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Eliot and Moral Philosophy: Kant and *The Mill on the Floss*

Although George Eliot is widely regarded as a moralist, few critics have claimed that she should be viewed as a moral philosopher. It may even be doubtful whether many critics have considered her to have a moral philosophy in any serious sense. She has often been accused of didacticism, with the implication that her moral philosophy consists merely of a set of moral principles derived from Victorian assumptions as to what is right and what is wrong. F. W. H. Myers's often-quoted account of a conversation with Eliot in Cambridge has done much to establish Eliot's image as one of the heaviest of Victorian moralists: 'taking as her text ... the words, *God, Immortality, Duty*, – pronounced, with terrible earnestness, how inconceivable was the *first*, how unbelievable the *second*, and yet how peremptory the *third*. Never, perhaps, have sterner accents affirmed the sovereignty of impersonal and unrecompensing law.'¹ This image has been reinforced by the claim that it was contradictory to believe in Christian morality even though she was no longer a believer. This provoked the mockery of Nietzsche, though he apparently had no direct acquaintance with her writing: 'In England, in response to every little emancipation from theology one has to reassert one's position in a fear-inspiring manner as a moral fanatic.'² Even when Eliot is treated seriously in relation to moral philosophy, she is accused of lack of originality: 'She draws from various traditions, and comes up with a position that is neither systematic nor particularly consistent' – and of intellectual confusion – 'she seems philosophically confused here ... [she] vacillates in her presentation of selfishness.'³ There is thus a lack of intellectual respect for Eliot as a moral philosopher and one can see this reflected in the way critics have responded to her depiction of moral dilemmas in her fiction.

Probably the most discussed of these dilemmas is Maggie Tulliver's moral crisis in *The Mill on the Floss* when, after her inadvertent elopement, she is faced with the decision whether to marry Stephen Guest or return to St Ogg's. Critics discuss this without feeling the need to allude to moral philosophy since they tend to assume that Eliot is merely applying a particular set of moral principles that are typically Victorian. This is exemplified in the following comments: 'She has placed Maggie in a dilemma in which no preconceived principle could direct her choice;'⁴ 'What positive is there to set against the sour taste of renunciation;'⁵ 'The difficulties experienced by readers are caused by a didacticism which falsifies the drama and makes genuine moral choice

impossible;⁶ '[Maggie] remains a figure of pathos, the prey of circumstances that are capricious and accidental.'⁷ Feminists critics have particularly objected to what they see as Maggie's perverse choice of renunciation. Kathleen Blake has remarked, '*The Mill on the Floss* is a text of scandal and fascination to feminists',⁸ as can be seen in Elaine Showalter's claim that 'Maggie is the progenitor of a heroine who identifies passivity and renunciation with womanhood'.⁹ Since Eliot's critics feel justified in disagreeing with what they regard as a set of views or beliefs that she adheres to passively and didactically imposes on the text, they assume there is no need therefore to bring moral philosophy into the discussion.

The kind of criticism the moral dilemma presented in the novel has generated implicitly disregards the fact that Eliot is both artist and intellectual. I will argue that to leave out of account the role of moral philosophy in her fiction is to ignore a dimension that has a crucial bearing on interpretation. It is striking that any mention of Immanuel Kant is virtually absent from critics' discussion of the 'Great Temptation' section of the novel, a significant omission since Kant is not only one of the most important of moral philosophers but his philosophy is directly concerned with the moral dilemma that is at the centre of Eliot's novel. It is clear in Eliot's essays that she had read Kant; she refers specifically and knowledgeably to his *Critique of Pure Reason*,¹⁰ and it can be safely assumed that someone as interested in moral questions as Eliot would have been familiar with his ethical writings.

