Empathy at the Intersection

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my advisor and mentor,

Marcia Muelder Eaton.

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It is enough/or us to stop our ears to the sound of music in a room where dancing is going on, for the dancers at once to appear ridiculous. How many human actions would stand a similar test? Should we not see many of them suddenly pass from grave to gay on isolating them from the accompanying music of sentiment? To produce the whole of its effect, then, the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart.

-Henri Bergson

Introduction

One of the ways that art contributes to society is by preventing *anesthesia of the heart.* The aesthetic experience characteristically makes us more alive, vibrant, and open to possibilities. Aesthetic experience need not be limited to the "fine arts," of course. In this project, I consider a broad variety of media, including jokes, modernist poetry, Greek tragedy, literature, film, and conversation. What these forms of aesthetic communication have in common is their ability to tell stories. I will argue certain features of narrative that (typically set aside as ethical considerations) have aesthetic relevance insofar as they affect our engagement with the story. I do not intend to minimize the differences between racist jokes and Anna Karenina nor blur the distinction mundane conversation and the poetry of Robert Frost. I invite the reader to indulge my choice of examples, as I am mainly interested in a particular aspect these art forms share-narrative structure and aesthetic affect. My terminology (empathy/sympathy/etc) is not constructed as an end, but only as a means; insofar as they clarify these shared aspects for my defense of ethicism.

There are three ways one might understand ethicism with respect to jokes:

1. Moral defects detract from aesthetic value (humor).

2. Aesthetic defects have moral impact.

3. Certain moral defects have a structure that is aesthetically flawed.

Although, I do not disagree with the first two claims, it is my intent to argue for the third claim.

I

Numbing the Heart
Racist Jokes and Aesthetic Affect

When we empathize with a character, we take on that character's feelings: we are shocked with her and we hurt when she hurts. This often occurs when reading, watching a film, or with any fiction. Usually we do this because we identify with the character, but sometimes the character with whom we identify, we would despise in real life. It is possible that both kinds of experience inspire compassion and develop our moral capacities.

The primary goal of this dissertation is to make a contribution to *ethicism,* the view that ethical considerations have aesthetic relevance. My analysis of empathy will be valuable toward that end, since it often takes an aesthetic form and has moral content and consequences. Empathy has been widely discussed in aesthetics, because it accounts for one of the reasons we value literature. I think it is an important topic for at least two reasons. First, applying theories of empathy can enrich our experiences with artworks. But more importantly, the mechanisms of aesthetic empathy are extremely relevant to society. If the way we relate to fictional characters affects our relationships with people, the ethical implications are obvious. I do not pretend to prove such a hypothesis. I do intend to explore the

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probable effects, negative and positive, given that there is some relationship between our experience with fictional characters and our experience with each other.

Philosophers working on empathy have not focused on jokes and I will see if their theories are adequate to explain the affect of racist jokes in particular. While existing theories do articulate the ways we empathize with characters, they do not satisfactorily account for the way our engagement with artworks can preclude empathy. What I mean is that these theories do not satisfactorily address points of view not included in "fellow-feeling." Racist jokes, especially what I shall identify as *ironic* racist jokes, bring this out in a helpful way, and empathy (or lack there-of) plays an important role in evaluating ironic racist jokes.

My hypothesis is that ironic racist jokes put their audience in a position that is at odds with the kind of compassionate fellow feeling characteristic of empathy as it has been described. My work will also more clearly distinguish empathy from identification and sympathy. I will argue that the self-protective irony at work in racist joke-telling damages our moral capacities in a way that mirrors the way that aesthetic empathy benefits these capacities.

Jokes and empathy

There is a trend among my friends to tell jokes that could easily offend. The people I have in mind are not blatantly racist. On the contrary, they seem to be liberal, fair-minded individuals who protest war, disdain apartheid, and vote for

the Green party. They claim to tell racist jokes with a sense of irony. In other words, when they tell a racist joke, the joke is allegedly a joke on the sort of racist that would tell such a joke without a sense of irony. Furthermore, the listener must infer that the teller intends to make fun of anyone that could be such an ignorant bigot. The success of an ironic racist joke depends in part on the appropriate audience uptake. Here is a generic joke on a racist:

"How many "X's" does it take to change a light bulb?

--A whole lot, because they are so dirty and stupid."

In this case, it is easy to see that the joke is on the person thinking that for any X, if X is any race but my own, X is dirty and stupid. It is a joke *about* racist jokes. My friends maintain that their jokes are told in the same spirit.

In contrast to the joke *on* the racist, here is a racist joke devoid of irony:

"How do you keep blacks out of your backyard?

--Hang one in your front yard."

This joke is reportedly funny to some people. It is what Ted Cohen calls a *conditional hermetic* joke in that it requires particular knowledge and a certain disposition, in this case prejudice.[1] Cohen defines a joke as conditional if it will only work with a certain audience, an audience that must supply something (the condition on which the joke depends) in order to get the joke. The joke is hermetic

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[1] Cohen, "Jokes" Eva Schaper, ed. Pleasure, preference and value; Studies in philosophical aesthetics. Cambridge University Press, 1983, 131.

to the extent that it requires arcane background knowledge.[2] For this joke, the knowledge required would be something along the lines of your not wanting black people in your neighborhood (i.e. your "backyard") and knowing the history we have of lynching black people in this country. If this joke is told within a community of prejudiced people, it could strengthen the bond between them. Hermetic conditional jokes tend to reinforce intimacy because they call on some shared disposition. In other words, when I tell a joke that you find funny, we establish that you and I have something in common. Furthermore, since this joke will not be funny to some people, it establishes an exclusive community.

For this dissertation, I will assume that racism itself is an undesirable, immoral characteristic. I do not intend to argue for this point. Instead, I want to establish at least some conditions for a joke to express racism and then consider the affect of racist jokes, especially those told ironically. Now it may be nothing new to say that racist jokes are bad. However, in light of the current backlash against political correctness, I believe that renewed reflection on the subject is appropriate.[3] Ted Cohen's article and subsequent book *Jokes,* handles the logical and aesthetic aspects of jokes in general, but leaves racist jokes largely untouched. While he does mention racist jokes, he does not consider the aspects I find most interesting and important: irony and empathy.

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[2] *Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters.* University of Chicago Press, 1999, 13.
[3] Much of this analysis will apply equally well in the case of sexist and homophobic jokes.

In this chapter, I will argue that ironic racist jokes (jokes allegedly *on* the racist) share features with racist jokes that establish them as unethical. Often, when someone tells a joke intended to be ironic, people are uncomfortable even if they see that the joke is intended to be ironic. I think that this reaction comes from the way jokes situate their audience for an appropriate aesthetic response. The listener is asked to identify with the racist in order to make the inferences needed to understand the joke. One problem here is that empathy (which I will argues begins as identification) leads us to appreciate someone's position.[4] Racism is obviously not a position we should be appreciating. Also, the racist jokes can be disturbing if we are not sure they are completely ironic. In addition, there may be an element of self-protective irony (I explain this in Chapter 4) in use by the joke teller. As I have indicated the joke tellers make a claim about irony. If they are wrong, then perhaps they are racist or at least engaging in racist behavior.

Recently, a person at an ASA conference commented, "I wouldn't want to live in a world with no offensive jokes." Indeed Ted Cohen makes a similar observation in his book Jokes: Philosophical Thoughts on Joking Matters: "I have come to realize that if there is a problem with such [racist] jokes, the problem is compounded exactly by the fact that they are funny. Face that fact."[5] These statements reveal a mistrust of censorship, but they also suggest that as long as a joke is funny, then it need not be moral. They may suggest that being offended can be good for us.

[4] I discuss the relationship between empathy and identification more fully in chapter 2.
[5] Cohen, *Jokes* 84.

Primarily, I think they express the attitude that humor is among our most guarded

and prized values. We might give up a lot of laughter if we lose the offensive

jokes.

However, in an earlier article, Cohen does a nice job explaining the

unacceptability of some jokes:

> Suppose that prejudice against P's is a bad thing, and that to be amused by an x-joke requires a disposition which is related to anti-P prejudice, although that disposition is not itself a prejudice. The joke will be accessible only to those who either have the disposition or can, in imagination, respond as if they had it. ..It will be fundamentally parochial if there are people who cannot find it accessible. What people will be in this position? P's, I think. Even the imagined possession of the disposition is in conflict with what makes these people P's.[6]

Cohen recognizes here that I cannot find a joke funny if in so doing I must

forsake an essential part of who I am-my race or gender for example. I would

add that there are others that could not appreciate the joke even if, unlike me, they

need not forsake some essential part of themselves to do so. The joke is

exclusionary and so those empathetic with P's will also not enjoy the joke. In this

case, the imagined possession of the disposition is in conflict with empathy for

P's.

On the one hand, we want and need to have laughter in our lives. On the other

hand, we think it is sometimes not worth the damaging effects. As such, it is

understandable that Cohen's ambivalence should be prevalent. Compare the quote

above to a comment in his later book: "I insist that you not let your conviction

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[6] Cohen, "Jokes" 131.

that a joke is in bad taste, or downright immoral, blind you to whether you find it funny."[7] Cohen's position changes substantially here. The importance of humor takes emphasis over any other value. In spite of his former insight into the unacceptability of these jokes, he decides that "my complaint that such jokes are in bad taste or unwholesome comes to nothing more than my wish to be made free of them."[8] He goes on to assert that if it were true that such jokes *are* symptoms of pernicious beliefs or that the jokes caused such perniciousness, it would warrant a moral objection. However, he concludes that no one can know or show that this is true. Contemporary moral theories would require proof that a joke produce genuine harm or that it reduces the moral character of those trafficking in them. Since no moral theory can be invoked, he argues, we cannot condemn the joke.

I intend to flesh out Cohen's earlier argument for the immorality of some jokes in spite of his more recent retraction. In the 1983 paper, Cohen describes a case in which a person is unable to find humor in a joke:

> She cannot bring her sense of humor to that joke without imaginatively taking on a disposition which is incompatible with her conception of herself as a woman or a certain kind of woman …she cannot reach the joke without a hideous cost.[9]

"Imaginatively taking on a disposition" here involves identifying with a point of view that diminishes one's self-esteem. Although Cohen maintains that the only person in this role is the person about whom the joke is made, I believe this

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[7] Cohen, *Jokes* 83.
[8] *Jokes* 79.
[9] Cohen, "Jokes" 134.

position is equally tenable for empathetic listeners. This listener's identity (race, gender role, etc) is not demeaned, but he or she identifies with the person who is at odds with the joke, whose self-esteem or identity is demeaned. This compassionate identification does not leave room for humor.

In the previous case, the listener identified with the person that the joke is *on.* However, when a joke is ironic, it requires its audience to imaginatively take on the mindset of a racist. As such, it brings its audience to make connections at odd with the kind of empathy I have described. An example may help here. Consider the following joke. It will require some background explanation. When I first came to the philosophy department and was introduced as "Tanya *Rodriguez,"* one of my colleagues informed me that he once dated a Mexican girl. I am not sure what his point was, but it was offensive in several ways. First, he was suggesting that he was cool with Mexicans and that I could consider him a friend. Perhaps he thought this information would establish an intimacy between us. Second, since I am Puerto Rican, his comment ignored any relevant difference between Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. Third, I am not a "girl" and fourthly, his comment implies that being a fellow graduate student is like being on a date. Upon hearing of this exchange, many people in the department were annoyed (even more than I). Since then, people have referred to this event by mentioning my alleged "Mexican heritage." It is usually amusing, a joke on the person that made the original mistake. For example, a colleague recently asked, "Why aren't *you* dressed up for

Cinco de Mayo?" This made me smile and remember that initial introduction to the philosophy department. Another day I was sitting at a computer working, when a colleague asked what I was doing:

"I'm working on a fellowship application."

--"Is it some kind of special fellowship for Mexicans?"

Supposedly this was a joke ironically referring to that initial event with the other colleague. The problem was that this person suggested that I could only be working on a "special fellowship" application. I felt immediately alienated. My capabilities were in question. In order to laugh, I would have to set aside the suggestion I was an Affirmative Action case. I would also have to ignore the resentment on behalf of my colleague that such "special fellowships" existed (he and I had discussed the topic before). I was not amused. In fact, I was deeply hurt by this comment. However, others in the department thought it was funny.

Let us consider another example. In his book, Cohen provides the following racist joke:

"How did a passerby stop a group of black men from committing a
gang rape?

--He threw them a basketball."

One does not need to be a black man to find this joke sad, offensive, and painful. It is sad that people hold such horrendous stereotypes; it is offensive that people would make light of such stereotypes, and it is painful when one imaginatively takes on the feelings of the person whose identity is at odds with the joke. In

chapter five, I give an example of how racist jokes slip from the seemingly innocuous to the deeply offensive. This particular joke falls in with the obviously offensive and some will maintain that not all racist jokes are in this category. Yet, if we can identify and feel for someone that has been the subject of painful racist joking, it becomes clear why we should avoid them altogether. However, Cohen holds that a personal reaction does not establish the immorality of the joke:

> This does not mean that it is unreal, that you should persist in telling me such jokes on the grounds that is only a personal, subjective matter that they do not agree with me, but it would mean that my complaint that such jokes are in bad taste or unwholesome comes to nothing more than my wish to be free of them. That is pretty much how it is for me, for instance, with regard to the music of Wagner and some of Eliot's poetry. I do not claim that these works are poor or corrupt, but only that I do not care for them; and if you do care for them, then this may mark a significant difference between you and me, but it signals nothing I am prepared to say about the works in themselves. [10]

So according to Cohen, I cannot condemn the joke in itself; I may merely assert my wish to be free of it. One reason for his position is that Cohen believes it is impossible to show a connection between exchanging racist jokes and negative beliefs about groups of people. [11] He argues that the jokes don't *say* anything about a group of people, because they are like fictions.

Many people cringe at the suggestion that the immorality of racist jokes stems from propagating stereotypes. People are dissatisfied with this stock objection to racist jokes and say that there is no proof that such jokes propagate stereotypes.

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[1] Cohen, *Jokes* 79.
[11] Jokes 78.

Let us suppose that racist jokes do not "propagate stereotypes" since, as Cohen points out, this is a universal claim that is difficult to establish.[1] There are at least two problems in addition to stereotyping that deserve attention. When a racist joke about someone of my race is told in my presence, there are two ways it could be interpreted. On one hand, racist jokes cheat people of their individuality, anonymously grouping me with all people of a "type." On the other hand, when a person tells a racist joke and means to exclude me, they disrespect my cultural identification. Consider a recent situation. A group of people talking comes to the topic of philosophy list-serves. Someone says, ""They should call 'Hisp-list' 'Spic-list.'" Now, if the joke tellers in this situation do not include me in their joke (it is laughter about Latino philosophers in general, not me personally) their exclusion is in bad faith.[12] It is in bad faith because there is no obvious reason to exclude me from that group except that I am present. Furthermore, I do not *want* to be excluded from a group with whom I identify. This is an important point to recognize. Many people grow frustrated with discussions of race. They would like to throw out the concept altogether. What we must realize as philosophers is that an analysis of race is necessary because it results from a fact about the world. People identify and are identified in terms of race.[13] Thus it makes sense to clarify

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[12] This is a common practice of people that hold prejudices. For example, my maternal grandmother did not approve of "mixing the races." However, she managed to accept me by imagining that my father was descended from Mayan royalty!

[13] Jorge Gracia made this comment at the APA annual meeting, 2005.

the that identification if we want to make progress with respect to empathy and racial difference. [14]

I would like to reconsider a joke I mentioned earlier:

"How do you keep blacks out of your backyard?

--Hang one in your front yard."

Cohen would categorize a joke like this as conditional and hermetic. Consider the listener who does not have the necessary background; how would this person have access to the joke? I think such a person would not have access without concerted effort. For example, I had to think about the person that told me the joke. He comes from a largely segregated Italian community. After long reflection, I recalled hearing an old man on television worrying about undesirables moving into their backyard. I finally noticed the double meaning of 'backyard' (literal and figurative). Adding to the joke's sinister subtext, I was reminded of our history in the U.S. of lynching black people. Finally, there is an air of nostalgia in this joke. As a result, getting the joke involves imaginatively taking on the position of a person reminiscing about this past. I believe this is a dangerous practice. If one simulates racist attitudes when one tells or appreciates racist jokes, the immorality of such jokes should be apparent. Notice that when people laugh at racist jokes, even when they are told ironically, they often feel uncomfortable. For example, when the ironic "special fellowship" joke was told, a few people

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[14] I will focus on this aspect of race in chapter three.

listening sitting nearby laughed, and one of these laughing people said, "That's just wrong." Why should someone that finds a joke immoral be simultaneously laughing? There is a shift in identification that allows one to follow the logic of the joke. The source of guilt may arise from the fact that one is aware of the necessary assumptions to "get" the joke. Perhaps catching the implications too easily directs makes that person self-conscious about making racist inferences.

Defending Aesthetic Ethicism

I have argued that empathy with marginalized people will interfere with finding humor in at least some racist jokes, ironic or otherwise. One objection implicit in scenarios laid out in conversations I have had is that they, though themselves not racist, sometimes find immoral jokes, including racist ones, very humorous. I have argued that this results not from their own inherent evil, but because they lack empathy for those at the "butt" of the joke. They might respond that they do not demonstrate racism in their actions. It seems to me that there is a denial of the real nature of their response to a racist joke. In other words they feel detached from concerns of the real world within the joke-world. The claim is that when one is "just joking" one doesn't really believe the ideas one entertains. One is detached from real world concerns much like the detached appreciation some prescribe for any purely aesthetic response.

Most famously, Kant argues that the appreciation of true beauty was free from concerns that the admired even exists. Whether the object of aesthetic appreciation

is also moral, true, etc. are questions beyond the aesthetic judgment. When people

appeal to the "just a joke"-type defense, they insist that a response is and should be

free from real-world concerns just as the formalists do when they restrict the

audience to narrow categories of aesthetic relevance. For them, in the case of a

racist joke, real-world oppression is not a relevant or an appropriate factor in

appreciation or lack there-of. As Ted Cohen directs:

"Wish that there were no mean jokes. Try remaking the world so that such jokes

will have no place, will not arise. But do not deny that they are funny. That denial

is a pretense that will help nothing" *(Jokes* 84).

Here Cohen sets humor apart from the moral. To describe a joke as 'wrong' or

'mean' is labeled an inappropriate aesthetic response.

Cohen's insistence that we in fact recognize humor in certain jokes demands that

we engage in one of these formalist approaches. While he recognizes that some

jokes are objectionable, he sees a problem in pinpointing the actual moral defect:

"First is the problem of finding a basis for any moral judgment passed upon

fiction, and then there is the problem of establishing the impropriety of laughing at

something especially when the something is fictional" *(Jokes* 75). This problem is

clarified by my own theory of empathy and I will discuss this in more detail as we

continue. At this point, however, I simply want to draw attention to the formalist

assumptions at work in Cohen's separation of ethical criticism from aesthetic

judgments of jokes. Finding a basis for a moral judgment of any fiction is for him

suspect.Cohen's attitude is born out in conversations more generally. People will agree that certain jokes should not be told in front of certain people, by certain people, or on certain occasions. But there is a prevailing resistance to the notion that it is wrong to tell a joke when these conditions fall away. For example, people ask me what the harm is in two close friends, both opponents of actual oppression, exchanging jokes that could hurt certain people, given that there is no chance that any such people would hear it. Appreciation in such a case is based on the uptake required of the hearer, intimacy established between the parties and perhaps the pleasure of relief in laughing at something unpleasant. None of these responses seems wrong. Such attention to the enjoyment of our response, detached from the thing to which we respond and the context that allows that thing to exist, is precisely characteristic of the formalist project.

Formalist views of interpretation and evaluation insisting on the separation of moral and aesthetic value have been very influential. Not everyone, however, thinks the inclusion of ethical considerations is inappropriate. Berys Gaut, for example, outlines the objections to formalism in "The Ethical Criticism of Art." Interestingly, Gaut's objections give the impression of being aligned in exact opposition to Cohen's separation of humor from ethical evaluation. Gaut characterizes the formalist position as follows:

> There is an aesthetic attitude in terms of which we aesthetically evaluate works: this aesthetic attitude is distinct from the ethical attitude we may adopt toward works; this aesthetic attitude is distinct from the ethical attitude we may adopt toward works; and ethical

assessment is never a concern of the aesthetic attitude. So the ethical criticism of works is irrelevant to their aesthetic value. [15]

Gaut describes two sorts of justification for this position. One classic formalist approach describes a work's intrinsic properties as the only appropriate focus of aesthetic attention. The work of art is free even from its own context on this view. Another makes detachment characteristic of the aesthetic attitude. Particularly in the case of fiction, the aesthetic response is coupled with our knowledge that we have some control in our actual lives. Some argue that this feature enables us to appreciate tragedy. [16] For example, we enjoy our response of sadness knowing that we can leave it behind when we leave the fiction and return to our lives.

If we think of jokes as short stories (Cohen's description) then there is supposedly no point in practical ethical objections, for we have no influence over a fictional joke-world that does not exist. However, Gaut makes an important criticism of this view: "The step from the claim that the will is disengaged and therefore that ethical assessment has no role to play does not follow: there is similarly no possibility of altering historical events, and we are in this sense forced to have a detached or contemplative attitude toward them, but we still ethically assess historical characters and actions" (Gaut 186) We engage with history to enlighten the present and we can engage with fiction in the same way. [17] Similarly, even if

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[15] Gaut, Berys. "The Ethical Criticism of Art" Ed. Jerrold Levinson. Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Intersection. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
[16] I attend to the notion of control and appreciation in chapter two.
[17] Aristotle held a similar view as well. He believed the pleasure of tragedy came from its special capacity for teaching us to be better people.

we cannot prove that a morally objectionable joke has negative real-world consequences beyond its performance; our engagement with them is subject to ethical scrutiny.[18]

I think what Gaut has in mind is something like this: It would be reasonable to admonish a person for misrepresenting slavery (for example) as a natural (or useful or whatever) practice even if one could not show that the misrepresentation had any consequences. However, one can object based on the moral superiority of honesty-slavery is a real world event and lying about it is harm to those being lied to. Also, one hopes that understanding historical events and their moral import will enlighten our current practices and even our feelings about those practices.[19] Now consider a novel that dramatizes the antebellum south. One might criticize it for a sentimental tone or inaccurate descriptions of the problems. Here again the moral failing would be one against truth or reality. Anything more (detrimental effect on society etc.) would be difficult to establish. Since the subject is fictional, it doesn't make sense to simply condemn it based on its truth value. If we did so most novels would be immoral, since the characters would be fictions and the description of their activities and thoughts thus a collection of lies.

David Pole argues that immorality in artworks creates internal incoherence and therefore constitutes a formal defect. Gaut is critical of Pole's attempt to derive ethicism from formalism, but I want to point out that (even if sound) this argument

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[18] By 'engagement' I include use, performance, discussion, and response or uptake.
[19] Gaut makes a similar observation about history and its relevance to our response to artworks in "The Ethical Criticism of Art" 186.

for formal ethicism will not be work for jokes. In fact, jokes *capitalize* on internal

incoherence. Consider this joke found in *Truly Tasteless Jokes:*

> "Why didn't the black man want to marry a Mexican?"

> "--He didn't want the kids to grow up too lazy to steal."[20]

One could hardly condemn this joke based solely upon the incongruent ending.

The formal structure depends on the twist, an answer that isn't reasonable.

