COMMITMENT IN REFLECTION

Essays in Literature and Moral Philosophy

Edited by
Leona Toker

GARLAND PUBLISHING, INC.
NEW YORK & LONDON / 1994

The Ethical Happy Mean, the Mean Unhappy Satirical*

David Fishelov

The concept of the golden mean, as a happy compromise between two extreme types of behavior, underlies common-sense morality. Aristotle systematized this concept in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and his ideas influenced various philosophers and writers (in the Jewish tradition, a notable example is Maimonides' ethical theory). The tripartite ethical model of the happy mean can also be found in various satirical writings. Yet in satirical works, this model tends to undergo interesting transformations which I shall demonstrate and attempt to explain on the material of Horace's *Satire 1.2* and Swift's *A Tale of a Tub*.

Horace's *Satire 1.2* is sometimes referred to as a satire on extremes. It opens with a description of the mourning over the death of Tigellius, an artist notorious for his wastefulness and profligacy:

> The federated flute-girls' union, pedlars of quack
> medicines,
> holy beggars, strippers, comics, and all that lot
> are filled with sadness and dismay at the passing of
> Tigellius the singer;
> he was such a generous person.
> (ll. 1–4)[1]

Afterwards the text swings like a pendulum from one extreme type of behavior to another, from the open-handed Tigellius to someone indifferent to a friend's suffering hunger

and cold, and then again to one who carelessly squanders his inherited estate:

> This fellow here, however,
> for fear of being called a wastrel would refuse to give
> a destitute friend
> enough to keep out the cold and relieve the pinch of
> hunger.
> If you ask another why, on receiving a splendid
> inheritance
> from his father and grandfather, he is squandering it
> all on his voracious gullet,
> ransacking the market for every kind of expensive food
> with borrowed cash, he replies that he doesn't want to be
> thought
> petty and mean. (ll. 4–11)

After exploring a few more variations on the theme of the miser versus the spendthrift, and before focusing on the central topic of the satire, namely, the description of extreme modes of behavior in sexual life, Horace explicitly announces the moral of his tale:

> If anyone now asks "What's the point of all this?" I'll tell
> him:
> In avoiding *one* moral fault fools rush into its opposite.
> Maltinus minces around with his tunic trailing low,
> another has it hoisted obscenely up to his crotch, the
> refined
> Rufillus smells of sweet cachous, Gargonius of goat.
> There's no middle way. (ll. 23–28)

Thus, Horace seems to concur in Aristotle's criticism of those who abandon the golden mean. The impression that Horace's satire is an illustration of the "ethical triangle" is also reinforced by the frequent use of expressions such as "this fellow . . . another," "opposite," and "middle way" throughout the text.[2]

There are, however, a few interesting aspects in which Horace's satirical treatment of the "ethical triangle" differs from the underlying model which it is supposed to illustrate. While in the case of ethics, extreme modes of behavior are judged according to high moral criteria (in Aristotle's ethical system, they obstruct the achievement of philosophical happiness), in

Horace's satire these extremes are rejected for reasons of expediency. By fooling around with others' wives, one risks one's neck:

> It is worth your while to give ear, ye who wish ill success
> to adulterous men, how on all sides they are beset by
> troubles,
> how their pleasure is spoiled by many a pain, is won but
> rarely,
> and then, as it often chances, amidst atrocious perils.
> One has jumped from a roof, another has been flogged to
> death;
> someone else while running away has blundered into a
> gang
> of violent thugs; another has paid cash for his life;
> another has been raped repeatedly by louts; there was
> even a case
> where a man mowed the lover's balls and randy prick
> with a sword. (ll. 37–46)

Thus, adultery is not inherently repellent, it is simply impractical. Moreover, Horace's satire differs from Aristotle's ethical model in another way. Indeed, in order to warn against the dangers involved in adultery, a single, straightforward sentence would do. To make the moral lesson more vivid, it would suffice to mention one example. But, Horace is not satisfied with such a possible presentation of the case. He seems to be fascinated with the description of various catastrophes in which adulterers are severely and extraordinarily punished: leaping from a height, fatal beating, robbing, sodomy, and castration. The description of this series of catastrophes verges on the farcical and the grotesque: the man is not simply escaping from the roof, but is "jumping from a roof," another is not only beaten, but "flogged to death," and, as a conclusion, we have a graphic description of how the balls and the "randy prick" of the last poor fellow are mowed down. One might wonder whether all these scenes are, historically, plausible situations that adulterers might have found themselves in.[3] But no matter what historians tell us, one thing is clear: Horace *is attracted* to the description of remarkably extreme types of situations, and he is even willing to weaken realistic credibility in order to create

"slapstick" scenes, complete with characters who are falling, getting flogged, robbed, and castrated.

