Eliot – is Dr.

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Cummings's: to let one's own framework of perception foreclose one's recognition of other points of view.

The relation of her realism to readers' perceptual schema is thus primarily destructive and disruptive: it dismembers artificial coherence into real ambiguities (social, interpretive, cognitive); it blasts generalized ideals to particularized fragments; it reduces "truths" to half-truths and lies. "Falsehood is so easy," Eliot observes in a passage that is devastating to the traditional authority of the "literal" meaning of scripture: "Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings – much harder than to say something fine about them which is *not* the exact truth" (160–61; ch. 17). As an art form dedicated to "the faithful representing of commonplace things," her realism is anti-conventional, anti-picturesque: "[D]o not impose on us any aesthetic rules which shall banish from the region of Art those old women scraping carrots with their work-worn hands," the narrator contends, or by "lofty theories" of what is "picturesque" cause us "to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy" (162; ch. 17). In hermeneutical terms, it dismantles the reified schema entailed in scriptural and literary interpretive traditions that have gained cultural authority.[24]

It is no accident that chapter seventeen begins as a realist manifesto and ends with Adam's reflections that "religion's something else besides notions" (163; ch. 17) and that "weighing and sifting what this text means, and that text means . . . was no part o' real religion at all" (165; ch. 17). The clear-sighted literary realism Eliot would practice for the rest of her career is expressed here, at the very beginning, as a differentiation from Christian Bible-based modes of seeing and knowing. Throughout the novel, demonstration of the many different ways the Bible can be put to social use alternates with speculation about how "souls" trapped in situated bodies draw truths out of subjective, relative contexts. That alternation between demonstration and speculation – what David Carroll calls the "working hypothesis" of Eliot's analytical method (*Conflict* 11–16) – establishes the hypothesis that however one reads a text, event, or character, different but equally plausible readings must be assumed to exist, even when they are not apparent.

I use Carroll's term skeptically, because the power of Eliot's realist account of the relativity of biblical truth lies in its indifference to the need for "proof." Eliot's writings ride on the current of a contemporary debate over the proper method of biblical exegesis, which included defenders of the traditional unified authority of scripture and proponents of historical and developmental theories for interpreting the Bible.[25] The latter group's arguments depended on finding historical, archaeological, and textual evidence in support of a historically specific meaning that countered received dogma. The German critic D. F. Strauss, whose *Leben Jesu* Eliot had translated before beginning her work on Feuerbach, argued that the gospels' accounts of the life of Jesus should be read as mythologies containing "eternal truths, whatever doubts may be cast on their reality as historical facts" (xi), on the basis of what could be inferred about the historically determined mindsets of their first-century authors.[26] His influence on English Bible critics such as the writers of the *Essays and Reviews* was fiercely resisted by churchmen like Samuel Wilberforce who questioned the validity of his evidence and tried to disprove his conclusions.[27] But Eliot's hypothesis that different readings are always possible needs no verifiable proof: in fact, in *Adam Bede* it is "demonstrated" only through fictional cases of divergent Bible readings, which have at best only a hypothetical validity. Yet acceptance of that hypothesis instantly makes the unified interpretations of Dr. Cummings, Samuel Wilberforce, and hundreds of other Victorian biblical authorities patently implausible.

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In the process of testing that hypothesis, Eliot does not deny the answers given by traditional faith; she merely offers an equally comprehensive materialist account of religious truth. As one early reviewer observed, she treats varieties of faith "as so many mental structures" concealing "the religious spirit common to the human race" (Chapman 502). This strategy restructures the reader's schema. In terms of the cognitive process of reading, it repeatedly activates the materialist, contextual account (rather than the spiritual one) in association with concepts like the interpretation of scripture or the emotional experience of worship (Elfenbein 487–89). The repeated act of tracing the spiritual back to the fleshly reconditions the way readers perceive phenomena, rerouting the paths of signification, establishing new channels for the "long-winding fibres of . . . memory" (Eliot, *Bede* 441; ch. 50) where meaning flows from a new belief in humanity, particularity, and historicity. "[N]ot deny[ing]" God, the process "silently and skillfully ignore[s] Him," as the reviewer W. H. Mallock observed; "the same old liturgies of human faith and action . . . are intercepted and appropriated by a new object, when they seemed to be on their way to the old. . . . [What] was once given to God is transferred silently to man" (454). A silent revolution in the mind disconnects readers' cognitive structures from their Christian faith, which, gradually falling into disuse, desiccates and drops away.[28]