That Kant was very much in Eliot's mind in the writing of the Maggie–Stephen Guest scenes is evident, I would suggest, in the language each of the characters uses. In order to demonstrate this I shall quote from Kant's two most important texts that have a bearing on the question of moral choice. In his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* he writes,

Will is a kind of causality belonging to living beings so far as they are rational. *Freedom* would then be the property this causality has of being able to work independently of *determination* by alien causes ... We have at least traced the determinate concept of morality back to the Idea of freedom, but we have been quite unable to demonstrate freedom as something actual in ourselves and in human nature: we saw merely that we must presuppose it if we wish to conceive a being as rational and endowed with consciousness of his causality in regard to actions – that is, as endowed with a will. Thus we find that on precisely the same ground we must attribute to every being endowed with reason and a will this property of determining himself to action under the Idea of his own freedom.¹¹

It should be noted that though associated with determinism Eliot believed that in practice a belief in free will was existentially necessary, as she makes clear in a short essay, 'Moral Freedom':

Life & action are prior to theorizing, & have a prior logic in the conditions necessary to maintain them. To regard any theory which supplants that logic as having supreme intellectual authority is a contradiction ... When once we have

satisfied ourselves that any point of view is hostile to practice, which means life, it is not the dominance of the intellect, but poverty of judgment, that determines us to allow its interference in guiding our conduct ... It is rational to accept two irreconcilables, rather than to reject tested processes in favour of reasoning which tends to nullify all processes.¹²

A true moral act or decision for Kant is one which is rationally chosen by the will and which may involve acting contrary to one's strongest feelings and inclinations. He writes in the *Critique of Practical Reason*,

The essential point in every determination of the will by the moral law, is that being a free will it is determined simply by the moral law, not only without the co-operation of sensible impulses, but even to the rejection of all such, and to the checking of all inclinations so far as they might be opposed to that law ... consequently we can see *a priori* that the moral law, as a determining principle of the will, must by thwarting all our inclinations produce a feeling which may be called pain.¹³

Kant takes a very critical view of nature. In his view morality has little to do with nature; indeed nature must be strongly resisted. He is associated, of course, with the 'categorical imperative', which contends that all moral action must be governed by universal principles and so be unconditioned. Discussing duty in the *Groundwork*, he writes,

For the purpose of achieving this proof it is of the utmost importance to take warning that we should not dream for a moment of trying to derive the reality of this principle from *the special characteristics of human nature*. For duty has to be a practical, unconditioned necessity of action; it must therefore hold for all rational beings (to whom alone an imperative can apply at all), and *only because of this* can it also be a law for all human wills. Whatever, on the other hand, is derived from the special predisposition of humanity, from certain feelings and propensities, and even, if this were possible, from some special bent peculiar to human reason and not holding necessarily for the will of every rational being – all this can indeed supply a personal maxim, but it is not a law: it can give us a subjective principle – one which we have a propensity and inclination to act – but not an objective one on which we should be *directed* to act although our every propensity, inclination, and natural bent were opposed to it.¹⁴

The Mill on the Floss can, I believe, be illuminated if these moral principles of Kant are taken into account. In this novel Maggie Tulliver takes a moral decision – founded on her sense of duty towards others which for her has the status of moral law – to reject the love of Stephen Guest because each of them has other ties. It is clear that if these ties did not exist Stephen Guest is the man she would choose to marry. But it is her conscious and rational moral decision to reject him even though this is in conflict with her strongest feelings:

O it is difficult – life is very difficult! It seems right to me sometimes that we should follow our strongest feeling; – but then, such feelings continually come across the ties that all our former life has made for us – the ties that have made

others dependent on us – and would cut them in two ... Many things are difficult and dark to me; but I see one thing quite clearly – that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others.¹⁵

In contrast, Stephen Guest believes they should be true to their strongest feelings: ‘Maggie, if you loved me as I love you, we should throw everything else to the winds for the sake of belonging to each other’ (*MF*, 448). Though she rejects this argument, circumstances later bring them together and she lacks resistance when Stephen allows their boat to be carried along by the tide, a natural force. She has, however, not made a conscious decision to go back on her previous resolution; her moral will has temporarily lost control, and she surrenders to ‘this stronger presence that seemed to bear her along without any act of her own will ... and she felt nothing else. Memory was excluded’ (*MF*, 464). The next day, however, when this dream-like state dissipates, conscience and the will reassert themselves, and she decides to leave Stephen and return to St Ogg’s.

