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A PHILOSOPHY OF SATIRE.
CRITIQUE, ENTERTAINMENT, THERAPY.

DIETER DECLERCQ

Submitted in fulfilment of the degree of
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This project has been with me for a long time. Academically, this thesis builds on ideas I have been continuously developing since I wrote my MA dissertation in Western Literature about *The Simpsons*. I could not foresee how that would change my life. Ever since, in some way or another, I have had the privilege to reflect on satire, a topic which has given me joy since I was an adolescent. To put things in perspective, I graduated in Western Literature in 2010, after which I continued to study Philosophy, Film Studies and (thinking I would never find funding for a PhD project) Translation and Interpretation Studies. Most fortunately, the Centre for the Interdisciplinary Study of Film and the Moving Image in the School of Arts at The University of Kent offered me a 50th Anniversary GTA Scholarship in 2013 to fund this project, for which I am very grateful. It is somewhat stunning to realise how long I have been thinking about the ideas presented in this thesis, but my investigation has taken me in directions I could never have foreseen. It is similarly quite sobering to realise how much more my thesis has still left unexplored and unanswered, but, in the future, I hope to have the opportunity to think some more about these matters (and hopefully about some other interesting issues as well).

Since this project has been with me for so long, I have many to thank for influencing or supporting me in developing the thoughts presented in this thesis – too many to list individually. I do want to specifically acknowledge my supervisory team, Prof Aylish Wood and Dr Hans Maes. I want to thank Aylish for excellent supervision, specifically for allowing me the freedom to explore side projects but redirecting me to the thesis when necessary, for pressing me to unpack my ideas and reflect on how they hang together, and for valuable advice in general. I also want to thank her for counselling during moments of alienation, specifically when some of the issues explored in this thesis became particularly pressing for me personally. Further, I want to thank Hans because he patiently believed in the merit of my original idea to compare satire and philosophy when I had experienced difficulties to interest other philosophers in my project. It seems hardly credible now that I had no notion whatsoever of aesthetics before coming to Kent and a general distrust of philosophy in the analytic tradition. I want to thank Hans for introducing and guiding me in what now feels like an academic home.

Apart from my supervisors, there are too many others to thank who are part of the vibrant research culture of the School of Arts for exchanging valuable ideas about my work. I do want to specifically acknowledge my fellow PhD students, with whom I exchanged ideas on

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As mentioned, one way or another, I have been working on these ideas before in previous dissertations at BA and MA level. Some of my ideas about satire and philosophy were previously published in "The Philosophical and Ethical Significance of Humour. *The Simpsons* as Humorous Ethical Truth-Telling." *Ethical Perspectives* 20.2 (2013): 271-298. I have revisited some of the literature and further develop some ideas from this and other previous research, but any such interaction has been substantially revised and updated in this thesis. At the time of submission, some paragraphs in Chapter 3 have been published in "Wink, Wink, Nudge, Nudge?" *Postgraduate Journal of Aesthetics* 12.1 (2016): 2-18.

ABSTRACT

What is satire, what can it do and what not, and why should we care about it? Since its introduction as a classification of artworks in Roman times, these fundamental questions about satire have been continually addressed by satirists themselves, their fans, their detractors, political and moral authorities, art-critics, and, not in the least, scholars. These longstanding debates about the fundamental issues of satire have often been fruitful and enlightening. Still, the fundamental questions about satire's nature, its function and its significance have remained unanswered. In this thesis, I aim to resolve these issues by engaging with satire throughout the ages in various media, with a specific focus on contemporary moving images. While satire was traditionally a literary phenomenon, it is nowadays most widespread on the screen, especially due to commercial success on American television (Gray, Jones and Thompson 2009, 19). For this reason, although I do not ignore debates in literary studies and other disciplines, I primarily engage with recent scholarship in film, television and media studies (e.g. Day 2012; McClennen 2011; Jones 2010; Baym 2010). Apart from moving images, I also discuss a variety of comics, because I argue that satire is characterised by similar storytelling techniques as cartoons and caricatures.

My investigation aims to clarify fundamental, general and abstract questions about the nature, function and significance of satire. In order to realise these aims, I introduce and develop methodological frameworks from analytic aesthetics and philosophy. I draw mostly on methodologies in philosophy of art to address my research questions and clarify closely related concepts to satire, including irony (Wilson and Sperber 2012), humour (Carroll 2014), fiction (Friend 2012), genre (Abell 2014), aesthetic experiences (Stecker 2010), entertainment (Shusterman 2003) and narrative interpretation (Currie 2004). I also engage with scholarship which has sought to appraise the nature, function and significance of satire by comparing it to philosophy (Gray 2005; Higgie 2014). On the one hand, such comparisons are problematically vague and, under scrutiny, the differences between satire and philosophy quickly become apparent (see Diehl 2013). On the other hand, these comparisons are valuable because they rightfully highlight that satirists and philosophers share a moral concern for truth, which situates them in a similar existential framework. Still, concepts like 'truth' and 'ethics' have remained problematically vague in recent debates about satire, especially in the wake of postmodernism. In order to redress this

situation and introduce greater clarity to the debates, I develop a meta-ethical investigation rooted in the quasi-realism of Simon Blackburn (1998).

In the first chapter, I challenge the idea that satire is a spirit or mode which can only be characterised by a cluster account (Condren 2012). Instead, I define satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. This definition highlights a fundamental tension in satire between a broadly moral purpose to critique and a broadly aesthetic purpose to entertain, which explains the ambiguous reception of satire: hailed for its truthful moral interventions (Gray 2005), enjoyed for its aesthetic pleasures (Griffin 1994), but also dismissed as frivolous pastime that cultivates cynicism (Webber 2011). In the second chapter, I frame the significance of satire's definitive tension as corresponding to a fundamental conflict in ethical life between the demands of critique and its limits. Although I acknowledge that satire's purpose to entertain limits its political impact as critique (Holbert 2013), I revalue entertainment in satire as therapy to cope with the limits of critique. In the third chapter, I investigate the cognitive contributions of satire as critique, even if they are moderate. Acknowledging that fictions are epistemically risky (Currie and Levinson 2017), I acknowledge that satire can deceive, but I also defend that good satire can teach non-trivial truths, including moral truths. Nonetheless, I advocate a careful cognitivism which acknowledges that satire's cognitive contributions need to be complemented with further inquiry. In the fourth chapter, I explain that satirists often cultivate a humorous irony to cope with the limits of critique. In dialogue with psychological research on the therapeutic function of narratives (Roberts and Holmes 1999) and the correlation between humour and wellbeing (Martin 2007; Ruch and Heintz 2016), I conceptually clarify the therapeutic dimension of humorous irony in satire as a narrative strategy to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. I conclude that further research about satire should focus less on proving that satire changes the world and more on how it copes with it.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS 3

ABSTRACT 5

ILLUSTRATIONS 9

INTRODUCTION 11

1. AIMS, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY 11
2. SATIRE AND PHILOSOPHY 17
3. CHAPTER OUTLINE 27

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING SATIRE (AND WHY A DEFINITION MATTERS) 30

1. INTRODUCTION 30
2. THE PERNICIOUS AMBIGUITY OF SATIRE 31
3. THE PROTEAN VARIETY OF SATIRE 34
4. DEFINING SATIRE AND WHY IT MATTERS 38
5. SATIRE IS A GENRE – NOT A SPIRIT OR MODE 53
6. THE AMBIGUITY OF SATIRE RECONSIDERED 63
7. ETHICS VS. AESTHETICS 70
8. CONCLUSION 82

CHAPTER TWO: ENTERTAINMENT AND THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE 83

1. INTRODUCTION 83
2. ETHICS VS. AESTHETICS 85
3. RECENT DEBATES ABOUT THE VALUE OF SATIRE 91
4. POSTMODERN ANXIETIES ABOUT CRITIQUE 98
5. DISPELLING POSTMODERN RELATIVISM 103
6. THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE 113
7. REVALUING ENTERTAINMENT 121
8. ETHICS VS. AESTHETICS RECONSIDERED 127
9. CONCLUSION 136

CHAPTER THREE: FICTION, COGNITION AND CRITIQUE 138

1. INTRODUCTION 138
2. VALUE INTERACTION IN SATIRE 139
3. FICTION AND TRUTHFULNESS 145
4. PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FICTION 152
5. A CAREFUL COGNITIVISM ABOUT SATIRE 159
6. SATIRICAL THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS 172
7. CONCLUSION 192

CHAPTER FOUR: HUMOUR, IRONY AND THERAPY 194
1. INTRODUCTION 194
2. SATIRE AS THERAPY 195
3. ADDRESSING ANXIETIES ABOUT HUMOUR AND IRONY 198
4. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMOUR AND IRONY . 207
5. HUMOROUS IRONY IN SATIRE 217
6. HUMOROUS IRONY AND THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE 230
7. SATIRE, PHILOSOPHY AND THE ABSURD 239
8. CONCLUSION 247
CONCLUSION 249
REFERENCE LIST 257
PRIMARY SOURCES (MEDIA) 257
SECONDARY SOURCES 263

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Tom Tomorrow, “Dogbert.” In *25 Years of Tomorrow*. Vol. 1, 315.
2. From *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, June 7.
3. From *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver*, June 14.
4. Stephanie McMillan, “Global Economy.”
5. Stephanie McMillan, *Capitalism Must Die!*, 43.
6. Khalid Albaih, “Worlds.”
7. Cristy C. Road, “Protect Trans Lives.”
8. Ted Rall, “Highlights From the Million Moderate March.”
9. Ted Rall, *2024*, 35.
10. Matt Bors, “Onward Christian Soldiers!”
11. Matt Bors and David Axe, *War is Boring,* 55.
12. Michael Goodwin and Dan E. Burr, “Trans-Pacific Partnership and ‘Free Trade’”, 18.
13. From *South Park*, “The Hobbit.”
14. From *South Park*, “The Hobbit.”
15. From *South Park*, “The Hobbit.”
16. From Britney Spears, “Work Bitch.”
17. From *South Park*, “The Hobbit.”
18. From *South Park*, “The Hobbit.”
19. From *District 9*, directed by Neill Blomkamp.
20. From *South Park*, “The Hobbit.”
21. Jen Sorensen, “If We Treated Our Homes like We Do the Earth.”
22. Jen Sorensen, “In the Minority.”
23. From Jen Sorensen, “If We Treated Our Homes like We Do the Earth.”
24. From Jen Sorensen, “In the Minority.”
25. Aaron McGruder, *The Boondocks. Because I Know You Don’t Read the Newspaper*, 127.
26. Aaron McGruder, *Fresh for ’01… You Suckas!*, 33.
27. From *The Boondocks*, “…Or Die Trying.”
28. From *The Boondocks*, “…Or Die Trying.”
29. Aaron McGruder, *Fresh for ’01… You Suckas!*, 72.
30. Aaron McGruder, *The Boondocks. Because I Know You Don’t Read the Newspaper*, 47.
31. Andy Singer, *No Exit*, 123.
32. Lloyd Dangle, “My Last Cartoon.”
33. Tom Tomorrow, “Breaking News.” In *25 Years of Tomorrow*. Vol. 2, 485.

34. Tom Tomorrow, "A Generic Tom Tomorrow Cartoon." In *25 Years of Tomorrow*. Vol. 1, 401.

INTRODUCTION

1. AIMS, SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

What is satire, what can it do and what not, and why should we care about it? Since its introduction as a classification of artworks in Roman times, these fundamental questions about satire have been continually addressed by satirists themselves, their fans, their detractors, political and moral authorities, art-critics, and, not in the least, scholars. These longstanding debates about satire have often been fruitful and enlightening. Still, the fundamental questions about satire's nature, function and significance have remained unanswered. This continuing uncertainty about satire is evident in recent debates and discussions. When the German comedian Jan Böhmermann was sued by the Turkish government in 2016 for insulting President Erdogan, politicians and public figures rose to defend satire in the name of freedom of speech. Yet, they were in discord about whether they defended ridicule for a critical purpose or simply ridicule for the sake of it. Further, during the 2016 American presidential campaign, satirists like Samantha Bee and John Oliver were repeatedly praised in online media for 'destroying' Donald Trump, whereas they themselves disavowed such hyperbolic appraisals of their political impact. At the same time, after the election, online sales of satires like George Orwell's *1984* and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* soared, and the planned adaption of Atwood's feminist novel as a drama series on Hulu was framed in response to Trump's gender politics. Nevertheless, some critics and scholars have argued that satirists throughout the ages have been foremost entertainers, not moral or political actors. For this reason, again others have argued that because it indulges in entertainment, satire like *The Daily Show with John Stewart* or *The Simpsons* is cynical and breeds moral apathy.

In this thesis, I aim to intervene in these ongoing debates about satire in order to introduce greater conceptual clarity about its nature, function and significance. In order to clarify these fundamental, general and abstract questions, I will introduce a philosophical methodology. Specifically, I will develop methodological frameworks from analytic philosophy, in particular aesthetics. Since the aim of my investigation is to introduce greater conceptual clarity about satire, I consider philosophy in the analytic tradition, renowned for its precision and perspicuity, as the only method to remediate the confusion and inconclusiveness in current debates. My philosophical investigation of satire can be situated in the current expansion of research topics beyond the traditional remit of aesthetics, including research about comics (Meskin and Cook 2012), videogames (Smuts

2005), silent comedy (Carroll 2007) and irony in films or pictures (Currie 2010; 2011). Still, only few philosophers have turned their attention to satire, without addressing the fundamental questions I aim to answer here (Diehl 2013; Dadlez 2011). Therefore, my sustained and fundamental research about satire offers a new and further contribution to the widening remit of contemporary aesthetics. At the same time, my investigation will communicate with research about satire in other scholarly disciplines, as well as incorporate insights by journalists, critics and, not in the least, satirists themselves. For this reason, I hope that my investigation will be of value to all who have an interest in satire, both inside and outside academia.

Traditionally, satire was a predominantly literary phenomenon and therefore primarily studied in literary studies. Yet, nowadays, satire has become more prevalent on the screen than the page, especially because narrowcasting strategies, which target niche demographics, have made it a commercially viable product on American television (Gray, Jones and Thompson 2009, 19). Moreover, since *Time* magazine proclaimed *The Simpsons* (Fox, 1989-pres.) as the best TV show of the twentieth century, satire has also developed a reputation of 'quality TV' (Time staff 1999). Seeking to capitalise both on this commercial and critical success, there has been a surge of satire on American TV, from *South Park* (Comedy Central, 1997-pres.) through *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (Comedy Central, 1999-2015) to *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee* (TBS, 2016-pres.). These television programmes and their formats have been globally disseminated (Baym and Jones 2012), especially propelled by the digital revolution (Day 2012, 24). The ubiquity of satirical comedy in contemporary globalised culture has led to ample scholarly discussion in film, television and media studies. Specifically, scholars first turned their attention to *The Simpsons* (Alberti 2004; Gray 2005), followed by *South Park* (Johnson-Woods 2007; Weinstock 2008; Stratyner and Keller 2009) and later the satirical news parody of Jon Stewart and others (Peterson 2008; Jones 2010; Baym 2010; McClennen 2011), alongside hybrid forms like Michael Moore's satirical documentaries (Day 2012). My investigation will primarily engage with these recent debates in film, television and media studies. For this reason, my thesis can be situated as much in aesthetics as in film studies, broadly conceived.