Formally, Horace is committed to advocating the happy mean; actually, however, he is drawn, at least from an artistic viewpoint, to deviant and immoral modes of behavior. Consequently, when and if it is alluded to, the happy mean is perceived as dull in comparison to the colorful and enthralling scenes where extreme behavioral types are presented. The way Horace ends the satire is symptomatic of this tension between the explicit moral commitment and the artistic, satirical inclination. After exploring various forms of misbehavior in sexual life, of either being carried away beyond what nature allows or being unnaturally bound in an extreme abstinence, Horace creates the impression that he intends to conclude on a positive note. First, he approvingly quotes Philodemus, who advocates the fulfillment of one's sexual needs in a manner corresponding to the happy mean, and then he describes a harmonious scene with an ideal type of girl:

> he [Philodemus] goes
> for the one who isn't too dear and who comes promptly
> when called.
> She ought to be fair, well-poised, and smartly
> turned out, though she shouldn't
> try to appear taller or more pale than she naturally is.
> When a girl like that slips her left side under my right
> she is Lady Ilia or Countess Egeria; I call her what I please.
> (ll. 121–26)

What could be a nicer concluding chord than this peaceful description of the happy couple, representing the ideal of the happy mean in sexual conduct? Note, however, that the ideal type of girl portrayed here is a prostitute, a fact that undoubtedly has an ironic impact on the reading of the whole scene. The satire, moreover, does not end here. After describing in positive terms his experience with such a girl, Horace goes on to make the point that with her there are no fears:

> No fear, while I'm hard at it, that her husband will
> hurry back to town,
> the door crash open, the dog bark, and the house
> reverberate
> with an awful din; that the woman, deathly white, will
> jump
> out of bed, her accomplice shriek, and we'll all be in
> terror—the maid
> for her legs, the guilty mistress for her dowery, and
> me for myself.
> I have to run off barefoot with my clothes in disarray,
> otherwise
> my cash or my arse or at least my respectability has had it.
> (ll. 127–33)

What starts as an integral part of the eulogy of the quiet and harmonious golden mean—"No fear, while I'm hard at it. . . ."—turns out to be something totally different. The charms of the peaceful scene (tinged with irony as it is) fade rapidly and are replaced by the gusts of a "juicy" adulterous situation. As in the colorful description of the misfortunes that befall adulterers at the beginning of the satire, here too Horace elaborates on the description of extreme and deviant situations far beyond what is ostensibly required by the moral lesson. The detailed and vivid description of the barking dog, the hysteria of maid and mistress, his own farcical escape with his clothes half off, all these graphic incidents are superfluous as far as the simple moral issue is concerned. They are, however, not at all superfluous from the viewpoint of artistic invention and aesthetic enjoyment. In fact, these vivid and hilarious scenes make the core of the author's, as well as of the reader's, enjoyment of the satirical text.

Horace's *Satire 1.2* has often been criticized for its loose structure, and the absence of coherent development of the central argument.[4] By looking for a coherent and consistent argument for the golden mean we may, however, lose sight of an important aspect of Horace's innermost satirical inclinations. The moment we begin to enjoy his inventiveness in creating memorable and vigorous descriptions of extreme types of character and incident, complaints of loose logical structure become irrelevant.