The debate which takes place between them, both before she goes off with him in the boat and afterwards, strongly suggests the influence of Kantian moral thought. Stephen adopts the view that powerful feeling and nature should have priority in determining actions and decisions, clearly an anti-Kantian position. Maggie believes choice is only valid if it is the outcome of both the will and a principle that she believes has objective force – though, as the novel shows, that objective force may not be easy to establish. This leads to her refusing to give way to her strongest feeling. To be sure, feeling is involved in her decision, but without her moral will the feelings that motivate her to give up Stephen would be overcome by the stronger feelings – sexual and therefore ‘natural’ – which attract her towards him. We can see how anti-Kantian Stephen’s views are in the continual emphasis he places on nature; he tells her repeatedly that her resistance to their love is ‘unnatural’: ‘It is unnatural – it is horrible’ (*MF*, 448); ‘It is come upon us without our seeking: it is natural – it has taken hold of me in spite of every effort I have made to resist it’ (*MF*, 448); ‘See how the tide is carrying us out – away from all those unnatural bonds that we have been trying to make faster round us – and trying in vain’ (*MF*, 465); ‘We have proved that the feeling which draws us towards each other is too strong to be overcome: that natural law surmounts every other; we can’t help what is clashes with’ (*MF*, 475). Philip Wakem had argued similarly in resisting Maggie’s attempt to end their meetings in the Red Deeps: ‘no one has strength given to do what is unnatural. It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations’ (*MF*, 329).

But Maggie in her debates with Stephen Guest takes the Kantian view that will and rational choice are more important than nature or inclination, though Maggie departs from Kant in seeing moral duties as also natural: ‘Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too’ (*MF*, 450). But significantly ‘inclination’, a key Kantian term, should be resisted. Stephen had ‘fought fiercely with over-mastering inclination’ (*MF*, 469) and lost but

Maggie continues to struggle against it: 'Remember what you felt weeks ago ... that we owed ourselves to others, and must conquer every inclination which could make us false to that debt ... If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment' (*MF*, 475). Stephen argues that '[w]e must accept our own actions and start afresh from them' (*MF*, 477), but Maggie does not feel she has performed an action. Her will did not choose to go off with him; on the contrary 'Every influence tended to lull her into acquiescence' (*MF*, 467). When she recovers from the passiveness of the drift down river with the tide her will is again primary: 'Maggie's will was fixed unswervingly on the coming wrench. She had made up her mind to suffer' (*MF*, 474). Eliot's critics may be tempted to equate this choice of suffering with masochism, but it can be seen as reflecting Kant's view that 'the thwarting of all our inclinations' must produce 'pain'. She repeatedly accuses Stephen of denying her choice: 'You have wanted to deprive me of my choice' (*MF*, 466); 'I couldn't choose yesterday' (*MF*, 474); 'I will not begin any future, even for you ... with a deliberate consent to what ought not to have been' (*MF*, 474); 'I have caused sorrow already – I know – I feel it; but I have never deliberately consented to it ... It has never been my will to marry you: if you were to win consent from the momentary triumph of my feeling for you, you would not have my whole soul' (*MF*, 476). Stephen himself 'had the uneasy consciousness that he had robbed her of perfect freedom yesterday' (*MF*, 472).