Laughter is prescribed by the irrational conclusion. Poor logic is often utilized for

the sake of humor. So with jokes, we are ensnared by more problems than arise

with the ordinary fictions Pole takes into account. In other words, when it comes

to finding a basis for ethical criticism that is aesthetically relevant to *humor,* the

internal incoherence argument falls short. Gaut suggests the "merited response

argument" to answer an additional shortcoming in Pole's formal ethicism-

artworks with internally *coherent* ethical flaws. He points to *Triumph of the Will*

as an example of a work that is consistently unethical.[21] When a work prescribes

an aesthetic response that not merited, Gaut identifies it as an aesthetic defect

without reference to consistency or lack-there-of. His examples include "comedies

that are not amusing, melodramas that do not merit sadness and pity" and so on.[22]

If a tragic love story is more comical than poignant, it is probably aesthetically

flawed. Artistic genres are the clearest way that works prescribe a particular

aesthetic response. However, *quality* of response is indicated by artworks in

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[20] Blanche Knot, ed. *Truly Tasteless Joke* (Ballentine 1982) 35.
[21] Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art" 191.
[22] Gaut 192.

addition to the kind of response: "We are also concerned not just with whether a response occurs, but with the quality of that response: humor may be crude, unimaginative, or flat, or may be revelatory, profound, or inspiring"[23]   Consider Gaut's 'merited response argument' applied to the case of racist joking. Jokes prescribe humor (by definition) and stereotyping is unimaginative (also by definition). Thus, even if a racist joke manipulates its audience to laugh, the quality of amusement should also be evaluated. Gaut writes,

> The aesthetic relevance of prescribed responses wins further support from noting that much of the value of art derives from its deployment of an affective mode of cognition-derives from the way works teach us, not by giving us merely intellectual knowledge but by bringing that knowledge home to us. This teaching is not just about how the world is, but can reveal new conceptions of the world in the light of which we can experience our situation, can teach us new ideals, can impart new concepts and discriminatory skills-having read Dickens, we can recognize the Micawbers of the world. And the way knowledge is brought home to us is by making it vividly present, so disposing us to reorder our thoughts, feelings, and motivations in the light of it.[24]

Interestingly, ironic racist jokes introduce another level of difficulty. It would seem that they must specifically prescribe revelatory humor, which will be merited depending upon their success. I will discuss this in detail in chapter four. It isn't enough to rely on formalist arguments that claim ethical considerations are irrelevant to aesthetic response because ethicists have made arguments to which the formalists must respond. The case of racist jokes gives another take on

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[23] Gaut 195.
[24] *Ibid.*

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arguments between ethicism and formalism even if we categorize them as little fictions.[25]

What then, do we appreciate in the form of humor we categorize as jokes? What is relevant to a judgment of a joke's aesthetic merit? Ted Cohen's directs his attention to devices for achieving intimacy. A Polish or Irish joke in which it really matters that the character is Polish or Irish is that such jokes require more of the hearer, involve him more intimately, and give him a greater opportunity for self-congratulation in his appreciation of the joke.[26] On Cohen's view then, the devices a joke employs to achieve intimacy are relevant to its appreciation. On the other hand, a joke that employs self-protective irony stands in the way of intimacy. If so, it follows that role of self-protective irony in joking must also be relevant to its appreciation.[27]

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[25] Racism is generally unimaginative and racist jokes generally dull, but this has more to do with the nature of racism. I will tackle the issue in chapter 3.
[26] Jokes, 75.

II
Recognizing Race
Invention/ Imagination! Identification

In this chapter, I develop my view of aesthetic empathy and identification with respect to race. Representations of race in fiction play an important role in human empathy and in imaginative self-identification. Race theorists have indicated that more work needs to be done on this topic and I hope to contribute here. Furthermore, I believe that the work started by race theorists can improve our understanding of emotional engagement with fictions in general. As such, analysis here supports a defense of ethicism by accounting for the way stories dealing with race affect their audiences. In order for this chapter to serve its function in my overall project and establish its philosophical niche, I will argue the following:

1. 'Race' must be recognized as a meaningful concept, one that has consequences for current debates in ethics and aesthetics (Section I)

2. My view of aesthetic empathy and identification contributes to race theory by focusing much needed attention on the subjective experience of race. (Section II)

3. An adequate of account of empathy must consider aesthetic affect with respect to race, as my analysis of racist joking makes evident. (Section III)

4. The role of imaginative identification in race theory speaks to problems I see in the recent discussion of identification and empathy in analytic aesthetics. (Section III)

Ultimately, I draw upon work done by race theorists to support my thesis-that recognition, identification, and empathy have artistic value deriving from moral content.

I: Inventing Race

Using a term like 'race,' that has generally been well established as having no basis in biology, needs some justification. Anthony Appiah argues that we cannot understand American social distinctions in terms of race. He believes that in order to move beyond racism we first must abandon racial identities altogether.[1] Appiah's work is central to the current debate over the race-concept. As his position on identity in particular directly contradicts my view, I feel compelled to provide an accurate, though brief, account of his reasoning. I will set aside his argument against biological essentialism, since I do not take issue with it. Appiah believes that the notion of race offers nothing to the quest for knowledge. Even as a social descriptor, the race-concept quickly breaks down. It is notoriously vague...[2]

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[1] K. Anthony Appiah. *Race, Culture, Identity Color conscious: the political morality of race* /K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann. Publisher   Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, c1996. 32.

In his paper, "Who Invented the Concept of Race," Bernasconi argues that understanding the history of the race-concept allows a better understanding of current racial practice. Originally, people used the term 'race' to square the biblical story of human creation with newly discovered people bearing little family resemblance to Europeans. Some people reacted by claiming that non-whites are not human at all; since they could not be descended from Adam and Eve who were (apparently) white! Others argued that Genesis tells only one creation story among many, a view called polygenesis. On this view, God created Adam and Eve, but they were the ancestors of white European-types only. God created other couples in other lands that gave rise to the exotic people described by world travelers. So diversity among people was explained by unrelated lineage. On Bernasconi's account, Isaac La Peyrere offered the initial theory of polygenesis. For La Peyrere, polygenesis had the advantage of explaining different kinds of people while identifying all of them as God's children, even if they were not descended from Adam and Eve. Accordingly, he hoped his view would encourage better treatment of Jews. Unfortunately, quite the reverse was true; the theory of polygenesis was soon appropriated in support of slavery. Polygenesis was not widely accepted, however, since it contradicted the Bible.[3]

Immanuel Kant went to great lengths to defend biblical authority and the belief that Adam and Eve were parents to all people. He believed that environmental

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[3] Bernasconi, Robert, ed. Race. Blackwell Publishers, 2001: 18.

factors activated latent traits inherent to all, thus explaining physical variation within a single kind. Once activated, these traits were hereditary and permanently imprinted on subsequent offspring. Kant introduced the term 'race' to denote difference within the species, referring mainly to skin color as the distinguishing trait. In Kant's words: "Races are deviations that are constantly preserved over many generations and come about as a consequence of migration…or through interbreeding with other deviations of the same line of descent, which always produces half-breed off-spring." [4] Defining race in these terms (environmentally activated hereditary variation among descendants of a single line) allowed Kant to answer the challenge of diversity and adhere to the Biblical account of human creation. While Kant's definition affirms the brotherhood of all people regardless of skin color, Bernasconi argues that its main appeal was adherence to Christian monogenesis. Polygenesis (the creation of more than one original pair) disputes the story of Adam and Eve as the only parents to human kind.

Bernasconi emphasizes that neither explanation of human origin necessarily supports a particular stance on the slavery issue:

> Within the context of the late eighteenth century the idea of race was a resource for those who opposed slavery, just as polygenesis lent itself to the upholders of slavery without there being any necessary connection between one's position on the mono-genesis-polygenesis dispute and one's position on slavery. Nevertheless, none of this means there was not a strong connection between the concept of race and racism"[5]

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[4] Kant, Immanuel. "Of the Different Human Races." in *Race,* Bernasconi Ed., 9.
[5] Bernasconi 21.

I think it is important to appreciate Bernasconi's point here. Although the theory was first articulated to combat illtreatment of non-white people, slave owners for theoretical support of their trade appropriated polygenesis. In other words, polygenesis has been used to support oppression and it has been used to fight oppression. Thus, polygenesis is not intrinsically racist or hateful toward a particular group. Conversely, Kant introduced the race-concept to combat polygenesis and some people appropriated it to counter certain arguments for slavery. However, this use is only one of many consequences. The mere origin of a term does not determine its worth nor its meaning. For that reason, I want to emphasize that even though historically 'race' was used to challenge the morality of slavery, we cannot immediately conclude that the race-concept is not racist. In other words, just as the theory of polygenesis does not oblige its subscribers to endorse slavery, it should be clear that the race-concept in itself does not entail respect for all people. As Bernasconi points out, the concept of race has strong ties to racism even though its origin was not hateful in spirit. While the origin of 'race' is a good starting point in its evaluation, I believe we must seek further justification for its use.

II: Racial Identification in Current Theory

First, I want to point out that I am setting out the case for maintaining the race-concept rather than promoting the conservation of any particular race. In other

words, my interest here is to argue that the race-concept serves a practical purpose in race relations and social progress. However, I am not suggesting that we should develop or maintain distinct racial groups. This distinction is not always obvious in the literature on race. Du Bois, for example, argued that African-Americans should preserve their racial identity for the sake of cultural progress. He objected to the notion that progress should require people to lose racial identity "in the commingled blood of the nation."[6] I agree with Dubois on this point-eliminating difference through "intermarriage" is a poor solution to social inequality. I also do not think it should be necessary to deny racial differences for the sake of comfort. However, Du Bois believed that each race has a particular message and if racial distinctions disappear, that message will disappear. This attention to the physical aspect of race has led some to accuse Du Bois of asserting a biological racial essence.

Tommy Lott, however, makes it clear that Du Bois was mainly concerned with revising the race-concept to throw out any basis in biological essentialism. Philosophers including Ron Sundstrom, Robert Gooding-Williams, and Linda Martin Alcoff, give alternative direction for the meaning and use of a race-concept and I will outline their views here. My aim is not to propose a new theory of race but to show how my application of aesthetic empathy eases a tension that can be problematic in constructionist accounts of race.

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[6] DuBois, "The Conservation of Races," 87.

A constructionist theory of race rejects biological essentialism. Constructionists about race reject biological essentialism but agree that race is real. They employ the race-concept in order to facilitate racial justice. However, there is some disagreement over the best understanding of race. However, one settles it; a good constructionist account would respect racial difference rather than denying that races exist. While most philosophers of race focus the debate on necessary and sufficient conditions, some do recognize the need for attention to the way race is experienced. Ron Sundstrom falls into this category and I will discuss his work. Additionally, Linda Alcoff has suggested literature as a means for understanding race and this suggestion motivates my work here. I intend to develop constructivist race theory by attending to race via aesthetic emotion. Accordingly, I tum now toward an explication of the constructionist landscape as given in current literature.

Ron Sundstrom's work deals with the ontology of race and the debate preservation of the race-concept. He classifies race as a social identity like gender, class, and sexuality. Sundstrom argues for the importance of race by describing its extensive impact on our lives and on our society. For Sundstrom, there is a mutually determining influence between society and social identity. While he hopes for a future without race, he recognizes it as a real social presence. As a result, Sundstrom argues, we must hold on to "race" in order to identify racism. However, he thinks the concept requires careful management to prevent misuse:

"society ought to regard it with irony, a position which expresses a socially critical perspective and distance from social categories."[7] To this end, Sundstrom uses double quotation marks ("race") to signify his reservation for using the term. In addition, Sundstrom believes this marking alerts the reader to be skeptical and avoid complacence for the term. While I do not adopt this technique, I appreciate the feeling behind it. In other words, I agree with Sundstrom's view that using the race-concept should not promote its unquestioned acceptance.

Sundstrom objects to what he and others call nominalism about race. Nominalism is the view that considers as real only those kinds that designate natural, biologically related categories. His criticism is particularly relevant to my use of the race-concept. Contra Appiah, Sundstrom rejects the claim that race is an illusion or myth because he thinks such a conception of race undermines the role it plays in political and social life. It precludes reference to rights based on group organization, such as calls for retributive justice.[8] By casting doubt on the race-concept, race becomes an unjustified category in political discussion. As a result, race is thought to be nothing more than illusion and any reference to it is nonsense. One cannot use the race-concept if it has been debunked as having no explanatory value. In highlighting a particular disparity among incoming graduates, for example, the race-concept can direct attention to neglected issues. Similarly, if we refused to acknowledge differences between men and women, it would not make

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[7] Sundstrom, Rending *the Veil: A Critical Look at the Ontology* & *Conservation of "Race"* 3.
[8] Sundstrom credits several authors for their work on this view, including Houston Baker, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Leonard Harris, Paul Gilroy, and Michael Root.

sense to point out analogous discrepancies in education.[9] Along these lines Sundstrom writes, "We need to be able to point to it, and discover what it is and the role it plays in our lives."[10]

Understanding the reality of race requires a look beyond the classifications used in the physical sciences. Sundstrom points to the kinds identified by social sciences. These categories are used to explain social organization and behavior based on norms rather than causal law. Sundstrom argues that human history can only be understood properly in terms of social organization. By way of example, Sundstrom suggests some questions that require this approach: "'Why did John Brown raid Harpers Ferry?' Why did Susan B. Anthony need to seek the franchise for women in the U.S.?'"[11] Clearly, it makes no sense to reject the explanatory value of the race-concept for social phenomena.

Sundstrom's account of race rejects the notion of racial essence without denying the reality of racial identity. This diverges from Appiah's view that the race-concept dictates group identification based on fundamental nature or essence. Sundstrom bases his analysis on the more general philosophical debate over realism. He focuses on the metaphysical status of kinds and argues that there is more than one way for kinds to be real. He describes the necessary conditions for the assertion that race refers to "a real human kind" and argues that these

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[9] I have in mind the different treatment boys and girls receive in some classes, particularly math.
[10] Sundstrom 97.
[11] Sundstrom 102.

conditions are present in the United States, as they have been historically.[12] I think Sundstrom's approach plays an indispensable role in establishing the ontological status of race. He is motivated by his respect for the experience of race, but he shows the worth of the race-concept through a careful analysis of what it means. Once the meaning of the race-concept is clarified, Sundstrom shows its status as a legitimate social classification. His anti-essentialist view considers identification in terms of classification, and focuses on the socially imposed aspect. While this aspect is a fundamental to race, individual agency also plays a role in racial identification. In other words, social legislation leaves room for interpretation and manipulation. We cannot help but have some say in who we are and how we respond to society. Although Sundstrom does not explore self-identification in detail, he recognizes that people participate in racial construction.

More work needs to be done on racial self-identification. Robert Gooding-Williams takes this issue on and makes an important clarification between the roles of society and agency. However, including aesthetic empathy in the discussion of race-identification would enrich his account. I will show that aesthetic empathy allows us to face racial difference without encouraging division. Gooding-Williams also argues for a social-constructionist theory of race, but he makes an interesting distinction between first-person and third-person identification. While he limits his discussion to black identity, I think his

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[12] Sundstrom 105.

distinction draws out an important issue with respect to race in general. Gooding-Williams, race-identification results in part from the classificatory scheme of a racist society. I am black if society identifies me as black. However, being a black person results from personal agency. Like Sundstrom, Gooding-Williams recognizes a collaborative relationship between society and social identity. However, Gooding-Williams' approach makes it plain that racial identity is not wholly determined for a person by clarifying the participation of the individual. He argues that being a black person is more than being someone society calls black.[13] Being black is "being racially classified as black."[14] Such racial classification (by society) is a necessary but not sufficient condition for black personhood. Becoming a black person requires an additional contribution:

> *1.* one begins to identify (to classify) oneself as black *and*
>
> 2. One begins to make choices, to formulate plans, to express concerns, etc. in light of one's identification of oneself as black.[15]

This definition reveals an important dynamic in racial identity. On this view, 'being black' is understood in general terms, whereas 'being a black person' must be recognized as having myriad interpretations. Even so, Gooding-Williams holds that politically, the collective aspects of being black are the most significant.[16]

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[13] I should mention that Gooding Williams defines the term "African-American" as those people born in America and classified as black.
[14] Robert Gooding-Williams, Race, Multiculturalism, and Democracy. in Race, Bernasconi Ed. 242.
[15] Robert Gooding-Williams, 243.

[16] Ibid.

If being a black person can be interpreted any number of ways, then simplistic Afro-centrism inhibits identification as a black person. Gooding-Williams particularly dislikes the Afro-centric view of black identification articulated by Molefi Asante: "I embrace that which I truly know, i.e., jazz, blues, railroads...I do not know the products of the other, i.e., country music, mistletoe, Valhalla. With my own products I can walk confidently toward the future knowing full well that I can grasp whatever else is out there because my own center is secured."[17] In contrast to Asante, Gooding-Williams points to Arthur Schlesinger Jr's The Disuniting of America. He believes that Schlesinger also commits the error of denying complicated self-identification. Schlesinger, however, thinks we should transcend ethnicity rather than let differences separate us. Gooding-Williams writes: "Where Asante seeks his solvent in a rhetoric of ancestral soil and biological growth, Schlesinger finds his in a fantastical vision of ideals."[18] The alternative offered by Gooding-Williams is a more sophisticated multi-cultural education. I will come back to this and show how my view mediates the differences between Asante and Schlesinger. Before I do that, I look at the descriptions of identification given by Tommy Lott and Linda Martin Alcoff.

In his book, The Invention of Race, Lott offers an alternative to the extremes of Asante and Schlesinger: "I exploit the ambiguity of Du Bois's term "invention" to suggest that along with the general idea that all races are political inventions, black

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[17] Gooding-Williams quoting from Asante's "Racism, Consciousness, and Afrocentricity" 142-3.
[18] Gooding-Williams 248.

people have a right to invent themselves for political purposes."[19] Lott argues that black culture retains African characteristics. However, he maintains that black culture also developed as a response to racism.

One helpful aspect of Lott's is his version of a particular model of African-European hybridity in which cultures evolve while preserving their heritage. He explains how the African part of African-American culture has been transmitted:

> There is no static African tradition frozen in time because remembrance of a preslave past is actively practiced in black music as recurring acts of identity operating through the call and response mechanisms produced in the interaction of performer and audience. The memory of slavery itself provides the basis for what Gilroy refers to as "rescuing" or "redemptive" critiques. Toni Morrison's Beloved is a retelling of the Margaret Garner story that involves the construction of a social memory."[20]

Unlike the Afro-centric position (which roots itself in Africa without adequate consideration of the extent to which that even culture survived slavery), this hybrid model supports the view that the native land of African Americans is America.[21] Lott indicates how race can be genuinely connected to its historical source in spite being pure invention.

Lott, drawing upon Du Bois, sees the notion of race as a necessary part of an agenda for racial-uplift. Du Bois gives the following definition of race:

> It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the

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[19] Lott, Tommy L. *The Invention of Race: Black Culture and the Politics of Representation.* Blackwell, 1999.
[20] Lott 25.
[21] Ibid.

accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life.[22]

Lott distinguishes between two aspects in the Du Boisian definition. In part, Du Bois wants dismantle the conventional meaning ofrace. However, he offers another version to take its place. The conventional definition of race emphasizes common blood, while Du Bois shifts the emphasis to non-biological aspects. Lott recognizes the requirement 'always of common history' as problematic, but argues that it fulfills its purpose: "giving voice to their aspiration for social equality by advancing a conception of African Americans that would allow a discussion of racial distinctions while accommodating the tendency of African Americans, under the dominating influence of racism, to want to minimize references to physical differences in such discussions."[23] Du Bois wanted to be able to speak about the needs and goals of African Americans as a group. Since the dominant group categorized African Americans according to a certain definition, it would be easier to engage that group under its own terms. The purpose of the revision was to shift the conversation away from the typical damaging assumptions about natural ability rather than to affirm biological aspects.

Lott makes it clear that Du Bois never asserts his definition as capturing truth.[24] Dubois understood race as an invention. As such, he thought it was impossible for it to be false in the straightforward sense. The important question

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[22] W. E. B Du Bois, "The Conservation of Races" 491, as quoted by Lott, 48.
[23] Lott 49.
[24] Lott quotes Du Bois as consistently referring to 'race' as an invented term, its use dictated by history, with no biological criteria.

for Du Bois and Lott alike is whether the definition serves the purpose of social progress. While I agree that the function of the race-concept must be our main concern, this understanding invites some difficulties. In other words, one reason for arguing about the definition of race is to acknowledge the reality of race. Consequently, simply calling the race-concept pure invention could detract from the intended function. I will return to this point later in this chapter.

Linda Martin Alcoff breathes life into the race debate, in part because she takes it beyond the typical black/white dichotomy. Furthermore, she points to the crucial role of imagination in understanding race and my work here is intended to take on task. Inthe next chapter, I work out the details of aesthetic imagination with respect to empathy and identification. For now, I will explicate Alcoff's essay on racial embodiment and show that her contextual theory of race calls for the work I do in chapter three.

In her article, "Toward a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment," Alcoff begins by outlining three general positions held by race-theorists on racial identification. [25]

1. Race nominalism: Race is not real because science has invalidated it as a meaningful biological category. The biological meaning of racial concepts has led to racism and so racial concepts should not be used.

2. Race essentialism: Race is politically salient and the most important element of identity. Members of racial groups share characteristics, political identity, and historical destiny.

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[25] Linda Martin Alcoff, "Toward a Phenomenology of Racial Embodiment" in *Race,* Bernasconi Ed.

3. Race contextualism: Race is socially constructed and produced through learned perceptual practice. Whether or not it is valid to use racial concepts depends on the context.[26]

Alcoff argues that the nominalist position overlooks the multiple meanings of race and therefore assumes that racial concepts have no referent. The racial nominalist thinks that ending the use of racial concepts will at least contribute to ending racist practice. I must agree with Alcoff s objection on this point: we cannot dispose of racial terminology until we recognize its powerful underlying beliefs and practices.

Essentialists about race imply that races are easily demarcated, racial groupings are homogenous, and ancestry determines who we are in the deepest sense. Understanding race this way disregards the influence of culture, and appeals to something like spiritual heritage. Recall Gooding-Williams' critique of Afro-centric essentialism. Essentialism, in that case, attempts to separate African-American experience from any European influence while oversimplifying African culture drastically. Denying the influences between cultures, according to Alcoff, "promotes the futile mission of opposing the tide of global hybridization."[27] On my understanding, however, essentialism about race is not sensible. It isn't sensible in light of global hybridization, regardless of any mission in opposition to it.

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[26] Alcoff 270.
[27] Alcoff 270.

Alcoff advocates the third view, which she calls "contextualism about race." On this view, "one can hold without contradiction that racialized identities are produced, sustained, and sometimes transformed through social beliefs and practices and yet that race is real, as real as anything else in lived experience, with operative effects in the social world."[28] This view takes into account the reality of racial categorization without naturalizing it. In other words, according to contextualism, race is real even though it does not describe a natural category. Alcoff s contextualism falls into the category usually labeled "constructivist." She uses the label "contextualism" to emphasize the cultural framework from which race emerges. Race is not constructed without foundation, but in a certain context.[29]

Within the contextual account, Alcoff identifies two levels, objective and subjective. The objective level refers to political and cultural race formation, while the subjective level describes everyday experience and social interaction. I view my project as primarily contributing to the subjective level of a contextual understanding of race, an area that Alcoff calls 'underdeveloped.' My focus on cross-racial aesthetic empathy responds to Alcoff s call for understanding race as it is experienced. This will contribute to understanding empathy as well, since attention to race is attention to difference and navigating difference poses some difficult philosophical problems for empathy theorists. It is no coincidence that

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[28] Ibid.

[29] I use the terms interchangeably since the contextualism is a variety of constructivism rather than an alternative to it.

narrative fiction supplies a mutual resource and point for comparison between Alcoff's work on race and work in aesthetics. Through imagination, fiction offers readers an opportunity to feel aspects of race left out in debate over definitions. Thoughts and perceptions are given in the way people have them, which is generally bound to emotion. I will argue (chapter three) that emotional involvement might be sympathetic or empathic, but follows from imaginative identification. Mechanical reasoning, however, does not foster inter-personal identification. Unfortunately, much of the philosophical work dealing with race focuses on definitional logic. In the "real world," however, artworks enable expression and formulation of identification. In other words, the arts reveal and influence racial identification because they affect us emotionally. Thus, my approach to aesthetic empathy enhances a contextual theory of race such as Alcoff's.