Until that cognitive transformation is complete, it is "little suspected by the majority of George Eliot's readers," Mallock goes on, because they "carry with them the lamp of their own religion into that tender but gloomy world into which the author leads them," where "the only light" is faith in the relativity, the eternal otherness, of the human condition (456). Little by little, readers "receive it, as it were in solution, into . . . [their] daily thoughts and feelings, so that [they] not only act and think by it, but also instinctively judge and feel by it" (454). Eliot's realism encourages a greater cognitive receptivity to previously unassimilated or annihilated forms of existence.

Thus, on the one hand, *Adam Bede* discredits the unified meanings produced by the cognitive structures of Christian faith in order to establish the superiority of its own realist vision. On the other hand, Eliot offers realism as a more authentically spiritual way of reading the world. Through realism, she seeks to induce what she elsewhere describes as "the self-abnegation through which the soul must go . . . that its poetry or religion, which is the same thing, may be a real ever-flowing river fresh from the windows of heaven and the fountains of the great deep – not an artificial basin with grotto work and gold fish" (*Letters* 1: 264). In *Adam Bede*, Eliot repeatedly describes sincere faith in the same terms, as the suspension of the mind's egocentric interpretive processes – a suspension which allows one to feel "the sense of our lives having visible and invisible relations beyond any of which either our present or prospective self is the centre" (436; ch. 50). True "religious feeling," she suggests, is any mode of perception like "love . . . whether of woman or child, or art or music" (32; ch. 3) which sweeps one up in a sense of something beyond oneself. Dinah describes it as "thought . . . overflowing my soul – as the pebbles lie bathed in the Willow Brook," as thought that "lie[s] upon us like a deep flood" (82; ch. 8). In the same way, the narrator employs a terminology of "waves," "ripples," "ocean," and "flood," as well as a contrast between "expression" and "silence," to mark the quasi-religious moments when one's cognitive schema fails to code experience into meaning and subjectivity is lost in the flux of existence:

> Our caresses, our tender words, our still rapture under the influence of autumn sunsets, or pillared vistas, or calm majestic statues, or Beethoven symphonies, all bring with them the consciousness that

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> they are mere waves and ripples in an unfathomable ocean of love and beauty: our emotion in its keenest moment passes from expression into silence, our love at its highest flood rushes beyond its object, and loses itself in the sense of divine mystery. (34; ch. 3)

This kind of ego-transcending religious experience is the ultimate goal of literature for Eliot. For her, the essence of poetry and religion, "which is the same thing" (*Letters* 1: 264), is a belief structure that recognizes the otherness of existence: a faith that does no violence.