It is highly illuminating that in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* adultery is not considered an extreme type of behavior. It is *explicitly excluded* from any "ethical triangle"; it does not earn the title of an extreme that has an opposite extreme and a

possible mean. Rather, adultery is flatly rejected by Aristotle as inherently an evil activity:

> But not every action or feeling admits of a mean; because some have names that directly connote depravity, such as malice, shamelessness and envy, and among actions adultery, theft and murder. All these, and more like them, are so called as being evil in themselves; it is not the excess or deficiency of them that is evil. . . . Nor does acting rightly or wrongly in such cases depend upon circumstances—whether a man commits adultery with the right woman or at the right time or in the right way, because to do anything of that kind is simply wrong.[5]

Despite Aristotle's unequivocal position on the issue, Horace chose adultery to represent an extreme mode of behavior in sexual life, hinting that questions such as "whether a man commits adultery with the right woman or at the right time or in the right way"— stated by Aristotle to be totally irrelevant—have in fact some bearing on our judgment. Moreover, Horace's text focuses on adultery more than on any other extreme behavioral mode in sexual life. The elaborate descriptions of "juicy" adultery scenes reveal Horace's artistic inclination and his preference for the intriguing aspects of satirical description over systematic ethical argumentation.[6]

In *Satire 1.2* Horace's aesthetic and artistic sensibilities lead him in a different, and possibly opposite, direction to that dictated by the ethical principle of the happy mean. The happy mean is overshadowed, at least as far as textual length and artistic inventiveness are concerned, by the satirical and unhappy meanness. By this latter I mean sordid and mean characters, especially adulterers, who are carried away by their lusts only to find that their lives are full of danger, pain, and unhappiness.

Thus, even in the classical and lucid Horace, whose name has become synonymous with the moral principle of the golden (Horatian) mean, there are tensions between ethics and aesthetics, between advocating the happy mean and being far more vividly interested in the unhappy, but colorful type.[7]

Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* carries this tension between ethics and aesthetics a step further. The allegorical tale of the three

brothers, who represent the three prominent contemporary Churches, evokes the tripartite pattern. Peter, the Papist, represents the tendency to decorate the original coat (i.e., original religious belief) with superfluous embroideries (i.e., superficial interpretations) to the point where all the extra trimmings hide the original coat. Jack, the radical Calvinist, represents the urge to get rid of all the superfluous decorations. However, in his zealous frenzy, he finds himself tearing the original coat as well. Thus, we are left with Martin, who represents the Anglican church, and is considered a viable compromise between the two extremes. Needless to say, many critics were enticed by the declared tripartite schema of the *Tale* to talk of "the sound and sensible Martin" as the character who represents Swift's recommended happy mean and of the whole work as pointing "to a middle way that lies between opposed forms of corruption."[8]

A closer look at these three brothers, however, will reveal some swerving from the classical model of the happy mean. To begin with, perhaps the most intriguing deviation from the classical "ethical triangle" is to be found where we have detected it in Horace. Like Horace's satire, Swift's text is preoccupied with the two brothers who represent two opposing extremes, while neglecting the allegedly positive brother. Swift reveals his artistic talent in his treatment of Peter and Jack, rather than in his description of the relatively colorless Martin. When he singles out one of the three brothers, it is for being more wrong-headed and tortuous than the others, rather than for being a positive example.

Swift opens by focusing on the fantastic and hilarious methods of interpretation used by Peter the Papist. Fashion dictates shoulder-knots, but no such trimming is mentioned in their father's will. So will they give up the attempt to reconcile fashion's requirements with their father's original formulations? Rest assured that Peter will find a solution:

> After much thought, one of the brothers who happened to be more book-learned than the other two, said, he had found an expedient. "'Tis true," said he, "there is nothing here in this will, *totidem verbis*, making mention of shoulder-knots, but I dare conjecture we may find them

> *inclusive*, or *totidem syllabis*." This distinction was immediately approved by all; and so they fell again to examine the will. But their evil star had so directed the matter, that the first syllable was not to be found in the whole writing. Upon which disappointment, he who found the former evasion, took heart and said, "Brothers, there is yet hopes; for though we cannot find them *totidem verbis*, nor *totidem syllabis*, I dare engage we shall make them out, *tertio modo*, or *totidem literis*." This discovery was also highly commended, upon which they fell once more to the scrutiny, and soon picked out S,H,O,U,L,D,E,R. (285)[9]

Later on, Peter's tortuous logic is put at the service of his brutal drive to dominate over his two brothers and, ultimately, over the whole world. Section 4 of *A Tale of a Tub* is devoted to the description of the process by which Peter turns from "Mr. Peter" into "Father Peter," and then into "My Lord Peter," until he begins to sign his letters with: "Your most humble man's man Emperor Peter." Swift reveals his artistic talents in his lingering on a grotesque description of the devices, cunning tricks, and deceptions used by Peter in his power hunt.