It is significant that Alcoff does not limit the role of imaginative identification to understanding racial difference. Imagination plays an important role when it comes to racial self-identification as well.[30] As I understand her view, imaginative self-identification helps one develop a racial identity by taking on characteristics of fictional character with whom we share a race-context. This allows Alcoff to include the agent's role in racial identity in a way that Gooding-Williams would appreciate. Identification is constructed in part by society, but one's reaction and

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[30] While gender and class are not the emphasis, they are included in this theory of identification.

interaction plays a constructive role as well. The socially constructed part of racial

identity that is the shared context, but the character can contribute to that identity

in unfamiliar ways. As a Latina for example, identifying with fictional Latina

characters allows me to experiment with different ways of understanding myself.

The ease of imaginative identification between reader and character will be one

test of narrative strength and thus, aesthetic value. I might recognize

characteristics or experiences similar to mine that I had not previously associated

with race. Additionally, I might discover useful ways of reacting to racism in

various circumstances.

Clearly, narrative artistry can induce feelings and perceptions that contribute to

self-realization. Even by itself, this provides evidence for ethicism, if one grants

that self-realization is morally valuable. Focusing on aesthetic imagination and

racial identity makes the moral aspect more urgent. The confusion and ambivalence

over race in our present social context only heightens the ethical relevance

of aesthetic identification.

III: Race and the Aesthetic Imaginatiou

At this point, I will defend my focus on race by clarifying its impact on current

philosophical debates that have not adequately addressed it. I think that the

importance of identification to understanding race suggests the importance of

considering race when trying to understand identification in general. Similarly, it

makes sense to focus on aesthetic identification since it is useful to the contextual

theory of race. Narrative is of particular importance, since emotional engagement with narrative allows empathy with racial others. Narratives also encourage imaginative self-identification with respect to race and this has consequences for those that would discard the notion of identification altogether.

If invention is justified when it comes to racial self-identification, what is that grounds race? In other words, how do we maintain that the experience of race is real, if imagination plays a legitimate role in racial self-identification? Lott allows invention for political purposes because all races are political invention anyway. Sundstrom's answer is less liberal; he recognizes that people participate in racial identification. Gooding-Williams describes racial self-invention as the personal interpretation of socially imposed labels. These philosophers emphasize that race is primarily a social product imposed upon people described as a group. As such, the individual person's contribution to racial identity is essentially a reaction to it.

I do not intend to contradict these positions. I am interested in the way race feels; thus I focus on participation, invention, and interpretation. However, these aspects of racial identity are only part of the story. The concern here is that an identity has little meaning if anyone can claim it. There are limits to the power of imaginative self-identification when it comes to race. As Alcoff has said, "One cannot have a subjectivity that transcends the effects of public identification."[31] Furthermore, it seems that some people are not justified in claiming a certain racial

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[31] Alcoff 78.

identity. What does justify claiming a racial identity is not something I can determine here. However, Spike Lee's film Get on the Bus brings out some important aspects of the topic and I want to describe a scene that is particularly relevant here.

Get on the Bus is about a group of African-American men that meet on a bus caravan traveling together to the Million-Man March in Washington D.C. The men come from all different backgrounds, differing in class, style, sexuality, religion, etc. Each gives some indication of why they are going to the march. "Flip" asks one light skinned man if he is mulatto and seems to suggest he does not belong on the bus. Gary, explains that his mother is white and his father was black, but that he identifies himself as black. The dialog continues:

> Gary: I already told you. I consider myself black.
> --Just like Bob Marley was black, ok? He was Mulatto.
>
> Flip: I'm not talking about him
>
> Gary: --I consider myself black.
>
> Flip: No disrespect partner. But I could consider myself six foot four and ugly.
> --The fact remains that I am six foot and too cute for the English vocabulary.
>
> Jeremiah: Mr. Hollywood?
>
> Flip: What?
>
> Jeremiah: The man is black. Why don't you just let him be?
>
> Flip: He is also white!

Jeremiah:	Ifthis was slavery you think ole massa would care that he was half white? --He'd be a slave just like the rest of us.
Flip:	Yeah, but he'd be a house slave in the big house. While the rest of us would be talking about grits, he'd eat potatoes. --He'd have the breast of chicken; we'd have the neck bones. --Our women would be blistered and stinking from picking cotton; his would be bathed and smelling good. --And nine times out of ten, the honey he'd be hitting skins with, she'd be a white girl.
Jeremiah:	Hold itjust a minute. --About the grits: grits was for the white folks up in the big house. Slaves would be lucky to get com mush. --And as for hitting skins with a white girl-a black man could get lynched for just thinking that thought.

I have another example that I would like to compare with the scene above. A couple years ago at the APA central meeting in Chicago, I was sitting in on a session focused on Tommy Lott's recent book. The topic of discussion was racial identity and an audience member was describing a white friend that had adopted African-American children. She said that her friend sees herself as black because she has the same concerns that a black mother would have. Her feelings for her children were inconsistent with seeing them as racial others. Professor Lott replied that even though the woman identified with black mothers, she could not identify herself as black. What I find interesting about these examples (APA and Get on the Bus), is the evidence people put forth to justify racial self-identification.

In the APA example, the woman has legitimate reason for aligning herself with a black mother's interests. However, in spite of her attachment to her children, she has not had the range of experience and social feedback that comes with being black. It is possible that her naivete, though well intended, actually shows a sense of entitlement or perhaps just unwarranted presumptiveness. Similarly, in Get on the Bus, Flip balks at Xavier's self-identification. It is as if he hasn't earned the identity because his light skin comes with privilege. Craig reminds them, however, that society dictates their identity with little regard for the difference in question. Demanding authentic racial self-identification does not suggest essentialism about race, it just acknowledges that race is socially constructed. However unfortunate, self-identification based in imagination lacks the structure that grounds race in reality. A chosen racial identity is essentially different from the sense in which imagination contributes to the subjective experience of race. Aesthetic identification however is not bound by social construct, as is self-identification. Thus, a white mother who imagines herself in the role of black mothers identifies with them without assuming that racial identity for herself. On my view, the extent to which she feels the feelings of black mother will determine the possibility of empathy. Empathy with racial others, does not ignore important differences in identity. After one is aligned with the interests of another, one may take the next step and feel as they do. Imaginative self-identification takes socially imposed racial identity and re-creates it. Creative self-identification might invoke fictional

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characters or role models. Through aesthetic free-play, one loosens the hold of race as it is given.

I think Noel Carroll's exclusion of identification is a flaw in his theory of aesthetic emotion. Imaginative identification captures an aspect of aesthetic experience that Carroll neglects and it would improve his theory. Furthermore, identification could be employed without the problems Carroll wants to avoid. Carroll's critique of identification does not consider self-identification beyond the arts. However, given the nature of Carroll's argument for dropping the term "identification," discussion on the topic with respect to race is particularly relevant. Carroll wants to replace 'identification' and 'empathy' with terms burdened by less philosophical baggage. His primary reason is that 'identification' and 'empathy' are not doing any special work for us when it comes to understanding the way we experience art. These concepts, however, do have an aesthetic function. Imaginative identification is indispensable to a constructionist account of race.

Furthermore, imaginative identification and empathy are of particular importance in our experience with art. I cannot help but think of Tony Morrison's Beloved when I want to describe a personal experience of aesthetic empathy across racial difference. Sethe murders her children for fear that they will become slaves. Taking imaginative steps needed to accept this action teaches takes on her interests. Morrison guides the reader through Sethe's emotions and allows access

to the emotional consequences of racism. One does not reasonably conclude a full grasp of these emotions, of course. I think the stages of imaginative identification are analogous to those taken by the white mother after adopting black children. She stepped into the shoes of a black mother by taking on certain concerns-she identified with black mothers. This was imaginative to some extent though not fictional. Her emotional connection was such that she had a strong sense of empathy for black mothers and this is probably what leads her to a mistaken self-identification. Just as this mother cannot claim to be a black woman, I cannot claim to know what is like to be Sethe. However, imaginative identification with her character sets up the conditions needed for empathy, just as the white mother's adoption of black children established conditions that lead to the emotional experience of a black mother.

Conclusion:

To recapitulate: I introduced this chapter by stating one of its functions: to defend my use of the race-concept in my view of racist jokes. Section I (early race theory) demonstrates the complicated relationship between 'race' and racism. It shows that it is especially important to see how race theory can be used in negative and positive ways despite the intentions of its original formulation. I think this is important because I am arguing that race has special characteristics that bear individual attention within other theories. An adequate theory of empathy, for example, must consider race. In light of this point, I directed my focus on those

who claim that that talking about race legitimizes it and perpetuates racism. By appealing to constructivist definitions, I believe I have provided the needed justification for paying attention to 'race.'

I also I indicated that my investigation would reveal a weak point in race theory that could be strengthened by my view of empathy. Toward that end, Section II surveys current theory. I sketch out arguments for the position that 'race' is a meaningful concept. These arguments all emphasize the social reality of race. Linda Martin Alcoff identifies two levels in contextual theories. I describe both of these levels (objective and subjective) and explain how they are both needed to establish the reality of race. In addition to showing that race is real on the objective level, contextual theory recognizes the need to understand race on the subjective level. My work adds to the contextual theory, since aesthetic empathy and identification cultivate respect for the subjective experience of race.

Section III shows how the work done by race theorists affects debates in aesthetics and ethics. I argue that aesthetic self-identification contributes to self-realization and this is morally valuable. I believe that the importance of self-identification with respect to race creates a moral imperative-we must incorporate a discussion of race into the discussion of aesthetic identification Narrative artistry encourages imaginative self-identification whereas narrative failure interferes. Ifwe throw out the concept of aesthetic identification, we lose access to an important source of aesthetic value. Our understanding of narrative art

forms is limited when we disregard the way we engage with them. An adequate theory of aesthetic affect must include self-identification. Likewise, a robust theory of empathy must also take race into consideration for its own sake. Because race can be an obstacle to empathy, it sheds light on the nature of empathy and difference. Focusing on race in, I have argued that "empathy" describes an experience that philosophers cannot capture with other terminology. Furthermore, my discussion of imaginative self-identification has implications for the way we understand aesthetic affect, specifically identification, sympathy and empathy. In the next chapter, I turn to an analysis of these often-conflated term.

III
Distinctions worth Making
Empathy, Sympathy, & Identification

Justifying the relevance of Ethicism requires more work and we now turn to that. My claim in chapter one is that ethicism is a serious alternative to formalism. In this chapter, I establish my claim that moral considerations are aesthetically relevant to jokes because of the roles played by identification and empathy. In so doing, I provide a more detailed account of empathy than was possible in chapter one. My first task here is to distinguish between empathy, sympathy, and identification and show how my view refines current definitions without diminishing the work accomplished in other areas. I demonstrate value in the notion 'character-identification' discarded by Noël Carroll and question whether Kendall Walton's view of 'fictitious emotion' describes cases of empathy. I add to James Harold's argument that empathy with fiction results in real emotion, but restrict the applicable cases by extending Marcia Eaton's notion of control. My analysis establishes the relationship between racist jokes and what has been called the paradox of tragedy. Finally, I address possible challenges by applying my theory of empathy to the novel *Lolita*.

Empathy v. Sympathy

I see the terms 'sympathy' and 'empathy' as conveying important differences in meaning. Simply put, when I empathize with someone I feel what they feel.

When I sympathize with someone, I feel for him or her. Sympathy suggests that I have a feeling that is related to another person's feeling but does not duplicate it. The relationship (unlike resemblance) that I have in mind might be causal, in that if the person I sympathize with is relieved of her suffering, then I too will be relieved, though not in the same way. I am merely relieved of my concern.

For example, when I give my student a lower grade than expected, I know that she will be disappointed. I am always sorry to disappoint someone, and as a result, I feel bad. However, if I were to empathize with her when she receives her grade, I would have to feel something like she was feeling. Instead of feeling bad about disappointing her (my point of view) I put myself in her place. I imagine that I had worked hard and held high hopes. I remember a similar event in my life; I consider possible reactions including embarrassment, anger, frustration, etc. Placing myself in her position obligates me to feel a variety of emotions that are unlikely in my position as instructor. Even if I am angry about her grade (for example because she had not worked hard enough) it will not correspond to her anger—over the possible bias in my reading, or the unreasonable expectations of the assignment— my sympathy is a recognition of her anger and a wish that she might overcome it. I myself would not be angry when sympathizing for a disappointed student. In fact, I can sympathize with very little knowledge of the particular student and very little thought of that student's situation. In order to empathize with a particular person, I must imagine her situation and her mindset to the degree that my anger is directed

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at the same things—injustice rather than lack of hard work. In the present example, empathy would more likely to be accomplished by someone in another role. Taking her position would require me to bracket understanding and experience as a teacher that that would be particularly relevant. Perhaps the student tells her friend that she got a low grade, that she was surprised, dreaded telling her parents about it, feared academic probation; she might also share her beliefs concerning the reasons for the grade (that the instructor was biased or assigned an unreasonable topic, etc.). Her friend might find herself becoming angry with the instructor, fearful over the parental interaction, and so on. Her friend does feel genuine empathy. While I am disappointed for my student, it is doubtful that I can feel her emotions especially when they are directed at me and so heavily influenced by her ignorance of my motivations. Although her feelings affect my reaction, *my* feelings result from what *I* believe about her feelings, they are shaped by *my* concern *for her*. Since my feelings are tied to my own point of view, I must describe them as sympathetic.

Darwall's Distinctions

Stephan Darwell's definitions of sympathy and empathy are very close to what I have in mind. He understands sympathy as way of caring for someone. Empathy involves sharing mental states irrespective of care:

Sympathy:

     I. responds to some apparent obstacle to an individual's welfare
    II. has that individual himself as object

III. Involves concern for him, and thus for his welfare, for his sake[1]

Empathy:
I. feeling what one imagines the other feels or should feel
II. a replication of another person feelings imagined from his or her perspective
III. can be followed by indifference, depending on one's interest in that perspective[2]

It is important to note that on Darwall's view, empathizing with people does not imply that you care about them. For example, I could imagine the feelings of desperation and misery that an addict feels without caring. Suppose I consider these feelings to be appropriate and just; then I could feel the addict's pain and suffering while remaining indifferent to the person feeling it. Similarly, a torturer might imagine the feelings of their victim even as they continue the act of torture. Darwall argues that sympathy for another person has nothing to do with understanding that person's point of view:

> I have reason to care about other's goods insofar as I have reason to care for them, and I have reason to care about my own good insofar as I have reason to care for myself. And while individuals may have more reason to care for themselves or close relations than they do for strangers, neither is possible without the (third-person) capacity to care for oneself *or* others that is involved in sympathetic concern.[3]

Darwall recognizes three forms of empathy: emotional contagion, projective empathy/simulation, and proto-sympathetic empathy. *Emotional contagion* is the most basic, and refers to the tendency we have to take on the moods of those

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[1] Darwall, Stephen L. *Welfare and rational care*. Princeton, N.J. ; Woodstock : Princeton University Press, 2004; 51.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Darwall 53.

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around us without any intentional, imaginative exercise. Simply being in the company of an anxious person tends to create anxiety, for example. *Projective empathy and simulation* involve perspective switching (I'll go into detail on simulation theory in the next section). Humean sympathy fits this category because one attributes a shared feeling to the other person's point of view. Darwall stresses two points with respect to empathy: (1) feelings present themselves as warranted by the situation; and (2) if one believes that another person's feelings are *unwarranted,* projective empathy will be difficult. In other words, empathy requires seeing the situation from the other person's emotional perspective, and as such, the emotions in question will at least seem to be appropriate. On the other hand, Darwall notes, the inability to empathize suggests a belief that the emotional response is unwarranted by a person's situation.[4] Empathy shows agreement on what situations warrant particular emotions. *Proto-sympathetic empathy*, Darwall's third category, brings aspects of sympathy and empathy together. For my own purposes, this category turns out to be very useful.

> Consider the difference between the instructions: (i) imagine what someone would feel if he were to lose his only child, and (ii) imagine what it would be like for that person to feel that way. Complying with (i) involves simulating someone in the imagined circumstances in order to identify what feelings the situation would apparently warrant when so viewed. It need involve no attention at all to having those feelings or suffering that loss. To comply with the second request, however, one would have to simulate, not just a person with the relevant feelings, but someone conscious of his feelings, their phenomenological textures, and their relevance for his

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[4] Darwall 61.

life. Call empathy of this latter form…"proto-sympathetic," because it brings the other's relation to his situation into view in a way that can engage sympathy on his behalf.[5]

On my view, what Darwall calls "proto-sympathetic empathy" is simply empathy. What is useful, however, is that the term acknowledges a distinction between an empathy that involves concern and one that does not. My own understanding would be similar to Darwall's "projected empathy" in that it projects into another person's perspective. The main difference is that identification need not be emotional in character. I will return to this point in my discussion on identification and as I defend my view of empathy in the concluding remarks.[6]

Simulation Theory

Simulation theory has been influential in the current literature and I would like to explore how it sheds light on this discussion. According to simulation theorists, including Susan Feagin and James Harold, empathy with people results from modeling their psychological processes. Feagin holds that a simulation must have the same relationship among sub-processes as what it simulates. In other words, the beliefs I entertain during a simulation should play the same role as they do for the person with whom I am empathizing. The more similar these mental processes are the better the simulation and as a result the deeper the empathy. When one

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[5] Darwall 63.
[6] I would rather distinguish a variation that remains indifferent, thus keeping empathy proper from excluding concern.

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engages in a simulation (intentionally or otherwise) one goes "off-line" from one's current sensory input. Imagining the experience or point of view of another person requires that I put aside the input of my own present circumstances.

Empathy via simulation, with characters or with real people, follows the same method. Of course, some object to the comparison, since empathy with fictional characters does not simulate actual psychological processes. However, James Harold makes a convincing argument the metaphysical difference is not an important one, as I explain later in this chapter. When empathizing with a fictional character, I imaginatively entertain the beliefs of that character and take the same attitudes towards those beliefs that the character takes. So, if a character is depressed because of recent events, I imagine myself encountering the same events. Then I imagine how I would feel in that situation just I would imagine the situation of a real person.

Simulation theory is best understood in contrast to its alternatives. Opponents of simulation theory are often called 'theory-theorists.' In "theory-theory," one holds a systematic set of beliefs and will make predictions about a person or character based on those beliefs. So, in order for me to have an idea how my friend feels when he tells me that his cat has been sick, I would have to draw upon beliefs I have, develop a kind of "theory" about what will influence his feelings. For example, I remember that he talks about his cat a lot, that he has pictures of his cat in his office, etc. These things have brought be to believe that he is very

attached to his cat and therefore he must be upset. I might also notice his quivering lip and decide that he is upset based on my belief that people's lips quiver when they are upset. The distinction here is that simulation theory describes an *imaginative* rather than an inductive thought process.

In simulation, one may temporarily assume beliefs that the character has but not actually hold any second-order beliefs about what the character believes. Feagin describes the difference as the difference between a model of a bridge and a theory about the bridge. Using a model, one can demonstrate things that one has not been able to explain theoretically. In empathy, one models the psychological involvement of a person or character. Rather than predicting that a character will behave certain ways in certain circumstances, one tries on the attitudes of a character and engages in an imaginative experiment to discover possible behavior.

Simulation theory is an attempt to explain the imaginative activity in which we engage when we want to understand a person or a character's inner life. When we imagine another person's mental life, we try on what we believe are the feelings they have. We feel their emotions, but we do not behave as if the emotions were our own. Some have explained this by calling the empathic experience 'off-line.' Others complain that this explanation suggests that the feelings aroused by empathic experience are not real. Here arises the tension: can we hold on to simulation theory and maintain that empathic emotions are genuine? James

Harold has argued that empathy produces genuine and simulated emotions.[7] He lists three objections held by his opposition, reasons for thinking that empathy with fictions is not real empathy. Two of the objections also pose problems for my view, but Harold gives ample reason for their dismissal.

The first objection makes the point that empathy is a success term. In other words, I only have an empathic experience when I succeed in sharing another person's emotional state. The extent to which I empathize is only the extent to which the experiences are alike. So, the claim is that in the case of fiction, there is no actual experience with which to compare mine. Thus, there is no measure of success. However, as Harold points out, we have no such measurement for the success of empathy between real people either. We use the same cues and evidence with fictional characters as we do with people. For the purposes of evaluating the success of empathy, Harold finds no relevant differences between them: "The question is whether it matters that Desdemona is a fiction. We have ways of arguing about what Hamlet's emotions are; we have standards of evidence (the words in the text, and their meanings in our language)."[8] It seems clear to me that as long as the standards of measurement are the same, the success standard cannot prevent us from having real empathy with a fictional character.

The second typical objection is that "real-life empathy can motivate a certain kind of action, whereas empathetic responses to fiction cannot…The difference is

[7] Harold, James. "Empathy with Fictions" BJAC 341.
[8] Harold 349.

that real-life empathy sometimes causes or leads us to *intervene*."[9] Harold argues that even real-life empathy does not always cause action. Whether due to choice or ability, there are times when action is a practical impossibility. Harold sees motivation, rather than action, as the required result of empathy. We desire to act in fiction (as in life) although we unable (as we can be in life). While Harold's answer to the first objection is sufficient, there is more to be said here. I include behavior in my description of action and I am not satisfied by stipulating that desire to act is sufficient for a case of empathy. This will require some explanation.

If simulated emotions were not real, then what would be their relationship to genuine emotion? The complaint that our behavior does not look the same in cases of simulation as it does for our real emotions is unconvincing. Often we experience emotions and do not behave, as one would expect for any number of reasons. Suppose I am in a crowd of people and someone whispers in my ear that I did not receive a fellowship I have been   I might look disappointed perhaps my face will 'fall' but I don't necessarily express the emotions I am actually feeling. If I were, I might start yelling about the process or crying a bit while letting the disappointment set in. Instead I say 'that's too bad' and go on about the social activities appropriate for the occasion. This is not a case of simulation and yet my behavior does not necessarily match my emotional state. I don't think it is very

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[9] Harold 348.

different when I read about Anna Karenina committing suicide. I was very depressed at the outcome for a character I had grown to feel for as if she were a friend or even as if I were she. What behavior did this depression cause? Well nothing noticeable. I put down the book for a couple of weeks and felt generally bummed out. I did not however, seek counseling, give up my activities for the time, or stay in bed all day. These sorts of behaviors might be described as the behavior of a depressed and sad person. So one might be tempted to say that my depression was not real since I did not behave like a depressed person. But we feel all kinds of things that we keep within the confines of our mental space. Certainly, some emotions are uncontrollable, as when a close friend dies and you cannot stop crying or you run screaming because you are being chased by a rabid dog. These are extremes of emotion but since they make up only a fraction of our emotive experience, I don't think it makes sense to compare only these to simulated emotions.

Empathy & Identification

I view identification with a character or person as a preliminary step to empathy. Before we can feel with a person, we must be able to put ourselves in his or her shoes. Not all cases of identification lead to empathy however. Identification, on my understanding requires taking a point of view and following the thought process of that point of view. It is analogous to what we do when we argue for a position with which we do not agree or have not taken a stand. For

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example, suppose I am assigned an essay topic that requires I take the "pro" position on the death penalty. Even if I am not "pro-death penalty" in reality, one approach would be to identify with an activist or writer on that side. In so doing, I follow his or her train of reasoning and try to see things from that point of view.

Noel Carroll describes several possibilities for what people might mean by "character-identification" in his book *The Philosophy of Horror*:

1. We like the protagonist.

2. We recognize the circumstances of the protagonist to be significantly like those we have found or find ourselves in.

3. We sympathize with the protagonist.

4. We are one in interest, or feeling, or principle, or all of these with the protagonist.

5. We see the action unfolding in the fiction from the protagonist's point of view.

6. We share the protagonist's values.

7. We are entranced (or manipulated or deceived) so that we fall under the illusion that we each regard ourselves as the protagonist.[10]

However, Carroll sees commentators as typically using a more radical concept of identification to indicate the audience thinking of itself as identical to the character. He describes this definition of identification as "a state in which the audience member somehow merges or fuses with the character" (Carroll 91). In

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[10] Carroll, Philosophy of Horror. Routledge, 1990; 89.

this state, commentators hold that the audience member accepts the character's point of view and is under the illusion that he or she participates in the fiction.