Since the aim of my thesis is to assess the nature, function and significance of satire in general, I have tried to be as representative as possible in delimiting my corpus. At various points, I engage with the ancient satire of Horace and Juvenal, as well as the Augustan

satire of Jonathan Swift and the views of his contemporary, John Dryden. Throughout, my assessment of satire is further informed by scholarship on literary satire from antiquity to modernity. Still, in order to substantiate the contemporary relevance of my investigation, I focus mostly on present-day satire. For reasons explained above, I pay particular attention to various moving images, most prominently *District 9*, *I, Daniel Blake*, *Last Week Tonight With John Oliver*, *Mock the Week, South Park* and *The Boondocks*. Further, because I will develop a kinship between satire and cartoons, many of my examples are comics, including Mike Goodwin and Dan E. Burr's *Economix*, alongside work from Aaron McGruder, Cristy C Road, Dan Perkins (aka Tom Tomorrow), Jen Sorensen, Khalid Albaih, Matt Bors and Stephanie McMillan. In terms of media, I also branch out to stand-up comedy, particularly discussing Lenny Bruce and Dick Gregory, and literature, specifically focusing on Margaret Atwood and Fay Weldon. I further discuss so-called satirical websites like *The Onion* and *The Daily Mash*, alongside satirical magazines like *Private Eye*. Finally, in order to highlight that satire need not be funny, I analyse musical satire by Iggy Pop and Jimi Hendrix. For the record, not all examples listed here are satire; some will just be discussed in comparison or contrast to satire.

This selection of satire throughout the ages and in various media permits me to draw conclusions about the nature, function and significance of the genre in general. Still, my selection has its limits. For one, I focus almost exclusively on satire in English, apart from discussing the German *Neo Magazin Royale*, the reception of *Charlie Hebdo* and, briefly, some examples in Dutch. Partly, my focus on satire in English is deliberate to appeal to an international audience, but my selection also reflects the limits of my competences. For similar reasons, my corpus is exclusively Western. My investigation would have been enriched by expanding its focus to non-Western satire. Unfortunately, I cannot claim the literacy or competence to do so. Hopefully, these hiatuses can be addressed in the future. At the same time, my corpus reflects the historical and cultural biases of satire in the West. In this respect, when Jen Sorensen explained that, after ten years, she was the first female cartoonist to win the Herblock Prize for Editorial Cartooning, she quipped, "[t]o be fair, 1 in 10 is probably an accurate ratio when it comes to political cartoonists, and even that might be a little generous" (2014). While Sorensen remains the only woman to have won the Herblock Prize to this day, all winners of the award are white. Without demonising the Herblock Foundation, there is still an undeniable problem regarding satire and diversity. For this reason, I have endeavoured to select a relatively diverse corpus, but my ultimate

selection remains dominated by white men. While I do hope to have introduced at least some prominent examples that help to redress the gender and racial imbalance in discussions of satire, I acknowledge that more can and should be done.

My philosophical investigation into the nature, function and significance of satire aims to take a stand in various longstanding and current debates. For this reason, I compare it to a metaphorical exercise of mountaineering. According to Simon Blackburn, philosophy is a landscape dominated by “three majestic and magnetic philosophical summits: truth, beauty, and goodness” (2010, 46). In this philosophical landscape, satire is only a middle-sized mountain. Yet, in order to know where we stand on satire, it is necessary to also approach the three summits – not in in the hope to reach the top, but to get high enough to see the best path up the middle-high mountain below. Moreover, satire borders several other mountains, including irony, humour, fiction, genre, narrative, critique, entertainment, value interaction, art and cognition, art as therapy, etc. Mastering satire is therefore more akin to climbing a mountain range, than a mountain top. Fortunately, most of this climbing will happen firmly in the trail of philosophical Sherpas, whom I will introduce below. Apart from mountaineering, my investigation can also be likened to philosophical boat maintenance. Otto Neurath famously introduced a metaphor for epistemological anti-foundationalism by arguing that “[w]e are like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without ever being able to dismantle it in dry-dock and reconstruct it from the best components” (1983, 92). Likewise, satire is a plank in Neurath’s boat, the stability of which can only be assessed by standing on other planks, checking their stability by again standing on others, in order to keep the boat afloat. Evidently, much can go wrong on such a metaphorical trip, so I consider it to have been successful to some degree if I do not sink my boat or fall down a mountain.

One methodological mainstay of my investigation is Gregory Currie’s theory of narrative interpretation, which will ground my interpretation of satires and other narratives. Currie defines narratives as “intentional-communicative artefacts: artefacts that have as their function the communication of a story, which function they have by virtue of their makers’ intentions” (2010, 6). For this reason, narrative interpretation is guided by communicative principles (Currie 2004, 112). Currie roots his theory of narrative interpretation in Dan Sperber and Deirde Wilson’s relevance theory of communication (2012). According to Sperber and Wilson, a communicative utterance represents a thought of the speaker that it resembles in content (2012, 127). On the grounds of such a communicative utterance, a

hearer infers the most optimally relevant interpretation of the thought the speaker intended to convey (Currie 2004, 111). Similarly, Currie argues that when interpreting a narrative, “we use the text, together with various other things, to come up with the best ideas we can about what the author intended to convey” (2005, 109). However, Currie highlights that “interpretation is not author-centred” in the sense that we seek to establish authorial intentions irrespective of textual evidence (2004, 125). According to Currie, narrative interpretation is governed by “the *constitutive* constraint”, which means that “[t]he text constrains work interpretation in ways that no other source of evidence does. An interpretation can be legitimate only if it makes coherent sense of the text (i.e. the text of that work)” (2005, 126, original emphasis). For this reason, I will infer the meaning of satirical narratives grounded in textual evidence of the satirist’s intention, sometimes irrespective of extra-textual evidence. Still, I will often substantiate my interpretation with other evidence of the satirist’s intentions, such as interviews, but such extra evidence is relevant only when it substantiates evidence already inferred from the text itself.

Drawing on Currie’s theory of interpretation and other philosophical methodologies, my investigation aims to intervene in longstanding and ongoing debates about satire. Against a large consensus in contemporary scholarship, most forcefully encapsulated by Conal Condren (2012), I will argue that satire is not characterised by a cluster account, but should be defined by providing individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions. Pace Condren and others, I will further argue that satire is not primarily an attitude or spirit, but a classification of artworks, nor is it a mode, but a genre. Concretely, my proposal is that satire is a genre which has since Roman times guided interpretation and evaluation of works on the grounds of the purpose to critique and entertain. This proposal substantiates the crucial distinction between satire and so-called ‘pseudo-satire’, which lacks critical intent (Peterson 2008). Further, I will draw on empirical research to challenge hyperbolic appraisals of satire’s political impact (Holbert 2013), although I will also dismiss claims that satire is cynical or morally indifferent (Webber 2011). Similarly, I will moderate claims by supporters about satire’s exceptional truth-telling function, often compared to philosopy (see section 2 of this Introduction). Conretely, I will develop a careful cognitivism to elucidate what and how we can learn from satire. Finally, instead of defending the idea that satire changes the world, I will focus on how it develops strategies to cope with it. Concretely, I will further develop the notion introduced by satirists like Jon Stewart that satire has a function as catharsis or therapy (Fettis 2015). In this respect, I will engage with

psychological research about the therapeutic function of narratives (Roberts and Holmes 1999) and the correlation between humour and wellbeing (Martin 2007; Ruch and Heintz 2016).

Apart from intervening in debates about satire, I will also take a stand in some debates in aesthetics, often indirectly, but sometimes also directly. My most direct intervention aims to contribute to the debate about communicative irony, by introducing a proposal that challenges the pretence theory of irony (Currie 2010) and seeks to defend the echoic theory of irony (Sperber and Wilson 2012). When it comes to debates about humour, I follow Noël Carroll's version of the incongruity theory (2014). Further, developing my definition of satire as a genre, I elaborate Catharine Abell's proposal that genres are normative categories which stipulate a purpose that guides interpretation and evaluation of works (2014). Similarly, endorsing a related proposal of Stacie Friend, I consider classification as fiction or non-fiction as similar to a genre classification; in other words, I endorse a contextualism about fiction (2012). Investigating what we can learn from satire as fiction, I exercise caution (Currie and Levinson 2017), but nonetheless develop a cognitivism about satire (John 2013; Carroll 2012; Gaut 2007; Young 2001). Further, elaborating my proposal of satire as therapy, I draw on ideas introduced by Peter Goldie on narrative thinking (2012). I will also engage with debates on interaction between aesthetic and ethical value, without making an explicit commitment, albeit everything I say can be framed in Carroll's moderate moralism (2002). Discussing aesthetic experiences, I follow Robert Stecker's minimalist approach (2010), and my ideas about entertainment are informed by Richard Shusterman (2003). Apart from methodologies in aesthetics, I will develop ideas on cartoons introduced by Scott McCloud in comics studies (1993) and on caricature by Ernst Gombrich in art history (1963).

My investigation will also engage with debates in philosophy beyond aesthetics. In this respect, my thesis is a philosophy of satire in two senses. Not only will I develop a philosophical investigation of satire, but I will also investigate the issue of satire as philosophy. Perhaps surprisingly, the idea that satire is related to philosophy has proven common and enduring in scholarship. These comparisons are most common outside philosophy or in works by philosophers aimed at a wider audience. Although not without value, the explanatory value of these comparisons is often undermined because key concepts like 'truth' and 'ethics' have remained vague and underdeveloped. In response, I aim to introduce greater clarity to the debate by developing a meta-ethical investigation.

Specifically, following Simon Blackburn, I will defend a minimalism about truth (2006) and a quasirealism about ethics (1998). My ideas about the value of truthfulness, and its risks, are further informed by Bernard Williams (2002) and his reading of Nietzsche. I also develop Susan Wolf's argument that moral reasons for action do not always trump other reasons, including aesthetic reasons (2015). This meta-ethical investigation will reveal a fundamental conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self, which I will link to a fundamental tension in satire between critique and entertainment. In this regard, I will revalue entertainment in satire as a therapy to deal with the limits of critique. I will focus especially on the therapeutic dimension of humorous and ironic strategies in satire. Accordingly, I will attenuate Blackburn's anxieties about the moral irrelevance of humorous irony, which he roots in a dismissal of Richard Rorty (1989). Throughout my investigation, I will reflect on the comparison between satire and philosophy, which I now introduce in some detail.

2. SATIRE AND PHILOSOPHY

My investigation into the nature, function and significance of satire can be framed in relation to common comparisons between satire and philosophy. Often, scholars and critics have appraised the significance of the genre by comparing its nature and function to philosophy. These comparisons are valuable because they highlight the ethical and truth-telling function that satire has as critique. To clarify, critique is a praxis of polemical enlightenment which, in the West, is commonly traced to Socrates, who aimed to emancipate society by stinging his fellow citizens out of complacency (Bronner 2011, 1). Similarly, to a certain extent, satirists are gadflies who seek to improve the world by revealing the falsity of the status quo. However, this comparison between satire and philosophy is loose and vague. On the one hand, because it is loose and vague, the comparison to philosophy does not distinguish satire's nature from other forms of critique, such as critical theory or feminism. On the other hand, if the comparison is pursued more stringently, it quickly becomes clear that the function of satire does not coincide with that of philosophy. Most importantly, entertainment has a central function in satire which it does not have in philosophy. Accordingly, the argument that satire is like philosophy risks ignoring the significance of the genre's definitive combination between critique and entertainment. In my investigation, I will therefore not stringently pursue the idea that satire is philosophy, in the same way as some have investigated if film could be philosophy (see Smith and Wartenberg 2006). Still, I will continuously reflect on how the two can

complement each other. This more nuanced comparison between satire and philosophy serves to highlight an important existential dimension of the genre, which I introduce below.

Most often, in scholarship, satire has been compared to ancient philosophy. In *The Oxford Handbook to Philosophy and Literature*, Robert R. Branham has argued that philosophy and satire are related in their “willingness to offend, provoke, and outrage, all in the name of calling a spade a bloody shovel, of telling the awful truth” (2009, 141). Branham specifically identifies the continuity of a philosophical legacy from Socrates to Diogenes the Cynic in the development of satire (although he is also careful to distinguish the Socratic and Cynic traditions from each other). According to Branham, the divine mission that Socrates received from the Oracle of Delphi to act as a horsefly and sting the citizens of Athens into moral reflection is satirical. He argues that “to practice philosophy as [Socrates] did is to satirize in public anyone with a reputation for wisdom, to show that reputation to be baseless by revealing through question and answer the comic gap (*to geloion*) between self-conception and public performance” (2009, 144). In a similar way to Socrates, Diogenes the Cynic later also set out on a divine mission to ‘deface the currency’ (*parakharattein to nomisma*), a pun which “exploits an ambiguity in the word *nomisma*, which can mean ‘metal currency’ (i.e., coinage) or ‘whatever is sanctioned by current or established usage’ (i.e., custom or law)” (2009, 146). The Cynics set out on their task “to drive out of circulation or replace conventional thinking sanctioned by tradition” especially “through fearless acts of truth telling (*parrhēsia*)” (2009, 146-7). As identified by Branham, “the Cynic *parrhesiast* (frank and candid truthteller)” (2009, 145) and Socratic “horsefly” (2009, 148) have become common models to frame the nature, function and significance of satirists’ efforts.

Several scholars have drawn comparisons between Socrates and Roman satirists. Specifically, William S. Anderson has identified Horace as a ‘Roman Socrates’ (2014 [1963]). According to Anderson, the satiric persona developed by Horace, especially in book II of *Satires*, is not simply a joker (*lusor*), but a teacher (*doctor*) who wears a Socratic mask to tell the truth laughingly (*ridentem dicere verum*) (2014 [1963], 22/26/30-1). Anderson identifies Socratic irony as a reflexive attitude which provides Socrates with a license to critique (2014 [1963], 26-28). Similar claims about Socratic philosophy and Roman satire have been developed by C.W. Mendell, who argues that “Socrates first brought philosophy into the field of ethics” (1920, 140) and exactly “ethics, practical philosophy of a popular sort, was

th[e] chief field" of the Roman satirists, Horace in particular (1920, 139-140). Additionally, Leon Guilhamet has argued that "[o]ther Roman satirists may be less Socratic than Horace, but Socrates invariably appears in their work and always as an object of reverence" (1985, 3). Guilhamet further explains that "[b]y portraying himself as a fly on a divine mission, Socrates succeeds in satirizing the city, its appointed representatives, and himself" (1985, 7), adding that a "role widely adopted by satirists is that of Socratic gadfly" (1985, 6). Guilhamet also argues that satirists hide serious claims behind the mask of a fool, identifying this process as "the perfect image of the Socratic paradox. Behind a comical, if not ugly exterior, professions of ignorance, and absurd contentions, the substance of wisdom is to be found" (1985, 9). Guilhamet alludes to a passage from *Symposium* (216e-217a) in which Socrates is compared to a Silenus or dirty woodland creature which looks ugly on the outside but possesses beauty on the inside. This seminal image was also incorporated by Rabelais in *Gargantua*, who, according to Guilhamet, acknowledged that "the Silenus image bodied forth some truths about his own art and satire generally" (1985, 10).

In literary studies, the comparison between satire and ancient philosophy has been further expanded beyond Roman times. Although he sought to downplay the centrality of ethics in satire, the comparison between satire and Socrates was further developed by Dustin Griffin, on the grounds of a shared function as enquiry and provocation (1994, 44). Similarly, George A. Test has argued that satire involves aggression and judgement in a ritual context of play governed by "the concept of *paidzeim spoude*, that is, playing seriously or seriously playing, as exemplified in Socrates" (1991, 23). Test also mentions the Socratic Silenus as part of a mythological substratum that historically informs satire (1991, 50-1). In an overview of political comedy, Charles E. Schutz likewise devotes a chapter to Socrates, whom he identifies as a divine fool who opposed conventions through humour and irony (1977, 86). Satire has further been linked to "that most serious mode of discourse, philosophy" by Conal Condren, who has related satire's straddling of the serious and non-serious to the principle of *serio ludere* (saying what is serious through laughter), which characterised the satirical writings of the Cynic philosopher, Lucian the Mocker (2012, 388-389). Similarly, Condren stresses the crucial role of humour in the literary tradition of Menippean satire (2012, 389), named after the Cynic philosopher Menippus of Gadera, and characterised by irony and humour in the service of *parrhesia* or direct and

brutal honesty (2012, 383). Similar links between satire and principles of ancient philosophy have also been developed in other disciplines.