The satirical exposure of Peter's "deconstructive" methods of interpretation and of his megalomania is, however, relatively mitigated in comparison with the satirical treatment that Jack receives. At the beginning, Jack scores high when he, together with Martin, joins in the attempt to restore their father's original will: "they both resolved, without further delay, to fall immediately upon reducing the whole, exactly after their father's model" (312). Yet Swift presents Jack in a relatively favorable light at the beginning only in order to enhance the effect of his ensuing forceful exposure.

The problem both Martin and Jack face in their attempt to restore the original model is that the extravagant medley of trimming is by now inseparable from the coat itself. What makes the description of the fate of the original coat powerful is Swift's ability to take the laughable one step further towards the grotesque. Had the brothers been carried away by the fashions of the day alone, it would have been bad enough.[10] It takes Swift's ingenuity to produce a monstrous, grotesque picture, in which the brothers treat ephemeral and transitory fashion with

conservative rigidity; they enshrine the present, while preserving all the accumulated trimming of the past and present. The outcome is a perverse mixture:

> I ought in method to have informed the reader about fifty pages ago of a fancy Lord Peter took, and infused into his brothers, to wear on their coats whatever trimmings came up in fashion; never pulling off any, as they went out of the mode, but keeping on all together, which amounted in time to a medley the most antic you can possibly conceive, and this to a degree, that upon the time of their falling out there was hardly a thread of the original coat to be seen, but an infinite quantity of lace, and ribbons, and fringe, and embroidery, and points. (313)

Realizing that the superfluous decorations are inseparably interwoven with the original coat, Martin begins to take off decorations with great caution, lest he should tear the original coat. Jack is, however, not so delicate in his version of reformation:

> Having thus kindled and inflamed himself as high as possible, and by consequence, in a delicate temper for beginning a reformation, he set about the work immediately, and in three minutes made more dispatch than Martin had done in as many hours. . . . Thus it happened, that stripping down a parcel of gold lace a little too hastily, he rent the main body of his coat from top to bottom; and whereas his talent was not of the happiest in taking up a stitch, he knew no better way than to darn it again with packthread and a skewer. But the matter was yet infinitely worse (I record it with tears) when he proceeded to the embroidery: for, being clumsy by nature, and of temper impatient; withal, beholding millions of stitches that required the nicest hand, sedatest constitutions, to extricate; in a great rage he tore off the whole piece, cloth and all, and flung it into the kennel, and furiously thus continuing his career: "Ah, good brother Martin," said he, "do as I do, for the love of God; strip, tear, pull, rend, flay off all, that we may appear as unlike the rogue Peter as it is possible." (314–15)

Martin responds by delivering a calm moralizing lecture, warning Jack against being overcome by his hatred for Peter to

the extent of substituting means for ends, and finding himself in another, opposite extreme. Martin, in short, is giving us a lecture recommending the happy mean. Note, however, how Swift treats this lecture:

> Martin had still proceeded as gravely as he began, and doubtless would have delivered an admirable lecture of morality, which might have exceedingly contributed to my reader's repose, both of body and mind (the true ultimate end of ethics); but Jack was already gone a flight-shot beyond his patience. (315)[11]

It seems that Jack is not alone in going "a flight-shot beyond his patience." I suspect that Swift himself is a bit bored with this solemn speech about the right way to tread. He is content to summarize and to cut short Martin's speech, in order to move to the much more picturesque and fascinating character, namely, Jack, with his inflamed, extreme reaction:

> Martin's patience put Jack in a rage; but that which most afflicted him was, to observe his brother's coat so well reduced into the state of innocence; while his own was either wholly rent to his shirt, or those places which had escaped his cruel clutches, were still in Peter's livery. So that he looked like a drunken beau, half rifled by bullies; or like a fresh tenant of Newgate, when he has refused the payment of garnish; or like a discovered shoplifter left to the mercy of Exchange women; or like a bawd in her old velvet petticoat, resigned into the secular hands of the mobile. Like any or like all of these, a medley of rags, and lace, and rents, and fringes. (315–16)

Instead of advocating Martin's position, Swift seems to enjoy lingering on the description of Jack.[12] Like Jack, he is too absorbed by the heated process of inventing. Here, he invents the series of similes at the end of the passage: a drunken beau, a fresh tenant of Newgate, a discovered shoplifter, a bawd. Thus, as in Horace's case, we find that the artistic inclinations of Swift the satirist are at odds with the ethical presuppositions that underlie his work. Swift's tendency to elaborate on grotesque scenes, and the exuberance of his inventive mind, lead him in a totally different direction to that assumed by the ethical principle of the happy mean.[13]

In addition to this tension between ethics and aesthetics, which is conspicuously present in Swift's text, there is another troubling deviation from the classical "ethical triangle." From the beginning of the tale, Swift stresses the fact that all three brothers have participated in the corruption of the original will and in going astray:

> On their first appearance [in town–D.F.], our three adventurers met with a very bad reception; and soon with great sagacity guessing out the reason, they quickly began to improve in the good qualities of the town: they writ, and rallied, and rhymed, and sung, and said, and said nothing: they drank, and fought, and whored, and slept, and swore, and took snuff. (281)

All three brothers seem to enjoy the adding of the fashionable and ridiculous decorations to the coat, despite the fact that their father's will either prescribes the wearing of the simple original coat, or explicitly warns against the adding of certain trimmings. All three brothers share the enthusiasm for fashion that starts with the shoulder-knots, which "our three gentlemen swaggered with as large and as flaunting ones as the best" (286), and then moves on to "flame-colored satine," "silver fringes," "Indian figures of men, women, and children," and to many other decorations of that sort.

All three, Martin included, were wholly absorbed in the ridiculous and harmful aspects of the world of fashion and hence are indiscriminately censured for what they did to the original coat. Thus Swift also calls into question the character of Martin, the brother who supposedly represents correct religious values. To accept Martin as a model, knowing of vices that he has not escaped, and that are now inseparable from him, is an ethical attitude that would amount to joining, at least being indulgent to, the company of knaves. On the other hand, to ignore Martin's faults, to overlook keen reason that exposes him for what he really is, namely a partial knave, could make us (to use Swift's expression) "a fool among knaves." Thus, Swift leaves us with the impossible choice between being a fool and being a knave.[14]

Swift constantly undermines the simple and solid "ethical triangle" by suggesting that, in identifying with Martin, we are not going to save our souls, at least not in any serious, profound

manner. While reading the *Tale*, we find ourselves not in a comfortable middle course but rather caught in an unresolved and frustrating dilemma.

There is yet another interesting point in which Swift's version of the "ethical triangle" radically differs from the classical doctrine of the happy mean. Whereas Aristotle insists that the two extremes are mostly different from each other, Swift develops the view that the two extremes are, in fact, very much alike. Aristotle emphasizes his point by the use of mathematical terminology:

> The greatest degree of contrariety is that which is found between the two extremes. For they are separated by a greater interval from one another than from the mean, just as the great is further from the small, and the small from the great, than either is from the equal. (107)

Swift, on the other hand, presents towards the end of *A Tale of a Tub*, a picture in which Peter and Jack, the two opposite extremes, the two greatest enemies, become almost identical:

> It was among the great misfortunes of Jack, to bear a huge personal resemblance with his brother Peter. Their humours and dispositions were not only the same, but there was a close analogy in their shape and size, and their mien. Insomuch as nothing was more frequent than for a bailiff to seize Jack by the shoulders, and cry, "Mr. Peter, you are the king's prisoner." Or, at other times, for one of Peter's nearest friends to accost Jack with open arms, "Dear Peter, I am glad to see thee, pray send me one of your best medicines for the worms." (347)

Here Swift again expresses his tendency towards the grotesque: to portray totally different behavioral types that become practically indistinguishable.[15]