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NOTES

1. My argument that Eliot uses faith as a paradigm for understanding the interrelationship between cognitive structures and material social relations builds the insights of Carroll, that "foundational act[s] of faith" affect social relationships in Eliot's work (*Conflict*, passim), and Levine, that Eliot draws a connection between social ethics and the mind (*Realism, Ethics* 25–50).
2. Eliot's understanding of exegesis – as a spiraling out into inevitably divergent contingencies and contexts – stands in opposition to a dominant twentieth-century model of biblical exegesis; see Osborne.
3. For the most extensive existing treatment of Eliot's exploration of the corporeal basis of spiritual realities ("faith" and "soul"), see Davis 169–73. On the materiality of mind in Eliot, see Chase 136–62. On the role of "belief" as a cognitive, perception-determining structure in *Middlemarch,* see Wainwright 136–39.
4. On the effect readers' assumptions that Eliot was a clergyman had on the early reception of her fiction, see Martin 34–36.
5. On the complexity of Dinah's rhetoric, which is both a submission to and an appropriation of divine authority, both a confirmation of and challenge to normative codes, see Krueger 252–60.
6. Dinah quotes Luke 4.18.
7. This is not to say that Dinah's preaching merely confirms the reader's expectations, but its challenging aspects are subtle and can be willfully overlooked by the reader (Krueger 260).
8. The quoted "nicknames" come from Matt. 15.14, Isaiah 56.10, and Zech. 11.17 respectively.
9. Lisbeth Bede's tendency to make fetishes of objects or people around which her mind has coiled powerful emotional memories is conveyed by her fascination with the picture of "th' angel a-sittin' on the big stone by the grave" (Eliot, *Bede* 100; ch. 10), rather than the text, in Adam's Bible. The elder Martin Poyser's ritualized re-reading of the same first three chapters of Genesis, when his health prevents him from going to church (169; ch. 18), suggests the frame of mind "under the yoke of traditional impressions" (371; ch. 40) which later makes him so heartless towards the fallen Hetty. Similarly, the superstitious rural character of the other old villagers is conveyed by the way they sit in church "silently, following the service without any very clear comprehension indeed, but with a simple faith in its efficacy to ward off harm and bring blessing" (178; ch. 18). "Brimstone," one of the students at Bartle's school, wants to read the Bible so "that he might have a greater abundance of texts . . . wherewith to banish evil memories and the temptations of old habit; or, in brief language, the devil" (212; ch. 21).
10. Far ahead of her time in this as in many other ways, Eliot's ideas about the relationship between cognition and embodiment anticipate many recent breakthroughs in cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics. As I note several times below, cognitive theory can help us understand both the character thought process she describes in *Adam Bede* and the way the novel works on its readers' mental structures.