In film, television and media studies, a comparison between satire and ancient philosophy was introduced by Jonathan Gray in his monograph on *The Simpsons* (2005). Gray equates the ironic truth-telling of satirical comedy to what Peter Sloterdijk (1987) has called 'kynicism' (from the Greek '*kynos*' or dog), a concept Sloterdijk introduced to distinguish his interpretation of Classical Cynicism from cynicism in its modern use. Gray quotes Sloterdijk when he explains that "[d]espite all apparent lack of respect, the kynic assumes a basically serious and upright attitude toward truth and maintains a thoroughly solemn relation, satirically disguised, to it" (Sloterdijk 1987, 296, quoted in Gray 2006 154). According to Gray, "where cynics have lost faith in the existence of truth, and where their cynicism serves as a reaction to this loss of faith, kynics hold on to a notion of truth, but since they see it being perverted all around them, their cynicism and laughing ridicule serves as a defense and an offense to this state of affairs" (2005, 154). Gray's application of kynicism to satirical comedy was picked up Jeffrey P. Jones (2010, 246-251) and Rebecca Higgie (2014). Specifically, Higgie argues that "[k]ynicism is cynicism without the latter's nihilistic nature" and complements her analysis of Sloterdijk's kynicism with that of Foucault's courageous *parrhesia*, also derived from Classical Cynicism (2014, 185). She also acknowledges how satirical truth-telling comes with "the risk of personal embarrassment, public outrage" (Higgie 2014, 195). Higgie does stress that satire is not strictly kynical by nature, since "[t]here is probably no satire that is strictly kynical or cynical. A satire may present politics as abusing essential ideas of truth and justice (kynical), and argue that it should change (kynical), while inevitably saying no truth remains (cynical)" (2014, 196).

Comparisons between satire and ancient philosophy are also commonplace in scholarship aimed at a general audience, in particular the various 'pop culture and philosophy' book series. According to Mark Ralkowski, *The Colbert Report* is similar to Socratic philosophy, for both Socrates and Stephen Colbert strike an ironic pose to expose the ignorance of political and moral authorities (2009). Likewise, John Stewart has been compared to a Socratic gadfly (Michels and Ventimiglia 2007; Barad 2007) and modern Cynic (Bárcenas 2007). Specifically, Jamie Warner has argued that "Jon Stewart embodies a contemporary form of what Michel Foucault calls *parrhesia*" (2010, 37). According to Warner, "*The Daily Show* functions as a *parrhesiastes* in our media-saturated, consultant-driven political environment, a truth-teller in an environment where no truth goes unspun" (2010, 42).

Similarly, *South Park* and its transgressions have been framed in a Socratic model (Hanley 2007; Young 2007; Cantor 2007), alongside *The Simpsons* (Keslowitz 2006, 15-23).

Taking stock, comparisons between satire and philosophy are common in scholarship. However, although they signal satire's function as critique, they are too vague to identify its specific nature and significance. In this respect, Alexander Nehamas has explained that Socrates is "a half-empty page" which has been interpreted and completed in different ways after his death (1998, 185). Similarly, comparisons between satirists and Socrates are ultimately of "an abstract model" which leaves much open for interpretation (Nehamas 1998, 186). Similarly, like Socrates, Diogenes left no writings of his own, which facilitates the retrospective presentation of his philosophy as an amalgam of 'universal' characteristics (Navia 1996, 22). Accordingly, there is a danger that Classical Cynicism develops into an overly baggy and almost meaningless concept, as exemplified in works like Ian Cutler's *Cynicism from Diogenes to Dilbert* (2005). Cutler has linked the philosophy of Diogenes to a variety of figures and movements, including Jeremy Paxman, Dada, Nietzsche, Beckett, H.L. Mencken, *Monty Python*, *South Park* as well as the titular *Dilbert*. However, if almost any oppositional practice can be linked to Classical Cynicism, such comparisons become almost meaningless. Moreover, expansive comparisons like Cutler's suggest that satire is in the same league as some media from which it really ought to be distinguished, including *Dilbert* cartoons. In this respect, American satirical cartoonist Dan Perkins, better known as Tom Tomorrow, has ridiculed *Dilbert* and its reception (fig. 1) because it "had a reputation as a critique of corporate power, when in reality it was just a comic strip about the banalities of office life" (2016, 316).

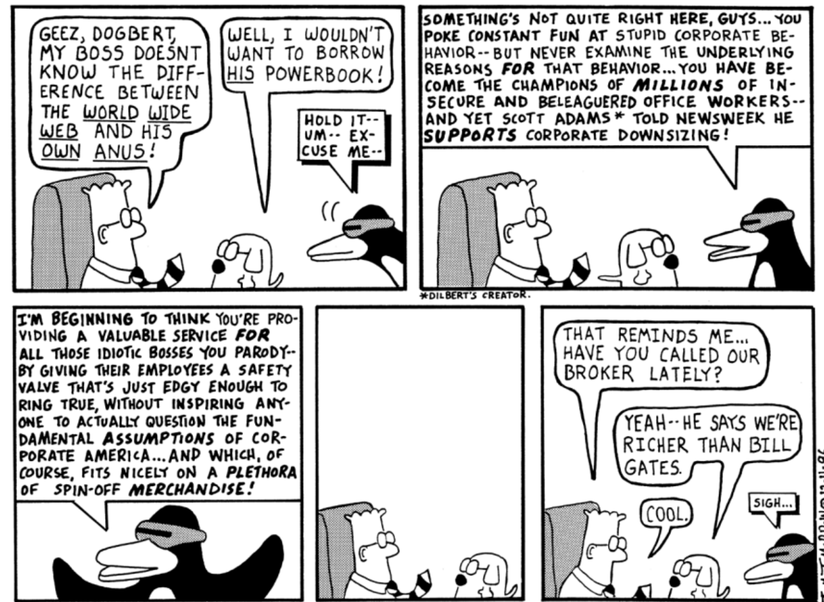

Figure 1

As Tom Tomorrow's satire of *Dilbert* clarifies, comparisons to Classical Cynicism are not only too inclusive to establish anything specific about satire's professed relationship to philosophy, but generate undue ambiguity by drawing illegitimate parallels to other media.

One particularly vague characterisation of Classical Cynicism is Sloterdijk's kynicism, which has been criticised as a hotchpotch of ideas borrowed from Diogenes, Nietzsche, Heidegger and New Age spirituality (Devos and Achterhuis 2005; Groot 1985). Most importantly, albeit kynicism has been said to elucidate satire's function as critique, Sloterdijk presented his *Critique of Cynical Reason* as an attack on the critical tradition of Enlightenment (1987, xxx). Specifically, Sloterdijk explicitly targeted the tradition of critical theory which he accused of a "European neurosis [that] sees happiness as its goal and an effort of reason as a way to achieve it. This compulsion has to be overcome. The critical addiction to making things better has to be given up" (Sloterdijk 1987, xxxvii). Instead, Sloterdijk preaches a Heideggerian *Gelassenheit* (releasement) and argues that "in a nonpraxis, a refraining from acting, a letting happen and a nonintervention, higher qualities of insight can come to expression than in any deed" (1987, 540). Further linking kynicism to a reading of Nietzsche, Sloterdijk argues that "Diogenes is the real founder of the Gay Science" (1987, 287) and explains that "[k]ynical reason culminates in the knowledge – decried as nihilism – that we must snub the grand goals" (1987, 195). Sloterdijk argues that, like Diogenes, "we cannot be nihilistic enough (…) [i]n that moment when our consciousness becomes ripe to

let go of the idea of good as a goal and to devote itself to what is *already there*” (1987, 195 original emphasis). Sloterdijk further ascribes “a puzzling oriental, indeed Asiatic component” to Diogenes’s character, adding that “[i]n the laughter of Diogenes and Buddha, the ego itself, which had taken things so seriously, laughs itself to death” (1987, 144).

In *Critique of Cynical Reason*, Sloterdijk explicitly compared kynicism to satire. Sloterdijk called the “first Gay Science” of Diogenes a “satirical intelligence”, clarifying that

> Diogenes inaugurates the Gay Science by treating serious sciences in a tongue-in-cheek manner. How much truth is contained in something can be best determined by making it thoroughly laughable and then watching to see how much joking around it can take. For truth is a matter that can stand mockery, that is freshened by any ironic gesture directed at it. Whatever cannot stand satire is false (1987, 287).

This idea that laughter is a test of truth, also developed by Shaftesbury (2001 [1711], 1.11), has sometimes been used in the service of establishing humour as central to philosophy (Zwart 1996, 200; Amir 2014, 40ff). However, Sloterdijk contends that Diogenes’s laughter was ostracised in the philosophical academy by Plato’s seriousness (1987, 102ff). Moreover, in opposition to the Frankfurt School, which he considered as the philosophical establishment at the time, Sloterdijk stressed that Diogenes’s laughter was not critical, for “what we in our scientific tradition call ‘critique’ is nothing other than a satirical function that no longer understands itself” (1987, 287). Critical theory and critique, as characterised by Horkheimer, aimed to expose the falsity of ideology and accordingly act as a “liberating (…) influence” that realises “emancipation from slavery” in order to “create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of all (1972, 246). By contrast, Sloterdijk identifies kynicism as the “‘self-revelation’ of truth” which “for the ancients was based in ‘cosmic passivity’” (1987, 541).

Importantly, Sloterdijk’s explicit dissociation from critique and critical theory contrasts with comparisons between kynicism and satire in scholarship. At the same time as applying kynicism to the satire of *The Simpsons*, Jonathan Gray also introduced an updated conception of Habermas’s public sphere to clarify the social and political function of the series as critique (2005, 104). Moreover, rather than Sloterdijk’s passivity, comparisons between satire and philosophy exactly highlight activist qualities associated with critique. In

this respect, Erich Bronner opens *Critical Theory. A Very Short Introduction* with the argument that

> "[p]ilosophy has evidenced a subversive element from its inception. (…) Socrates called conventional wisdom into question. He subjected long-standing beliefs to rational scrutiny and speculated about concerns that project beyond the existing order. What became known as 'critical theory' was built on this legacy" (2011, 1).

So rather than substantiating or clarifying the suggested links with philosophy, comparisons between satire and kynicism ultimately obscure the philosophical role as critique which scholars seek to ascribe to satire.

Alternatively, Michel Foucault introduced a rigorous conception of Classical Cynicism which does highlight a critical dimension (2011). At the same time, he attributes a pivotal place to Classical Cynicism in the history of Western philosophy and culture which is stimulating but suggestive. According to Foucault, through their radical free speech or *parrhesia*, the cynics introduced a model of the 'true' life (or the life lived in truth) which has had great cultural impact (2011, 287). More specifically, Foucault argued that the Cynics revealed the life devoted to truth as radically "*other*" and opposed to conventional forms of existence (2011, 315, original emphasis). Foucault has suggested that this concept of the true life as an *other* life has been progressively ignored in academic philosophy, but has had various cultural manifestations over time, including Christian asceticism, political radicalism and modern art (2011, 181ff). While Foucault passed away before he could substantiate these suggestions, some scholars have identified contemporary satire as one such form of *parrhesia* or brutal truth-telling in opposition to mainstream culture (Higgie 2014; Warner 2010). Nevertheless, although satire is to some extent oppositional, it does not share the radical otherness which Foucault rightfully ascribes to Classical Cynicism (after all, Diogenes literally lived like a dog on the street). While critical and oppositional, the likes of commercial satirists like John Oliver and Samantha Bee are hardly radically outside the mainstream. Likewise, in Roman times, satirists were all part of a cultural elite. For this reason, comparisons to Foucault's *parrhesia* frame satire as more radical than it really is.

Moreover, analytic philosophers like Martha Nussbaum have identified Foucault's reconceptualisation of philosophy on the model of Classical Cynicism as "exciting, [but] also deeply problematic" (1994, 5). Nussbaum has critically highlighted that for Foucault "philosophy is a set of *techniques du soi*, practices for the formation of a certain sort of self"

which overlooks that “[w]hat is distinctive about the contribution of philosophers is that they assert that *philosophy*, and nothing else, is the art [of living] we require, an art that deals in valid and sound arguments, an art that is committed to the truth” (1994, 5, original emphasis). In other words, although Foucault rightfully highlights self-stylisation as central to ancient philosophy, analytic philosophers like Nussbaum have complained that his conception of philosophy as an aesthetics of life does not duly acknowledge the singularity of philosophy, nor the centrality of reason and argumentation as the distinctive methods through which philosophy aspires to truth. Albeit Nussbaum also incorporates an existential component in her philosophy, she does try to marry philosophy’s function as a therapeutic praxis to the standards of analytic philosophy. By contrast, thinkers who have been inspired by Foucault’s aesthetics of life have often moved away from or operate in the fringes of academic philosophy. Take Joep Dohmen, who lectures at the small University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht alongside organising philosophical holidays, or Michel Onfray, who founded the *Université Populaire* in Caen and publishes prolifically as a public intellectual.

The comparison between satire and philosophy on the grounds of Foucault’s aesthetics of life is unlikely to convince many analytic philosophers. In this respect, addressing the question whether satire could qualify as moral philosophy, Nicholas Diehl has concluded that “for analytic philosophers, satire is as close as kin but less than kind” (2013, 319). Diehl does grant that “satire has a closer kinship with moral philosophy than has generally been recognized” and even argues “that it is possible to practice philosophy in the analytic tradition through satire” (2013, 311). According to Diehl, satire often develops its critique through an analogy between a fictional representation and a real-world target, which is a legitimate philosophical technique (2013, 313). Nevertheless, Diehl stresses he does not “think that the history of satire provides philosophers with examples of works of art that are simultaneously works of philosophy” (2013, 319). Specifically, Diehl highlights that the aesthetic concerns of satire do not necessarily concur with the moral concerns of philosophy, adding that standard features of satire, like ridicule, often develop into philosophical flaws, such as *ad hominem* attacks (2013, 319). For this reason, Diehl explains that it would ultimately be “deeply uncharitable to insist upon treating satire as a defective subset of moral philosophy rather than as a categorically distinct mode” (2013, 319). At the same time, he argues that satire could in principle be philosophy because “we can establish rough desiderata from our study of the borders of satire and of good philosophical practice

and then build (perhaps in thought experiment) the sort of work that will satisfy the terms of both" (2013, 320). Yet, although such a hypothetical work may in some way conceivably be philosophy, it is problematically artificial as satire. In other words, it is highly unlikely that an actual satire would also be philosophy.

In conclusion, comparisons between satire and philosophy are problematic. On the one hand, comparisons in scholarship outside philosophy, sometimes rooted in models developed in the continental tradition, lack precision and misconstrue either satire or philosophy. On the other hand, when pursued more stringently, the comparison between actual satire and academic philosophy is a non-starter. Nevertheless, albeit in a loose sense, this comparison is not without value because it rightfully situates satire and philosophy in the same existential 'ballpark'. The vagueness of the metaphor is deliberate. Satire and philosophy are together in this existential ballpark because they share a concern for truth, critique and emancipation. In Western culture, this existential concern has commonly been traced to Socrates. Still, this existential ballpark is expansive and, apart from philosophy and satire, contains many other practices, including critical theory and feminism. Moreover, in this existential ballpark, satire and philosophy are distinguished because they play ball differently. Satire does not share the same commitment to reason and argumentation as philosophy, while entertainment is not as central to philosophy as to satire. On the grounds of this difference, satire is not in any sense really philosophy. Instead, I consider it more fruitful to investigate the existential significance satire may have exactly because it is not philosophy.