So far, I have presented the transformation that the model of the happy mean tends to undergo in satirical works. Two principles seem to govern these satirical transformations: (1) while openly advocating the "ethical triangle," the satirist is in actuality attracted, from viewpoint of artistic potentialities, to the condemned extremes; (2) the swerving of the satirical text is towards the extreme mode of behavior marked by hectic and excessive activity. Aristotle distinguishes between two types of

extremes: being excessive and being deficient—with regard to a certain mean.[16] If we are to accept this distinction, then the satirist's inclination is towards the pole of the excess. It is not surprising that this is the case, since most sins are to be found, according to Aristotle, in this pole.[17] Thus, Horace's satire swerves towards excessive modes of sexual behavior (and not, say, abstinence), and Swift's *Tale* focuses on Peter and Jack, two opposite but complementary forms of excessive manifestations of the ego (or of man's "spirit" or "wind") in religious belief and conduct. And of these two, Jack is foregrounded because of his tendency for hyperactivity.

If, indeed, these are the principles that govern the satirical transformation of the "ethical triangle," there yet remains the issue of explanation. In conclusion, I will briefly examine a few possible explanations for these satirical transformations. The first is the radical idea that literature is, *ipso definitio*, at odds with the positive ethical stance, i.e., that every work of art which tries to justify the ways of God finds itself with Satan's party. I propose to reject this radical explanation, because it seems to ignore many literary works (not only didactic ones) that may successfully evoke and shape a positive ethical response in their reader (e.g., the works of Fielding, Austen, and Tolstoy).

Another way to explain the complex rhetoric of the satirical text might be in psychoanalytic terms. According to such an approach, the satirist's unconscious drives, associated with the principle of pleasure, are "taking over" the satirist's ego with its conscious, ethical intentions. The fact that the works of Horace and Swift that we have discussed are saturated with obscene language and sexual insinuations seems to corroborate such a psychoanalytic approach. I think, however, that the psychoanalytic move here is neither necessary nor, ultimately, illuminating. In fact, a psychoanalytic description of the two satires might only obscure (or, if I may use the term, suppress) the dynamic and playful hovering between the ethical and the non-ethical planes that characterizes the reading process. In other words, I propose to see the appeal to our serious ethical response, together with the playful refusal to adhere to any fixed ethical stand, as two "legitimate," "overt," and "conscious" drives in the satirist's mind that should be treated equally and

that need not be explained away by psychoanalytic terminology.[18]

Instead of the "radical" and the "psychoanalytic" explanations, I propose a different twofold explanation of the above transformations. First, the satirical genre is, in general, inclined to linger on various forms of deviant behavioral modes and to elaborate on the follies and vices of mankind. The satirist is not usually interested in creating a positive and desirable ideal.[19] Satire often creates a situation where, on the one hand, it evokes our moral sense in our response to the characters and actions presented, while at the same time it constantly evades, in an attractive and playful way, an unequivocal ethical statement. Thus, satire is paradoxically the most ethical but also the most unethical, or non-ethical, of literary genres.[20] Consequently, the transformations are a result of the special conventions and possibilities specific to satire as a literary genre, rather than features of literature in general or a product of a neurotic or pathological mind.

Second, the tendency to focus on the various forms of extreme behavior is rooted in the very concept of the golden mean. This tendency is deeply embedded in the ethical triangle model, since the happy mean is defined, and evaluated, as a "negative" symbol, a void between the two extremes. In other words, it is easier to define the positive happy mean by contrasting it with its two negative antipodes than it is to examine it in its own terms. This is true even in the more philosophical formulation of the "ethical triangle." It may be instructive, for example, to look at Aristotle's description of the magnanimous man, the incarnation of the happy mean with regard to questions of honor and dishonor:

> The magnanimous man does not take petty risks, nor does he court danger, because there are few things that he values highly. . . . He is not prone to express admiration, because nothing is great in his eyes. He does not nurse resentment, because it is beneath a magnanimous man to remember things against people, especially wrongs. . . . He does not care for personal conversation; he will talk neither about himself nor about anyone else. (156–58)

One can detect the logic governing these selected passages of Aristotle's description of the magnanimous man, or, for that matter, Aristotle's descriptions of courage, liberality, and other commendable human qualities. Instead of focusing on describing him in positive language, i.e., in terms of what he actually does or should do, Aristotle uses repeated negative formulas: the magnanimous man is defined and described as someone who avoids doing X and avoids doing Y (or, even better, as the opposite of X). The reason is obvious: it is easier to conceive of the golden mean as a "void" between two extremes, especially in contrast to the one marked by excessiveness, because these extremes are more memorable, and more easily imaginable.