My claim makes no assertions about the illusory effects of fictional character-identification. It may be that identification with a character involves a sense of participation, but I think that the participation is just that of any audience and any artwork. As such, even when we view a painting we participate in the work. This does not entail that upon viewing a painting or reading a novel, I enter some hallucination that separates me from reality. However, even if what we mean by identification is something less radical than this, Carroll sees little use for a clarification of the term 'character-identification' since he believes it muddles the picture.

When a person tells a racist joke, the appropriate response is to take the racist point of view. Recall Ted Cohen's example of a racist joke and suppose someone asks you:

> "How did a passerby stop a group of black men from committing a gang rape?"

When such a question is posed, and it is clear that a joke is being presented, people sometimes guess at the punch line. What happens when they do this? They may inventory racial stereotypes. If they cannot come up with a clever reply to usurp the punch line, they might say, 'I don't know,' signaling that they are ready to hear the answer: "He threw them a basketball." It is not immediately clear that

the listener has any feelings resembling those of the racist. It is likely with mild curiosity that he or she wonders what the punch line will be. Even so, a listener responding appropriately cannot help but be at odds with the subject represented in the joke. Suppose upon hearing the opening line I imagine myself as a black man hearing people joke like this. It is safe to assume that I will be less likely to enjoy the joke. I believe this is a result of the fact that in a racist joke, engagement with the represented subject interferes with the expected uptake. This has a lot to do with the nature of racism, in that it is accompanied by hate and suffering.[11] The depth of identification characteristic of empathy goes a step further. In this case, I hear the joke, identify with the subject, and invoke the feelings such a person might have. I imagine how it would feel to hear this joke given the identity, experiences, and history that are characteristic of the subject. It is unlikely that I will be laughing and saying what a good joke it is. It may be that I cannot give empirical proof that this is the case. In part, my project makes an analytic claim: We have agreed to a great extent about what we will call aesthetic empathy. As such, it seems that as we refine that definition it will be possible and necessary to say what we cannot reasonably include within it. So it is not so important that I empirically show that a practice is at odds with empathy. Rather, it is logically impossible for empathy to be compatible with racist joking under my description.

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[11] I will discuss this further in chapter 3.

If we define empathy as fellow feeling or compassionate identification, those definitions do not include the detached recklessness that is present in racist joking.

The person well practiced in identifying with those that have experienced prejudice develops a sensitivity that is often incompatible with this kind of humor. This is evident when those for whom the stereotyping is a personal issue react without humor. Consider the joke "How many feminists does it take to change a light bulb?" What some would call a purely aesthetic reaction might be amused at the surprise ending etc.; however if one is well acquainted with the struggles of feminists and the stereotype of them as humorless fanatics, a laugh would be quickly quelled by the understanding of the damage being done. If we define empathy as an emotionally rooted understanding of others, an activity that causes one to feel another's pain and joys then empathy would have us feel the oppressive nature of the joke. Could consciousness of oppression and laughter at the fact go hand in hand? Perhaps it does sometimes, as when members of a group joke about their mutual struggle. In these cases, the laughter would be a bonding experience and provide some catharsis. Some will claim that an outsider could imaginatively identify with the group included in a racist joke. If so, the outsider could appreciate the joke as if he or she were a member, perhaps empathizing with the group catharsis. I think this is presumptuous. It misses the emotional connection of people that know each other well and have had many similar experiences that are deeply emotional. Some will object that no such necessary emotional connection

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exists between members of a traditionally misrepresented group. If the emotional connection is not between the members then at least they have access to it. If I claim that you do not have access to it because of white privilege, however, I am severely limiting empathy. I do not think it is the case that non-members have no access to understanding the emotional states of group members entirely unlike themselves. On the contrary, the importance of imaginative empathic experience stems from the possibilities of having insight into someone with whom you share few commonalities. However, in this case an understanding of a group that has experienced prejudice would entail respect for that group. I do not think that we can simultaneously respect this experience and think that we should be able to make the same jokes or use the same language that group members find liberating.

Empathy and Control

One difference I see between the experience of sympathy and empathy comes into play depending on the feeling of control one has over his or her conditions. Marcia Eaton underscores the notion of control, although toward different ends than my own, in her paper on the paradox of tragedy, "How Strange a Sadness" She argues that in tragic art our ability to control ourselves, and thus our reaction, allows us to experience pleasure along with sadness.[12] So for Eaton, sadness evoked by fiction is real; our pleasure results from the complexity of aesthetic experience. Knowing

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[12] Eaton also gives non-art examples where self-control allows an aesthetic appreciation of otherwise negative events.

that I can manage my own situation allows me to appreciate the skillful lighting, character development, and even feelings of heartbreak conjured by the artist. Eaton's describes cases in which control or lack there-of determines one's ability for pleasure. For example, she confesses, "An admittedly irrational fear of birds prevents me from watching or reading, let alone enjoying, *The Birds*."[13] If she were to watch the film, Hitchcock would usurp her control and her ability for pleasure along with it.[14]

My concern here, of course, is not to address the pleasure we take in tragedy (or horror or fear); I want to extend the role played by Eaton's notion of control to the distinction I am pursuing between sympathy and empathy. Consider the case of *Anna Karenina*. I was devastated by her end. I threw down the book and did not pick it up again for several weeks. I was actually angry with Tolstoy for making me so unhappy. Still, it remains my favorite novel and I want everyone (everyone I like, anyway) to read it, so they can enjoy it as much as I did. Consider another example. When I saw the movie *Boys Don't Cry*, I cried sporadically for hours after it ended. The story was devastating though the film in general is very good. I cannot say that I found it a pleasure. It was worthwhile as a work of art in that variously rewarding elements of film were present. But Brandon's story was too

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[13] Eaton, Marcia. "How Strange a Sadness," JAAC 60.

[14] Control is an issue in the real world as well: "We do not enjoy a roller coaster that is out of control, but only one which we believe will stay on the track and stop at the appointed time and place." However, this is not relevant to my purpose here, which is to elucidate sympathy and empathy.

sad. Similarly, some movies are too scary for me. I have nightmares and can't take out the trash at night afterwards.

Now it may be the case that I made the empathic leap more easily than most for the main character in *Boys Don't Cry*, Brandon. I also attended high school in a small intolerant town exactly in the middle of nowhere. It was not difficult for me to imagine myself in her position. I do not plan to see the movie again. It was painful and I do not want to do that to myself. I think this is easily categorized a case of empathy and I think the fact that I did not have the level of self-control required to may have something to do with it. Let me explain. It seems that there are cases in which we feel sad yet the pleasure of the aesthetic experience outweighs the sadness. In those cases, we have more control. Yet, there are a few instances when we recognize the value in a work, but cannot enjoy it due to some inability to remain at a distance from the subject. If empathy describes a level of feeling like the feeling of a fictional character, then perhaps only the greatest works of art rival those negative feelings to the extent that they are worth our attention. My concern here is the point that sympathy could more plainly describe those feelings inspired by works that do not affect us in the way empathic feelings do. If we really feel what Anna Karenina feels, why do we enjoy her story? The complexity of the work is enhanced by our emotion and the pleasure we feel rivals our sorrow. But I must insist that when we feel with a character, our actions will be influenced. Empathy does not allow for so-called aesthetic distance. Empathy

does not allow for so-called aesthetic distance. Aesthetic empathy with negative

emotions raises the familiar paradox. If we have the control Eaton describes, can

the emotional experience be a case of empathy? If not, then the paradox is settled

by the explanation of control only in cases of sympathetic emotion.

Here are some directions to consider:

1. We do not enjoy negative feelings in cases of aesthetic empathy.
   - So, if we enjoy a tragedy, our emotions are sympathetic.
   - We can only explain the pleasure of *sympathetic* sadness by our ability to control appreciation of other aspects of a work.
   - The answer of meta-response (Carroll) only works for sympathetic emotion.

2. When we enjoy a tragedy, our negative feelings are fictional; they are quasi-feelings (not real).
(Walton, Feagin)
   - Empathy with fictions is also not real.

3. We appreciate value in tragedy and this appreciation cannot be categorized as pleasure.
   - There is no paradox to solve.
   - Empathic sadness is not an inconsistent result of an artwork we   value.

The third option is best on my view. One and three are consistent. Harold's

argument (earlier in this paper) for the reality of aesthetic empathy rules out

number two. So, what exactly does an analysis of tragic emotion in terms of

sympathy, empathy, and identification contribute to my analysis of empathy and

humor?

Suppose that when we enjoy a tragedy it is the case that we feel sorrow for

characters, but manage to control our response enough to appreciate other

aesthetic aspects. I have said that this is a case of sympathy and not empathy.

Perhaps when a person that does not condone racism, laughs at a racist joke, something similar is going on. I am able to laugh if I realize that my response results from something from which I can leave behind. Here the pleasure comes from following the inferences and successfully 'getting' the joke. In addition, one appreciates the skill of a well-crafted joke. This is analogous to one's success at feeling heartbroken at the death of Anna Karenina. One enjoys the sadness resulting from a tragic fiction because sadness is the expected response. Furthermore, because it is the appropriate response, feeling sadness indicates one's successful uptake. Appreciating the author's skill at evoking emotion is another pleasure. Reactions like these have been described as 'meta-responses.' Perhaps the strange sadness of tragedy is analogous to the strange humor of racist jokes. Now, if it is the case that this ability to detach (as seems necessary to the enjoyment of a meta-response) highlights a trait of sympathy rather than empathy then it seems that any enjoyment of tragedy would not include aesthetic empathy. This may be similar to saying that if we are enjoying a sad movie than we cannot have achieved an empathic response. Is this a useful distinction to make between sympathetic and empathic responses?

While it may not be immediately appealing, I want to evaluate the usefulness of this distinction.

Empathic Resistance

Suppose I want to understand how slavery has affected the psyche of African Americans today. First, one would have to have specific persons in mind rather than "African Americans in general." I think you would have to consider the beliefs that some African Americans hold. Some say that white people cannot understand the ways prejudice has evolved from times of slavery. Thus, they can never understand the feelings of African Americans. It seems to me then that an attempt at empathy that did not have the empathizer concluding the same belief would have to be a failure. If we know how a person responds to certain input, and we simulate that input, we hope to achieve a response like the person in question. A dissimilar response will show that the simulation must have been faulty. So a successful simulation in this case would imagine feelings that would arise from a lifetime of experiencing prejudice. One could draw on one's own experiences of being marginalized (if one has any) and perhaps imagine them magnified, etc. Another helpful tool would be an excellent book that manages to describe the emotions involved in-group oppression. The depth of our identification with a person in this position would require the growing feeling that one really cannot fully access those emotions as much as one might try. Thus, the most successful case of empathy possible would realize its own necessary limits when imagining the place of someone who believes you cannot really imagine their emotional state.

Likewise, in joke telling, if you know that people are offended by certain jokes, but you continue to engage in them, you cannot have managed to empathize with those people that are offended. If you understood their feelings and thought processes, you would have to have a concluding belief similar to theirs. One might say that one would have the belief off line, but this seems at odds with the way we describe empathy. This would be more a case of theory-theory, where one recognizes the theoretical stages of another person's beliefs but never feels them or holds them or tries them on. I guess one could say well I am empathizing with those people that do not mind racist jokes or stereotypes of their own race. This avoids the problem. We have just admitted that we cannot tell the jokes and empathize with the person that minds at the same time. And that is what I am calling attention to: we are at odds with empathy with people when we engage in behavior that is contrary to the behavior of those with which we think we can empathize.

Emotions and Fictions: special ontology issues

I believe that what Walton calls "fictitious emotion" is sympathetic emotion. His description of fictitious emotion centers on entertaining emotions rather than feeling them. Quasi-pity, for example, is not so much a feeling as it is recognition of a feeling. Walton describes it: "In some cases the fact that fictionally one pities or detests or admires someone is probably generated by the fact that one experiences the quasi emotion as a result of being aware of an appropriate fictional

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truth about her" (Mimesis 250). Walton does grant that those experiencing quasi-emotions share sensations characteristic of real emotion. He thinks that we are only able to feel "quasi-pity" for fictional persons, although quasi-pity may also be held for an actual person. The distinguishing characteristic is none other than the ontological status of the object: for fictional characters, there can be no real pity. Walton realizes that this distinction is problematic, but believes that it results from a lack of understanding about emotions in general.

Noel Carroll also sees a disanalogy between the emotional state of the audience and fictional characters: "the audience's emotional response is rooted in entertaining thoughts, while the character's responses originate in beliefs. The character is horrified, while the audience is art-horrified...the audience's response will be involved with concern for another person...while the protagonist...is concerned for himself" (*Horror* 91). So Carroll concludes that we can simplify our analysis by describing the audience as being in a state of sympathy.

I agree that we can remain detached enough to have second-order feelings, we must call it sympathy.[15] When we experience quasi-fear, and respond to that in some way that might be real fear or might be pleasure (or annoyance or whatever), we do not have an experience that is isomorphic to the person or character with which we identify. If I am right, then certainly the experiences we can describe as empathic are lessened. However, it brings out an aspect missing in the debate over

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[15] Of course, I think that the notion of character-identification does work for us that Carroll does not consider, as I have already argued.

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real emotions versus fictional ones. The emotions are real; we are just describing a different level of engagement with them. What I want to accomplish with the retreat to the common terms is a greater respect for empathy. On my view, if you are feeling *with* someone your feelings are real and your actions will be affected. Feeling *for* someone describes a response to recognition: I see that you are sad (recognition) and I hope that your day will improve (response). I do not feel sad myself, but am aware of what your feelings must be. In the case of a tragic fiction then, it may be that if your experience is pleasurable then it is not empathic. People seek tragedy in life as well as in art and as such, it seems that the paradox is not one of fiction, but only of our descriptions of emotion.[16]

Lolita: empathy with a character that is not sympathetic or sympathy for a character with whom you cannot empathize?

Lolita may be a problematic case for my distinction between sympathy and empathy. Reading the novel, I encountered the strangeness of imagining myself in the position of a character that I also found disgusting. It was almost enough to make me stop reading the novel. Nabokov's ability to immerse the reader in the world-view of a pedophile was so great that just following the protagonist's reasoning (necessary to any reading) was incredibly disturbing. The initial question that troubles me is this: Is my response an empathic one? Consider the following excerpts

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[16] I agree with Walton on this point at least!

"Not a trace of modesty did I perceive in this beautiful badly formed young girl whom modern co-education, juvenile mores, the campfire racket and so forth had utterly and hopelessly depraved."

"I delivered a tremendous backhand cut that caught her smack on her hot hard little cheek bone. And then the remorse, the poignant sweetness of sobbing atonement, groveling love, the hopelessness of sensual reconciliation."[17]

Following my analysis, we can say that even looking through the eye, thinking the thoughts, and imagining the actions of a character is not the same as feeling what he feels. Here the distinction between identification and empathy becomes useful. I have stipulated that identification with a character or person is only a preliminary step to empathy. Before we can feel with a person, we must be able to put ourselves in their shoes. Not all instances of identification lead to empathy however. Identification, on my understanding requires taking a point of view and following the thought process of that point of view. It is analogous to what we do when we argue for a position, with which we do not agree or have not taken a stand. For example, suppose a teacher assigns an essay topic that requires I take the "pro" position on the death penalty. Even if I were not "pro-death penalty" in reality, one approach would be to identify with an activist or writer on that side. In so doing, I follow his or her train of reasoning and try to see things from that point of view. We are able at least to take a character's (or a person's) point of view without feeling his or her feelings.

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[17] Nabokov, Vladimir Vladimirovich, *Lolita*. New York : Greenwich House, 1955.

Lolita brings out another difference between what I am calling identification and empathy. In both cases, we imagine ourselves in the position of another. When we identify with a person or character, however, we do not necessarily wish them success. Even when I imagine myself in Humpbert's shoes, I do not want what he wants. Consider another example. When an ex-heroin addict watches *Requiem for a Dream,* it will be easy for him or her to identify with the characters by recognizing the behavior and attitudes. Nevertheless, when Harry explodes in anger toward at his mother for not lending him money, it is unlikely that you will also explode in anger. We often identify with characters that have feelings that we cannot share because we do not approve of those feelings. In dark humor, we laugh at those with which we identify and yet cannot approve.

Suppose we agree that I identify with Humpburt and do not empathize with him. I have said that identification with the racist point of view in racist joking puts the audience at odds with its subject. One could similarly argue that taking on his rationalizations and twisted imaginary world puts me at odds with Lolita, since if this were the case, I would be unable to empathize with her, the victim, and still enjoy the book. I think I can solve this problem by pointing to the differences between shallow joking and complex fiction.[18] One difference between racist joking and a more complex fiction is that the joke allows little time for critical reflection. When we watch a good movie, we might find ourselves identifying

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[18] Not all cases of fiction and joking will be respectively complex or shallow, of course.

with an evil character, one that we would abhor in real life. One could argue that if we empathize with an evil character, then we put ourselves at odds with those hurt by that evil.

My view of empathy need not preclude identification with morally reprehensible characters. Identification in racist joking, however, prohibits empathy with the joke's object. This is because we take on the racist mindset in order to follow the implications of a joke. However, in these situations, the racist mindset is oversimplified. We gain no significant insight into the racist character through racist joking. On my view, it would not necessarily be wrong or dangerous to identify with a racist character, given the complexity of that character's presentation.

To sum up: I have drawn an analogy between the strange sadness of tragedy and the strange humor of racist jokes, showing that each introduces a similar paradox. The solution for each is different however and my terminology and distinctions are useful here. One difference between the aesthetic appreciation of racist humor and tragedy is the role empathy plays. In the case of tragedy, empathy enhances value, while in racist jokes empathy ruins value. No paradox is present when both cases are understood thorough this analysis of aesthetic emotion. I also recognize a comparable problem in Lolita, but argue that this is dis-analogous to the case of racist joking.

IV
Narrative Disruption
Empathy and Self-protective Irony

Ironic joking complicates the discussion of empathy and raises problems for current theories of it. In Chapter 1, I discussed some examples of racist jokes intended to be ironic. These jokes seem to be on the racist, the person that would tell such a joke without a sense of irony. In successful cases of ironic joking, the covert meaning reverses the apparent meaning. Whereas standard irony communicates the speaker's beliefs, self-protective irony intentionally makes the speaker's beliefs ambiguous. I will argue that the self-protective irony at work in some racist joke telling is morally problematic, as my view of empathy makes clear. While I think that ironic racist jokes are problematic in themselves, the presence of self-protective irony makes these problems obvious. In Chapter Two, I argued that some ironic racist jokes put their audience in a position that precludes the possibility of empathy. Here, I consider the role conversation plays in human empathy and mutual understanding. I begin this chapter by explicating the notion of self-protective irony as Jon Wenstrom develops it.[1] Subsequently, I argue that racist jokes told ironically often show characteristics of self-protective irony. I argue that self-protective ironic joking rejects the intimacy offered by joking and the potential for friendship building that conversation fosters. As a result, I conclude that ironic racist jokes of the self-protective variety not only preclude

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[1] Wenstrom, John. "Modernist Irony." Ph.D. dissertation, UMN, 1991.

empathy, they discourage even basic mutual understanding. As a result, self-protective irony discourages friendship and limits personal growth.

Wenstrom argues that self-protective irony is a genuine case of irony. By way of demonstration, he contrasts self-protective irony with the standard form. Wenstrom defines standard irony according to "the classic Quintilian definition: that 'the intention of the speaker is other than what he actually says.'"[2] Once Wenstrom identifies the features of self-protective irony, he defends each by providing literary examples and arguing that the standard notion of irony is insufficient to account for these. I think that standard irony also misses the role self-protective irony plays in conversation. By way of demonstration, I begin here by distinguishing standard irony from its self-protective counterpart with examples in ordinary conversation. Then I will return to Wenstrom's literary examples before applying his definition of self-protective irony to joking.

Standard Irony

Suppose that I truly hate grading papers. One afternoon in the department office, my colleague says to me, "It's too bad you have to miss the hike to finish your grading." I might cheerfully reply, "Grading is great fun!" Given my well-known love for hiking, my colleague could justifiably interpret my statement's ironic intention. Regardless, in cases of standard irony I do not believe or intend to mislead others about my belief in the ironized message that "grading is great fun."

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[2] Wenstrom, 15.

There are several reasons I might use irony in this situation. I might not want to complain about grading around students and faculty. I might want to avoid indulging myself in self-pity. I might just employ ironic conversation because I fancy myself a sophisticate. In any case, in standard irony I do not believe or intend to mislead others about my belief in the ironized message that "grading is great fun."

Self-Protective Irony

Suppose that I sincerely love grading papers. My fellow graduate students, however, complain endlessly about grading. I fear that if I express my true feelings on the subject they will resent me. So when put on the spot, I cheerfully proclaim, "Grading is great fun!" I would (and should) expect people to interpret my statement as ironic and assume my true feelings to be quite the opposite of what I have said. In this example, I act as if my statement is ironic although I am in earnest; I pretend to facetious when I am not. "In ordinary irony," writes Wenstrom, "one may pretend an earnestness and sincerity which are actually absent, whereas in self-protective irony, one may pretend irony when and earnestness and sincerity are actually present."[3] As we have seen, self-protective irony thwarts communication. It is not the case that standard irony need be obvious for successful communication. The distinction is that once recognized, standard irony does not leave the meaning ambiguous. Identification of irony

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[3] Wenstrom, 15.

entails that the listener realizes that the actual intended meaning deviates from the apparent one. [4]   According to Wenstrom,[5] self-protective irony has four distinguishing characteristics. I refer to the straightforward message as 'P' and the ironic message as '~P.'

1. The speaker believes in the ironized message, P. In other words, he or she believes in the straightforward message or at least has some investment of feeling in it.

2. Self-protective irony is a defensive device used to protect the speaker from adverse judgments that might result from non-ironic expression, for example, asserting P. While standard irony is intended to communicate a meaning other than the overt meaning, self-protective irony is intended to prevent the listener from inferring an intention to communicate the overt meaning.

3. In self-protective irony, the speaker disassociates herself from the apparent message (P), so that she is understood to affirm the opposite of that message (~P). Self-protective irony rejects the overt message but the rejection is equivocal in the following sense:

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[4] Of course, there is the possibility of standard communication. Suppose I say that I think grading is great fun. However, in this case, I do not intend listeners to interpret my statement as ironic. I am simply offering my opinion in what I consider straightforward language. My cynical colleagues however, chuckle and affirm my view with profuse enthusiasm. In this case, I am not intending to hide my beliefs but to communicate them.

[5] Wenstrom, 15.

4. In self-protective irony, the overt message is not wholly concealed by the irony. Thus, the speaker avoids a declaration of her beliefs without actually denying them.

In the kind of irony I am ascribing to some racist jokes, the speaker only pretends to reject the ironized message. Wenstrom does not insist that the speaker must agree with the message, although this may be the case. It is enough for the speaker to imply disbelief when something less (doubt, for example) is the case. In standard irony, on the other hand, the speaker states the message ironically to convey her disbelief in it. However, when a speaker states a message ironically to cover her belief in it (as in self-protective irony); she prevents the conventional exchange of ideas we look for in conversation. Wenstrom refers to a description of Amalia in Franz Kafka's The Castle:

It's not easy to follow her, for often one can't tell whether she's speaking ironically or in earnest. Mostly she's in earnest but sounds ironical.[6]

Wenstrom points out that when Amalia uses irony to mislead people she is using it deceptively. In order to do this, Amalia takes advantage of the appropriate interpretation of irony, that what someone means is opposite of what has been said. It is easy to imagine circumstances that would motivate such deception. Wenstrom suggests that using irony this way "might imply contempt for the listener, despair for being understood, or fear of the consequences of having one's

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[6] Kafka, Franz. *The Castle*, 266.

real beliefs or feelings known."[7] If Amalia's genuine feelings tend to be perceived as saccharine, self-protective irony might enable her to deflect the condescending smiles of those who disapprove.