Throughout this thesis, I will develop the idea that satire can complement philosophy in significant ways because it has certain freedoms which academic philosophy lacks. Specifically, I will investigate the freedoms satire has as a fictional genre, whereas philosophy is a paradigm of non-fiction. Concretely, albeit fiction is epistemically perilous, I will argue that satire can make moderate cognitive contributions to a moral project of critique because it can exploit imaginative techniques in ways unavailable to philosophy. I do not claim that satire rivals epistemic best practice in philosophy, but it can nonetheless complement philosophical investigation in moderate ways. Moreover, although satire shares a moral commitment to critique with philosophy, as fiction, the genre also has a license to pursue the purpose of entertainment. Although I will acknowledge that satire's purpose to entertain abates its purpose to critique, I will revalue entertainment in satire as a therapeutic strategy to cope with existential issues that follow from its moral

commitment to critique. Concretely, my meta-ethical investigation will reveal that critique and its emancipatory ideal is indispensable, yet the demands of critique risk to madden and depress if unabated. In this respect, entertainment in satire can function as a therapeutically mature strategy to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. Accordingly, my investigation will frame the significance of satire as negotiating a fundamental and irresolvable conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self.

3. CHAPTER OUTLINE

In the first chapter, I will define satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. Satire's definitive purpose to critique and entertain can be traced to its inception as a genre classification in Roman times and remains to guide interpretation and appreciation of works to this day. This definitive combination of critique and entertainment supports art-critical practices which distinguish satire from more frivolous representations and practices, including fooling around and shock humour, as well as more solemn critical representations and practices, such as feminist philosophy and British social realist cinema. On the one hand, critique is a broadly moral pursuit, which involves taking a stand against a certain discourse or practice. On the other hand, entertainment is a broadly aesthetic pursuit, which, I will explain, involves delight in 'unexalted' aesthetic pleasures. Although the purposes of critique and entertainment can fruitfully interact in good satire, they are nonetheless propelled by concerns which often pull in contrastive directions. Whereas critique is motivated by the concern to make the world a better place, entertainment involves enjoying the easy pleasures of the world as it is. In this respect, satire is defined by a tension between the moral concerns that propel critique and the pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures in entertainment. This tension between ethics and aesthetics explains the ambiguous status of satire: hailed for its truthful moral interventions, enjoyed for its aesthetic pleasures, but also dismissed as frivolous pastime that cultivates cynicism. In the following chapters, I will address this ambiguity by investigating how satire's definitive tension determines its nature, function and significance.

In the second chapter, I will frame the significance of satire's definitive tension between critique and entertainment as corresponding to a fundamental conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self. I will explain that entertainment in satire is not simply instrumental to critique and neither is satire more effective as critique because

it entertains. Still, I do not consider it a flaw of the genre that it abates the moral demands of critique by pursuing the unexalted aesthetic pleasures of entertainment. I will introduce a meta-ethical investigation rooted in Simon Blackburn's quasi-realism to safeguard the genre's function as critique in light of common anxieties about truth and ethics in the wake of postmodernism. At the same time, my meta-ethical investigation will reveal the limits of critique. Although critique can highlight what is wrong with the world, it would be naïve to think that it can wholly emancipate the world. Moreover, an unabated commitment to critique is psychologically destructive. This absurd gap between the need for critique and its limits is a fundamental conflict in ethical life which is psychologically traumatic if unaddressed. In this respect, I will argue that entertainment in satire has a therapeutic function to abate the limits of critique. I will develop this therapeutic dimension of entertainment in satire by discussing Hume's strategy of engrossment in avocations to dispel philosophical melancholy. In this regard, I will link Hume's avocations to the unexalted aesthetic pleasures of entertainment. The aim of this investigation is not to resolve the tension between critique and entertainment in satire, but frame its significance in an existential framework.

In the third chapter, I will investigate the contributions of satire as critique, even if they are moderate. My investigation will challenge hyperbolic praise of satire's cognitive function or political impact. Such overestimations of satire's political and cognitive function are pernicious because they set the genre up for failure by introducing expectations it cannot uphold. Since empirical evidence suggests that the political impact of satire is at best minimal, my investigation will focus on the cognitive value it may have as critique. I will argue that the cognitive value of satire is moderate, but significant. Concretely, I will defend the idea that good satire can teach non-trivial truths, including moral truths, but satirical truth is best understood as an introduction to an issue which requires further investigation or an interesting perspective which needs to be nuanced or complemented with further inquiry. Such a cognitive function can be meritorious, but should not be overestimated. At the same time, I caution that satire can deceive. The same fictional techniques which sometimes generate cognitive value in satire are also the ones responsible for cognitive flaws on other occasions. Specifically, I will compare satirical representations to cartoons and caricatures to highlight that they capitalise on imaginative techniques associated with fiction. In light of satire's fictional status as entertainment, I will develop a careful cognitivism to highlight the relative merits of the genre alongside its particular dangers. The

aim of this investigation is to intervene in a polarised debate between all too enthusiastic supporters and overly pessimistic detractors of satire's cognitive value.

In the final chapter, I will further develop the idea of satire as therapy. Specifically, I will explain that satirists often cultivate a humorous irony to cope with the limits of critique. Such humorous irony typically manifests itself as a hopeful pessimism or hopeless optimism, which permits satirists to pursue critique without being crushed by existential absurdity. In this respect, many satirists frame their satire as a way to remain sane in mad world they cannot wholly cure. My investigation will be substantiated by recent psychological research into the effects of humour and irony on psychological wellbeing. However, since methodological difficulties prevent to wholly transpose these findings to satire, I will develop a philosophical investigation to conceptually clarify the therapeutic dimension of humorous and ironic strategies in the genre. Concretely, I will frame the therapeutic function of humour and irony in satire as narrative strategies to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. For one, I will argue that ironic ridicule in satire fosters a symbolic victory over politically powerful targets by highlighting their normative deficiency. Moreover, humorous irony in satire introduces a therapeutic distance from the psychological trauma of critique. In this manner, satire is significant because it cultivates a humorous irony as a plausible therapeutic function in coming to terms with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. For this reason, further research about satire should focus less on proving that satire changes the world and more on how it copes with it.

CHAPTER ONE: DEFINING SATIRE (AND WHY A DEFINITION MATTERS)

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I develop a definition of satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. This definition elucidates the nature and function of satire, specifies its significance by distinguishing it from frivolous as well as more serious representations, and delimits pathways for an investigation into the value of satire, which I will develop in the rest of this thesis. My proposal to develop a definition of satire challenges the current consensus in scholarship that satire cannot and need not be defined (e.g. Diehl 2013, 311-312; Marshall 2013, 2-5; Quintero 2007, 6; Freudenburg; 2001, 1; Griffin 1994, 4; Test 1991, 7). The consensus is that satire can only be characterised on the grounds of a cluster of non-essential features or, in Wittgensteinian terms, family resemblances (Condren 2012). On this proposal, typical characteristics of satire (which are by no means necessary or sufficient conditions) include absurdity, analogy, attack, critique, fantasy, humour, irony, mockery, and transgression. However, such a cluster account is problematic because it supports a pernicious ambiguity in international media contexts by not appropriately distinguishing satire from other representations. Specifically, a cluster account inadequately acknowledges the difference between satire and frivolous fooling around or gratuitous

shock humour. Concretely, a satire which targets politics, like *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* (HBO, 2014-pres.), takes a moral stand and therefore differs from media which cultivate ridicule for the sake of insult or are just fooling around, like BBC's *Mock The Week* (2005-pres.). Yet, a cluster account does not acknowledge this fundamental difference and, thus misconstruing satire's serious nature and moral significance, perpetuates pernicious misunderstandings about satire in public discussions. For this reason, a definition matters.

At the same time, satire is not solemn. Although satire has a moral dimension which frivolous fooling around or gratuitous shock humour lack, by itself, it is also without the firmness of activist strategies like hunger strikes or the graveness of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*. As opposed to activism or other critical art, satire like *Last Week Tonight* also incorporates 'easy pleasures', including jokes and spectacle. In other words, satire does not just critique, but it also entertains. In this respect, I propose to define satire as a genre which has since Roman times guided interpretation and evaluation of works on the grounds of their purpose to critique and entertain. This proposal not only distinguishes satire from gratuitous offensiveness and frivolous fooling around, but also from critical representations which are straightforwardly solemn. Moreover, this definition highlights a fundamental tension which singularises satire as a genre. More specifically, satire is distinct because of a tension between critique, a broadly moral pursuit, and entertainment, a pursuit of 'unexalted' aesthetic pleasures. Although the purposes of critique and entertainment can concur, and must do so to a certain extent in good satire, they are nonetheless propelled by concerns which often pull in contrastive directions. Accordingly, satire is singularised by a tension between the moral responsibilities that propel critique and the aesthetic pursuit of pleasurable feelings in entertainment. This tension between ethics and aesthetics explains the ambiguous status of satire: hailed for its truthful moral interventions, enjoyed for its aesthetic pleasures, but also dismissed as frivolous pastime that cultivates cynicism. Highlighting this fundamental tension between critique and entertainment, my proposal attenuates this ambiguity by eliciting the two-fold nature of satire and outlining pathways for further investigation into its value and significance, which I will pursue in this thesis.

2. THE PERNICIOUS AMBIGUITY OF SATIRE

The label 'satire' is currently perniciously ambiguous. In international media contexts, representations are casually identified as satire, while there are good reasons to argue that they really are something else. Concrete examples include the 'satirical' quiz show *Mock the Week*, most of the articles on 'satirical' websites like *The Daily Mash* or *The Onion*, and the

‘satirical’ stand-up comedy of Frankie Boyle. These conflations are pernicious because they misconstrue the nature, function and significance of satire. Specifically, inappropriate classification of works as satire make the genre appear less morally serious than it really is, if not gratuitous. Recently, some scholars and critics have challenged this casual classification of works as satire in international media contexts. For example, they argue that satire like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* or *The Colbert Report*, which set out to critique politics, should be distinguished from representations that simply ridicule politics, including *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* (NBC, 1992-2009) (Peterson 2008, 11) and *Saturday Night Live* (NBC, 1975-pres.) (Day and Thompson 2013). The latter kinds of media are sometimes referred to as ‘pseudo-satire’. I agree with these scholars and critics that the distinction between satire and pseudo-satire is important, but often ignored in international media contexts. In order to theoretically support this distinction, I propose to develop a definition of satire.

To clarify, the distinction between satire and uncritical representations sometimes called pseudo-satire is no mere academic dispute, but holds political significance. Over time, the label ‘satire’ has become a political tool to defend and legitimise transgressive media. Already in early twentieth century Germany, Kurt Tucholsky (1919) defended the alleged crassness of satire on the grounds that satirists are offended idealists, allowed to go to any lengths in exposing malice. Similarly, the contemporary transgressions of *South Park* have been defended as “fart jokes with a higher purpose” on the grounds that “[t]he ultimate aim of any such ridicule and all satiric attack, even via scatology, is always correction and change” (Stratyner and Keller 2009, 3). However, very contrastive media have come to be defended in the name of ‘satire’. While the transgressions of *South Park* and the satire described by Tucholsky are legitimate because they incorporate a moral dimension of critique, not all transgressive media currently defended as ‘satire’ are equally meritorious. Sometimes the label ‘satire’ functions as a fig leaf to justify unwarranted transgression. Accordingly, the nature, function and significance of real satire risks being diluted by association to frivolous fooling around and gratuitous shock humour. Therefore, it is necessary to develop a more precise delimitation of satire than is commonplace in contemporary international media contexts.

The perniciousness of all too casual applications of the label ‘satire’ in contemporary international media contexts becomes clear when considering a few recent examples. The Belgian TV show *De Ideale Wereld* (Canvas, 2016-present) is commonly marketed and

received as satire, but it does not approach topical events with moral seriousness. Instead, the programme revels in silliness. Case in point, *De Ideale Wereld* approaches the commemoration of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in Paris as an opportunity for absurdist comedy, by approaching the event as a historical re-enactment of a medieval battle ("Een re-enactment van Charlie Hebdo"). While such humour is fairly inconsequential and innocent, conflating it with satire nonetheless obscures the moral seriousness and significance of the genre. Moreover, more problematically, similar conflations facilitate the defence of vicious shock humour as 'satire'. Recently, Dutch politician and former presenter Jan Roos sought to defend homophobic and misogynistic jokes by situating them in the context of a "satirical show" ("Pauw & Jinek", my translation). Along the same lines, the lawyer of Belgian author Herman Brusselmans defended his client's column about the Dutch singer-songwriter Anouk and her six children, entitled "Anouk is a blonde slut who refuses to swallow the pill", by arguing "Brusselmans writes satire" which means "you exaggerate" (Cardoen 2017, my translation). Similarly, after Scottish stand-up comedian Frankie Boyle mocked the disability of glamour model Katie Price's son, Harvey, broadcaster Channel 4 defended his stand-up act as a "satirical comment on high profile individuals whose lives have been played out in the media" (Sanchez 2010). In other words, the ambiguity of the label 'satire' in contemporary international media contexts is pernicious not only because it obscures the morally serious nature and significance of real satire, but because it has become a fig leaf to justify downright nasty humour.

Summing up, a stringent delimitation of satire matters because the moral nature and significance of the genre cannot be understood without distinguishing it from both inconsequential silliness and gratuitous offensiveness. In what follows, I will argue that such a stringent delimitation can only be supported by a definition of satire. Nonetheless, a good definition must also acknowledge that appraisals of satire as critique by supporters are often hyperbolic and overestimate its social and political impact. In appraisals of *Last Week Tonight*, John Oliver was commonly praised for "destroy[ing]" (Barrell 2016; Stern 2016) and "annihilat[ing]" (Reed 2016) Donald Trump as he ran for GOP presidential candidate. Regardless, Oliver's satire had little impact on the course of the election (Felder 2016). Such hyperbolic praise of contemporary satire's critical impact is commonplace in contemporary online media. Yet, these overestimations of satire's function as critique are equally pernicious as casual conflations with frivolous fooling around or gratuitous shock humour, because they set the genre up for failure by stipulating unrealistic conditions for its success.

In response, satirists like Oliver have often pragmatically downplayed the moral seriousness discernible in their work by dismissing "any larger sense of mission. It's just — we're making a comedy show" (Marchese 2016). At the same time, while such dismissals of critical intent prove easily refuted in analysis of *Last Week Tonight*, Oliver rightly highlights that satire is by itself not as solemn and grave as other forms of critique, including political rallies or British social realist cinema. Crucially, satirists like Oliver also set out to entertain their audience. For this reason, I will propose to define satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. This definition will overcome the pernicious ambiguity between satire and gratuitous offensiveness or frivolous fooling around, but also acknowledge its distinctness from straightforwardly solemn critique.

3. THE PROTEAN VARIETY OF SATIRE

My proposal to develop a definition of satire challenges a large consensus in contemporary scholarship. A definition of satire, which stipulates necessary and sufficient conditions, is commonly dismissed as impossible because of satire's "protean" variety (Jones 2007, 1; Weinbrot 2005, 3; Knight 2004, 31; Ball 2003, 165; Bogel 2001, 4; Gill 1995, ix; Test 1991, 256; Hodgart 1969, 13; Kernan 1959, 7). Kirk Freudenburg has argued that

> [t]he central question put to Roman satire has always been 'What is it?' Since antiquity scholars have struggled to identify that solid 'something' beneath the shifting surfaces of [Roman satirists' writings] (…) that would allow us to contain the variety of their works by means of a single, streamlined generic formula (2001, 1).

According to Freudenburg, the challenge to define satire has remained unresolved, simply "because 'it' is not there" (2001, 1). Instead, satire has come to be considered as a cluster concept. In particular, Conal Condren has argued that satire cannot be defined but must instead be characterised "by virtue of a contingent range of characteristics, some of which overlap sufficiently between members of the group for a resemblance to be created" (2012, 386). To clarify, if a concept can only be characterised by a cluster account, it means that "there are no properties that are individually necessary conditions for [an] object to fall under [that] concept", which entails that "one cannot define that concept, in the sense of fixing individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for it" (Gaut 2005a, 274). In other words, while a definition would identify essential conditions for satire, a cluster

account denies that there is at least one condition that all satire must possess. For this reason, a cluster account and a definition of satire are rival theories.