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11. Neither "egocentric interpretation" nor Carroll's more general phrases "hermeneutics of character" or "ways of making sense of the world" quite do justice to the sheer intensity and detailed particularity of Eliot's account. I will henceforth use the term "schema" to refer to this holistic system of unconscious and conscious cognitive processes and interrelated physiological structures through which one interprets (read: pre-cognitively filters, perceives, interprets, and then reacts to) one's world. I draw the term "schema" from Frow's synthesis of recent applications of cognitive theory to literary studies, which goes some way towards establishing a theoretical basis for infinitely particularized and subjective frameworks of interpretation. Eliot's account, however, is even more complex, including not only the cognitive but also the physiological and the psychological aspects of meaning-production.
12. Compare Eliot's discussion of the "inconvenient singularity" of souls in her essay "Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming" 437.
13. It is unclear whether Eliot's familiarity with Kant's aesthetic and moral philosophy comes from close study of Kant's *Critique of Judgment* itself, or whether she absorbed his ideas through her reading of other continental philosophers like Comte and Feuerbach. Eliot had certainly read some of Kant's works before her writing career began (Anger, "Philosophy" 77–78), and she reviewed Meiklejohn's translation of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* a few years before beginning *Adam Bede* (Eliot, "Translations and Translators"). For a detailed analysis of Eliot's much later treatment of Kantian ideas of morality in her revision of Lewes's *Problems of Life and Mind*, see Collins.
14. Cf. Anger, "Philosophy" 86, 91.
15. Eliot's historicist view of language in *Adam Bede* anticipates key insights of philologists like Trench and Müller in the philological revolution of the following decade, on which see Taylor 207–52.
16. For key arguments in the debate over the treatment of Hetty in *Adam Bede*, see Goode; Williams 173; Beer, *George Eliot* 69; Uglow 113; Heyns 136–82.
17. We know that Eliot consulted French translations as well as the original German text of *Das Wesen des Christenthums* in preparing her own translation. It is possible that the French translation she used was that produced in 1850 by Ewerbeck, *Qu'est-ce que La Religion, d'après la Nouvelle Philosophie Allemande [What is Religion, according to the New German Philosophy*]. That volume (Ewerbeck published several under the same title) consists of five works by Feuerbach: *The Essence of Religion* (1845), *The Essence of Faith According to Luther* (1844), *Response to a Theologian* (1842), *The Essence of Christianity* (1841), and *Death and Immortality* (1830–46). Given that Ewerbeck disregards the chronology in which these texts were written and uses the short *Essence of Religion* as the prefatory piece to a volume centered on the magisterial *Essence of Christianity*, and because Feuerbach himself begins *Religion* by suggesting that it puts *Christianity* into context, it seems reasonable to infer that Evans would have read *Religion* while preparing to translate *Christianity*.
18. This is my translation of Ewerbeck's French version, which reads as follows: "[La Religion est] aussi favourable à la démocraties qu'au despotisme. Elle parle d'une Dieu, père des hommes, qui est tout amour et liberté, et un instant après elle parle d'un Dieu, maître absolu des hommes, qui est tout autorité et esclavage; et la paternité divine même renferme déjà la *patria potsetas* du droit romain, élément extrêmement antilibéral, qui n'est rien autre chose que l'obéissance aveugle en politique" (28).
19. Again, this is my translation of Ewerbeck's version, which reads: "La conséquence est que la religion fait dépendre le salut éternal des âmes de son cérémonial, absolument comme l'Etat fait dépendre le salut temporel de ses formalités juridiques; cel-là établit des devoirs envers les dieux, celle-ci envers les rois; mais ces devoirs sont en contradiction avec ceux qu'on doit à l'homme; l'une pour sanctionner les barbaries qu'elle commet, prétexte les conseils impénétrables de ses dieux; l'autre pour justifier les brutalités qu'il se permet, nous parle de je ne sais quels ineffables motifs d'une indicible importance politique; l'une immole la raison, l'autre le droit naturel. . . . [L]e code pénal prenant si vivement le parti de Dieu, ne s'intéressa au fond qu'a l'Homme, dont l'honneur est partout et toujours en rapport direct avec les dieux qu'il vénere. La résultat était cependant à peu près le même: en Égypte on noya

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quiconque avait offensé le sain crocodile, en Autriche on brûla celui qui avait parlé mal du Dieu trinitaire. L'État politique chrétien prouve de la sorte que les éternelles flammes de l'Enfer ne sont point une illusion fantastique, et les blasphémateurs qui subirent les tourmens diaboliques du droit criminel sous Léopold I[er], empereur d'Autriche, trouvèrent sans doute un quart d'heure long comme l'éternité" (28–29).

20. There is strong evidence of Evans's deep and thoughtful engagement with this part of Feuerbach's argument while translating it. Hill has discovered that, following the phrase "He who has once concluded a marriage ought to hold it sacred" (Feuerbach, *Christianity* 165), Evans chooses not to translate Feuerbach's next sentence: "*Schon der Blick nach einer andern ist Ehebruch* [Even a glance toward another is adultery]" (Hill 642). I have found that Evans silently amends a second passage on sexual mores as well. Feuerbach criticizes religion for trying to make things sacred only by externals, while in fact "marriage – we mean, of course, marriage as the free bond of love – is sacred in itself [*geschlossen wird*, *heilig* – literally, 'closed, sacred']." No doubt Evans appreciated the import of Feuerbach's redefinition of marriage as the free bond of love, as well as the footnote in which he continues this line of argument – "Yes, only as the free bond of love; for a marriage the bond of which is only an external restriction, not the voluntary, contented self-restriction of love, in short, a marriage which is not spontaneously concluded, spontaneously willed, self-sufficing, is not a true marriage, and therefore not a truly moral marriage" (271).