Later in this chapter, I review another literary example given by Wenstrom because I think it shows the complexity of the subject. First, a word needs to be said about how our projects are related. Wenstrom's project is to show that modern poets use ironic devices to hide their genuine feelings and commitments. After demonstrating the subtlety of self-protective irony in Wenstrom's work, I integrate his account within my study of jokes. The comparison between literature and jokes works because jokes share with literary works many characteristics commonly identified as aesthetic. For example, jokes provoke the imagination via formal structure and convention. Like poetry, novels, and theater, jokes have aesthetic features such as 'rhythm,' 'subtlety,' and 'ambiguity.' Furthermore, the aesthetic qualities emerge from their category and appreciation refers to that category.[8] Thus, appreciation of jokes is like appreciation of the arts. Comparison within a category draws attention to the features relevant to aesthetic judgment. In the case of sonnets, for example, comparison to other sonnets tempers or intensifies one's admiration of adherence to form. Likewise, we praise a joke according to the standards of that genre. Ted Cohen suggests that the devices a

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[7] Wenstrom, 18.
[8] See Walton's "Categories of Art," The Philosophical Review, Vol. 79, No. 3 (Jul. 1970), pp. 334-367.

joke employs to achieve intimacy are relevant to its appreciation.[9] In the case of

ethnic jokes, for example, he prefers jokes that "make something" of the ethnicity.

According to Cohen, a Polish or Irish joke in which it really matters that the

character is Polish or Irish requires more of the hearer, involves him more

intimately, and intensifies his appreciation as a result.[10]

Another commonality between jokes and literature becomes apparent in

philosophical commentary on the two areas. Philosophers point to the same

characteristics in jokes that they point to in other fictions to support the claim that

ethical concerns are inappropriate topics for aesthetic discussion. Earlier (chapter

one), I pointed out that Ted Cohen exempts racist jokes from moral censure in

light of their function as little fictions. He believes that even if a joke seems

morally objectionable, disapproval is not easily justified and he explicitly

identifies jokes as a kind of fiction:

> First is the problem of finding a basis for any moral judgment passed on
> fiction, and then there is the problem of establishing the impropriety of
> laughing at something, especially when the something is fictional.[11]

Suppose, for example, that I declare, "The Hobbit is immoral because it is false—

trees cannot talk and walk around." This complaint convinces few, as demanding

literal truth from fiction betrays some sort of confusion about the genre.[12]

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[9] In chapter one, I discuss these in more detail.

[10] *Jokes* 75.

[11] *Jokes* 76.

[12] A critic recently commented on the response to Dan Brown's novel, *The DaVinci Code:* "Scholars are upset because it is nothing but lies. That's right people; it's called the fiction section." Of all the things to complain about in this novel, its relationship to the facts is the least of them. In areas of actual aesthetic relevance, condemnation of Brown's book is well deserved though relatively scarce.

Similarly, people often interpret moral objections to racist jokes (that they draw on false representation s of ethnic groups, for example) as a failure to appreciate that genre. They claim that the objection comes from an inappropriate expectation of jokes. On this view, jokes claim no more about actual people than The Hobbit claims about trees.

Another way my project benefits from comparison to literature comes in dealing with the difficulty of interpreting what is said. Verifying self-protective irony versus irony versus standard communication in jokes and fiction requires reference to the speaker's intention and the hearer's appropriate response. Demonstrating these features turns into a real puzzle. One problem is establishing the speaker's intention. In the case of jokes, we must decide to identify the joke-teller or an imaginary narrator as the speaker. Fictions generally pose this dilemma, forcing us to resolve whether author or fictional character is properly identified as the speaker. I will clarify this problem in my application of H.P. Grice's work on conversational implicature. For now, it is enough to note the analogous relationship between speaker and utterance; the poet is to poem as joker is to joke. As such, Wenstrom's analysis of self-protective irony in modernist poetics will benefit my examination of self-protective irony in racist jokes.

Wenstrom argues that the following passage contains all the features he attributes to self-protective irony. His example comes from Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse:

It was true; he was for the most part happy; he had his wife; he had his children; he had promised six weeks time to talk "some nonsense" to the young men of Cardiff about Locke, Hume, Berkeley, and the causes of the French Revolution. But this and his pleasure in it, his glory in the phrases he made, in the ardor of his youth, in his wife's beauty, in the tributes that reached him from Swansea, Cardiff, Exeter, Southampton, Kidderminster, Oxford, Cambridge—all had to be deprecated and concealed under the phrase "talking nonsense," because, in effect, he had not done the thing he might have done. It was a disguise; it was the refuge of a man afraid to own his own feelings, who could not say, this is what I like—this is what I am.[13]

Wenstrom points out that Mr. Ramsey (described in this passage) uses self-deprecation to hide his self-satisfaction. He fakes humility because flagrant conceit would diminish public perception of his accomplishments. Wenstrom suggests that Mr. Ramsey's ironic self-contempt not only deflects outside criticism but also allows his continued self-approval.[14] Thus, Mr. Ramsey demonstrates the features of self-protective irony defined by Wenstrom:

Like Amalia, Mr. Ramsey pretends to take a deprecating ironic stance toward something in which he has a real investment of sincerity…His deceptive behavior is motivated by a need to protect himself from hostile criticism; his ironic behavior protects him precisely by dissociating him from the self-threatening content, allowing him to deny and disavow it.[15]

Now we begin to see that this pattern of self-protective irony can be identified in the cases of racist joking that I described in chapter one. There I have argued that

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[13] *Jokes* 22.
[14] *Jokes* 23.
[15] *Jokes* 24.

identification with the racist point of view involves taking on racist attitudes. However, 'taking on' can be understood in two ways. It could mean 'having racist attitudes.' Let us call this 'taking-on$_1$'. Clearly, actually having racist attitudes has no redeeming value. On the other hand, 'taking on' could mean "pretending to have" racist attitudes. We will call this 'taking-on$_2$.' Of course, pretending to have racist attitudes does not mean that one does not actually have racist attitudes. Pretending to have racist attitudes could be valuable if it put one in a better position to deal with racists. In addition, taking on racist attitudes allows the pretender to draw attention to certain characteristics of racism thereby making its absurdity and hence its defects obvious to others.[16] If one takes-on$_2$ racist attitudes as in standard irony, one intends to communicate disbelief in those racist attitudes. Self-protective irony, on the other hand, conceals something less than disbelief, ambivalence about racism, or even genuine racism. This leaves open the possibility that racist joking is a case of taking-on$_2$, or self-protective irony. In what follows, I consider these possibilities.

When someone takes on the racist character in order to mock it, he or she sets himself or herself apart from that character. It is as if the person claims that they cannot be racist, because they are in fact mocking the racist. This exaggerated racist allows joke tellers to feel more at ease with relatively trivial racism (the normal result of growing up privileged and naïve). I see a similarity in American

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[16] In chapter one, I argue that absurdity is not the real problem with racism. Here I am considering the best-case scenario for taking-on$_2$. If ironic racist jokes expose the moral defects of racism, they would certainly have more value than if they do not.

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appreciation of Jerry Springer type antics. In Jerry Springer's shows, the people are so dumb, trashy, and corrupt, that its audience feels noble by comparison. Likewise, ironic or self-protective ironic racist jokes allow one to diminish one's resemblance to the racist by caricaturing them.

Recall the conversation I described in chapter one. I was in the computer lab in my department; a fellow graduate student ("Joe") was at the next computer playing video games. A few other students watched the game over his shoulder. He asked me "What are you working on?" I replied, "A fellowship application." He asked, "Is it some kind of special fellowship for Mexicans?" A round of laughter followed. They recognized his reference to that awkward encounter I had when coming to the department. At face value, his question was ironic. He knows I am Puerto Rican and we have all laughed over the "I once dated a Mexican girl" comment to which he was referring. Nonetheless, his comment exhibits all the features characteristic of self-protective irony.

Without context, Joe's statement might be simply offensive, but in this setting, the intentional racial misnomer sets the stage for an ironic interpretation. He has disengaged himself from a literal interpretation of his words, the overt message. That message could be that Latinos are interchangeable or that I could only reasonably expect this kind of fellowship, or that such fellowships should be thought of as "special." He condescendingly makes use of a term ("special") often used to describe the developmentally disabled, thereby connecting ethnicity and

(dis)ability. Still, this suggestion was intended to be understood ironically, as he is merely referencing (or mentioning) the suggestion. Therefore, he cannot be held accountable for its content. He even seems to be asserting a disbelief of the overt message, which is the third characteristic Wenstrom identifies in self-protective irony. It may be the case that Joe disbelieves the overt message. If he intends his disbelief to be recognizable, then this example falls within the bounds of standard irony. However, if Joe has some investment in the message with which he wants to disassociate, he has met Wenstrom's first condition of self-protective irony.

It happens that Joe had revealed his view against affirmative action to me before this particular encounter. As teaching assistants for a class dealing with the topic, we had argued over its merit. He views any consideration of race as unfair discrimination. By exaggerating his feelings and packaging them playfully, Joe implies that he does not mean what he says and is mocking someone that would. However, he actually does mean some version of his message. Referencing another student enables him to detach himself from the content of the statement. Interestingly, the ironized content manages to filter through because of our acquaintance over the years. I know him well enough that I cannot dismiss the likelihood of real feeling beneath his humor. As a result, Wenstrom's fourth characteristic is evident: the message survives and yet the speaker protects himself or herself from criticism.

Like Mr. Ramsey and Amalia, Joe avoids criticism by pretending to mock an attitude that he knows is not politically correct. As stipulated in Wenstrom's second characteristic of self-protective irony, the joke protects Joe from adverse judgment by preventing those listening from knowing his actual intention. His ironic posture muddles the relationship between himself and his statement. Finally, his purpose is not to criticize the attitude he mocks, but merely to separate himself from it. Thus, Joe exhibits each feature characteristic of self-protective irony: concealed investment in the ironized message, protection from adverse judgments, disassociation from the overt message (by appearing to affirm the opposite), and finally, survival of the ironized content because of ambiguity.

I think it is relevant that on Wenstrom's view, "dissimulative intention logically implies the underlying sincerity." [17] In other words, there is no need to conceal something that does not exist. One does not take pains to hide something that is not there, in this case, a view that one does not hold. Of course, this is not to say that simply denying some view implies that belief. Self-protective irony is distinct from standard irony in part because it intends to disguise attitudes rather than criticize or simply deny them. The distinguishing features of self-protective irony must therefore establish that the denial is not genuine.

Truly ironic racist jokes bring attention to the absurdity of racism. Exaggeration might be employed to that end. Even so, ironic intention should leave no doubt of

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[17] *Jokes* 24.

the speaker's feelings once identified. This requirement suggests another variation of self-protective irony worth consideration. Consider a more complicated case of ironic racist joking. Suppose I recognize my own racist tendencies and include myself when I mock racists. My discomfort with my own beliefs, uncertainty about their source, and even a desire to get the issue into the open, could motivate me. In this case, I feign ironic assertion of the message, but not to simply distance myself from the message. In this case, I am laughing at myself or at my own ridiculous views. I suggest that by identifying 'self-conscious irony' we are able to recognize variations of commitment between speaker and message in cases of self-protective irony.

One of the characteristics of self-protective irony is that it enables one to disown the position mocked. Likewise, in what I am calling 'self-conscious irony,' one establishes a foundation, such that if necessary, one can deny association with the ironized message in self-defense. However, in simple self-protective irony the speakers do not consciously include themselves within the message's believers. There is a difference in motivation between the two variations of self-protective irony. The self-conscious ironist does not use irony to hide their relationship to a message that he or she actually believes. Instead, the self-conscious ironist uses irony to a reveal their relationship to a message he or she wants to question. One such self-conscious ironist in my department reported the following example.

> My husband and I take turns hosting dinner parties with a gay
> couple. Before they arrive, we make a point of telling each other all

the gay jokes we can devise. We intentionally make offensive homophobic jokes in an attempt to get it out of our system. This allows us relax the rest of the evening.

In this case, the jokes are ironic in that they mock homophobia rather than homosexuals, but they are self-conscious because they are mocking homophobia they recognize in themselves. There seems to be an atypical cathartic aspect present in this example. However, the self-conscious variety is still a case of self-protective irony and not irony proper, because the ironic rejection is equivocal. It is equivocal in the sense that the speaker has some investment in the message that standard irony simply rejects.

Wenstrom also recognizes variations within self-protective irony, although he is concerned with a different sense of the speaker's relationship to the ironized message. In his study, Wenstrom argues that modern poets, including Robert Frost and T.S. Eliot, often use self-protective irony to distance themselves from romantic ideas and what they fear would be embarrassing personal emotions. Wenstrom's examples illustrate what he calls "expression through non-assertion." He believes that the suppressed message resurfaces through the irony. In some cases, the poet hedges on the irony and sustains quiet sympathy for the suppressed message. In other cases however, non-ironic feelings are expressed, though not by design. In these cases, self-protective irony preserves the suppressed message without a suggestion of sympathy for it.

Ezra Pound supplies one of the less complicated examples of self-protective irony in modern poetry.[18] Wenstrom points out that "A Dance Figure," sounds at first like an expression of romantic desire and that there is speculation that Pound had an affair with the French dancer Ione de Forest.

Dark eyed,
O woman of my dreams,
Ivory sandaled,
There is non like thee among the dancers,
None with swift feet. (*Personae*)

Pound manages to distance himself from any personal or romantic impulses by cloaking his ode in scholarly camouflage. His description recalls old-testament passages: "White as an almond are thy shoulders;/ As new almonds stripped from the husk." Wenstrom argues that Pound uses phrases like "Ivory sandaled" and drops the obscure name "Nathat-Ikanaie" to make his intentions seem objective. The poem's sentimental longing (apparent in the second line, "O woman of my dreams" and the erotic tone of the title) are suppressed by the ironic dramatization. For the modern poets, a climate hostile to romanticism motivated self-protective irony. Perhaps we have a climate that is inhospitable to open discussion about race. Self-protective irony allows expression of unpopular ideas especially in settings where straightforward debate might be deemed inappropriate. One such setting would be the context of my "Mexican fellowship" example. In a field that has very little ethnic diversity and far more men than women, it is likely that some

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[18] Wenstrom 26.

people would feel uncomfortable discussing the topic (especially in a room where people are playing video games). This may explain the trend of ironic racist joking that went on for some time in my department. It is relevant at present because it motivates the self-protective irony I want to single out, just as an anti-romantic climate motivated modern poets like Frost. Self-protective irony would be unnecessary without concern for hostile criticism or disapproval.[19]

H.P. Grice and Self-protective Irony

I adhere to definitions of self-protective and standard irony that rely on the distinction between types of meaning, specifically, intended meaning and overt meaning. As a result, I need to give some account of meaning. Toward that end, I follow Wenstrom and the work of H.P. Grice. Grice makes a distinction between meaning that depends on intention and meaning that is independent from intention. Grice calls independent meaning 'natural' and dependent meaning 'non-natural' or 'meaning$_{NN}$.' For the sake of clarity, I extend this notation and henceforth refer to all cases of natural meaning as 'meaning$_N$.' At first glance, communication in conversation and literature seems to rely non-natural meaning since both are products of human intention. However, a careful look at the distinction between meaning$_N$ and meaning$_{NN}$ allows for a better understanding of self-protective

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[19] The objection could be raised that the poets (and my colleagues) are employing standard irony in an attempt to criticize the environment that motivates it. In this case, the poet is not hiding his or her actual beliefs but intends to communicate them. So, P is 'I cannot openly express my beliefs, and $\sim P$ is 'I am expressing my beliefs.' However, I think that in most cases (and definitely in the ones I discuss), there is more evidence for dissimulation of some P than any communication of $\sim P$.

irony. Here, I sketch out both senses of meaning and then apply Grice's distinction to self-protective irony.

Natural Meaning

Natural meaning (meaning$_N$) is "natural" in the sense that it indicates a relationship between facts apart from intention. However, it would be inaccurate to define natural meaning simply as meaning that indicates a causal relationship. Natural meaning is entailed rather than intended. However, signifying a cause *is* a large part of the way signs have natural meaning. Grice gives the following sentences as examples:

"Those spots mean measles."

"The recent budget means that we shall have a hard year."[20]

In both cases, 'x means$_N$ P' entails P. In other words, it would not make sense to say, 'Those spots mean$_N$ measles' and conclude, 'He does not have measles.' Likewise, I cannot conclude from the former statement 'Somebody meant$_{NN}$ by those spots that he has measles.' The spots do not mean$_N$ measles because anyone intended them to have that meaning. In this example, spots mean$_N$ measles because they are in fact a sign or symptom of measles. Similarly, the budget indicates a hard year because the facts give reason for that expectation independently of a speaker's intention or what one might assume the audience to understand.

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[20] Grice, H.P. Studies in the Way of Words, Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1984;213.

Non-Natural Meaning

The important feature of non-natural meaning on Grice's view, is its function in human communication. Intention plays a central role in non-natural meaning ("meaning$_{NN}$").[21] For example, serving coffee after dinner means$_{NN}$ that the party is over only if I *mean$_{NN}$* that the party is over when I serve coffee. Furthermore, I must expect my guests to recognize my intention in serving coffee. Finally, in virtue of their recognition of my intention to indicate the party's end, my guests must realize that the party is over. I mean$_{NN}$ something by serving coffee, because I am communicating something by serving it. If I communicate successfully, the primary effect will be that my guests believe the party is over, but the secondary effect is my guests' departure.

For someone A, to mean$_{NN}$ something by x, A must utter x intending to induce a belief in the audience through the audience's recognition of this intention. In the following example, Grice emphasizes the role of intended recognition:

> If as an examiner I fail a man, I may well cause him distress or indignation or humiliation; and if I am vindictive, I may intend this effect and even   intend him to recognize my intention. But I should not be inclined to say that my failing him meant$_{NN}$ anything. On the other hand, if I cut someone in the street I do feel inclined to assimilate this to the cases of meaning$_{NN}$, and this inclination seems to me dependent on the fact that I could not reasonably expect him to be distressed… unless he recognized my intention to affect him in this way.[22]

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[21] Utterance can include gestures, statements, expressions, and so forth.
[22] Grice, 220.

So, in cases of meaning$_{NN}$ recognition leads to the effect, but does not cause it. In cases of natural meaning, A means$_N$ x entails x, whereas in meaning$_{NN}$, the intended effect is not one of necessity though one reasonably expects it. Suppose I mean$_{NN}$ to anger a person by spilling his or her beer ('x' is the act of spilling a person's beer). In this case (non-natural meaning), I reasonably expect anger upon the person's recognition of my malevolent intention only if that person has some control over his or her reaction (the effect). Otherwise, my intention and the person's recognition of it would be irrelevant to his or her anger. On the other hand, if spilling a person's beer causes that person's anger, my spilling his or her beer means$_N$ he or she will be angry regardless of my intention and its detection. This distinction between the kinds of meaning highlights the dynamic at work in ironic communication. For example, if I mean$_{NN}$ a potentially offensive joke to be ironic, I intend it to be humorous at least in part because I expect my audience to recognize my intention to be ironic. However, it is not obvious that the intended effect in this case (humor) is a response within the audience's control.[23] Furthermore, in ironic jokes of the self-protective variety, it is unclear what effect was even intended given the context and relationship between speaker and audience. I return to this point shortly. At this point, it will be useful to break down the 'Joe' case and integrate Grice's terminology with my own. Recall that

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[23] There might be some relevance of the ideal critic here. One could argue that the well-equipped audience should have some control over the effect. The control might be a result of knowing what should and should not have my attention when I hear a joke.

earlier, I decided to refer to the straightforward message as 'P' and the ironic

message as '~P.'

> Joe and the Case of the Mexican Fellowship
>
> x: the utterance, "It must be a special fellowship for Mexicans"
>
> P: the apparent message, 'You are only eligible for "special" fellowships.'
>
> ~P: the ironic message: 'It is absurd (and therefore humorous) to suggest that you are only eligible for "special" fellowships.'

In context, Joe's utterance has non-natural meaning, because in order to

communicate ~P, he relies on the audience's recognition that he disbelieves P. On

Grice's view, 'Joe meant$_{NN}$ ~P by x' is roughly equivalent to 'Joe intended the

utterance of x to produce some effect (humor) in the audience by means of their

recognition of this intention.'[24] In other words, 'Joe meant$_{NN}$ ~P' implies that 'x

meant$_{NN}$ ~P.'

Effective communication requires appropriate uptake based on recognition of an

intended message. Consider the following possible effects given recognition of

meaning$_{NN}$ in the Joe case:

1. I recognize that Joe meant$_{NN}$ to be ironic and for that reason, I find

    it funny.

Ironic communication poses no problem for Grice's theory of meaning. When an

utterance is ironic, the meaning$_{NN}$ is simply the negation of the utterance (x).

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[24] Grice, 221. "'x meant something' is (roughly) equivalent to "Some-body meant$_{NN}$ something by x."

Within the framework conversational implicature, one sees how the intended meaning can differ from the overt meaning (or message). In "Logic and Conversation" Grice argues that defiance of conversational maxims "begets the inference that what is meant is other than what is said."[25] Blatant disregard for the maxims of conversation indicates that the listener should recognize the speaker's alternative meaning or subtext. Thus, the norms of conversational logic are what make ironic communication possible. When a person obviously disregards the rules, it prompts the listener to reinterpret the intended meaning just to preserve consistency and make sense of the conversation.

2. I recognize (and believe) that Joe meant$_{NN}$ to be ironic, but in spite this, I cannot help but be offended and find no humor.

Note that the intended effect here seems to be something beyond my control. This might suggest that my offense is not relevant to Joe's meaning$_{NN}$. I understood his intention, but did not react as he intended. Perhaps the mere belief that he meant$_{NN}$ to be ironic is sufficient for appropriate uptake, regardless of its failure to produce humor. If so, the primary effect is a belief about Joe's intention and only its secondary effect (humor) has failed. The next step on this view, is to accuse the offended listener of lacking a sense of humor, since a well-equipped audience (like the ideal critic) has some control over their response and therefore takes no offense. Such control might be a result of knowing what should and should not

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[25] Grice, 46.

have attention when hearing a joke. If taking offense is inappropriate to humor as an aesthetic category, then perhaps the offended party is "opting out."[26]

However, I think describing humor as secondary effect mistakes simple recognition for the primary effect.[27]

3. <u>I recognize that Joe *meant*$_{NN}$ to be ironic, but I believe that x actually *means*$_N$ some version of the ironized message, or P*.</u>

Here I believe Joe's words reveal an attitude or belief despite his intentions. By saying x, he *means*$_N$ P*, or for example, "Your race gives you an unfair advantage for fellowships." I use 'P*' to show that I cannot be sure if he believes P, although ~P certainly is ruled out. Thus, P* is some indeterminate version of the message P. In context, the intended meaning$_{NN}$ of x inadvertently signifies ambiguity with regard to P. The utterance indicates P*, much like spots indicate measles in Grice's example. One *discerns* P* independently of the utterer's intention to communicate it.

However, the ambiguity of Joe's utterance seems to present a problem for Grice's definition of natural meaning, which he describes as having a necessary implication. Furthermore, Joe's communication of P* does not fit Grice's view of non-natural meaning, since recognition plays an unintended role in producing its effect. The utterer's intention to communicate P is important to knowing that x

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[26] Grice, 46.

[27] Searle argues that getting the audience to understand the utterer's intention is the intended effect, but I think this understanding is already part of recognition.

means$_N$ P*. This is to say that in self-protective irony, 'A means$_{NN}$ P by x' indicates that 'x means$_N$ P*'. Therefore it is unclear that we can ascribe natural meaning to P* since recognizing the speaker's intentions is prerequisite to identifying the disguised message.