The appeal of a cluster account of satire, which does not have the onus to establish individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions, has only increased since antiquity. Susan H. Braund argues that "for the Romans it [satire] denoted a specific form of literature" but "[f]or us, it denotes a tone of voice which may occur in virtually any form – a novel, a letter, a play, a cartoon, a comic sketch" (1992, 1). The *Oxford English Dictionary* confirms the varied use of satire (and related lemma) and highlights the terminological expansion to non-artistic contexts. In its artistic sense, the third edition of the *OED* still primarily characterises satire as "[a] literary composition", but also highlights "related senses", specifically a "film, or other work of art which uses humour, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize prevailing immorality or foolishness, esp. as a form of social or political commentary." In its non-artistic sense, satire has come to denote "[t]he type of derisive humour or irony that is typical of a satire". The *OED* outlines a similar distinction for the adjectives 'satiric' and 'satirical', which denote, in the artistic sense, principally, "[o]f or relating to a satire" and, in the non-artistic sense, principally, "[c]haracterized by a sarcastically critical or mocking attitude to a person, situation, etc., esp. one viewed as foolish or immoral." A cluster account is arguably appealing because it can easily accommodate satire's protean variety. Conversely, Condren admits that a cluster account risks to be "insufficiently restrictive" (2012, 387). Indeed, I will argue that the problem of a cluster account is that it ultimately misconstrues the nature and significance of satire because it inappropriately distinguishes the genre from other representations. The challenge of a definition is therefore to outline essential conditions for satire while accommodating its infamous protean variety.

The label 'satire' has always been applied to a variety of representations since antiquity. Etymologically denoting 'medley' or 'hotchpotch' (Gowers 2012), satire was characterised by variety from the moment it originated as a classification of poetry in Roman times (Classen 1988). The label was originally applied to miscellaneous writings, such as those of Ennius, but later came to denote a kind of sardonic poetry, with Horace, Juvenal and Persius as exponents (Braund 1996, xi; Freudenburg 2001, 4). Further complications arose in the Renaissance, when prose writings in the style of Menippus the Cynic, whose own work predates Roman satire, were also identified as satire, while the classification 'Menippean satire' was transposed to contemporaneous works of Erasmus and others

(Relihan 2005, 109). Furthermore, European popular culture already showcased manifestations of satire before the word was introduced in vernacular languages, including English in the early sixteenth century (Gray 2015, 193). Since then, variety of the classification 'satire' has only increased as it has come to refer to literary works of François Rabelais in the 16th century, John Dryden in the 17th century, Jonathan Swift in the 18th century, Jane Austen in the 19th century, Margaret Atwood in the 20th century and Paul Beatty in the 21st century.

Moreover, satire is not exclusively literary. Satire manifests itself in various media, including films of Charlie Chaplin, stand-up comedy of Mort Sahl, television shows with Samantha Bee, caricatures of Daumier, cartoons of Aaron McGruder, murals of Banksy and songs of Pussy Riot. Scholars have also highlighted the geographic dispersion of satire in the practices of Chinese netizens (Rea 2013), contemporary Nigerian poetry (Akingbe 2014), anti-Stalinism in the Soviet Union (Ryan 2009), *hija* in Persian culture (van Gelder 1990) and political talk shows in Hungary (Imre 2012).The classification 'satire' has also been applied to sociohistorical contexts themselves unfamiliar with the concept, most prominently ancient Greece (which had no word equivalent to the Roman *satura*) or the folk literature of the Khoi, an indigenous people of present-day South Africa (Wittenberg 2014). The ambit of satire is also often expanded to include perhaps less obvious examples, such as Jimi Hendrix's live performances of "The Star Spangled Banner" (Hutcheon 1985, 87) or some of Tolstoy's novels, including *War and Peace* (Donnelly 2013; Maus 2002).

Likewise, whole literary traditions have been reinterpreted as satirical, such as the late-Victorian realism of Thomas Hardy and George Gissing (Matz 2010) or the modernism of James Joyce and Virginia Woolf (English 2012). The classification 'satire' also often operates in tandem with other classifications. Take Neil Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009), which is commonly understood as satire and science fiction. Furthermore, sometimes only specific parts of works are qualified as satirical. For example, *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix, 2013-pres.) has moments of satire from season three onwards, when the Federal Department of Corrections sells Litchfield Penitentiary to a private company, Management & Correction Corporation. Finally, the classification 'satire' exceeds narrowly artistic contexts. The speeches of Sir Edward Clay, former British High Commissioner to Kenya, have been analysed as satirical (Harrington, and Manji 2013). Another example could be Nigel Farage's infamous takedown of Herman van Rompuy, first President of the European

Council, whom he quipped had "the charisma of a damp rag, and the appearance of a low-grade bank clerk", further dismissing his alleged anti-nationalism by adding "perhaps that's because you come from Belgium, which of course is pretty much a non-country" (2010). Whatever the merit of Farage's politics, his caustic style would not be out of place in *The Daily Show* or *Last Week Tonight*.

This brief overview testifies to the protean variety of satire, which has led scholars, like Robert C. Elliott, to conclude that "[n]o strict definition can encompass the complexity of a word that signifies, on one hand, a kind of literature (…) and, on the other, a mocking spirit or tone that manifests itself in many literary genres but can also enter into almost any kind of human communication" (1984). Subsequent generations of scholars have heeded Elliott's warning well, and there is nowadays a consensus that satire cannot and need not be defined (Marshall 2013, 2-5; Quintero 2007, 6; Griffin 1994, 4; Test 1991, 7). In particular, Conal Condren (2012) has developed a strong case against individually necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for satire. Dismissing a definition, Condren has instead characterised satire on the grounds of a cluster of variable criteria or, in Wittgensteinian terms, non-essential family resemblances (2012, 386). A similar cluster account had already been suggested by Elliott himself, who claimed that "there are no properties common to all the uses" of satire and "if [we] could find an essential property, it could be so general as to be useless for purposes of definition" (1962, 22). Such cluster accounts have often proven strong in contemporary aesthetics, including Berys Gaut's (2005a) cluster theory of art and Stacie Friend's (2012) theory of fiction. Alongside satire's protean variety, the success of such cluster accounts may seem enough reason to abandon a definition of satire. However, in the case of satire, the absence of a definition misses what I will identify as a key tension at the base of satire between critique and entertainment. For this reason, I will challenge the cluster account of satire and introduce a definition of satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain.

For the record, I do not dismiss the value of cluster accounts overall. Later, in Chapter Three, I will defend Friend's cluster account of fiction. Accordingly, I will argue that there are some characteristics which are typical of fiction, but not one definitive characteristic that fiction must have that sets it apart from non-fiction. Still, it remains possible to establish whether a work is fiction on the ground of criteria which count toward its fictional status (although there will be some ambiguous cases). However, in the case of satire, a

cluster account is not normatively adequate because it cannot similarly ground a distinction between satire and so-called pseudo-satire. The problem is that satire typically shares multiple characteristics with pseudo-satire, be it irony, ridicule, analogy, attack, fantasy, absurdity, etc. The difference between the two really hinges on one essential criterion, i.e. all satire must critique. Since a cluster account would consider critique a family resemblance, but not a necessary condition, it can therefore not adequately distinguish satire from pseudo-satire. Further, my proposal is that satire must not simply critique, but also entertain. This necessary condition of entertainment does not further distinguish satire from pseudo-satire, but rather accommodates why confusion between the two is rife. Instead, as I will clarify, satire's purpose to entertain further distinguishes it from straightforwardly solemn critique, including other critical art. In conclusion, in its weakest formulation, my proposal is that critique and entertainment are two necessary conditions which set satire apart from pseudo-satire and other critical art. As it stands, this weak proposal would already improve on the normative inadequacy of a cluster account of satire. Yet, I will develop the strong formulation of this proposal, which is that the purposes to critique and entertain are jointly sufficient to define satire (and I will address counterexamples to this proposal below).

4. DEFINING SATIRE AND WHY IT MATTERS

Satire may be infamously protean, but there is nonetheless an art-critical consensus that some works currently identified as 'satire' in international media contexts really are something else. I will frame the political significance of this art-critical distinction below. Now, I will develop the argument that this art-critical distinction can only be upheld by a definition of satire, not a cluster account. As mentioned, the art-critical distinction introduced by scholars and critics is between the real satire of, say, Samantha Bee and John Oliver, and the so-called 'pseudo-satire' of *Saturday Night Live* or Jay Leno (Day and Thompson 2013, 180; McClennen 2011, 70; Jones 2010, 10; Hendra 1987, 24). Russell Peterson distinguishes between "comedy *about* politics", which stimulates indifference and cynicism, and "genuine satire, which uses comedic means to advance a serious critique" (Peterson 2008, 9, original emphasis). Likewise, when accepting the Herblock Prize for editorial cartooning in 2014, Jen Sorensen inscribed her work in Herblock's satirical tradition by explaining that "he drew from a clear moral perspective" and did not "go for innocuous, crowd-pleasing Jay Leno-style gags". A similar distinction was ironically acknowledged by the German comedian Jan Böhmermann in his programme *Neo Magazin*

Royale (ZDFneo, 31 March 2016), which although marketed as satire, he nonetheless sought to distinguish from real satire as '*Quatsch'* (nonsense). Sometimes, "pseudo-satire" has also been equalled to "lampoon" or "a descriptive portrait that relies on invective rather than objective and sophisticated analysis" (Darah 2005, 22-23).

In particular, scholarship of contemporary satire on American television has highlighted a critical dimension which distinguishes it from so-called pseudo-satire. Discussing satirical news parodies like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* (Comedy Central, 1999-2015) and *The Colbert Report* (Comedy Central, 2005-2014), Jeffrey P. Jones argues that "satire is a hard-knuckled critique of power" (2009, 83). Similarly, Geoffrey Baym identifies these programmes as "stinging critique in the guise of good humor" (2010, 124). Amber Day identifies satirical documentaries (like Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me* (2004)) and media activism (like Billionaires for Bush) as "critique of the inadequacies of contemporary political discourse" (Day 2011, 43). Sophia McClennen explains that "[s]atire's aim is to offer social criticism" (McClennen 2011, 70) and adds that "this is a form of humor meant to cause change" (McClennen 2011, 5-6). In the same vein, Peterson quotes Charles E. Schutz who argues that "the purpose of satire with its negative approach is positive change" (Peterson 2008, 169). These statements are indicative of an art-critical consensus that satire serves a critical if not emancipatory function which distinguishes it from mere fooling around, also commonly identified as pseudo-satire.

Pseudo-satire is to be distinguished from satire because it lacks a morally serious dimension of critique. Concretely, although both are often casually identified as 'satire', there is a significant difference between the satire of *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* and the pseudo-satire of *Mock the Week*, the show on which Oliver debuted before moving to *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. In its first season, *Last Week Tonight* received a Peabody Award for distinguished and meritorious public service by "bringing satire and journalism even closer together" (2014). Similarly, *The Daily Show with John Stewart* was awarded three Peabody Awards for its "biting political satire" (2000), "sharp commentary" (2004) and "sp[eaking] truth to power" (2015). By contrast, while *Mock the Week* is promoted by broadcasters BBC (n.d.) and Dave (n.d.) as taking a "satirical swipe at the news", a producer explains it is really a show with "jokes about politicians being fat and ugly or all sorts of other things" (Sherwin 2013). In this respect, Oliver was actively discouraged from addressing issues like the Iraq war during his time at *Mock the Week* (Bennett 2011) and

has deplored the lack of true satire like *The Daily Show* on British TV (Garrahan 2015). This difference between the satire of *Last Week Tonight* and the pseudo-satire of *Mock the Week* can be elucidated through analyses of their different approaches to scandals involving the international football organisation, FIFA.

In “FIFA and the World Cup” (2014), John Oliver introduces FIFA as “a comically grotesque organisation.” He sets the tone for a comic but critical exposition by explaining that “telling somebody about FIFA’s inner workings for the first time is a bit like showing someone ‘Two Girls, One Cup’. You do it mainly so you can watch people’s horrified expressions on their faces.” Throughout, Oliver oscillates between levity and seriousness by using comic strategies in service of arguments which reveal the immorality of FIFA officials. Specifically, Oliver introduces a comic syllogism to highlight the controversy in Brazil about hosting the 2014 World Cup. Positing that “Brazilians are excited about everything”, he supports this premise with a clip of samba dancers at Brazilian carnival, explaining “this is how they celebrate that it is about to be Lent. They love the concept of giving up chocolate temporarily!” Oliver then reminds the audience that Brazilians “also are the biggest soccer fans on earth” and concludes “so they must be thrilled at the prospect of hosting the World Cup.” However, Oliver undercuts this conclusion with news reports of protests in Brazil against FIFA and the World Cup. As a baffled Oliver looks for an explanation, more news reports clarify the extravagant spending of the Brazilian government, which will ultimately only enrich FIFA and its officials. Specifically mentioning the construction of a stadium so deep in the rainforest that it cannot be reached by car, Oliver adds that the stadium will remain unused after the World Cup and jokes it will then become “the world’s most expensive bird toilet”. After roughly thirteen minutes, Oliver concludes his comically critical exposition by stating, “[b]y this point, I hope I’ve proven to you that FIFA is just appalling.”

By contrast, rather than the object of comic critique, allegations of bribery and corruption at the address of FIFA executives are an occasion for simply fooling around on *Mock the Week* (“Mock The Week Series 10 Episode 1”). In an opening round called “Headliners”, the six panellists (professional comedians) are asked to complete the initials of a headline (B.S.I.P) accompanied by a picture of David Beckham handing a present to FIFA president Sepp Blatter. The multiple guesses of the panellists, including “Is it ‘Bean Sprouts in Package?”, “‘Blatter Steals Idiot’s Pizza?” and “‘Beckham’s Spelling is Ph-unny’?”, do not serve to substantiate a critical argument about the immorality of FIFA and its executives.

Instead, rather than investigating and condemning FIFA's culture of corruption, the panellists indulge in fangless jokes about Beckham launching a new cough medicine, "Becksip" (most likely a pun on the cough medicine 'Lemsip') and Sepp Blatter's name "sound[ing] like set platter" and "like a German guy asking for a step ladder." Occasionally, some jokes at the expense of FIFA are critical, for instance when Chris Addison reacts to FIFA's controversial appoint of Henry Kissinger to its ethics committee by exclaiming, "an 88-year-old war criminal?! That's who you want on an ethics committee! Who else is there? Abu Hamza? The Child Catcher off *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*? And the producers of Britain's Got Talent?" Yet, sandwiched between so many other uncritical jokes, these few moments do not sustain any meaningful critique in *Mock the Week*. By and large, *Mock the Week*'s comedy about topical events does not set out to critique, but simply to ridicule for the sake of it and fool around.

The difference between satire like *Last Week Tonight* and pseudo-satire like *Mock the Week* is that the former employs comic strategies to critique current affairs, while the latter approaches the news as an opportunity for silliness. Although both shows are casually identified as 'satire', they must be situated in different artistic categories. The comic critique of John Oliver serves a markedly different artistic function than the fooling around of *Mock the Week*'s panelists. This difference is also reflected in the critical reception of the two shows. Whereas *Last Week Tonight* has been lauded with a Peabody for its public service, *Mock the Week* is commonly criticised for failing to attain the standards of satire (Walker 2014). In this respect, critics have dismissed *Mock the Week* as "a parade of dick jokes", wondering "isn't this supposed to be a satirical swipe at the news?" (Logan 2015). Crucially, the point is exactly that *Mock the Week* is not poor satire, but that it is not satire at all, despite being marketed as such. Whatever broadcasters BBC and Dave may claim, *Mock the Week* is not developed to be satire, since it does not set out to critique. Instead, *Mock the Week* seeks to serve the purposes of comic panel show – and as a comic panel show, it is arguably quite good. Nonetheless marketing the show as a satirical swipe at the news sets it up for failure in the eyes of critics, because that label introduces certain expectations in art-critical circles that *Mock the Week* really does not set out to fulfil. At the same time, art-critical dismissals of *Mock the Week* do suggest that real satire has an important function as critique, which the fooling around of 'pseudo-satire' does not match.