In several of Eliot's other novels one can also detect the influence of Kant's moral philosophy. In *Middlemarch*, for example, Lydgate is anti-Kantian in the choices and decisions he makes to disastrous effect. Impulses of the moment and pressure of circumstances motivate his actions to the disregard of rationality and the will. Lydgate, however, believes himself to have a strong will. He looks down on Farebrother because he believes Farebrother's will is weak: 'Lydgate thought that there was a pitiable infirmity of will in Mr Farebrother' (*M*, 185). But Lydgate's concept of the will is a non-Kantian one. It does not signify a strong commitment to reason or conscience or anything that aspires to the status of moral law. For him will is rather the expression of his strongest feelings, and he is proud and arrogant: 'Lydgate's conceit was of the arrogant sort, never simpering, never impertinent, but massive in its claims and benevolently contemptuous' (*M*, 148). This makes him vulnerable to impulses of the moment, as in his feelings for the French actress Laure: 'He knew that this was like the sudden impulse of a madman – incongruous even with his habitual foibles. No matter! It was the one thing which he was resolved to do' (*M*, 150). Similarly in his relationship with Rosamond it is impulsive feeling and desire that lead him to propose to her, even though he has earlier made a rational decision not to marry: 'Lydgate, forgetting everything else, completely mastered by the outrush of tenderness at the sudden belief that this sweet young creature depended on him for her joy ... poured out words of gratitude and tenderness with impulsive lavishness' (*M*, 298).

We also see Lydgate failing to make a choice based on any sense of objective moral principle when he casts his vote for Tyke as chaplain to the infirmary, even though he believed Farebrother was the more deserving candidate. He had hoped that the vote would be decided without his participation being necessary, but when he is forced to give a casting vote he votes for Tyke partly through a combination of narrow self-interest, as not doing so would be likely to have a negative effect on his relationship with Bulstrode, and partly to show his contempt for those who see him as under the control of Bulstrode. Lydgate lacks the sense of moral principle reinforced by will and rationality that would make him capable of making a choice that resisted his dominant impulse or pressure of circumstances, and in this respect he stands in contrast to other characters in the novel, Dorothea, Mary Garth and Ladislaw, who all possess both moral principles and wills strong enough to adhere to them.

Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* believes, like Lydgate, that she has a strong will and she likes nothing better than to exercise it. We are told that 'her will was peremptory' (DD, 12). But for her also 'will' does not represent the will in any Kantian sense but is the expression of her strongest feeling or desire. When called upon to exert her will in a situation where morality comes into play she is quite powerless. She instinctively feels it would be wrong to marry Grandcourt when she meets his mistress Mrs Glasher, and she flees from him to the continent, but this quasi-moral decision is gradually eroded by pressure of circumstances. Never having exercised her will in opposition to strong feeling or self-interest, she finds she has little power to resist. When Grandcourt sends her a letter asking if he may call, she knows 'a moment of choice was come' (DD, 247). Again her will is powerless and she drifts into acceptance: 'She seemed to herself to be, after all, only drifted towards the tremendous decision: – but drifting depends on something besides the currents, when the sails have been set beforehand' (DD, 257). One is reminded of Maggie Tulliver's temporary loss of moral control when she allows herself to drift down river with Stephen. Ironically Gwendolen Harleth, a committed believer in the power of the will, makes the most important decision of her life by allowing her will to lapse.

It is clear, then, that the word 'will' is used in two senses in Eliot's fiction: in Kant's sense as the means of making moral decisions even in the face of inclination, as with Maggie Tulliver, and in the opposite sense as the expression of one's strongest feeling or impulse, as with Lydgate, Gwendolen and several of Eliot's other egotists. One should, of course, be aware of these differences when interpreting the word in her novels.

Although I have suggested that Eliot greatly respected Kant's moral theory, there is a fundamental difference between them. Kant's morality is grounded in the 'moral law' and the concept of 'duty' that is derived from it, and though he does not spell out what actions are right and what are wrong (though he did claim it was never right to tell a lie) by implication the 'moral law' has a metaphysical or, more exactly, religious basis. Eliot was not a religious believer,

though she respected those who were believers, and she was opposed to metaphysical philosophy. In her essay 'The Future of German Philosophy' she associates Kant with German metaphysics, and asserts that 'philosophy must renounce metaphysics'.¹⁶ One has then to ask on what grounds she supports a Kantian moral position. Does she have a non-metaphysical basis for making Kantian moral judgements and choices? In relation to what should one exercise the will to take rational moral decisions if one rejects the metaphysical? Some insight into this question may emerge from a further consideration of *The Mill on the Floss*.