I believe that it is consistent with Grice's view, where A is a human agent, 'A means$_N$ P by x' entails P, whereas 'A means$_{NN}$ P by x' does *not* entail P.[28] For example, one could not say 'Mr. A means$_N$ that he is pleased when he smiles, but he is not pleased.' One could say 'Mr. A means$_{NN}$ that he is pleased when he smiles, but he is not pleased.' In the first case, Mr. A's smile indicates his pleasure, whereas in the second case his smile indicates his intention that his audience recognize his pleasure. While his intention to indicate pleasure gives good reason for the audience to think that he is pleased, it is not necessarily the case that he is in fact pleased. If in fact, his smile *means$_N$* that he is pleased, then he must actually be pleased.

In the Joe case, Joe's utterance betrays an attitude, like blushing reveals embarrassment despite the blusher's wish to conceal it. Because blushing means something without reference to intention, it has natural meaning. Just as in the case above, if Mr. A's smile betrays that he is pleased, then his smile has natural meaning. I think that we can conclude that it is consistent with Grice's view that Joe can mean$_{NN}$ P by x, and at the same time mean$_N$ P* by x.

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[28] 'A' is a human agent.

To review: I begin this chapter by introducing my claim that unlike standard irony, self-protective irony hinders communication. I put forward Wenstrom's argument that modern poets employ self-protective irony and apply his analysis to ironic racist joking. The cases I provide exemplify each of the four features Wenstrom identifies as characteristic of self-protective irony. Defining self-protective irony necessitates a distinction between types of meaning, and like Wenstrom, I use Grice's work in the philosophy of language toward that end. I apply his definition of utterer's meaning (meaning$_{NN}$) to the "Joe" case, identifying three possible interpretations of uptake based on that definition. Grice's account of meaning$_{NN}$ easily handles standard irony. However, the self-protective variety underscores a problem within his categories of meaning as he gives them. Grice alludes to a related problem in cases where intended uptake is not within the audience's control, but he sets it aside. However, my analysis of self-protective irony handles the issue by clarifying the relationship between meaning$_N$ and meaning$_{NN}$ in relationship to listener uptake. I show that self-protective irony is properly understood in terms of natural meaning (meaning$_N$) as demonstrated in the "Joe" case. Thus, I argue that self-protective irony has *meaning$_N$* despite its intended meaning$_{NN}$.

Grice's distinction shows that the meaning of language is not always determined by the speaker's intention. In addition, his theory of conversational implicature accounts for the way we communicate standard irony in conversation.

However, Grice proposes his theory of implicature mainly as an alternative to formal logic in an analysis of language. He introduces the notion of 'implicature' to draw attention to patterns of inference in natural language that resists symbolic denotation. Thus, implicature benefits my discussion of self-protective irony, but only to the degree that it attempts to clarify conversation in general.

Conversational implicature provides some grounds for criticism of self-protective irony in conversation, since it fails to cooperate with the norms that make even basic communication possible. I think this is an important point, but I want to take the criticism further. Just as Grice thought that formal systems were inadequate for analyzing natural language, I think that conversational implicature falls short of describing the way we communicate meaning in conversation. As a result, implicature also fails to capture what I see as the real problem with self-protective irony in conversation. The maxims of conversation that Grice sets out merely obligate participants to adhere to the lowest standards of quality in conversation. Grice mainly wants to show that observance of the Cooperative Principle is *rational*, in so far as:

> Anyone who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication (such as giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others) must be expected to have an interest...in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the Cooperative Principle and the maxims.[29]

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[29] Grice, 30.

For Grice, the basic goals of conversation are argumentation and the exchange of information. However, human conversation serves other purposes that must be considered here. Conversation develops friendship, allows for emotional connection, and enables us to understand one another. Understanding persons requires transmission of more than information. If I want another person to understand me, I want my motivations to be recognized, my fears validated, my perspective seen. Conversation at its best brings others to feel as we do. If I tell my story well (in other words, if I communicate well) my experience can be felt by another person. Thus, conversation has the capacity for invoking empathy. The criticism that self-protective irony flouts rational communication (although true) does not go far enough. Self-protective ironic joking in conversation destroys the possibility of mutual understanding by constructing deceptive self-representation. Thus, self-protective ironic joking is a story that not only precludes rational communication, but also undermines the possibility of friendship building that conversation provides. Furthermore, by shying away from the opportunity to cultivate friendship, self-protective irony may demonstrate the speaker's desire to alienate the listener.

Even casual conversation can develop friendships. I recently went to dinner with some philosophers at an aesthetics conference. Two of us were graduate students and the third was just beginning his career as a professor; we had all just recently met. One of them mentioned that he had brought a suit with him but that

it was too wrinkled to wear. He described himself unpacking it, trying it on, and realizing that it looked like he'd dug it out of a garbage can. I knew exactly how he felt, and so I revealed the duct tape hem keeping my suit pants from dragging the floor. This prompted an exchange of more stories about professional settings and embarrassing wardrobe malfunctions. By telling stories about embarrassing professional mishaps, we were able to relate to one another as something other than professionals. We recognized the frustration expressed in the first story and demonstrated our sense of fellow-feeling by telling our own stories. If one of us had responded with a story that had a different feeling, we would know that we had not been understood.

Suppose, for example, I added a story about my recurring dreams about flying. The others would wonder if I had been following the conversation at all. It would be reasonable for them to consider my response insensitive or even arrogant. Telling an inappropriate story conveys disengagement with the topic of conversation and suggests the speaker's lack of interest in the topic or concern for those present. Similarly, a story colored by self-protective irony indicates a lack of concern, although such a story's ambiguity and pretense tends to amplify its negative impact.

Suppose a person simply cannot identify with these stories because of his or her impeccable taste and careful planning. Consider the impact on the conversation should the person contribute by ironically insisting that clothes are

the most important part of a philosophical presentation, that appearance indicates one's intelligence, and that people probably should not show up at all rather than arrive rumpled. If the irony is not genuine, then the speakers do not share something of themselves, as have the others. We tell stories in conversation to show who we are and what we care about, but self-protective irony serves the opposite purpose. The extent to which people conceal their feelings in conversation necessarily determines the camaraderie conversation affords.

Conversation is often an exchange of stories. Notice that *jokes* are, in Ted Cohen's words, "a kind of story meant to make us laugh."[30] Like conversation, jokes can be a powerful tool for establishing intimacy. Cohen describes that intimacy:

> When you offer your joke you solicit their knowledge, you elicit it, in fact, virtually against their will, and they find themselves contributing the background that will make the joke work. Thus they join you. And then they join you again, if the joke works, in their response, and the two of you find yourselves a community, a community of amusement.[31]

I think his description is exactly right; successful jokes create a shared feeling among the participants. Taking a certain perspective (in other words, contributing the appropriate background) allows us to share feelings of amusement. Understanding one another's laughter through jokes is akin to understanding other emotions through storytelling. As Cohen says, pain and humor come from our

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[30] Cohen. *Jokes* 1.
[31] *Jokes* 40.

shared humanity. However, we should also note that stories told in conversation allow us to share a *particular person's* pain and humor, not just human feelings in general. Sometimes sharing a person's perspective brings us to feel as they do about a situation. Even if we do not actually feel the same way they do, we can understand what they feel and why. Thus, insofar as conversation is an exchange of stories (and I include jokes as a kind of story), it is a resource for empathy and other forms of mutual understanding. When a person *opts out* of conversational narrative, they do more harm than can be explained by Grice's conversational logic.

Given the singular mode for understanding that conversation provides, a thorough analysis of self-protective irony must improve upon a critique in terms of conversational logic alone. Sarah Worth provides the basis for such an improvement. I think Worth's discussion of narrative reasoning strengthens some of the objections I have raised against self-protective irony in conversational story-telling. In what follows, I outline Worth's "Descriptive Narrativity Thesis." Next, returning to the "Joe" case as an example, I show how self-protective irony conflicts with narrative reasoning. Finally, I argue that self-protective irony gets in the way of friendship by disabling empathy.

Narrative Reasoning

Narrative reasoning is distinct because it allows us to access knowledge that deductive analysis cannot. According to Sarah Worth's Descriptive Narrativity

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Thesis, narrative is "one of the primary ways we impose coherence on, and give meaning to, our experiences."[32] Worth argues that recruiting the imagination through narrative enables us to find meaning that would otherwise be inaccessible. In order to make sense of a story, we must follow the reasoning of its teller. However, these inferences are fundamentally different from methods that employ discursive, logical arguments. According to Worth, narrative reasoning is closer to abductive reasoning, in that it suggests the best explanation based on information beyond what is given. In narrative reasoning, for example, one might employ a theory about the characters' experiences and beliefs in order to explain their actions.

I take narrative reasoning to be the process of investigation which we use to arrive at the best understanding of stories told in literature as well as conversation. Commentary on Henry James's *The Turn of the Screw* provides a good example of the way we use narrative reasoning to interpret literature. Given the novel's ambiguous language, readers draw on a variety of theories to make sense of it. Interpreting this story requires some kind of theory about the character's motives and actions. People generally choose the one they believe provides the best understanding. Consider the following passages, taken from critical essays about *The Turn of the Screw*:

> Isn't it true that one trouble with first-person narrative, the story told by somebody in the story is that the authority of that person is

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[32] Worth 13.

usually not quite established? We say usually of such a person: she is participating in it, you can't expect her to give an unbiased version of it; she's not sufficiently detached; she's not disinterested…The very fact that the governess is biased becomes a dramatic factor. That bias becomes a part of the story.[33]

In this passage, Allen Tate interprets the governess's actions based on a theory about first-person narrative. Although Henry James never explicitly states that the governess is biased, Tate sees the bias as necessary to understanding the text.

When I first read this story, I accepted the governess's visions as real, that is, the ghosts were real in themselves, and not only the governess, perhaps, but others might have seen them; they had a life of their own. But as I went on reading the story and studying it through the years, and I read Henry James's notes on it, I decided that the ghosts were a projection of the governess's imagination and were part of her plot.[34]

Here, Katherine Anne Porter explicitly draws on information beyond the novel (James's notes) in order to construct the best explanation of the governess's character and action.

We make these kinds of inferences when we engage with all kinds of narrative, whether that means reading literature or listening to the stories told in conversation. Roger C. Schank describes conversation as responsive storytelling and argues that intelligence is bound to our ability to tell the right story at the

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[33] Tate, Allen. From a radio symposium, ed. Deborah Esch and Jonathan Warren. *The Turn of the Screw*, A Norton Critical Edition. 176.
[34] Porter, Katherine Anne. Ibid., 173

time.[35] The following stories were exchanged during a conversation Schank describes:

Initial story:

> You know a big part of the problem? When we were dating we spent most of our time talking about sex. *Why* couldn't I do it? Where could we do it? Were her parents going to be out *so* we could do it. Talking about being alone for a weekend. A whole night. You know. Everything was talking about gettin' sex or planning our wedding. Then when you're married…It's crazy. You can have it whenever you want. You wake up. She's there. You come home from work. She's there. So all the sex-planning talk is over. And the wedding planning talk. We can sit up here and bullshit the night away, but I can't have a five minute conversation with Beth. But I'm not putting the blame on her. We've just got nothing to talk about.[36]

Response:

> Well, that reminds me of the qualifying exam in Artificial Intelligence actually. It reminds me of the phenomenon where you're spending time thinking about one particular thing going on in your life, and then when that thing is over you are supposed to be happy because you have passed through this barrier. Before you get married, your main goals are having a place to have sex and having sex, and then when you're married, that's taken care of, and then, all of a sudden, all sorts of other problems start to creep in. That reminds me of the qual. You're focused on how your whole life is going to be okay if you just pass the qual; but when you pass the qual, then other aspects of graduate school start sweeping back in. All of a sudden, you're upset that your room is a mess and your social life starts to seep back in, and you have to find a way to do research.[37]

The initial storyteller relays an experience and in the friend tells a story in response. The responding storyteller recognizes a theme in the initial story and

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[35] Schank, Roger. *Tell me a Story*, 64.
[36] Schank 64.
[37] Ibid 72.

demonstrates a similar theme through a story that is quite different in its particulars. The initial storyteller will feel understood to the extent that the responding story exemplifies the theme he intended to convey. Neither storyteller states a necessary conclusion for the listener. To understand either story, one must draw upon one's own experience or perhaps one's beliefs about the storyteller. Thus understanding the story requires reasoning based upon inference rather than implication.

If narrative reasoning characterizes our engagement with others through conversation, then Grice's conversational logic will not capture the problem of self-protective irony in conversation. Self-protective irony, as I have said, does more disrupt a logical exchange of information. It interferes with our ability to understand one another. As such, Joe's comments were not necessarily problematic in content; but in form. The form of his utterance hid his beliefs and shielded them from criticism. Thus, he destabilized the process of narrative reasoning. By interfering with narrative reasoning in conversation, self-protective irony inhibits mutual understanding and empathy. Although my examples have focused on self-protective irony obscuring a particular content (racist beliefs) my goal in this chapter is to show that the form itself is problematic. Worth's analysis of form in narrative reasoning is helpful toward that end.

In order to establish the value of narrative quality, Worth argues that the reasoning structures with which we engage have an effect on our reasoning

abilities. She focuses on narrative structure: "With the shift of focus that I want to provide, morally bad content will not be the corrupting influence cognitively (although it might be with another focus) as much as poorly told and poorly delivered stories."[38] While a logical argument requires precise reconstruction to assure the same conclusion, storytelling mainly requires that the teller express the relevant feeling or impression. A poorly told story inhibits imaginative reconstruction of motive and cause. Thus, narrative quality is essential to narrative reasoning. If narrative provides an understanding of the world and other people that is otherwise inaccessible, and the form or style of narrative determines its effectiveness, then the form our stories take has epistemological consequences that we must consider. Worth argues that conversational narratives affect how we understand ourselves, and, as a result, who we *are*. If she is right, and I believe she is, then self-protective irony interferes with self-knowledge. I will take this point up shortly. However, my primary concern is to show that conversation provides a chance for empathy and that the use of self-protective irony greatly diminishes that chance. As an additional result, its use discourages friendship and the personal growth cultivated only through friendship. In what follows, I clarify the relationship between these consequences.

Authentic Self-representation, Empathy, and Friendship

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[38] Worth, "Well Told Stories" 19.

Friendships require at least a sense of mutual understanding, at best an empathic connection. In other words, true friends (or virtuous friends) share a sense of fellow feeling. I share the joy felt by my best friends; their sorrow is mine as well. If I watch a close friend give a presentation, for example, and I see that she is uncomfortable and nervous, I will probably be uncomfortable and nervous as well. Even immature friendships require some degree of mutual understanding such that I recognize and value my friend's point of view. I must also share my own point of view to develop a friendship. If I falsify my point of view, I put myself at a distance. It is difficult to understand and appreciate an insincere person. I believe that self-protective irony is exactly that: inauthentic self-representation.

The relationship between authentic self-representation and mutual understanding is a complicated one because it is reciprocal. While I am arguing that sustainable friendships require honest self-representation, it is also the case that honest self-representation requires self-knowledge. Self-knowledge, however, is a shared achievement.[39] Suppose I can only know myself by comparing my self-image with the image others have of me. How will I make this comparison? Certainly, conversation will be essential, and if the quality of the conversation depends on the narrative structure (as Worth argues) then the form of stories I tell and hear about myself will influence my self-knowledge. Dishonest self-

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[39] See MacIntyre's discussion of knowing oneself as a social person in *After Virtue*, chapter 3 (23-36).

representation limits the dialectic necessary for one to grow as a person. As Alasdair MacIntyre points out, "insofar as I am overprotective of myself in resisting disclosure…I am liable to become a victim to my own fantasies."[40] Delusion is typically marked by inconsistency and an inconsistent story interferes with the listener's imaginative engagement. Furthermore, if I do not tell stories about myself that enable narrative reasoning, I also limit the extent to which *others* understand me.

In the "Joe" case, self-protective ironic joking exemplifies each of these aspects, poor narrative structure, inauthentic self-representation, and the consequential impediment to friendship. While Joe's joking leaves me unsure of his feelings, to others he appears to be making an ironic joke. Thus, he represents himself as someone that mocks racists, someone that sees the absurdity of racism. Those that accept this representation will not challenge him on issues if his views appear to be consistent with their own. In other words, no-one in the computer lab that day will engage him on the matter of affirmative action or ethnic recognition if he seems to hold a position with which they agree (or if he has not asserted a position with which they disagree). With his beliefs hidden and unchallenged, Joe is free to believe they are reasonable. Thus, he is unlikely to change.

Joe's self-representation was an example how self-protective irony effectively shields him from any challenge that might prompt change or re-examination. On

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[40] MacIntyre. *Dependent Rational Animals*, 95.

the other hand, straightforward conversation with people he trusts could serve the purpose of self-knowledge just as well on some other occasion. Unfortunately, however, the joke cannot help but strain my relationship with Joe. Since I have identified his meaning$_N$ in spite of his meaning$_{NN}$, I recognize his intention to misrepresent himself. His misrepresentation suggests that he must not particularly care if I (or the other people present) understand his point of view. There is little room for objection on my part. If I object that I am Puerto Rican and not Mexican, it appears that I missed a well established. If I object simply because that he should not scorn me even if I were applying for a fellowship that considered race, then I stand to be accused of mistaking Joe's meaning$_{NN}$. Thus, he shrouds himself in self-protective irony and he opts out of a chance for friendship.

In this chapter, I argue that presumably ironic jokes (specifically racist ones) often exemplify *self-protective irony*. To show that self-protective irony is a genuine category distinct from standard irony, I outline the necessary and sufficient conditions as identified by Jon Wenstrom. Self-protective irony in conversation flouts the norms of conversation by Paul Grice's standards. My application of conversational logic confirms that self-protective irony deviates from ironic communication in its standard from. In addition, by building upon Grice's view of meaning, I explain that his categories can account for the natural meaning of an utterance despite the intended non-natural meaning. This aspect of

my project has the additional benefit of fleshing out an important aspect of Grice's work.

Although a Gricean analysis reveals the mechanics of self-protective irony, the moral consequences require further consideration. Conversation is more than a vehicle for information exchange. Accordingly, I turn to an analysis of narrative reasoning to extend my critique of self-protective irony. I argue that conversation is essentially an exchange of narratives and that narratives tender mutual understanding and empathy. My analysis of narrative includes jokes, of course, since they are a kind of story and central to my thesis.

Self-protective irony spoils the intimacy that joking creates and it snubs the friendship that conversation fosters. Because friendship grows initially from mutual understanding and grows deeper with empathy, conversation provides foundation for friendship building. Thus, I conclude that ironic racist jokes of the self-protective variety not only preclude empathy, they discourage even basic mutual understanding. As an additional result, self-protective irony limits the personal growth made possible only through friendship.

In my chapter 1, I argue that appreciating ironic racist jokes put the listener at odds with empathy. Laughing at ironic racist jokes involves (as telling them encourages) a distance from the subject. My initial concern was to show that ironic racist jokes are aesthetically flawed, thus contributing to an adequate defense of ethicism. Chapters 2 and 3 distinguish my view from current theories of empathy

and race. These chapters also show that reciprocal consideration of empathy and race benefits both areas. Here in chapter 4, I broaden the scope of my initial critique by identifying self-protective irony in ironic racist joking. Using particular films as a case study, chapter 5 merges my analysis of ironic joking, empathy, race, and self-protective irony. Film provides an excellent framework for determining what light my theory sheds in its application.

V
__Feeling with Film__

Ultimately, my goal is to augment and reinforce *ethicism*, the view that the ethical criticism is a legitimate aspect of aesthetic evaluation.[1] In this chapter, I demonstrate useful applications of my theory and show how my views contribute to a comprehensive justification of aesthetic ethicism. Ethicism is a claim about aesthetics in general. Thus, my discussion of aesthetic affect applies to a variety of genres and accommodates the aesthetic dimension of topics not typically considered artworks. Thus far, I have considered jokes, classical tragedy, horror, poetry, literature, conversation, and I have mentioned film. I have argued that evaluating these modes of story-telling requires an understanding of aesthetic affect such as empathy and other forms of identification. Interpreting them requires an understanding of meaning, and I have focused on ironic meaning in particular. Self-protective irony has consequences for aesthetic evaluation because its presence undermines narrative reasoning. Furthermore, narrative reasoning is crucial to interpretation and evaluation, both of which contribute to an appropriate aesthetic response.

Theorizing across genres tends to ruffle analytic feathers. In other words, many scholars are uncomfortable with claims that attempt to cover jokes *and* poetry, literature *and* film. These media use seem to use unrelated tools to affect

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[1] This is Gaut's definition as he introduces the term in "The Ethical Criticism of Art."

an audience and it is not obvious that they have enough in common to merit serious comparison. However, my interest is in a particular aspect—narrative structure—and even more specifically, the modes of aesthetic identification that story-telling creates.

Gregory Currie defends the possibility of a interpretive theory that applies to literature and film. In both media, interpretation requires an understanding of the artistic motivations. The interpreter's role, on his view, is to articulate a credible theory for a work's story-telling intentions. As narrative evolves, inference between teller and hearer will become increasingly complex, but will the rules of inference have identifiable boundaries. Near the end of his book, *Image and Mind*, Currie concludes: "The structure here will not be set by the laws of genre, of literary archetypes or by the structure of language, but by the rules for assessing the reasonableness of inferences about people's intentions." [2] I absolutely agree, though I do not limit my theory of interpretation to film and literature. I think that the interpreters task remains the same in cases of conversational narrative and joking: one must formulate plausible hypotheses about the teller's intentions. When it comes to aesthetic interpretation, a theory of narrative inference should apply to all narrative art forms. In addition to expanding the focus on kinds of narrative, my view takes Currie's view in another direction. I argue that

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[2] Currie, *Image and Mind*, 282.

interference with narrative reasoning affects more than interpretation; it interferes with aesthetic affect, and such interference constitutes an aesthetic defect.[3]

While generalizing from one genre to another is discouraged, it seems to me that generalizing across categories of race, gender, and class is common. However, as I pointed out in chapter 3, the way in which race affects empathy requires special discussion. An all-purpose theory of aesthetic identification, for example, misses characteristics of racial identification in art that are important for an adequate aesthetics. It is helpful here to see how applications of gender theory have enriched aesthetics, something I want to do with race theory.

In "Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers," Mary Devereaux suggests that our resistance to feminist art theory stems from deep-rooted assumptions about the universal value of aesthetic experience.[4] Devereaux makes the case that analytic aesthetics has much to gain from feminist theory and she turns to the notion of the male gaze for demonstration. Film lends itself to an investigation of the male gaze "because it is a medium so fundamentally built around the activity of looking."[5] The gaze describes a point of view taken up by audience members. Most work done on identification in film theory refers to the gaze; moreover, theorists use it to describe not only point of view but general emotional engagement with characters. The gaze, however, does not capture the level of engagement that empathy or sympathy describes, not as I understand these terms. Nonetheless, the

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[3] It may be that the defect is "aesethical" in Eaton's sense.
[4] Devereaux, Mary. "Oppressive Texts, Resisting Readers" *Feminism and Tradition in Aesthetics*, 125.
[5] Devereaux 126.

gaze is a good starting point for the discussion of race and aesthetic identification I want to advance.

Although we engage with film imaginatively, we apprehend its content mainly through pictorial representation.[6] In other words, film is necessarily visual. Race (in America at least) is also a matter of visibility. Even as a matter of culture or social construction, the notion of race has a component of visibility. Terms like 'passing' are some indication of this visible aspect. Since the gaze refers to the perception imposed on film by those with the most control, the gaze describes a white point of view as well as a male one.[7] Accordingly, I want to consider the extent to which feminist work with respect to the gaze translates to race, and in turn, how this applies to aesthetic affect, and ultimately to ethicism. I do not attempt any general theory of film and race. Instead, I focus on aesthetic affect with attention to racial representation using particular films for demonstration.

In what follows, I consider the modes of aesthetic affect I discussed in chapters 2 and 4 while keeping my eye on the impact of racial representation I discussed in chapter 3. In the first section, I discuss dramatic empathy and I turn to humor and irony in the second section.

Dramatic Empathy

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[6] Currie. *Image and Mind*, 281.

[7] This point of view is not bound to actual gender or race, but to the dominate way of seeing film.