Importantly, this art-critical distinction between genuine satire like *Last Week Tonight* and pseudo-satire like *Mock the Week* can only be supported by a definition of satire, which identifies critique as a necessary condition, not a cluster account, which considers it simply a family resemblance. As a reminder, prominent defenders of a cluster account of satire include Robert C. Elliott (1962) and Conal Condren (2012). Criticising Elliott's cluster account, David Fishelov already remarked it would be undermined if there was "a necessary condition that applies to all satire" (1991, 128-129). Ironically, while Elliott mentioned in a throwaway remark that "[a]ll satire attacks", Condren too hints at such a necessary condition for satire when he acknowledges "one informing characteristic, namely moral seriousness", adding that "[t]his intentional thread of ethical critique has been pervasive" (2012, 391). Similarly, in developing a working definition of satire (to help lawyers deal with changes in Australian copyright law), Condren and colleagues have asserted "that satire has come to refer to a dimension of writing or communicating critical of some aspect of society or intellectual life" (2008, 411). Acknowledging that "[t]he means to [satire's] critical ends are also various, but are most likely to involve the provocation of humour", Condren and colleagues therefore developed a working definition of satire as "those artistic expressions created in the satiric mode or idiom", i.e. "the critical impulse manifesting itself in some degree of denigration, almost invariably through attempted humour" (2008, 413).

Nevertheless, despite acknowledging critique as central to a working definition, Condren ultimately maintains that "censoriousness" (or what I call critique) is only a family resemblance and not essential for satire (2012, 392). Specifically, Condren has alluded to mass media marketed as 'satire', of which *Mock the Week* is an example, to concede that "satire can contract into really being only a joke" (2012, 392). He explains that "[i]f satire as merely joking is to be included in the range of a definition of the satiric, the recent working definition of satire put forward by my colleagues and I might require adjustment" (2012, 392). Accordingly, Condren concedes the possibility of satire which does not critique and rejects "anything tighter" than a cluster account of satire (2012, 396). However, the looseness of Condren's cluster is problematic because it misconstrues the nature and significance of satire. Crucially, while Condren's concession to include uncritical satire follows strictly from his cluster account, it ignores the genuine difference between the satire of *Last Week Tonight* and the pseudo-satire of *Mock the Week*. This normative inadequacy has political significance, because it makes satire appear less serious than it really is and provides ammunition to detractors of the genre to dismiss it as trivial, if not

cynical. Moreover, this concession contrasts with common art-critical practices that do consider critique essential to satire (see Akingbe 2014, 48; Greenberg 2011, 3; Ryan 2009, 8; Milner Davis 2009, 197; Hooley 2007, 5; Matz 2010, xiv; Bradshaw 2004, 222; Fry 1957; Horton 1993, 4; Greenblatt 1965, 105).

In response to the normative inadequacy of a cluster account, my proposal for a definition identifies critique as a necessary condition for satire. Accordingly, the nature and significance of satire must be construed as a broadly ethical activity. In this regard, I follow Simon Blackburn in delimiting the domain of ethics "in terms of a staircase of practical and emotional ascent" (1998, 8). At the bottom we have pure preferences, but going up, we enter into the domain of ethics as we are unable to still agree to disagree and take a stand. Critique consists exactly of taking such a stand in opposition to that with which we disagree. Similarly, James Sutherland has claimed it is "the mark of the satirist that he [*sic*] cannot accept and refuses to tolerate" and is "driven to protest" (1958, 4). Often, critique opposes social discourses and practices to advance wellbeing and realise emancipation (Critchley 2001, 72-73). At the same time, critique in satire can be less lofty, for example when *South Park* ("Cartoon Wars Part 1") protested against confusion between their carefully developed storytelling and the random jokes in *Family Guy* (Fox, 1999-pres.). Although a matter of aesthetic disputation, the disagreement nonetheless enters into the broadly ethical domain when watching *Family Guy* and confusing it with *South Park* is not to be tolerated but instead must be actively opposed.

In this respect, the difference between *South Park* and *Family Guy* runs parallel to that between satire and pseudo-satire. Albeit that not everyone agrees (Frim 2014; Peterson 2008 *passim*), *South Park* has been praised as satire on the grounds of its critique of contemporary society (Weinstock 2008, 18; Thompson 2009; Johnson-Woods 2007, 96-97). By contrast, while the transgressions of *Family Guy* and its creator, Seth McFarlane, are sometimes also defended as satire (Sevenich 2015; Pous 2011; DeRochi 2008), critics have dismissed such defences on the grounds that "[s]atire is meant to take one thing and examine it through a humorous lens, usually in a critical way. MacFarlane's humor often doesn't have that object at all—it's one-dimensional shock humor" (MacDonald 2013). This difference between satire like *South Park* and pseudo-satire like *Family Guy* can be further clarified with a metaphor, which I borrow from Bruce Springsteen (Rolling Stone Staff 2012).

Reflecting on his musical influences, Springsteen explains how he was inspired by Hank Williams's country classic, "My Bucket's Got a Hole in It" (1949). Crucially, although Williams would sing about hardship and deprivation, he never asked "Why does my bucket have a hole in it?" (Rolling Stone Staff 2012). As Springsteen explains, the country tradition in which Williams operated was "rarely politically critical" (Rolling Stone Staff 2012). Springsteen himself had to wait until he discovered the politically critical folk tradition of Woodie Guthrie in order to find music that did breach Williams's unaddressed question of why the bucket has a hole in it. Crucially, protest singers like Guthrie highlighted that the bucket need not necessarily have a hole in it, but that it was sustained by political authorities. Similarly, if society is the bucket, satire critically opposes and protests against the hole in it, much like the folk music of Woody Guthrie. By contrast, pseudo-satire has a go at the expense of the hole in the bucket and cultivates it as an opportunity for merriment. In other words, satire has a critical and even emancipatory dimension which pseudo-satire lacks. It follows that whichever hole in the bucket satirists identify, by virtue of opposing it, they take a stand that things would be better if the hole was fixed (even if they rarely introduce suggestions how it can be fixed or can even be downright pessimistic about the likelihood of repair).

Crucially, my proposal that critique is a necessary condition for satire entails, in metaphorical terms, that there is no satire without the intention of a satirist to oppose a hole in the bucket. In this regard, propagations of Wyndham Lewis and others that satire is non-moral are either counteracted by artistic practice (Bradshaw 2004, 222) or by contrastive claims that do identify ethical concerns and critique as central to satire (Griffin 1994, 71). However, it does not follow that a satirist must also be justified in their critique. They may identify a hole where really there is none or end up butchering the bucket rather than repairing it. In this regard, the Nazis had satire (Plea Staff 2016), while many satirical cartoons of Michael Cummings, MBE, are racist. Similarly, when Juvenal exclaims, "it is hard *not* to write satire" in light of the "injustices of Rome", we need not agree it is an outrage "[w]hen a womanly eunuch takes a wife!" (2004 Satire I. 22/30, original emphasis). Although satire by definition sets out to critique, and therefore results from more serious motivation than pseudo-satire or fooling around, rightful categorisation of a work as 'satire' is not automatically a badge of honour. There is bad satire and sometimes satire is bad because it is immoral in its critique. (In the next chapter, I will develop a meta-ethical investigation in

order to arbitrate when satire is morally on target.) Yet, even bad satire sets out to critique and ought to be distinguished, on these grounds, from pseudo-satire, fooling around or shock humour. However, this art-critical distinction is often ignored in international media contexts.

The art-critical practice of delimiting satire more rigorously than common in popular culture is not exclusively contemporary. Similar to current ambiguity in international media contexts, classification as 'satire' was casual in 17th and 18th century Britain, "for in addition to being used to describe almost anything written or spoken of 'a sharp or severe' turn, it was applied to light mockery too" (Elkin 1973, 11). In response, in certain art-critical circles, "careful attempts were made to distinguish 'satire' from the terms with which it was commonly confused" (Elkin 1973, 13). According to Ashley Marshall, who favours a cluster account, such art-critical distinctions are problematic because they ignore the great "complexity and difference" in applications of 'satire' at the time (2013, 2-5; 33). However, while Marshall's study of works that were commonly identified as satire in 17th and 18th century Britain is enlightening, the indiscriminate inclusivity of a cluster account does misconstrue the significance and nature of satire by including, say, the non-critical "sympathetic satire" of Henry Fielding (Marshall 2013, xiii). On my proposal, sympathetic satire is a contradiction in terms. While it is invaluable to understand the complexity and difference in application of the label 'satire' in media contexts across the ages, acknowledging it all as really satire is problematic because it denies satire's moral dimension as critique.

In this respect, enforcing the centrality of moral seriousness to satire and, accordingly, distinguishing it from frivolous fooling around or gratuitous shock humour is no mere academic matter, but holds political significance, especially in light of recent events surrounding *Charlie Hebdo* and *Neo Magazin Royale*. These events have put the adequate delimitation of the concept 'satire' at the heart of debates about European identity and democracy. After the attacks on Charlie Hebdo in Paris, an editorial about "Satire and Science" was published in *Nature* which sought to stress "the part that both science and satire played in promoting the contrasting values of the Enlightenment" (Campbell 2015). If satire is to be inscribed in such a serious tradition of enlightened critique, spearheaded by the likes of Voltaire, it matters that *Mock the Week*'s fooling around or Frankie Boyle's offensive shock humour is really something else. The satirists of *Charlie Hebdo* had a moral agenda rooted in the anarchistic principle 'no gods, no masters' (De Redactie Staff 2015). In

a defence of a secular individualism, they attacked sacred cows of political and religious authority. However, although *Charlie Hebdo* proclaimed a progressive politics, its satire was flawed because the magazine's blunt style could easily be construed as perpetuating xenophobia and racism. Nevertheless, although *Charlie Hebdo* did not always successfully realise its critical intentions, it is important to acknowledge it was not simply offensive for the sake of it. Satire, even if it is flawed, is rightfully distinguished from gratuitous shock humour, otherwise its purpose appears less serious than it is.

Further, satire should be distinguished from uncritically fooling around in order to avoid ambiguity about its rightful place in liberal democracies. When Jan Böhmermann was sued by the Turkish government for an ironic poem about President Erdogan in his TV programme *Neo Magazine Royale*, the right to satirise was publically claimed as a value which set liberal democracies apart from authoritarian regimes. However, public defences often outlined contrastive functions of satire. Most prominently, publisher Matthias Döpfner (2016) defended Böhmermann's satire as necessary crassness against undemocratic malice, in a tradition outlined by Tucholsky (1919). By contrast, liberal MEP Guy Verhofstadt trivialised Böhmermann's act as "not my taste in humor, but in a free society such satirical poems must be possible" (Spiegel Staff 2016a). In other words, contra Döpfner's defence of satire as a serious political contribution, Verhofstadt merely tolerated it in the name of freedom of speech. Regardless whether Böhmermann's poem lives up to Döpfner's praise, which I will investigate below, if the values of democracy are defended in the name of satire, it does matter whether one is defending the right to speak truth to power or the right to simply ridicule high-profile politicians. Crucially, a cluster account offers no theoretical elucidation here because it cannot ground this distinction between satire and pseudo-satire. In order to redress this problem, a definition is required to legitimise the appropriate significance of satire as a democratic value.

In conclusion, a definition of satire matters because it grounds satire's political significance by distinguishing it from uncritical transgressions. Still, as an alternative to a cluster account, a definition which outlines necessary and sufficient conditions faces a further challenge. Condren has rightfully raised the caveat that "if some sort of ethically critical edge is characteristic of satire, this is unlikely to be a uniquely defining feature or to provide an exclusive purpose", so "an additional element" would be needed for a definition (2012, 378). He has explicitly warned that considering humour "as an essential feature of anything

called a satire, let alone define satire in terms of it, is bound to distort" (Condren 2012, 389). Condren specifically refers to "the customary designation of Orwell's *1984* as satire", which is not humorous and neither does it intend to be (2012, 389). Other examples, like Jimi Hendrix's "The Star-Spangled Banner", further testify that humour is at best a standard feature of satire, not an essential condition. At the same time, what Orwell's and Hendrix's satires do have in common with *Last Week Tonight* or *The Great Dictator*, I argue, is that they set out to entertain. Therefore, my proposal is to define satire as a genre that sets out to critique *and* entertain.

Apart from critique, my definition also stipulates entertainment as a necessary condition for satire. In various ways, satire's fundamental combination of entertainment and critique has continually been acknowledged in scholarship. It has been said that "[t]he satirist holds a place half-way between the preacher and the wit" (Wolfe 1929, 7) and "though he [*sic*] may enjoy his talent and may hope that we will enjoy it too, the satirist normally avows a more serious intent" (Pollard 1970, 1). Further, satire has been considered "a weapon and a toy" (Nokes 1987, 17), which "aims to entertain and amuse as well as to inform and reform" (Brown 1993, 3), "to sting and amuse" (Wight 1964 [1936], 9) and "to entertain and to improve society" (Hornblower and Spawforth 1996, 953). Similarly, satire has been said to stimulate "jest and earnest" (Highet 1962, 233) and "combines aggressive denunciation with some aesthetic features which can cause pure pleasure in the spectator" (Hodgart 1969, 10). In this respect, Niall Rudd has argued that

> Roman satirists may be thought of as functioning within a triangle of which the apices are (a) attack, (b) entertainment, and (c) preaching. If a poem rests too long on apex (a), it passes into lampoon or invective; if it lingers on (b) it changes into comedy; and if it remains on (c) it becomes a sermon (Rudd 1986, 1).

In line with these comments, I develop the proposal that the combined purpose of critique and entertainment is a necessary and sufficient condition which singularises satire as a genre. I will now briefly elucidate the nature and function of entertainment in satire in contrast to critique. In what follows later, I will explain that the definitive tension between critique and entertainment determines the nature, function and significance of the genre.

Unlike critique, which is a broadly moral pursuit, I propose that entertainment, on the whole, involves particular aesthetic experiences (derived from, say, the masterful timing of a joke or the aptness of an analogy). I will further clarify this proposal below. For now, I introduce a minimal view of aesthetic experiences, according to which they are "experience[s] derived from attending in a discriminating manner to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things, attending to these for their own sake or for the sake of a payoff intrinsic to this very experience" (Stecker 2010, 45). Often, although not always, the intrinsic payoff of aesthetic experiences is some sort of pleasure (Stecker 2010, 53 note 5). Entertainment, I propose, involves intrinsically pleasurable diversions of a certain 'unexalted' kind. The identification of entertainment as involving such unexalted aesthetic pleasures has been traced by Richard Shusterman to Plato's *Phaedrus* (2003, 294). In *Phaedrus*, Socrates argues that philosophical dialogues are better than written texts by introducing an analogy which distinguishes "between the farmer's serious business and what he might do in a different spirit" (276c), more specifically "in a holiday mood by way of diversion" (276b). In Hamilton's translation (1973), Socrates considers such writings as a "pastime" which gives "pleasure", and compares them to other "diversions" and "pleasures" which are intended to "amuse" (276b). In Fowler's translation (1914), these writings are explicitly identified as "entertainments". Similarly, I understand entertainment as principally involving easy or 'unexalted' aesthetic pleasures.