What prevents Maggie Tulliver from accepting the love of Stephen Guest is that she could not reconcile such acceptance with the values and duties which belong to her past. Though she does use religious language at times – 'I couldn't live in peace if I put the shadow of a wilful sin between myself and God' (MF, 476) – this has much less force than her human sense of responsibility towards others. She repeatedly stresses responsibility towards others as what motivates her to resist the power of inclination: 'I can't believe in a good for you ... that we both feel is a wrong towards others' (MF, 477). She also asserts that she must remain true to values such as constancy and faithfulness towards others if she is to possess a sense of wholeness of self. Desires and impulses which threaten continuity of self must be resisted. Authentic moral choice is therefore an action or decision that emanates from her sense of whole self. She tells Stephen, 'My whole soul has never consented; it does not consent now' (MF, 479). When Stephen asserts that they must reject past ties because it is the first time they have loved with their 'whole heart and soul', she replies, 'No – not with my whole heart and soul, Stephen ... I have never consented to it with my whole mind' (MF, 476). This reference to her 'whole mind' indicates that her sense of whole self includes rationality as well as feeling and implies that rationality has an essential role to play in moral choice. If she chose Stephen she 'must for ever sink and wander vaguely, driven by uncertain impulse' (MF, 471).

Although the past is central to one's sense of whole self, Eliot does not see it as a force that should be adhered to passively. There must be consent to past ties and duties. They are not causally determining; the self must feel that it is free to choose them and to defend them rationally. Previous critics have tended to see the past in Eliot's work as existing in a static relationship with the self. To refer to the 'authority of the past' or the 'worship of the past'¹⁷ is misleading since the concept of the whole self implies that there is selection from the past in order to arrive at, in effect, construct, the sense of whole self; there is no passive submission to the past for its own sake, and aspects of the past may be rejected on rational grounds. For example, in *Daniel Deronda*, Catherine Arrowpoint makes a choice which on the surface is opposed to Maggie Tulliver's when she rejects the claims of her family and chooses to marry Klesmer. Her parents urge her to reject Klesmer and be true to family duty and those values that her parents believe in. A crude and unconscious

caricature of Kant's moral philosophy governs Catherine's mother's argument, as is indicated by her Kantian language: 'A woman in your position has serious duties. Where duty and inclination clash, she must follow duty' (*DD*, 210). But there is no contradiction between Maggie and Catherine. Rationality plays an important role in their relation to the past and to the duties and values they have derived from it. A sense of whole self may involve rejecting aspects of the past as well as accepting them. Catherine's parents want her to take account of her class status and wealth in regard to whom she marries, but she has little respect for those and feels that she is free to reject them: 'I am sorry to hurt you, mamma. But I will not give up the happiness of my life to ideas that I don't believe in and customs I have no respect for' (*DD*, 210). 'Respect' is an important concept for Kant, which he sees as arising from the 'moral law'. Yet Catherine is not asserting that love should be overriding in all circumstances, in the manner of Stephen Guest: 'I feel at liberty to marry the man I love and think worthy, unless a higher duty forbids' (*DD*, 210). Rationality is central to the sense of feeling free to choose. To adhere to her parents' concept of duty would be to be false to her sense of whole self. But clearly Maggie's situation is much more difficult than Catherine's as her past is so beset with conflict and divided loyalties that for most of the novel she has no secure sense of whole self and only eventually attains that sense as a result of the crisis created by her inadvertent elopement, and even then she remains vulnerable to doubt and temptation as when she later receives a letter in which Stephen tells her of his suffering. She struggles to resist before recovering her moral will and 'the sense of contradiction with her past self in her moments of strength and clearness' (*MF*, 514).