While many films employ empathy with respect to race, there are two films that I think demonstrate definite challenges to current theories of empathy. *A Time to Kill* and *Menace II Society* invoke aesthetic imagination in ways that deserve consideration. *A Time to Kill* uses explicit manipulation to produce empathy across racial lines (I'll explain this shortly); and *Menace II Society* challenges us to take on the feelings of a violent criminal (I addressed identification with immoral points of view in chapter one). Each of these films uses an internal narrative. By 'internal narrative' I refer to a story within the story. In the examples I use, the internal story is told by fictional characters. However, while these films do frame the relevant stories internally, there is some degree of "assertion" in their "mention." In other words, I will argue that the films endorse the perspective framed by the internal narrative.[8] This is important to my argument in this section because I use these particular films not just as examples, but as narrative works that benefit from an analysis of intention and affect. This is the kind of analysis I apply to conversation and joking in earlier chapters. To extend the usefulness of my view, and thereby contribute to a defense of ethicism, I use these two films to show how the story-telling intentions of the implied author have ethical aspects with aesthetic impact.

A Time to Kill

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[8] Another way to make this point would be to say that the implied author supports the view expressed by the character, rather than being critical of it. If I only discuss the internal manipulation, I do not make an aesthetic claim about film.

A Time to Kill is a courtroom drama that takes place in Mississippi. It tells the story of Carl Lee Hailey, a black man on trial for killing two white men that brutally raped and attempted to murder his ten year old daughter. Carl's attorney, Jake Tyler Brigance, makes a desperate attempt to provoke empathy for his client and sympathy for Carl Hailey's daughter, Tonya. His closing statement to the jury (given here in its entirety) takes a narrative form that mirrors by the movie itself:

> I want to tell you a story. I'm going to ask you all to close your eyes while I tell you the story. I want you to listen to me. I want you to listen to yourselves. Go ahead. Close your eyes, please. This is a story about a little girl walking home from the grocery store one sunny afternoon. I want you to picture this little girl. Suddenly a truck races up. Two men jump out and grab her. They drag her into a nearby field and they tie her up and they rip her clothes from her body. Now they climb on. First one, then the other, raping her, shattering everything innocent and pure with a vicious thrust in a fog of drunken breath and sweat. And when they're done, after they've killed her tiny womb, murdered any chance for her to have children, to have life beyond her own, they decide to use her for target practice. They start throwing full beer cans at her. They throw them so hard that it tears the flesh all the way to her bones. Then they urinate on her. Now comes the hanging. They have a rope. They tie a noose. Imagine the noose going tight around her neck and with a sudden blinding jerk she's pulled into the air and her feet and legs go kicking. They don't find the ground. The hanging branch isn't strong enough. It snaps and she falls back to the earth. So they pick her up, throw her in the back of the truck and drive out to Foggy Creek Bridge. Pitch her over the edge. And she drops some thirty feet down to the creek bottom below. Can you see her? Her raped, beaten, broken body soaked in their urine, soaked in their semen, soaked in her blood, left to die. Can you see her? I want you to picture that little girl. Now imagine she's white.[9]

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[9] IMDB. http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0117913/quotes

Here the challenge involves explicit manipulation. In chapter two, I discussed a problem philosophers have raised concerning empathy and that problem is relevant here. Peter Goldie, for example, argues that empathy is not the best way to engage with the thoughts and feelings of others. On his view, appreciating people who are different requires adopting an external perspective whereas empathy requires perspective switching.[10] I think we should keep the term 'empathy' in the current discussion because it captures a particular kind of experience that allows many people to engage with one another. However, I do think it is important to make a distinction between perspective shifting and empathy. While imaginative perspective shifting can lead to empathy, there are other ways of simulating the emotions of others. Thus, we can keep the term empathy and avoid the problem Goldie identifies. *A Time to Kill* provides a good example of how simulation can lead to empathy without requiring that we put ourselves in the shoes of another.

When Jake gives his closing statements, he acknowledges that perspective shifting is not the best way for the jury to feel for his client. However, empathy is necessary to any hope of Carl's acquittal. By manipulating the jury's imagination, he attempts to simulate Carl's thoughts and feelings, *without* putting them in his shoes. Jake manipulates the jury to feel what Carl Hailey feels for his daughter. Feeling for Tonya as one feels for a daughter requires taking a father's

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[10] Goldie, Peter. "Dramatic Irony and the External Perspective" Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, 60(Supp), 69-84, 16 p. 2007.

perspective. In order to feel what Carl feels, one must take a point of view unmediated by racial difference. Simulating the beliefs and thoughts of others will be more or less difficult relative to the individual. In this case, race is the main difficulty. Since the jury is entirely composed of white people, feeling for Tonya (as a father feels for his daughter) apparently necessitates first seeing her as white.

Clearly, Jake attempts to elicit empathy with his story. He hopes to encourage lenience for the crime by bringing the jurors to feel as Carl does. It is bizarre that he asks his audience to imagine the girl as white in order to accomplish this goal. It suggests that he lacks confidence in their ability to shift perspectives by abandoning their own whiteness. Jake considers himself above racial prejudice and he spits out the last words of his summation ("imagine she's white"), as if disgusted by them. It is unclear whether he is disgusted by his own belief that these words are necessary or by the jury's need to hear them. Earlier in the film, Carl challenges Jake to *use* his perspective as a white man to mediate racial difference for the jury:

> Carl Lee Hailey: Jake, I can't do no life in prison. You got to get me off. Now if it was you on trial...

> Jake Tyler Brigance: It's not me, we're not the same, Carl Lee. The jury has to identify with the defendant. They see you, they see a yardworker; they see me, they see an attorney. I live in town, you live in the hill.

> Carl Lee Hailey: Well, you are white and I'm black. See Jake, you think just like them, that's why I picked you; you are one of them, don't you see? Oh, you think you

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ain't because you eat in Claude's and you are out there trying to get me off on TV talking about black and white, but the fact is you are just like all the rest of them. When you look at me, you don't see a man, you see a black man.

Jake Tyler Brigance: Carl Lee, I'm your friend.

Carl Lee Hailey: We ain't no friends, Jake. We are on different sides of the line, I ain't never seen you in my part of town. I bet you don't even know where I live. Our daughters, Jake; they ain't never gonna play together.

Jake Tyler Brigance: What are you talking about?

Carl Lee Hailey: America is a wall and you are on the other side. How's a black man ever going to get a fair trial with the enemy on the bench and in the jury box? My life in white hands? You Jake, that's how. You are my secret weapon because you are one of the bad guys. You don't mean to be but you are. It's how you was raised. Nigger, Negro, black, African-American, no matter how you see me, you see me different, you see me like that jury sees me, you are them. Now throw out your points of law Jake. If you was on that jury, what would it take to convince you to set me free? That's how you save my ass.[11]

It seems to me that when Jake demands that the jury admit racial prejudice, the film's implied author dares the audience to admit racial prejudice just as Jake dares the jury. There is good reason to think the author wants its audience to learn the same lesson Jake learns. I will argue that *A Time to Kill* has two aspects that

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[11] Goldie *70.*

attest to the implied author's commitment: 'narrative framing' and the 'gaze'.[12] 'Framing' refers to the way perspectives can be bracketed and thus set apart from work as a whole and, in the present discussion, the 'gaze' describes a point of view imposed upon the audience by the film.

1. Framing:

    Although Jake's summation is internally framed, the message of his story reflects the point of view taken by the master narrative. The message and point of view I mean might be something like "Empathy across racial difference requires manipulation when perspective switching is impossible" or "white people must imagine persons of other races as white in order to feel for them."

2. Gaze:

    Just as the lawyer explicitly asks the jury for its imaginative engagement, the film's implied author (*auteur*) asks its audience to imagine along with the jury. If so, we can say that the gaze is "raced" because it assumes that like the jury, the film audience is white.

Framing

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[12] Of course, these are not distinct features. Framing contributes to the gaze. However, I identify the relevant framing as standard or non-standard within the trial movie genre, which adds the element of external context.

Faithful interpretation requires attention to a work's internal structure. 'Framing' allows an artist to present a point of view without endorsing it.[13] By bracketing content, the artist differentiates his or her own perspective from a perspective located within a work. Thus, we must consider the way a work situates its content to determine authorial commitment.

Consider the framing created by the closing statements Jake makes in *A Time to Kill*. If Jake's summation merely *represented* a point of view rather than expressing it, the film would have room for questioning or critiquing that viewpoint. In other words, the implied author could use Jake to convey one message to the jury while expressing a distinct and even contradictory message to the audience. Manipulating the context of Jake's story through dialog, character development, plot etc., allows the implied author to show its flaws. Lynne Tirrell gives a clear cut example of internal framing which may be useful for contrast. She describes Hal Prince's production of *Showboat*, in which he edits out subordinating discourse but not images and thus fails to bracket its content. Tirrell points out that a non-oppressive presentation of *Showboat* might be possible, "if the play were staged as a play-within-a-play, with the internal play represented as a relic of our racist past, then a condemnation of that past might help mitigate the

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[13] I use 'context' in a slightly different way than Lynne Tirrell, although I have her discussion of reclamation in mind here (see "Aesthetic Derogation" in *Aesthetics and Ethics*). Tirrell uses 'context' to describe the way content is framed internally. Later, I use 'context' in my discussion of gaze, referring to the tradition or genre from which the film emerges. It is also important that framing here is used to describe story told within the master narrative. However, 'framing' can also refer to visual properties of composition and staging.

racist content."[14] Such a production would bracket the racist content within the internal narrative (play-within-the-play) and make that content the object of criticism.

In the case of a Time to Kill, the self-conscious racist content of Jake's summation is not the object of criticism, but of testimony and accusation. In what follows, I argue that in *A Time to Kill,* the author confesses self-conscious racism while insisting that the audience do the same.

There is a familiar pattern here: liberal white man saves black man from white racists.[15] Films representing racism for a white audience often use white protagonists to mediate the experience, thereby suggesting (or recognizing) the white audience's inability (or refusal) to identify across racial difference. Likewise, in *A Time to Kill*, Jake's point of view drives the narrative. Jake's character is played by Matthew McConaughey, an all-American, blonde, sweetheart type with a stunning smile and gentle southern drawl.[16] Although Jake is not just a romantic hero, *A Time to Kill* creates romantic moments between Jake and his beautiful wife (Ashley Judd) as well as between Jake and his femme fatale legal assistant (Sandra Bullock). Thus, McConaughey's sex symbol star power establishes his character Jake as a noble husband with sex appeal.

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[14] Tirrell, Lynne. "Aesthetic Derogation" in *Aesthetics and Ethics* Ed. Jerrold Levinson. Cambridge University Press, 1998; 305.

[15] For example, consider *To Kill a Mockingbird*. There are variations on this theme, including 'white man goes undercover as (or is mistaken for Black) and reveals the horrors of racism.'

[16] McConaughey plays a role similar to Jake in *Amistad*. He is a property lawyer working on the defense team for the escaped mutineers of the slave ship, Amistad.

Samuel Jackson, on the other hand, brings a sense of danger to the character of Carl. He has chiseled features and dark skin, whereas an actor like Morgan Freeman is light skinned and soft. His serious image creates a more threatening presence than McConaughey's boy next door (imagine the different impact these characters would have if they were played by Terrence Howard and Billy Bob Thornton).

A Time to Kill's narrative does not fill out Carl's private life beyond his role as provider and protector to his family. Tonea Stewart plays Carl's wife, and although she is lovely and strong, she does not add sex appeal to her character nor to the relationship with Carl. The audience then, is motivated to see the world through Jake's eyes.

We experience the majority of the events as Jake does, with only occasional interludes presented from an objective or "God's eye" point of view. Furthermore, statements in the dialog above suggest the message Jake articulates and these statements are not contained within his summation. Jake tells Carl the jury needs to identify with him but they can't; Carl tells Jake to use whatever would convince *him*, since Jake is one of *them*. Jake's summation imaginatively takes racial difference out of the story, thereby allowing the jury to identify with Carl. Analogously, the implied author uses a non-black protagonist to manipulate the audience's empathic response. Jake suggests affecting the jury requires that they

see the little girl as white and the implied author suggests that affecting the audience requires that they see through the eyes of a white protagonist.

Gaze

A Time to Kill takes its place in a film-historical context of courtroom dramas. Carol J. Clover argues that the trial movie positions its audience as active participants with work to do. She points out that the very first trial movie (*Falsely Accused!)* unequivocally establishes the correlation between audience and jury.[17] Other trial movies go even further, instructing the film audience to take on the role of jury members (*By Whose Hand?, The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald, Free White and 21*).[18] One way that *A Time to Kill* fits the trial movie pattern Clover describes is by avoiding the jury as both a narrative and visual subject. We know little about the jurors beyond their whiteness. The shot establishing the jury immediately follows a God's eye view of the KKK marching outside the courthouse. The scene cuts from white hoods to a close up of an older white man sitting toward the far end of the jury box.[19] The camera tracks backward to include a few more jury members, then finally then pans across and tightly frames them together.[20] This

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[17] "*Falsely Accused!* Is not just a movie about a trial. It is a trial movie that spells out the natural fit between trials and movies. By having a motion picture give testimony (note the placement of the film screen at the witness stand), *Falsely Accused!* turns the courtroom into a movie theater and the jury into a film audience." Carol Clover, "Judging Audiences: the case of the trial movie" in *Reinventing Film Studies*, ed. Gledhill & Williams. 246.

[18] Clover, 257.

[19] This is the man that makes racist statements and seems to cause the most trouble in the little that we see of jury deliberation.

[20] Tracking out combined with zooming is a common combination. See Paul Joannides, "The Aesthetics of the Zoom Lens."

lasts only a few seconds and is followed by a reaction shot focused on Jake as he surveys the jury.

According to Clover, trial movies consistently shun the jury because "we understand the jury to constitute a kind of necessary blank space in the text, one reserved for occupancy by us."[21] Too much information about the jurors distracts the audience from determining a fair verdict on its own. If Jake's summation is for a white jury, and the film suggests that *the audience* is also the jury, then we can safely say that *A Time to Kill* implies a racially determined gaze. In other words, it insists on being seen through a white person's eyes.

One way the film sets its audience up to identify with Jake is by contrast with a wide variety of white characters. There is little variation among the Black characters, in part because they are given little time for development. Jake is not like the ignorant, drunken, dirty racists nor is he part of the callous, uptight, self-involved polite society.[22] He does not identify himself as a liberal, yet he is not part of the conservative power structure. Thus, the suggested point of view is in the safe middle ground. The Black characters are not represented in extremes, and without contrast we get little direction for possible points of view with which to identify.[23]

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[21] *Ibid.*, 253.

[22] Note that this contrast has the same purpose as self-protective irony in jokes, both work to distance the audience from the racist. One is not racist in comparison to the ignorant racist one is mocking.

[23] Nick Browne makes the case that empathy can develop without literally representing a singular point of view. See "The Spectator in the Text" 108.

There is some comparison made between Carl and Jake however, and the visual comparison is at odds with the Carl's insistence that Jake and he are not the same. Settings provide cues for comparison in the scenes introducing Carl and Jake. Carl is shown at work when he finds out that his daughter is in trouble. He works outside in a lumber yard, and every shot keeps him at a distance. The camera watches first from far above then zooms in low, looking up at Carl and when we finally see his face it is in shadow behind glass. The film cuts to McConeghey walking into work, but instead of watching from a distance, the camera moves along with him, following him. The cool comfort of his office is established by dusky rose toned walls, fresh flowers, and Jake's crisp white shirt. High key lighting blends Jake into his surroundings, suggesting his comfort within that setting.

The home setting provides some commonalities between the two men. There are tight shots of both men with wife and child. Long speechless close-ups of both men's eyes create a similar motif in the presentation of home life. The distinction most evident is that these scenes show Carl suffering while Jake smiles and jokes. A hard sidelight catches Carl's tears but obscures most of his expression. Jake's smile fades upon hearing about little Tonya. An extended close-up of his blue eyes leaves enough space in the frame to follow the direction of his gaze. This cuts to the next scene, a shot of Carl's back, his figure revealed by backlighting. The frame moves in closer to show Tonya in a hospital bed, then turns back to Carl.

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Once again, he is framed behind glass, watching behind a window, standing in shadow. [24]

Even within this initial sequence, *mise en scene* creates a narrative subtext beyond the main plot. We see two men, different races, different work, with similar character and family attachments. The closing scene returns to that narrative and suggests progress. The men meet at Carl's home with their families surrounding them, giving final emphasis to their commonalities. We are intended to remain in Jake's shoes through the end, and this is evident in Carl's cautious demeanor as the families meet. We see the distrust in the furrowed brow and careful greeting that Carl gives Jake and it is incongruent with all we know about him. *Mise en scene* encourages audience identification with Jakes because it reveals him whereas Carl's staging typically obscures him. [25]

Establishing a racial gaze in this case is important because it supports my assertion that the implied author advocates the message framed within Jake's summation. Since I am considering empathy as an aesthetic affect that crosses genre lines, it is useful to compare the filmic affect with the internal, fictional affect of Jake's narrative. In the film's closing scene, we see the two families come together in a sunny, bucolic setting. Both wives wear summer dresses, both men wear khakis and white shirts and both little girls wear sundresses tied with

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[24] An overview of lighting techniques to drive narrative can be found in Kris Malkiewicz, *Film Lighting: Talks with Hollywood's Cinematographers and Gaffers*.

[25] Shot reverse shot consistently reveals: "If shot 2 shows that something is 'on the other side' of shot 1, there is no place for the narrator to hide." David Bordwell "Narration in the Fiction Film" 111. Quoted in Carroll's *Mystifying Movies*, 185.

bows at the shoulder.[26] Carl softens at the very end, after Jake says he hoped the girls could play together. We see Carl's smile and he seems to admit that he was wrong—not all white men are not alike. It is a telling irony, that Carl learn this lesson, given the characterization of Black men so lacking in detail that there is little difference portrayed between them.[27]

I think this scene is given in an attempt to show the progress cultivated by human empathy. Once Jake admits his inability to identify with Carl as a black man, and makes the adjustments necessary to an empathic connection, the two men can initiate a real friendship. This rather quaint happy ending settles the tension between the main characters and manages to subdue any edge created by their relationship. As an audience, the implied author hopes we learn what Jake did.[28] While I appreciate the effort *A Time to Kill* makes for the sake of empathy across racial difference, I do not favor Jake's method of invoking empathy (which I also attribute to the implied author). In other words, I do not believe that disregarding race the best way (much less the only way) for a white person to empathize with Carl, whether that person is a fictional or in the film audience. However, the film provides a good example of the self-reflection empathy

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[26] Costume matching establishes intimacy as a visual bond. See Bordwell's *Film Art*, 176-178.

[27] It may be intended for Black audience members, suggesting that prejudice toward White people as a homogoneous group is unwarranted. However, I think a more likely interpretation is that it is meant to ease the resentment that White people feel when Black people keep them at a distance in spite of their liberal self-image.

[28] Although there is not room for it here, there is more work to be done in a thorough analysis of *A Time to Kill*. For example, in a later paper I would like to take up the film's variations on the trial movie pattern, and how these variations affect its meaning.

requires. It also recognizes the important fact that overcoming racism is not always pretty. We must confront aspects of ourselves we might rather not.

For my purposes, the key aspect of *A Time to Kill* is that it shows how aesthetic empathy can take differences between people into account. It is not always necessary to forsake one's own perspective, which some say we cannot do in the first place (Goldie *et al*). Simulation theory allows for whatever imaginative adjustments are necessary to produce feelings like the object of one's intended empathy.

Paradigm Scenarios and Dramatic Empathy

My concern with racial representation stems from my belief that aesthetic representations affect how people actually construct and interpret race in daily life. The general idea that art affects us emotionally is nothing new; nor is the concern that its effects are morally harmful. Plato, of course, worried that audience identification with fictional characters was madness[29] On the other hand; Aristotle thought art improved its audience by refining emotional aptitude, thus encouraging virtuous character. Now, just as a person could learn viciousness from a poor role model, it would be consistent on Aristotle's view to hold that an audience could develop inappropriate emotions from a poor tragedy. I make a related claim. I see racist characterizations as an aesthetic defect, a defect that affects its audience's

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[29] This is not unlike Lamarque's concern about seeing one's life as a narrative. If one sees one's self as a tragic hero, for example, one might make detrimental life choices based on a fatalistic world view.

capacity for empathy. Since proper empathy is a virtue that needs developing, this particular aesthetic defect has moral consequences.

Film deserves special attention with regards to racial representation. As a "mass art," it probably has the greatest affect on empathy of the art forms I discuss.[30] We can see the effect film has as an aspect of the way art trains our emotions. Ronald de Sousa makes the case evident. He argues that the arts condition our emotional responses by creating *paradigm scenarios*:

> My hypothesis is this: We are made familiar with the vocabulary of emotion by association with paradigm scenarios. These are drawn first from our daily life as small children and later reinforced by the stories, art, and culture to which we are exposed. Paradigm scenarios serve as models that demonstrate the appropriate reactions for a given situation.[31]

De Sousa identifies two aspects of paradigm scenarios: Situation-types provide characteristic objects and reaction-types provide characteristic emotions. First, consider an example I think will be uncontroversial. If films tend to portray women jumping on chairs and screaming at the sight a mouse, these films create situation types that characterize mice as an object feared by women. Thus, over time, viewers perceive fear as the normal feminine reaction to mice.[32]

Obviously, the paradigm scenarios created by *A Time to Kill* and *Menace* are more complicated. In *A Time to Kill,* the situation-type changes characteristic objects and the changes affect an alternative characteristic response. A white jury

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[30] Carroll makes this observation as well. See *Mystifying Movies*, 208.

[31] Ronald De Sousa. *The Rationality of Emotion*, 182.

[32] I once shocked myself by jumping on a chair and screaming when I saw a mouse. I immediately felt ridiculous and confused. It has never been my character to be squeamish over tiny harmless animals.

must empathize with a black criminal to reach a just verdict. Jake, Carl's attorney, enables that response-type by removing race from the situation. With the race-object out of the way, the jury can react as the situation demands. Their empathic responses are trained only for objects (persons) like themselves. Jake recognizes the necessary paradigm scenario and constructs it for the jury in his closing statements. Since the jury has not been conditioned to empathize across racial difference, Jake removes the element of race from the scenario. However, as I have argued, *A Time to Kill* reinforces that paradigm by relying upon the customary white protagonist as the characteristic object to invoke an appropriate audience response-type.[33]

Menace II Society, on the other hand, does not rely on the tattered paradigm scenarios we usually get. The story is told from the viewpoint of a young drug dealer that has just graduated high school. Caine means well but is overwhelmed by negative influences. Understanding Caine's point of view—knowing that he means well—is the intended audience response (as I will argue), but it is not supposed to be a simple response. *Menace* sets the stage for empathic resistance, but challenges that resistance without diluting his viciousness.

In *A Time to Kill*, when the jury puts themselves in the position of the defendant, they conclude that murder was justified. Empathy with the defendant here leads to lenience and suggest that empathy with characters that are truly bad

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[33] Noel Carroll also argues that film can influence spectators by establishing norms for emotional response in "The Image of Women in Film: A Defense of a Paradigm" The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 48, No. 4, Feminism and Traditional Aesthetics (Autumn, 1990), pp. 349-360_ 377.

would lead to unfair lenience. Gaut argues that sympathy for evil-doers is morally inappropriate regardless of practical effects. In fact, *Menace II Society* challenges us to empathize with a violent criminal—exactly the kind of character that some think should not receive leniency. Unlike "Tre" of *Boyz N the Hood*, Caine has not risen above his situation. *Menace* invokes empathy for Caine by showing him with his grandparents, his girlfriend, and his friends. Viciousness distances Caine from his friend O'dog for example, and Caine seems closer, more accessible, as a result. When Caine dies saving a child's life, he establishes himself as a hero; he is admirable in spite of his flaws.