    Nevertheless, she omits from her translation that marriage is also *geschlossen*, "closed."
21. I refer to the author of the earlier German translations and essays in the *Westminster Review* as "Evans" and to the author of the later novels as "Eliot." Where I compare early with later texts, I sometimes use both names in the same sentence to keep perspective on the continuities and changes in Evans/Eliot's writing and thinking. I hope the historical precision thus achieved outweighs the possible confusion inherent in using two names to refer to the same person.
22. The essay is a review of Tulloch's *Theism: The Witness of Reason and Revelation to an All-wise and Beneficent Creator*. Although unable to agree with Tulloch's conclusions, the reviewer praises the logic of his argument and, in sharp contrast to Dr. Cumming's sophistries excoriated by Evans, considers Tulloch "entitled to special thanks for the fearlessness with which he has faced [the difficulties facing faith in the present day]. . . . And however we may dissent from his initial or suggestive attempts at explanation, we honour the moral courage and manful honesty with which he has come forward to accept this, the true burden of his theme" ("Theism" 340). The *Wellesley Index* gives no attribution for the essay, but by using the *Wellesley*'s stated methodology for evaluating the internal stylistic evidence of an unattributed essay (Houghton xiv–xv) to compare this review against attributed pieces published in the *Westminster Review* around the same period, one finds reasonable evidence for naming Lewes as the author. Besides displaying a Lewesian interest in problems of mind, "Theism" shares a similar style with Lewes's other Westminster Review essays in terms of style of footnoting, usage of rhetorical questioning, sentence structure, and italics for emphasis. Conversely, on all of these points, "Theism" is stylistically unlike other authors' essays from the same and surrounding numbers of the *Westminster Review*.
23. Compare Eliot's descriptions in *Middlemarch* of "the roar which lies on the other side of silence" (182; ch. 20), and of Dorothea's worldview being transformed by the sudden realization that her husband, Casaubon, has his own perspective on life, an "equivalent centre of self," fundamentally different from her own (198; ch. 21).
24. See Levine, *Realistic Imagination* 3–22, 272–74; Nardo 155.
25. For an overview of contemporary debates over biblical interpretation, see Anger, *Interpretation* 23–24.
26. On Strauss in the context of contemporary Victorian debates, see Anger, *Interpretation* 177, fn. 5.
27. On the English reception of Strauss, see Shea and Whitla 10; on the backlash against the *Essays and Reviews*, including Wilberforce's critique, see Shea and Whitla 28–46.
28. The strategy Eliot uses to secularize her readers' belief structures relies on what cognitive researchers have identified as "memory reconsolidation": that is, the way that "decoding or retrieval will change the information content of the 'trace' such that memory can be viewed . . . as an emergent, dynamic,

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adaptive property" (Sara 73). Evidence of the extent to which Eliot's fiction actually transformed the cognitive structures Victorian readers brought to the Bible is both easy and difficult to obtain. On the one hand, not until twenty years later would Mallock be able to identify the "gradual setting forth" of a de-Christianized "philosophy and religion of life . . . getting more and more evident as the career of the author has proceeded" (Mallock 456) – though intriguingly ten to twenty years is the time frame some cognitive researchers consider necessary for new associations to be thoroughly integrated into long-term memory (Nadel 178). On the other hand, theologically conservative responses to her Feuerbach translation show a shift – from a purely antagonistic stance to an accommodating one, which rethinks a fervent Christian faith in terms of imminence, humanity, and materiality – that correlates with the span of Eliot's fiction-writing career (see Guizot; Collier). A broader correlation also appears in the gradual replacement of the doctrine of "Atonement" with that of the "Incarnation" in Evangelical thought and practice from the 1860s onward (see Hilton 5, 296–317; Helmstadter 61–95; Beer, *Darwin's Plots* 154). On Eliot's intention that her novels would replace the Bible for Victorian readers, see Qualls.

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