In *Middlemarch* Eliot refers to the idea of 'persistent self', which is obviously strongly related to the sense of whole self. After the passage I quoted earlier about Lydgate's passion for Laure, there is the following comment: 'Strange, that some of us, with quick alternate vision, see beyond our infatuations, and even while we rave on the heights, behold the wide plain where our persistent self pauses and awaits us' (*M*, 151). Lydgate's will has never taken account of any sense of persistent self in his actions and decisions: 'He had two selves within him apparently, and they must learn to accommodate each other and bear reciprocal impediments' (*M*, 150–1). In contrast we see characters like Dorothea and Mary Garth resisting impulse or pressure of circumstances to act in keeping with their persistent selves, as when Dorothea overcomes her resentful impulse after she has seen Ladislaw and Rosamond together in what looks like a compromising situation and recovers consciousness of the feelings that motivated her to visit Rosamond in the first place. Mary Garth similarly refuses to give way to Featherstone's order that she burn his will even though he tries to force her to obey him and offers her money. She makes a rational decision in keeping with the values in which she has been brought up. Even when she finds out later that Fred Vincy may have lost heavily as a result of

her decision she still believes that she did the right thing. Ladislav also acts in relation to his sense of persistent self when he resists Bulstrode's offer of money despite the fact that in his circumstances money would be very useful to him: 'My unblemished honour is important to me. It is important to me to have no stain on my birth and connexions' (*M*, 615).

I have suggested that Eliot is opposed to impulse, but this needs to be qualified. As with 'will' one needs to take care when 'impulse' is used in her fiction. Though well aware of the dangers of impulse overpowering rational choice, when it is aligned with the sense of persistent self it is treated positively. The danger of impulse is clear in the final story of *Scenes of Clerical Life*, 'Janet's Repentance': 'There are moments when by some strange impulse we contradict our past selves – fatal moments, when a fit of passion, like a lava stream, lays low the work of half our lives.'¹⁸ But Janet's impulse to confess to Tryan is one that is consistent with her persistent self: 'The impulse to confession almost always requires the presence of a fresh ear and a fresh heart; and in our moments of spiritual need, the man to whom we have no tie but our common nature, seems nearer to us than mother, brother, or friend' (*SCL*, 351). Tryan's impulse to tell Janet of his past life is similarly positive: 'Yet he hesitated; as we tremble to let in the daylight on a chamber of relics which we have never visited except in curtained silence. But the first impulse triumphed' (*SCL*, 358). Impulse also governs Ladislav's rejection in *Middlemarch* of Bulstrode's money: 'The impulse within him was to reject the disclosed connection' (*M*, 613).

The idea of whole self or persistent self is not present in Kant's writing on morality though not, I think, out of keeping with it. On the surface it may appear to be a concept without philosophical substance, but there is a similarity between Eliot's idea of whole self and the thought of a later philosopher also interested in what constitutes free and authentic choice. Bergson takes the view that one is 'free' when one has performed an act in keeping with one's 'whole personality', and such freedom is sacrificed if one allows an impulse of the moment or pressure of outward circumstances to govern one's actions. In *Time and Free Will*, he describes the performance of a free action in the following way:

For the action which has been performed does not then express some superficial idea, almost external to ourselves, distinct and easy to account for: it agrees with the whole of our intimate feelings, thoughts and aspirations, with that particular conception of life which is the equivalent of all our past experience, in a word, with our personal idea of happiness and honour.

He goes on to say,

In short, we are free when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work ... In a word, if it is agreed to call every act free which springs from the self and from the self alone, the act which bears the mark of our personality is truly free, for our self alone will lay claim to its paternity.¹⁹

It is not my intention to lay great emphasis on the parallels between Eliot and Bergson, no doubt there are important distinctions to be made, but it is interesting that a later philosopher took the view that authentic actions must issue from a sense of the whole self.