In this respect, there is a longstanding discussion in the history and philosophy of art which has contrasted entertainment against more exalted forms of artistic expression. At least since Plato, "entertainment has largely been defined by its deprecatory contrast with what philosophy considered higher forms of culture, whether the contrast was with philosophy itself or (at a later stage) with forms of high art" (Shusterman 2003, 291). In this respect, satire has since antiquity been presented and received in various contexts as lowbrow, even if many satires are now canonical (Meijer Drees and Nieuwenhuis 2010, 198; Hooley 2007, 4; Jones 2007, 1; Matz 2010, 13; Nokes 1987, 8; Hodgart 1969, 10; Wight 1964 [1936], 6; Highet 1962 3; Kernan 1959*,* 17). Further, from the genre's inception, the Romans situated satire in a context of aristocratic play, in contrast to (or as a preparation for) the seriousness of real life (Habinek 2006). Throughout the ages, satire has remained a playful activity through which satirists have displayed their skill as entertainers (Griffin 1994, 71-94). Importantly, these unhalted pleasures pursued in entertainment do contrast with the equally central seriousness of critique in satire. Often, satire's generic purposes are seen at

odds with each other. In this respect, Geoffrey Grigson contends that "[w]hatever satirical poets may have said about their moral or reforming or punitive intentions (…) we may be sure that writing their satires never caused them pain. They have enjoyed it; and we enjoy what they have written, without apology" (1980, v). Throughout my investigation, I will argue that this tension between the exalted moral concerns of critique and the unexalted aesthetic concerns of entertainment determines the nature, function and significance of satire.

For the record, I do not argue that satire is not art because it is entertainment, nor that it is therefore devoid of aesthetic value. On the contrary, I consider entertainment to be an aesthetic category. This proposal may sound counterintuitive to some who may wonder what aesthetic experiences we derive from engaging with entertainment like a quiz show (an example introduced to me by Aaron Meskin). A full answer to this issue is beyond the scope of my investigation, but I do want to clarify why entertainment is plausibly an aesthetic category. For one, recent investigations in everyday aesthetics have to some degree normalised the idea of previously unacknowledged aesthetic experiences in everyday life. Moreover, as opposed to the aesthetic experience of say, scratching an itch (Irvin 2008), the kind of aesthetic experiences I consider central to entertainment are far from unfamiliar. If my proposal sounds counterintuitive, I think it is because we do not realise that familiar aesthetic experiences of a certain kind are central to entertainment. Take quiz shows. If pressed to explain why we find them entertaining (if we do), we will quickly start appealing to familiar aesthetic concepts, like suspense. In film studies, suspense is an aesthetic experience understood as resulting from a narrational strategy which delays the outcome of an established expectation (Bordwell and Thompson 2015, 55). For example, is Roger Thornhill about to fall down Mt. Rushmore at the end of Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) or will he manage to escape to safety? Similarly, quiz shows are designed to evoke suspense by delaying the outcome of an established expectation with every new question: Is the candidate going to know the answer? Are they going to falter soon? Etc.

My intuition is that familiar aesthetic experiences like suspense are exactly what makes entertainment entertaining. Take professional road cycling: Where are the favourites going to attempt a breakaway? Is the peloton going to catch up with leaders? Etc. In this respect, many stages in *Le Tour de France* are boring because you already know from the beginning

that the peloton will catch the leaders in the end. In other words, they fail as entertainment because they fail to deliver suspense. For this reason, aiming to market an entertaining product to a mass audience, organisations like *Le Tour* introduce strategies like intermediate sprints to make races more suspenseful. Along the lines of these intuitions, I think that aesthetic experiences are more central to entertainment than is perhaps commonly acknowledged. Moreover, I think that entertainment involves aesthetic experiences of a certain kind. For lack of a better term, I identify these aesthetic experiences as unexalted pleasures, in line with Plato's remarks in *Phaedrus*. Further research would be necessary to identify what distinguishes exalted from unexalted aesthetic pleasures, but the difference between the two is intuitive in our aesthetic appreciation. For example, suspense is a typical aesthetic quality of films marketed as entertainment, usually in the Hollywood tradition, whereas narration in arthouse cinema tends to exploit more exalted aesthetic experiences such as ambiguity or disorientation. These cinematic experiences may be pleasurable too, but they are commonly framed as more solemn than the easy pleasures of mainstream cinema (which is not to say that the latter are not aesthetically valued). Whatever the role of context in distinguishing exalted from unexalted pleasures, I do think that entertainment is intrinsically singularised because it involves a certain ease. As Socrates says in *Phaedrus*, entertainment is pursued "in a holiday mood by way of diversion" (276b).

Although my proposal that entertainment is an aesthetic category needs further development, as it stands, it sufficiently appeals to common intuitions to identify the pursuit of entertainment or a certain easy aesthetic pleasure as central to satire. As I will explain below, the central pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures sets satire apart from other critical representations. In what follows now, I want to elucidate the centrality of entertainment in satire by revisiting John Oliver's satire of FIFA on *Last Week Tonight*. As explained, the satire of *Last Week Tonight* has often been praised for its critique. When interviewing Oliver as host of *The Late Show* (CBS 2015-pres.), Stephen Colbert complemented his former *Daily Show* colleague for taking "deep dives into very difficult subjects" and asked him "[w]hat's the next thing you'll get me to care about that I didn't knew I cared about?" ("John Oliver Doesn't Care about Donald Trump"). However, Oliver has always denied that his satire has an explicitly critical function akin to investigative journalism (NPR Staff 2016; Garrahan 2015; Helmore 2014). Stressing his priorities, Oliver contends that "[s]ome of the stuff that we're most proud of is not those long stories [about

socio-political issues] but the spectacle. (…) [T]hat's the kind of thing where [*sic*] we get really excited about" (Marchese 2016). Although these comments should be nuanced as pragmatically downplaying hyperbolic expectations about the critical impact of satire (since analysis clearly reveals that *Last Week Tonight* has critical intent), Oliver nonetheless rightfully stresses that the function of entertainment in satire is not simply instrumental to critique. Satire like *Last Week Tonight* also entertains for its own sake.

Concretely, in his satire of FIFA corruption, Oliver uses comic strategies not only to substantiate an argument about the immorality of the organisation and its executives, but also in the function of entertainment simpliciter. After the arrests of FIFA executives in May 2015, Oliver once more revisited the organisation's culture of corruption ("FIFA II"). At the end of his comically critical exposition, he explicitly appealed to FIFA's big sponsors to have president Sepp Blatter fired. In return, Oliver promised he would wear a pair of Adidas's "ugly shoes", eat from McDonald's "dollar menu" and "even make the ultimate sacrifice" in the form of "personally drink[ing] one of [Budweiser's] disgusting items". Against all odds, Blatter indeed resigned the week after (although there are no reasons to assume any causal influence). While Oliver nuanced that "Blatter's departure still leaves FIFA with a huge amount of restructuring to do", he nonetheless ran with the opportunity for spectacle, which culminated in drinking a Bud Light Lime at an elaborately staged beach party ("John Oliver Keeps His Promise") (fig. 2). At the end of the episode, Oliver also reminded his audience about buying airtime on Trinidadian national television in response to controversial FIFA executive Jack Warner's earlier defence on the same channel. Afterwards, Warner replied in a video message that he didn't "need any advice from any comedian fool" ("Jack Warner Replies"). Again in response, a gleeful Oliver mocked the ominous score of Warner's video message, revealing that "if you type the phrase 'epic and dramatic music' into Google, it's the first result that pops up! It's the first one!!" ("John Oliver Fires Back"). The face-off culminated with Oliver inviting Warner "to continue to trade shit-talking videos with increasingly high production elements", adding "I see your music choice [Jack] and I raise you, fire!" Oliver's mock-intimidating response was underscored by an impressive fireworks display, which lit up behind his desk (fig. 3).

Figure 2

Figure 3

Summing up, albeit that *Last Week Tonight* serves a critical function, it also revels in spectacle and entertainment for its own sake. Crucially, it is important to duly acknowledge this role of the satirist as entertainer in order not to overstress and misconstrue the moral seriousness of the genre. As already mentioned, in early twentieth century Germany, Kurt Tucholsky responded to anxieties in German civil society about the alleged "crassness" of satire by highlighting its moral seriousness. According to Tucholsky, "[t]he satirist is an offended idealist: he wants the world to be good, but it is bad, and now he's running against the malice" (1919). Framing his intervention, Tucholsky introduced his essay with a programmatic epigraph borrowed from Gerhart Hauptmann's *Einsame Menschen* (1891). The epigraph is a piece of dialogue between a mother and her son, a scholar and would-be poet. When the mother proposes that "one should at least be able to derive enjoyment from the arts", her son responds that "[o]ne can derive much more from the arts than one's enjoyment." Similarly, Tucholsky argues that the function of satire exceeds entertainment.

However, although the moral seriousness of satire does indeed set it apart from the fooling around of *Mock the Week* and shock humour of Frankie Boyle, Tucholsky's defence inappropriately downplays the role of satirists as entertainers by overemphasising their mission as offended idealists.

Tucholsky's overemphasis of satire's moral seriousness at the expense of its equally important function as entertainment resonates in contemporary hyperbolic appraisals of satire as hard-hitting investigative journalism. Such hyperbolic appraisals are counterproductive because they solicit pragmatic responses of satirists who downplay satire's critical function or often deny it altogether. Instead, rather than arguing that satire really only does the one but not the other, or otherwise making the role of entertainment in satire wholly instrumental to critique, my proposal is that both critique and entertainment are equally important purposes of satire. While satirists do employ strategies of entertainment in function of critique, satire cannot be reduced to simply critique *through* entertainment. The kind of spectacle pursued for its own sake in *Last Week Tonight* is not to be dismissed as falling outside the scope of the programme's satire, but is part and parcel of the genre. As I will develop below, satire is therefore appropriately defined as a genre with the purpose to critique *and* entertain. This investigation will also challenge popular conceptions in the literature that satire is not a genre. More specifically, I will argue that satire is a genre classification which was introduced in Roman times and through negotiations in production and reception contexts has since come to guide interpretation and evaluation of works created, at least in part, with the purpose to critique and entertain.

5. SATIRE IS A GENRE – NOT A SPIRIT OR MODE

My proposal to define satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain diverges not only from the consensus that satire cannot be defined, but also the consensus that satire is not a genre (Gray 2015, 194; Simpson 2003, 76; Brown 1993, 4; Test 1991, 10; Rudd 1979, 9; Wight 1964 [1936], 2; Sutherland 1958, 1; Elliott 1960, viii; Walker 1925, v-vii). According to Condren and colleagues, satire is not primarily a classification of artworks, but an "impulse" or "spirit" with manifestations "almost as various as cultural activity itself" (2008, 443). Satire itself, as a specific classification of artworks, should then be understood "as the outcome or product of that moving spirit" (Condren et al. 2008, 443). Moreover,

when satire does function as a classification of artworks, Condren, alongside others, considers it a mode, not a genre (2012, 394; also Frow 2015, 69-73; Marshall 2013, 5-8; Phiddian 2013, 46; English 2012, 856; Matz 2010, 1; Hooley 2007, 3-4; Knight 2004, 4; King 2002, 94; Bogel 2001, 1-5; Ryan-Hayes 1995, 1; Griffin 1994, 4; Muecke 1993, 2; Witke 1970, 21). However, although common in scholarship, these alternative concepts to genre are historically problematic and theoretically vague. Not only do they ignore the etymological development of the label 'satire', but they also fail to elucidate its normative function in mediating expectations about artworks. In response, by identifying the label 'satire' as a genre classification, my proposal will both clarify its normative function in interpreting and evaluating artworks, as well as illuminate its infamously protean applications.

The identification of satire as a 'spirit' is fairly common in scholarship (Brown 1993, 4; Witke 1970, 21; Rudd 1979, 9; Wight 1964 [1936], 2; Walker 1925, vi). In particular, Elliott prominently developed the idea that satire is "a form of art and a spirit" (1960, viii). Drawing on Aristotle, Elliott links satire to the magic fertility rite of prehistoric Phallic Songs all over Europe and Asia Minor, through the Attic Old Comedy of Aristophanes and others (1960, 4-5). One caveat is that Aristotle's ideas about the historical development of comedy are nowadays considered to be of "doubtful value" (Dover 2012). Regardless, Elliott develops the plausible argument satire has its roots in primitive rituals of aggressive ridicule, through which transgressors were cursed for breaking social conventions (1960, 77). This idea that satire rests on a "substratum of ritual and folk behaviour" was further developed by George A. Test in *Satire: Spirit and Art* (1991, 9). According to Test, "satire [i]s a legitimate aesthetic expression of basic human emotions – anger, shame, indignation, disgust, contempt – emotions that are aroused by universal human behaviour – stupidity, greed, injustice, selfishness" (1991, 5). Test argues that

> [s]atire, from the beginning of recorded literature, existed in its own right as a spirit expressed through other forms (poetry, drama, fables) as well as a reaction to literary forms (epic, drama). No classification by genre or kind has ever succeeded in fully integrating these diverse forms into a system (Test 1991, 10).

Likewise, Paul Simpson has argued that satire should not be studied as "literary discourse" but rather "as a culturally situated discursive practice" (2003, vii). Similar ideas are echoed

by Condren and colleagues, who argue that "it is quite misleading to see satire, then or now, as fixed in any specific type of writing" (2008, 411). They therefore criticise accounts which "have unhistorically constrained the satiric to literature rather than to the broadly discursive" (2008, 411). In this respect, understanding satire primarily as a spirit and not a classification of artworks, Condren and colleagues consider it useful to "focus, not on 'satire', but on 'the satiric'; that is, upon the informing intention in and rationale for this creative activity in all its forms of expression" (2008, 443). According to Condren, the satiric should be studied as "a predicate variable for a wide diversity of expression" which "will cover much more material that has been associated with some notion of satire" (2012, 394).

The idea that the label 'satire' applies to non-literary and even non-artistic practices is indeed common sense. It is not counterintuitive to identify a political speech or even a conversational remark as 'satirical'. Similarly, it is a valid idea that satire is propelled by cross-cultural and cross-historical emotions. Further, the roots of satire can probably also be traced to pre-historic practices. However, granting this much, it does not follow that satire ought to be understood primarily as an attitude or non-artistic discourse (and therefore as an adjective) and only secondarily as a classification of artworks (or a noun). This suggestion is historically and etymologically misplaced. The third edition of the *OED* explains that all contemporary uses of satire and etymologically related terms can be traced back to the Latin *satura*. In this respect, "Greek literature offers no parallel to Roman satire and no word which means *satura*" (Witke 1970, 21). As Emily Gowers explains, the Latin "[*s*]*atura* is the feminine of *satur*, 'full', and was transferred to literary miscellanies from *lanx satura*, a dish crammed with first fruits, or from *satura*, a mixed stuffing or sausage" (2012). Specifically in the wake of Lucillius (c.180-103/2 BC), *satura* became fully established as classification of artworks in Roman times (Freudenburg 2001, 25). So, granted that satirical qualities can be detected in a variety of human behaviour across different cultures, which may themselves be unfamiliar with the concept, as far as that behaviour is now identified as 'satire' or an etymologically related term, this identification is rooted in the expansion of a Roman classification of artworks.