Thus, it seems that when satirists swerve towards the excessive types of behavior, they are only developing, in a graphic and ingenious manner, a tendency that is already inherent in the ethical concept of the happy mean. This additional satirical development is so forceful and attractive that it often destabilizes the ethical ground on which it stands. Note, however, that to destabilize does not mean to annihilate. The reader is asked to activate his sound moral judgement, but at the same time his reading experience cannot be summed up in a simple, straightforward ethical formula. He enjoys the graphic portrayals of the immoral characters, without forgetting that they are censured. While this artistic enjoyment is not merely a "bait" intended to facilitate the learning of a moral lesson, it should also not be regarded as a factor that totally demolishes the reader's ethical convictions. The reading process of satirical works should include the activation both of ethical beliefs and non-ethical, artistic enjoyment, and should not be reduced to either.

NOTES

*My thanks to the participants of the seminar, "Literature and Moral Philosophy," for their useful responses. Special thanks to Leona Toker,

the coordinator, for her helpful comments, to Sanford Budick, the discussant of the paper, who offered many erudite and perceptive remarks, and to Moshe Ron, for his critical suggestions.

1. Here, and below, citations are from *Satires and Epistles* by Horace, trans. Niall Rudd (Penguin Classics, 1973), pp. 32–36. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books, Ltd., copyright © Niall Rudd, 1973.

2. In addition to these explicit linguistic expressions (*contra, neque . . . neque, neque . . . nec, medium est*), the text-continuum as a whole is structured according to a movement between thematic and semantic opposites. These opposites are primarily moral ones, but they can also be visual (opposite ways of clothing), and even cosmological (the opposition between "void" [*inane*] and "solid" atoms in Epicurean physics). For the Latin text, see *Horace: Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978), pp. 18–29.

3. For the account of punishments fitted to adulterers in Roman society by Valerius Maximus 6,1,13 see, for instance, George Converse Fiske, *Lucilius and Horace* (Westport, Conn., 1971), p. 353n. 72. My source for an historical view of the moral situation in Rome of Augustus's time is Zvi Yavetz, *Augustus: The Victory of Moderation* (Tel Aviv, 1988), pp. 60–61, 307–09 (in Hebrew).

4. For instance, in his highly illuminating *Roman Satire*, Michael Coffey comments that the satire's argument "is somewhat muddled and the structure in consequence lopsided" (London, 1976), p. 72. Niall Rudd discusses the structural and logical shortcomings of *Satire 1.2*; *The Satires of Horace* (Berkeley, 1982), pp. 10–12. Eduard Fraenkel argues that the true theme of the satire is by no means the golden mean but rather a warning against adultery; *Horace* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 76–86. His suggestion, however, does not provide a satisfactory explanation for the first 37 lines of the satire. David R.S. Bailey suggests a way to overcome the uncertainty of structure by assuming that parts of the text belong to an interlocutor of Horace; *Profile of Horace* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982), pp. 10–14. He too, however, notes that the doctrine of the mean falls into the background soon after its introduction.

5. Aristotle, *Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson, revised by Hugh Tredennick (Harmondsworth, 1976), p. 102.

6. In *Lucilius and Horace*, pp. 248–74 Fiske meticulously points to the various ideas Horace shares with the Epicureans. These close affinities, however, cannot explain Horace's *artistic* inclination in *Satire 1.2*.