My main purpose, however, has been to show that Kant's moral philosophy influenced Eliot's ethical thought and that this has not been sufficiently taken into account by previous critics in considering her thought and fiction. It would, however, be simplistic to describe Eliot as a Kantian without serious qualification. She is suspicious of the conceptual oppositions that govern Kant's thinking in relation to philosophical questions. In her essay 'The Future of German Philosophy', she writes that 'Kant ... was mistaken in regarding synthetical and analytical judgments as two distinct classes'.²⁰ Although she makes use of Kant's opposition between rationality and inclination in her moral thought, for her the separation between the two cannot be fully sustained. There are numerous examples in her work of characters who believe they are being rational but merely use rationality to justify actions that reflect their inclinations. Tito Melema in *Romola* is probably the most notorious example. For Eliot, the ego cannot be left out of account as is clear from her many statements on the subject, as in *Middlemarch*: 'the egoism which enters into our theories does not affect their sincerity; rather, the more our egoism is satisfied, the more robust is our belief' (M, 513). The narrator provides an example of how duty can be corrupted by the ego so that it becomes identified with inclination in an ironical account of Casaubon's attempt to prevent, after his death, a marriage between Dorothea and Ladislaw: 'The human soul moves in many channels, and Mr Casaubon, we know, had a sense of rectitude and an honourable pride in satisfying the requirements of honour, which compelled him to find other reasons for his conduct than those of jealousy and vindictiveness' (M, 415).

Reason, rationality and concepts such as duty and honour are always at risk from the ego infiltrating them and subverting them from within. But this does not lead Eliot to embrace scepticism. It may not be easy to keep the rational separate from self-interest or to have secure knowledge of one's whole self, but this does not devalue Kantian moral philosophy, which she sees as an indispensable aid in motivating human beings, when faced with the necessities of action and choice, to resist impulses of the moment, pressure of circumstances and the inevitable and continual presence of inclination. Psychology inevitably comes into play and complicates Kantian moral thinking, but it should not lead to philosophy being discarded, and it is this unresolved and unresolvable tension between the two that gives Eliot's fiction much of its power. There is a significant difference from Kant, however, as I shall discuss in a later chapter, as her fiction shows that moral choice cannot be totally secure and thus free of anxiety since future events may reveal that a different choice could or should have been made. Whereas time is not relevant for Kant in regard to the ethical, for Eliot the ethical cannot completely exclude the temporal.

Although Eliot may have expected part of her readership to notice the Kantian connections in *The Mill on the Floss*, she would not have expected the great majority of her readers to be aware of them. Indeed it is likely she would have felt that she had failed in artistic terms if readers were able to translate the human dilemma into an issue of moral philosophy. Even for readers who recognized the Kantian connection, it should not be separable from the concrete human situation that is depicted. It is likely that she would not have had any objection to the controversy this part of the novel has aroused as it could be seen as a sign that she had succeeded by artistic means in involving her readers fully in both a human and a philosophical issue in which the two were not perceived as separable, even if she might have disagreed with many readings of 'The Great Temptation' section. Though for Eliot certain intellectual issues were so important that in writing about them she was clearly prepared to risk 'laps[ing] from the picture to the diagram' – notably with *The Spanish Gypsy* and at times in her fiction, for example, with the debate at the Philosophers club in Chapter 42 of *Daniel Deronda* – the ideal was to integrate fully intellectuality and art. T. S. Eliot famously identified a 'dissociation of sensibility' in the period from the mid-seventeenth century – before which he claimed it was possible for there to be 'a direct sensuous apprehension of thought, or a recreation of thought into feeling'²¹ – up to his own time. For T. S. Eliot one of the major aims of modernism was to create literary forms that could overcome this dissociation. Many critics hostile to George Eliot have in effect claimed that much of her work is characterized by such a dissociation, but in my view *The Mill on the Floss* refutes such a claim since the power of feeling and sensuous apprehension is undeniable yet the presence of the intellectual, the analytical and the philosophical is equally undeniable, so that they are finally inseparable. As both intellectual and literary artist, Eliot was well aware of the danger that art could be compromised by intellectuality, and I shall now focus on her devotion to literature as art and her effort to fuse intellectuality and the literary, anticipating T. S. Eliot, and suggest that some of the means and methods she adopted look forward to modernism in several respects.