Caine's crimes, however, are not motivated by a sense of justice or the greater good as Carl is in *A Time to Kill*. Thus there is some need to consider the risk of empathizing with such a character. In *Menace II Society* , I start to feel for the main character when I see his parents measuring drugs on the kitchen table, making sales, and sometimes violent interaction with addicts. This is the child's only view of life; it is all he knows. We meet his friends and they have similar or worse family situations. One is not surprised when the child grows up in that lifestyle and continues it as an adult. He has never known another way of life. He has never known anyone who got out of that life. Watching this movie one feels for the characters, such that one believes that under the circumstances most of us would be just like them. If I find myself at a loss for the character's ability to make choices, I might then condone his choice of violence. Given the opportunity,

perhaps I would even excuse such violence. This is the concern of those that see a danger in empathizing with a criminal.

Menace uses familiar machinery: voice over first person narration, binary characters for contrast, and so forth. Yet the familiar aesthetic tools work on such raw and graphic content, that some critics claim that the film "glorifies violence."[34] People fear evil when it is wrapped in pretty packaging; I think we fear that some see only surface. Menace however does not wrap its story in pretty packaging and rejects the comfort of content that is simply evil.

Menace opens with our "hero" Caine and his friend O'dog entering a liquor store. As they walk in, the camera facing them swiftly backtracks, as if retreating from a bully. The threat is enhanced by a slight upward angle. As the camera pans across the store, a female shopkeeper nervously steps into the frame frequently glancing over. Shots of her sideways glances are cut to shots of them looking back with contempt. The shot and reaction shots go back in forth with a rhythm that creates the sense that one is between them looking back and forth. Point of view has already begun to change; we start out facing the boys, we are bystanders. Gradually, the shot/reverse long shot pattern starts by putting us in the place of the shopkeeper; we see the boys as other when they are framed at a distance. But when the frame tightens around them and pans to a long shot of the other

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[34] The Hughes brothers discuss this criticism and respond in an interview on the DVD release.

shopkeeper, we begin to shift perspective.[35] The camera pans around them in a

circular swoop and when the frame settles, a shopkeeper is on either side of them,

and they are visually trapped. It seems inevitable when O'dog explodes and kills

them. Caine's sense of fatalism takes hold of the viewer as his voiceover begins:

"Went in the store just to get a beer. Came out an accessory to murder and armed

robbery. It's funny like that in the 'hood sometime'."

The framing of the opening scene starts to put the viewer in sync with Caine

emotionally. O'dog's impulsive brutality immediately distances him from Caine,

and makes Caine more identifiable. Compared to O'dog, Caine is the good guy.

The contrast manipulates our impression of them, just as *A Time to Kill* distances

Jake from the ignorant racists. Binaries create sympathy and both films use

extreme characters to better enable identification with the supposedly "moderate"

character.

Menace invokes a deeper emotional connection with Caine via his relationship

with Anthony, the son of his role model, Pernell. A progression of parallel scenes

works to establish Caine's relationship with Pernell. When the film flashes back to

Caine's childhood, we see Pernell looking out for him. At a party he comes out on

the porch and sits with Pernell; Pernell shows him how to hold a gun. The same

scenes take place with Anthony and Caine, and we understand that Caine's actions

are products of his own childhood.

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[35] There is a great deal of debate over the extent to which a point-of-view shot prompts audience identification, as Bordwell points out (*Film Art*, 268). See Edward Branigan, *Point of View in the Cinema: A theory of Narration and Subjectivity in Classical Film*.

Although the film focuses on Caine's subjective experience, it does not lose the tension of a detached critique. For example, the shot of Caine counting out money to leave for Pernell and his mother is crosscut with a dealer arguing with a crack addict about payment. The addict is twitchy and desperate, the dealer tells him to get cash or forget it. Clearly, the money Caine gives to Anthony's mother is earned dealing crack. The juxtaposition of kindness and exploitation makes the empathic response a complicated one. We understand Caine's desire to help Anthony and feel that we would do the same. Furthermore, the history explains his method. The matching scenes create a narrative parallel between Anthony and Caine, suggesting a cycle at work. The cycle seems to be repeating, thus adding to the film's fatalism. There is a sense in which Caine's behavior is a natural consequence of his life, but we are brought to understand and not condone.

The audience is left feeling just as Caine felt, that there was no other way for him. *Menace* presents a situation-type with uncharacteristic objects (though in so doing, creates a new characteristic object). The story advocates a response-type for a protagonist without the standard empathetic qualities. I suspect that the criticism surrounding the film resulted from this departure from established paradigms.

I do not think that aesthetic empathy like I have described presents any danger to society. On the contrary, empathizing in this way should only result in kindness. The act of empathy makes it more likely that a punishment will be appropriate. We know that understanding does not imply indulgence. With our own children,

we can understand why they chose a certain behavior and still punish that behavior. We might even think that we would have made the same bad choice as the child did. The act of punishment takes on a bitter taste in such situation, but one realizes the necessity for a reasonable penalty. It is part of a necessary learning process. I think this kind of example is important, because it is familiar to us that we feel for a child's misery at punishment, we sometimes at least understand the behavior. Yet we agree that we should craft just consequences for bad behavior, as it is in the child's best interest. If we are able to do this with our own children, empathizing with adults without tolerating undue lenience is surely within our capabilities. We understand many failures without eliminating the consequences.

Compassion and punishment need not be at odds. If they are, it may be possible to re-construct present norms by constructing new paradigm scenarios. We can expect that novel paradigm scenarios will tend to improve aesthetic value and that hackneyed ones, producing stale empathic responses, will be an aesthetic defect. However, I should point out that not all novel paradigms will improve aesthetic value. In the case of empathy, for example, the response-type must be earned by the narrative quality of the situation-type. Furthermore, if we have an obligation to re-construct empathic situation-types it is at once an aesthetic

obligation and an ethical one.[36] Constructing new paradigm scenarios demands artistic originality in representation and morally innovative content with respect to situation and reaction. The ethical and aesthetic cannot be considered in isolation from one another in paradigm scenarios, since representation affects the quality of moral training and innovation affects the quality of aesthetic originality. Paradigm scenarios that encourage narrative reasoning will also have aesthetic merit and I have tried to show how I think these manifest in films dealing with race. Paradigm scenarios demonstrate the connection between ethical and aesthetic value, because the quality of each determines the quality of the other.

The Comic and Ironic

In the recent film, *Crash*, there is a scene that I think demonstrates the deadening effect a racist joke can have on intimacy. A young black man and Hispanic woman are shown in bed together, while the man talks to his mother on the phone:

> Graham: Mom, I can't talk to you right now, OK? I'm having sex with a white woman.
>
> [hangs up, and Ria gets out of bed]
>
> Graham: OK, where were we?
>
> Ria: I was white, and you were about to jerk off in the shower.

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[36] I have in mind, of course, Marcia Eaton's "Aesthetic Obligations." Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 66.1 (01 Dec. 2008): 1-9.

Graham: Oh, shit. Come on. I would have said you were Mexican, but I don't think it would have pissed her off as much.

Ria: Why do you keep everybody a certain distance, huh? What, you start to feel something and panic?

Graham: Come on, Maria. You're just pissed 'cause I answered the phone.

Ria: That's just where I begin to get pissed. I mean, really, what kind of man speaks to his mother that way?

Graham: Oh, this is about my mother. What do you know about my mother?

Ria: If I was your father, I'd kick your fucking ass.

Graham: OK, I was raised badly. Why don't you take your clothes off, get back into bed, and teach me a lesson?

Ria: You want a lesson? I'll give you a lesson. How 'bout a geography lesson? My father's from Puerto Rico. My mother's from El Salvador. Neither one of those is Mexico.

Graham: Ah. Well then I guess the big mystery is, who gathered all those remarkably different cultures together and taught them all how to park their cars on their lawns?

Ria is offended in this scene several reasons; first Graham refers to her as a white woman, which of course she is not. Then he dismisses any differences between Latino ethnic groups, and finally he makes a joke that uses a negative stereotype about Latinos as if they were one (inferior?) group. Furthermore, Graham has distanced himself from Ria's pain over his refusal to acknowledge her ethnic identity instead of a mere instantiation of some variable non-black woman. Add to all this Ria's likely emotional response resulting from associations she

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might make with the joke's particular content. Clearly she is upset, yet the film audience laughs and Graham shows no emotion at all.

Given the current state of Latino categorization (identity as a visible class without appropriate recognition of cultural differences), Graham's joke is far from trivial. Linda Martin Alcoff says of this generic category: "The discourse in the United States (as well as elsewhere in the global North) about encroaching majority minorities tends toward aggregation, and the sometimes hysterical concern about the Spanish language, national loyalty, and non-Anglo cultural traditions makes the differences among Mexican, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans less important than the similarities."[37] I doubt that the audience laughing at Graham's joke was well-acquainted with the political ramifications of his joke much less its emotive impact for those people included as the characteristic objects of derision.

Racist jokes at the dinner table in *Guess Who?* (2005) take a different tone than the joking in *Crash. Guess Who?* attempts an ironic twist on the classic *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*: Instead of a white girl bringing home her Black fiancé, Theresa Jones brings Simon, her white fiancé, home to meet her African-American family. The scene I want to discuss takes place at dinner, in the home of Percy and Marylyn Jones, (Theresa's parents). Grandpa Jones and Keisha Jones (Theresa's sister) are also at the dinner table. Theresa's father, Percy, is unhappy

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[37] Alcoff, Linda Martin. *Visible identities : race, gender, and the self.* New York : Oxford University Press, 2006, 228.

about her white fiancé and has set him up for failure several times already. Percy is determined to dislike Simon. The dinner scene is just one example of him maneuvering Simon into revealing how unfit for Theresa he really is. However, while Percy's motives are to encourage Simon's self-destruction, the insight upon which he draws warrants our attention.

Simon comments on his distaste for racist jokes during conversation and of course, Percy asks for examples of the jokes he has in mind. Percy clearly knows that this path can lead only to trouble. By encouraging the racist jokes, Percy need only wait for Simon's slip down an inevitable slope, thus exposing the chasm between the Jones's and himself, indeed between all those who cannot empathize across racial difference. Theresa recognizes the set up, and she begs Simon to refuse. Simon eventually he gives in to the request, with the best intentions. Since he tells the jokes ironically, he believes no harm can be done:

> Simon: I can tell you this. Last Thanksgiving…my Uncle
>   Dave said a black joke at the table, right?
>   -So I said, right in front of the whole family, 'Look, that's
>   inappropriate. We're not gonna have it."
> -I think that's how you change people. You just gotta   attack it one
>   at a time.
> Theresa: Exactly.
> Percy: What was the joke?
> Simon: Excuse me?
> Percy: Tell the joke.
> Simon: I don't remember it.
> Percy: Sure you do. Tell the joke.
> Simon: Really, I don't remember it. It was...
> Theresa: Dad.
> Percy: Chicken.

Simon: Excuse me?

Percy: I didn't stutter.

Simon: Okay, you know what? I'll tell the joke.

Theresa: No, Simon. You don't...

Simon: Baby, it's okay. I'll tell you why.

-Because by not telling the joke,

-I'm empowering it. Right? So I'll just...

> -tell the joke and expose how simple-minded...
>
> -and crude and unfunny it actually is.
>
> -What do you call...
>
> -What do you call …
>
> -black men...
>
> -buried in the ground up to their neck?

Percy: What?

Simon: Afro-Turf.

Marilyn: That's cute.

Percy: What are you laughing at?

Marilyn: It's cute.

Percy: Cute don't make it funny. Tell another.

Theresa: Dad, no.

Percy: Let the man tell a joke!

Simon: I don't know any other ones.

-Obviously, I've heard other black jokes,

-but I think I've proven my point.

Percy: So it's okay to empower the other ones?

Simon: Okay. I see what you're doing here, you're putting me on
          the spot.

- It's okay. Look, it's fine.

-'Cause I'm not gonna back down.

Theresa: Back down, Simon.

Simon: The only way to break down barriers

is to have everything out in the open.

- Right?

Percy: Exactly.

Simon: So, what do you call...

one black man being chased by 50 white men?

Percy: What?

Simon: The PGA Tour.

Percy: I get it.

-Tiger Woods. There it is.

-That's good.

Percy: Tell another one.

Simon :   How do we know that Adam and Eve weren't black?
Percy: How?
Simon: You ever try to take a rib away
from a black man?
[laughter]
Percy: That's pretty good.
- That's pretty good.
Simon: I wouldn't take one from you, I know that!
- You chewing it down to the bone.
Percy: That's a good one.
Marilyn: He's a rib fan.
Theresa: Don't try.
Percy: Tell more.
Simon: Okay.
- Why don't black people like country music?
Percy: Why?
Simon: 'Cause every time they say "hoe-down,"
they think someone shot their sister.
[laughter]
Percy: You gonna be all right?
Keisha: That is so true.
Simon: That's a tailored joke for you.
Keisha: Why I gotta be a ho?
Marylin: Ain't nobody talking about you.
Simon: It's a sister joke!
-You're sisters.
Keisha: I'm not the "ho sister."
Percy: Come on now. Can't stop now, baby.
Simon: What are three things that a black man can't get?
Percy: What is that he can't he get?
Simon: A black eye, a fat lip, and a job.
[laughing stops]
Grandpa: I tell you I'm going to kick this boy's ass!
Theresa: Grandpa.
Simon: No, it's...
Theresa: We know you can take him, but just sit down. Be
nice. Come on.
Percy: Come on, now. It's a joke.
Theresa: That's right, Daddy.
Percy: Sit down. It's just a joke. Come on. Hee-hee, ha-ha.
           That's all it is. Now if you'll excuse me...all of a sudden, I
           lost my appetite.

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> -Think I'll take a walk.
> (later)
> Simon: I should have stopped at "hoe-down."
> Theresa: You should have never started.

The first jokes result in mild giggling with no offense. Percy encourages Simon to tell more and Simon obliges. The dialogue makes a telling progression, each joke slightly less innocent than the one before. As the jokes become more provocative, they produce bigger laughs. Finally, of course, Simon tells a joke that manages to insult and hurt everyone at the table. I think it is safe to say that Simon intends to tell the jokes ironically; he explicitly states that by telling these kinds of jokes he lessens their power. Yet in spite of his explicit intention, the irony is doomed to failure.

The progression of jokes in the *Guess Who?* dinner scene demonstrates the subtle distinction between harmless jokes and hateful ones when it comes to the failure of ironic intentions. Just to be clear, ironic failure in this case is not enough to call it a case of self-protective irony. I don't think there is any valorization of the racist message here. The Jones are not insulted because they believe that Simon agrees with some version of the message he ironically mocks. Rather, by telling the joke, he communicates a lack of respect for the experience of racial discrimination. Furthermore, several times previous to this, we see the particularly high value placed on employment by the Jones family. Clearly, the insult here is not based on some vague belief that Simon is a racist. On the contrary, I believe

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Simon's offense is his *particular lack of empathy* with respect to job discrimination.

Notice that the scene in *Crash* I discuss above presents a straightforward, non-ironic case of racist joking whereas the scene in *Guess Who?* demonstrates ironic joking where the irony ends up failing. *Guess Who?* portrays a case similar to those I describe in chapter one, cases in which we feel confident that the person telling the joke is not a racist. In other words, the dinner scene illustrates my view that even genuinely ironic racist joking interferes with compassionate fellow feeling.

I use *Crash* to demonstrate a case of straightforward racist joking, and *Guess Who?* as an example of ironic racist joking. Now, I want to turn to the more complicated case of self-protective irony. Spike Lee's *Bamboozled* dramatizes much of what I argue with regard to self-protective ironic racism. Although there is not a particular joke-scene, there is a comic 'show within the show' that functions much like the joking at issue in chapter four, which defines self-protective irony. *Bamboozled*'s protagonist, Pierre Delacroix, writes a minstrel show for network television in the hopes of getting fired. The show succeeds in spite of his intentions, however. He means to offend network executives, but fails to do so. Because it is written by African-Americans and stars African-Americans, the producer argues that it cannot be racist. It is billed as a satire, one that we are ready for now that slavery is so far in the past. Nevertheless, the show's content

overwhelms the supposed irony and we see the emotional havoc that content has on those involved with its production.[38]

Initially, it seems that Delacroix writes the minstrel show, "Mantan," with ironic intentions. His description of it, as a satire with a social message, is ironic because he explicitly states that he actually means to create nothing more than an old fashioned minstrel show. I will discuss Delacroix's intended meaning with respect to "Mantan" momentarily. First, I want to identify the more obvious case of self-protective irony, as it is displayed by the show's other contributors.

Network writers and producers make changes to the content and style of "Mantan" without Delacroix's consent. Lee portrays *their* meaning$_N$ as self-protective irony without a doubt.[39] We have good reason to believe they want only racist depictions of black people on television (since that is what they produce) although they go though great pains to hide it. When network executives miss Delacroix's irony, embrace the minstrel show and take it further, they hide behind his intended misnomer, calling it a satire.[40] Most importantly with respect to my view of self-protective irony, the racist message is valorized and not

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[38] I am often asked about the Dave Chapelle show. Chapelle is a black comedian and uses race as the main topic in this show. In spite of its great success, Chapelle broke his contract and would not do another season of the show. He said his heart was no longer it.

[39] Recall that 'meaning$_N$' refers to meaning conveyed regardless of conscious intention.

[40] Mantan's audience cues the film audience. Our discomfort is represented by their hesitation; their laughter breaks our silence.

ironized. In other words, racist stereotypes and dehumanization are not mocked by the minstrel show, but simply reinforced by it.[41]

The possibility of "mentioning" some racist content is problematic in ways that other offensive content is not. If I portray a racist person (or tell a racist joke) mediating the content so as not to assert its message will have special requirements. Racist messages such as stereotyping damage via dissemination and not necessarily by intention. By way of contrast, consider a film that attempts to criticize narrative that is overly sentimental.[42] If the film is successful, recognizing the film's intention to convey ironic sentimentality as opposed to actual sentimentality will mitigate our perception of sentimentality in general. To be a successful critique, the narrative has to have a more dominant message contradicting the effects the message it ironizes. It frames the sentimentality in such a way that mitigates our perception of it. However, I suspect that some content cannot be sufficiently diminished by irony. In other words, irony is not up to the task of alleviating the affects every message. I think that the emergence of paradigm scenarios accounts for the limits of irony with respect to racism.

For example, suppose I see a film that intends to criticize a stereotype that Laotians are ill-tempered. Later, in conversation with a friend, I speculate that our

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[41] While the minstrel show project strays from Delacroix's stated project, I think that Bamboozled as a film avoids reproducing the effects of its internal narrative. Spike Lee's style forbids "implicit valorization of the character which he could have drawn from an "interiorized" writing," to borrow from a description by the editors of Cahiers du Cinema. "John Ford's Young Mr. Lincoln" in *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology* 445.

[42] I have in mind a film like *Adaptation* that mocks Hollywood endings yet has a typical Hollywood ending, supposedly represented ironically.

Laotian colleague had a certain reaction because of her ethnic background ("After all," I might say, "stereotypes are often rooted in truth.") Despite whatever criticism the film levied against this stereotype, I discovered the stereotype from the mere mention. Thus the representation survives the irony; the film mentions the stereotype but the effect is no different than a film using that stereotype. How can we distinguish "use," if not through its effect? If we can define the *use* of a stereotype in terms of its function, and the function is to propagate stereotypes, then mitigating racist stereotypes via "mention" immediately fails. Thus, attempts to ironize stereotypes cannot escape the affect of using them and ironic racist jokes tend to propagate racism by their mere utterance. If we contribute to paradigm scenarios in spite of ironic intention, perhaps it is not even possible to merely *mention* a racist joke. A self-protective ironist desires the luxury of humor without paying for it, but racist jokes are costly nonetheless.[43]

Paradigm scenarios that construct poor models for interaction across racial difference have greater effects than we tend to admit. As a instructor for philosophy courses in the Midwest, I have had many students that report never meeting a black or Latino person before starting college! Furthermore, the interaction with other ethnicities is severely limited. Sometimes the only Asian people they have known were children adopted by white families in their community. The only information or images they knew of other races came from

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[43] Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis*: "A sentimentalist is one who desires to have the luxury of an emotion without paying for it." Quoted by De Sousa in *The Rationality of Emotion*, 320.

television and movies. Thus, paradigm scenarios with respect to race is a serious matter. Furthermore, without some experience for comparison, some audiences lack reason to mistrust media representations of race.

Race theorists have identified the unreliability of Hollywood representation in general. Although I cannot give an adequate overview of the debate here, I want to indicate the relevance of work in this area for my discussion of ironic racism. Tommy Lott refers to the debate over *In Living Color*. He points out that the show's producers emphasize their intention to use parody and satire. However, Lott writes, "I do not think In Living Color should be credited with innovation, given that it can be viewed as a black version of Saturday Night Live with black comedians doing blackface, along with reverse white tokenism."[44] Herman Gray criticizes the show's ambivalent politics: "…this ambivalence makes it hard to construct a critical space from which to speak, especially because it so effectively and cleverly organizers several different social positions… For all their high jinks, clever deconstructive turns and transgressive hipness, *In Living Color*'s sketches about the black poor more often than not seem simply to chum out, leaving the black poor exposed and positioned as television objects of middle-class amusement and fascination."[45] The discussion of *In Living Color* could easily be a discussion about "*Mantan*," Spike Lee's show within the show. Lott suggests that we have reason to mistrust the stated intentions behind *In Living Color*. Likewise,

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[44] Lott, 164.
[45] Gray quoted by Lott, 164.

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Spike Lee suggests that we have reason to doubt the reliability of *Bamboozled*'s narrator, Pierre Delacroix.

Bamboozled begins with a voice-over in which Pierre Delacroix defines satire. He speaks with an affected, vaguely British accent and later we discover that his real name is not Pierre, but Peerless. He is unreliable as a result; there is some reason to distrust the way he presents the story, in light of his dishonest self-representation. Although Delacroix's first person dialog establishes that the story is his, we are led identify with his assistant, Sloan Hopkins. Sloan's point of view is easier to occupy than that of "Big Black Africa," her revolutionary brother or "Pierre," her sell-out boss; she is genuine and consistent in comparison.

Spike Lee's film makes an interesting implication through his narrator's characterization, I think; his film demonstrates the fact that unreliable narration is characteristic of self-protective irony. That characteristic is also evident in *Guess Who?*, since Simon gives an unreliable self-representation (he claims to be a NASCAR fan, for example). Furthermore, his conversational joke-telling relies on stereotypes of African-Americans, although he intends them to be ironic. The difference between Simon's joke-telling and Pierre's TV script is in the affect. Pierre's stereotypes valorize and promote themselves, whereas Simon's reveal his lack of empathy. Simon is unreliable because he doesn't see the difference between the jokes he is telling. His ironic intentions fail, but they do not valorize racism. Pierre, on the other hand, hides behind the claim that his comedy is satire.

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Making matters more complex, "Mantan," the show within the show, is not only offensive and racist, it manages to be funny. Within the film, the studio audience wants to laugh, as does the film audience. Both internal and external audiences resist laughing, however, because it isn't *really* funny. Racist jokes can have a similar paradoxical affect. "Mantan" is funny because its cast is so talented. It is important, I think, to realize that aesthetic appreciation of a joke, play, movie, etc., can result from a talented performance overcoming the other artistic shortcomings. Thus, it is not inconsistent to say for example, that the Dave Chapelle show is very funny and that it is racist, if Chapelle's talents are greater than the faults of his material. People sometimes resist the idea that racist humor fails on aesthetic grounds, simply because they find it *funny*. They make the case that one can enjoy comic aspects by controlling one's attention, by attending to the rhythm or delivery rather than its content. As I argue in my discussion of empathy in chapter two, this strange humor is like the strange pleasure of tragedy. For better or worse (I think for the worse), controlled attention that allows such paradoxical pleasure, be it humorous or tragic, comes only at the sake of empathy. Thus, if I say that a joke is not good because it is racist, it doesn't necessarily follow that the joke is not funny. What does follow, however, is that appreciating such humor entails a lack of empathy, for it insists upon numbing the heart.

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