7. Horace's typical attitude in the *Satires* is to ridicule characters who are carried away by a doctrine to an extreme degree. See, for example, W.S. Anderson, *Essays On Roman Satire* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 41–49. See also my "*Homo Ardens* chez Horace et Diderot," in *HSLA* 16 (1989), especially 50–55. One should, however, bear in mind that to Horace the extremes are also fascinating and attractive, a source of enjoyment. In Book 2 he has clearly distanced himself from the "ardent" characters, but in Book 1 (especially in 1.2, probably his earliest satire) he is sometimes close to and drawn to them.

8. The first phrase belongs to Kathleen Williams, *Jonathan Swift and the Age of Compromise* (Lawrence, 1958), p. 137. The second is in Martin Price, *Swift's Rhetorical Art* (New Haven, 1953), p. 80.

9. Here, and throughout the paper, citations are from Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings*, ed. Louis A. Landa (Boston, 1960).

10. On Swift's harsh criticism of the world of fashion with its ephemeral and unreliable aspects, see Martin Price, *Swift's Rhetorical Art*, especially pp. 78–79.

11. In using the formulation "Repose, both of body and mind" Swift is, no doubt, alluding to line 356 of Juvenal, *Satire 10*. Juvenal, perhaps the satirist closest to Swift in temperament, also uses some positive ethical formulation (in this case, the famous *mens sana in corpore sano*), but his deepest interest lies in the description of grotesque scenes. See my "The Vanity of the Reader's Wishes: Rereading Juvenal's Satire 10," *American Journal of Philology* 111: (1990): 370–82.

12. The speaker in these passages is, of course, the "Author" of *A Tale of a Tub*, a *persona* clearly distinct from Swift. Still, I would like to contend that in such passages Swift, the satirist, shares with the "Author" (who also serves as the butt of the satire) the enjoyment of being carried away. For a view that points to the dialectical and intimate relationship between the author and Swift, see Robert C. Elliot, *The Power of Satire* (Princeton, 1960), pp. 221–22, and Alvin Kernan, *The Plot of Satire* (New Haven, 1965), pp. 103–04.

13. Swift was keenly aware of the tendency of the mind, especially his own, to be carried away by extreme modes: "whereas the mind of Man, when he gives the spur and bridle to his thoughts, doth never stop, but naturally sallies out into both extremes of high and low, of good and evil" (p. 324).

14. Kathleen Williams, for example, is right in presenting the dilemma's horns, but she seems to underestimate the unresolved tensions of that dilemma (*Jonathan Swift*, p. 134). Some critics have

pointed out the highly ambivalent status of Martin in the "ethical triangle": see Robert M. Adams, *Strains of Discord: Studies in Literary Openness* (Ithaca, 1958), pp. 146–57, and Jay Arnold Levine, "The Design of *A Tale of a Tub*," *ELH* 33 (1966): 214–17. Note also Mathew Hodgart's observation that "Swift was supposed to be defending Martin (Luther) against Jack (Calvin) and Peter, but the effect of his brilliant burlesque is to discredit all forms of dogmatic Chrisianity." *Satire* (New York, 1969), p. 118.

15. Cf., for instance, Juvenal's description of old age in his *Satire 10*, ll. 188–288.

16. Aristotle, *Ethics*, especially pp. 100–02.

17. *Ibid.*, especially pp. 107–08.

18. Swift's satirical art was, for example, the subject of many psychoanalytic (as well as quasi-psychoanalytic) treatments. For a persuasive criticism of the hasty and insensitive application of psychoanalytic terminology to Swift's art, see Norman O. Brown, "The Excremental Vision," in *Swift: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Ernest Tuveson (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), pp. 31–54.

19. In *Bitter Carnival: Ressentiment and the Abject Hero* (Princeton, 1992), Michael André Bernstein has astutely probed some of the most intriguing and troubling aspects of the relationship between satire and utopian ideals. I have discussed satire's shunning of accepted ideals in "Satura Contra Utopiam: Satirical Distortions of Utopian Ideas," *Revue de littérature comparée*, forthcoming.

20. In *Fiction and the Shape of Belief* (Chicago, 1964), Sheldon Sacks, for instance, persuasively argues that the *raison d'être* of satire lies in the act of negating, rather than in proposing a positive ethics. His highly perceptive description of satire, however, seems to underestimate the other pole of the paradox, namely, the need to evoke a "horizon" of shared, positive ethical beliefs.