Similarly, the idea that the predicate 'the satiric' takes conceptual precedence over the noun 'satire' is etymologically and historically misplaced. As Elliott explains, the classical Latin *satura* had no derivate forms before the introduction of the adjective *satiricus* in Late

Antiquity (1984). Although any etymological link between *satura* and Satyrs (the bawdy forest creatures from Greek mythology) is spurious, the post-classical adjective *satiricus* was appropriated on the model of the Greek *satyros* (Elliott 1984). Moreover, in the English language, 'satire' was introduced as a classification of artworks in the early sixteenth century, to be followed only by expansions to non-artistic practices in the late sixteenth, early seventeenth century (*OED*, third edition). In light of these historical and etymological developments, it is the noun 'satire', as a classification of artworks, and not the adjective 'satiric', as a spirit or attitude, which takes precedence. In other words, any conceptual expansion of satire, retrospectively to Greek artistic practices and later to the broadly discursive domain, is rooted in the original Roman classification of artworks. Importantly, such expansion is also far from exceptional. Other classifications of artworks, such as epos and tragedy, have developed similar derivative uses and are also applicable to a range of non-artistic situations and practices. In conclusion, identifying satire as a spirit rather than classification of artworks is therefore not only historically and etymologically misplaced, but ultimately unhelpful, because it presents the phenomenon as more elusive and extraordinary than it really is.

Apart from the identification of satire as a spirit, another common misconception in scholarship is that satire, when it functions as a classification of artworks, is a mode and not a genre. According to Robert Phiddian, the idea "to describe the emergent feature of texts we call 'satire' adjectivally as 'satirical'" follows from understanding the classification as a mode which qualifies other genres, rather than a genre itself" (2013, 45-46). The distinction between genre and mode was solidified in literary studies by Alistair Fowler (1985). According to Fowler, genres are kinds with fixed forms and structures (1985, 56). On these grounds, Condren associates genres with "the presence of certain general, formal, even required properties, such as those of plot, motif and structure" (2012, 393). Similarly, Susan H. Braund understands genre as a "[t]ype of work, usually with a distinctive metre, length and content" (1996, 65). By contrast, Fowler argues that "modal terms never imply a complete external form" (1985, 107). Instead, a mode "is a selection or abstraction from kind" (Fowler 1985, 56). Fowler argues that "[n]ormally, a modal term will imply that some of the nonstructural features of a kind are extended to modify another kind" (1985, 107).

According to Fowler, satire is a mode, allegedly derived from "fixed satiric kinds [which] existed in antiquity" (1985, 110). However, Fowler's claim is historically problematic

because satire had no fixed form or structure in Roman times from which a mode could be derived (Classen 1988). Moreover, the distinction between genre and mode is theoretically problematic because genres are not determined exclusively by textual features, such as form and structure, but are constructs whose meaning is historically mediated by agents in production and reception contexts (Ryall 1998). In this respect, it is puzzling that scholars like John Frow maintain the distinction between mode and genre while at the same time arguing that "genre is not a property of a text but it is a function of reading. Genre is a category that we impute to texts" (2015, 111).

The distinction between mode and genre results from a mistaken understanding about the nature of genre and therefore calls for revision. Similarly, in linguistics, the idea that genres are determined by strictly textual features has been challenged. Instead, linguists like Douglas Biber and Susan Conrad consider genres as "approaches or perspectives for analysing text varieties" and "*not* as different kinds of texts or different varieties" (2009, 15, original emphasis). In this respect, its use in linguistics signals that the function of genre in communication exceeds that of classifying artworks. Many have indeed argued that genre classification not only governs artistic interpretation, but all communicative meaning (Jauss 1982, 79; Hirsch 1967, 72-76; Frow 2015, 2; Derrida 1992, 230; Bakhtin 1986, 90). Although such claims should not be exaggerated (Currie 2004, 54, note 17), this general function of genre in communication is compatible with Sperber and Wilson's relevance theory of pragmatics (2012). According to the relevance theory, human beings are seekers of relevance who, when interpreting communication, seek maximally relevant meaning at minimal cognitive cost. While Frow has criticised Sperber and Wilson for overlooking the function of genre (2015, 87), Fábio José Rauen (2009) has shown it can be easily incorporated in the relevance theory. According to Rauen, "generic structures set relevance restrictions and enlarge communicative efficiency, providing a discursive context that cognitively focuses the attention of writer and reader" (2009, 72) Similarly, explaining how relevance restrictions guide interpretation of artworks, Catharine Abell has explained that "knowledge of a work's genre helps to determine how its various features are construed" (2015, 34).

In the broad sense as employed in linguistics, genres are not fixed kinds determined by textual features, but rather perspectives which guide communicative interpretation. More narrowly, as a classification of artworks, the function of genres is similar. Still, it is now

commonly agreed that genre classification not only guides interpretation but also evaluation of artworks (Kivy 2015, 52). In analytic aesthetics, specifically, the function of artistic genres has become understood, along the lines of Walton's categories of art (1970), as classifications which guide interpretation and evaluation of artworks (Friend 2012; Atencia-Linares 2011; Laetz and Lopes 2010). In other words, genre classification fixes expectations about what a work sets out to do and how successfully it does it. Take Jimi Hendrix's performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock, in which he mangles and distorts the sounds of the American national anthem, combined with the tunes of "The Last Post". Situating this performance in the genre satire guides us to understand and appreciate it as a virtuosic yet biting condemnation of the Vietnam War. By contrast, somebody who does not recognise Hendrix's performance as satire and also knows nothing about rock music, will most likely only discern noise. Similarly, classifying *South Park* either as comedy or satire significantly alters understanding and appreciation. Classifying *South Park* as only a comedy dismisses its inherent seriousness, whereas classification as satire introduces the expectation that the series must not only amuse but also critique.

A particularly useful theory of genre, which I will apply to clarify the function of the label 'satire', has recently been developed by Abell (2015, 34). Although Abell does not explicitly root her theory in Walton's categories of art, her proposal is nonetheless in line with current Waltonian-inspired understandings of genre in aesthetics. The novelty of Abell's proposal is that she specifies that "every genre has a characteristic purpose" (2015, 31). In this respect, while Walton explained that "[t]o perceive a work in a certain category is to perceive the '*Gestalt'* of that category in the work" (1970, 40), Abell's proposal is that genre classification of a work depends on recognizing its generic purpose. Concretely, recognising *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) as a mockumentary and not a documentary is somewhat similar to perceiving the rabbit and not the duck in the textbook case from Gestalt psychology. On Abell's proposal, the correct classification of this film depends on recognizing that its purpose is, at least in part, to mock the conventions of documentary rather than genuinely document reality. Abell further explains that genre classification depends on "common knowledge" of the generic purpose between audiences and artists (2015, 32). She also adds that "genre classifications (…) are *normative* (…) because we evaluate works according to how well they perform the purposes for which they are produced" (2015, 36 original emphasis). In other words, once audiences know that *This Is Spinal Tap* was created, at least in part, with the purpose to mock the conventions of documentary, they have a

framework which guides them to understand what the work is doing and evaluate how well it does it.

Abstractly put, on Abell's proposal, genres are historically developed types, negotiated between artists and audiences, which stipulate a purpose that guides interpretation and appreciation of tokens which were created, at least in part, to serve that purpose. Along these lines, I propose that satire was introduced as a genre classification in Roman times and through negotiations between artists and audiences came to denote a type which stipulates the purpose to critique and entertain. Accordingly, classification as satire has come to guide interpretation and appreciation of tokens created, at least in part, to serve the purpose to critique and entertain. In this respect, satire's generic purpose became consolidated between the first century BCE and the first century AD, in the writings of Horace, Persius and Juvenal. Etymologically denoting medley or hotchpotch, *Saturae* had already been introduced before as a classification of miscellaneous writings by Ennius (Braund 1996, xi; Freudenburg 2001, 4). Yet, it is Lucilius who became known as the first real Roman satirist in the reception of his work by Horace, Persius and Juvenal. Crucially, in adopting Lucilius as a model to define and legitimise their own practice, these later generations of self-identifying satirists ignored the variety of his work, instead highlighting key features which they sought to establish as essential to the genre (Jones 2007, ix-1).

Horace was the first to explicitly model his practice on Lucilius. He inscribed his predecessor in the Greek tradition of Old Comedy, represented by Aristophanes and others, explaining that "if anyone deserved to be noted down for being a villain and a thief, for being an adulterer or an assassin or otherwise infamous, they would show great freedom of speech in branding him" (Horace 1993 *Satires* I.4, 2-6). He also added that Lucilius "was witty, with an acute nose, but rough in composing his verses" (I.4, 9-10). On another occasion, Horace praised Lucilius "because he scoured the city with the abundant salt of his wit", but critically added that "in granting him this I wouldn't also concede the rest", for his style was too harsh to constitute "beautiful poetry" (I.10, 4-7). Commenting on Lucilius, Horace stipulated that good satire must not only succeed as critique, but also as poetry. At the same time, again like Lucilius, Horace explicitly sought to distinguish satire from more elevated poetic equivalents like epic and tragedy by stating "I play about with these trifles" (I.10, 38). Likewise, Persius and Juvenal presented their satire as spontaneous outbursts with unexalted artistic aspirations (Anderson 2014 [1982], 6-9). In this respect, although

Juvenal has often been credited with a high or grand style, rivalling epic, J.G.F. Powell (1999) has argued against identifying Juvenal's style as overly serious and has dismissed exaggerated differences with the down-to-earth style of Horace and others.

Throughout the ages, satirists have identified this combination of critique and entertainment as essential to satire. According to Jonathan Swift, "[t]here are two Ends that Men propose in writing Satyr; one of them less noble than the other, as regarding nothing further than the private Satisfaction, and Pleasure of the Writer (…) The other is a public Spirit, prompting Men of Genius and Virtue, to mend the World as far as they are able" (quoted in Pollard 1970, 73). Crucially, as far satirists preach to amend the world, "[i]t is fun for the preacher, and fun for the congregation" (Sutherland 1958, 25). In modern times, the classification satire has remained to guide interpretation and evaluation of works on the grounds of how they succeed to critique and entertain. Take Lenny Bruce, a stand-up comedian sometimes praised "as social critic and secular moralist" (Kofsky 1974). Towards the end of his career, however, Bruce often ranted about injustices he suffered during his obscenity trials. While these rants were critical (and even successfully so, for Bruce was arguably in the right), they were not very entertaining, which is why his later performances do not rate as highly as his earlier ones (Nachman 2003, 412/418). Importantly, if Bruce had simply been a social critic or secular moralist, and not a satirist, this lack of entertainment would not have been problematic. Yet, in line with Horace's criticism of Lucillus, modern satirists are still praised only when they succeed both to critique and entertain, and scorned when they fail to meet either of these two essential conditions.

Crucially, this revised understanding of genre, rooted in Abell's theory, clarifies satire's primary function as a historically developed classification which guides interpretation and evaluation of artworks, without appeal to vague alternatives like 'mode' or 'spirit' (see Abell 2015, 30ff). First, this theory explains why satire has no essential features, only "*standard*" (Walton 1970, 339, original emphasis) or "*conventional*" features (Abell 2015, 37, original emphasis). What is essential to satire is its generic purpose of critique and entertainment, which can be fulfilled by various textual features. Concretely, while humour and irony are important standard features of satire because they are particularly suited to fulfil the purpose of critique and entertainment, they are not essential to do so. Second, generic purposes can concur. Especially since the purpose to entertain can be fulfilled broadly, the generic purpose of satire often concurs with other genres, including comedy, science fiction

and realism. Third, if genres are singularised by purposes, not form or structure, a genre classification like satire can apply across media and to parts as well as entire works. Some parts of an artwork may set out to critique and entertain, while others do not. Fourth, generic purposes can also be expanded to non-artistic practices. Although non-artistic expansions of the concept 'satire' are inevitably looser, they are justified as long as they incorporate the essential purpose of critique and entertainment. For example, in identifying Sir Edward Clay's speeches as satirical, John Harrington and Ambreena Manji highlight that these not only attacked corruption in Kenya but are also "notable for their rhetorical self-awareness" (2012, 9).

However, critics of my proposal may grant that satire critiques and entertains, but retort that these individually necessary conditions are not jointly sufficient to define the genre. If they are right, I would have to settle for a weak version of my proposal. Still, even conceding this much, my proposal would be more normatively adequate than a cluster account, because it would still distinguish satire from so-called pseudo-satire. Regardless, although it may seem open to counterexamples, I do defend the strong proposal that satire is distinct from other representations because it is a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. Below, I will explain that this definition grasps an intuitive distinction between satire and more solemn critical art. Here, I address the suspicion that there are representations which critique and entertain, but are not satire. I take it that critics would be thinking of examples like some realistic or naturalistic novels, including work by Tolstoy or Zola, or some of Shakespeare's political plays, like *King Lear* or *Hamlet*. If I defend the strong proposal, I would have a hard time denying that these works are satires or exhibit satirical qualities, for they arguably do critique and entertain, at least in part. For this reason, critics might argue that my definition lacks at least one other condition to stipulate jointly sufficient conditions for satire. Alternatively, they might suggest I need to include a set of disjunctively necessary conditions, alongside the individually necessary (but not jointly sufficient) conditions of critique and entertainment, for instance humour, irony, fantasy, etc. (see Fishelov 1991). Yet, I do not think such concessions are necessary, for I am willing to grant that these apparent counterexamples are, at least in part, satire, or that they exhibit satirical qualities – and I am not alone.

Take certain realistic novels. Fairly recently, Aaron Matz has developed a careful study which suggested to largely reframe the tradition of nineteenth-century realism as "*satirical*

realism", specifically focusing on novels by Thomas Hardy, George Gissing, Henrik Ibsen and Joseph Conrad (2010, ix, original emphasis). Likewise, various novels by Tolstoy, including *The Death of Ivan Illych* and *War and Peace* have been framed as satire in literary criticism and scholarship (Donnelly 2013; Maus 2002). Similarly, literary critics highlight "Zola's moralizing satire" (Nelson 1983, 20) alongside "his satire of bourgeois mismanagement" (Nelson 1983, 5). Likewise, Leonard Feinberg mentions Upton Sinclair's muckraking novel *The Jungle* to make a point about the character and motivations of satirists (2006 [1964], 13). Finally, Oscar J. Campbell has argued that Shakespearean characters like Hamlet, Iago and Lear exhibit "traits of a malcontent-satirist" (1943, 151), which he suggests was a common way for contemporaneous tragedians to invest their works with satirical qualities (1943, 161). As opposed to the conflations with pseudo-satire discussed before, I have no issue with such expansive applications of the concept satire. For one, they do not misconstrue the nature, function and significance of the genre. Moreover, framing these examples as satire arguably introduces an interesting perspective that enriches our understanding and appreciation of these works. To clarify, I would not argue that all these works are satires, but I see no reason to deny that they have satirical qualities, exactly because, in part, they critique and entertain. Neither do I argue that satire is the most appropriate classification for these works, because they are not exhausted by the purpose to critique and entertain and, on the whole, more aptly fulfil the expectations associated with other categories of art than satire. Summing up, rather than problematising the strong proposal that satire is defined by the purpose to critique and entertain, these counterexamples further corroborate it.

To further clarify my position, whether a specific token is satire or has satirical qualities means investigating whether it is justified to interpret and evaluate it as setting out to critique and entertain, at least in part. Importantly, as opposed to most other genres, "the category in which the artist intended the work to be appreciated, or in which the artist's contemporaries would have placed it" is often less decisive in the case of satire, due to ambiguous classificatory practices in international media contexts (Walton 1970, 357; see also Friend 2012, 187). In line with art-critical and scholarly practices, my proposal akcnowledges that certain works marketed as 'satire', like *Mock the Week*, are not satire because they do not set out to critique and entertain. Conversely, my proposal also accommodates the reinterpretation of works originally not classified as satire, such as aborigine orature or late-Victorian realist novels, because it can be justified that they

should be interpreted and appreciated, at least in part, as setting out to critique and entertain. (The alleged counterexamples to the strong version of my proposal discussed above fall in this latter category.) In general, classification as satire depends on authorial intentions discernible in the work but is also influenced by contextual factors (other than the classification of the work by the author or contemporaries). In this respect, James Sutherland has discussed newspaper articles which would count as satire in one context, but not in another (1958, 6). The crux is that context is a factor which helps to signal the intention behind works.

Similarly, although some fake articles on the so-called 'satirical' website *The Onion* could be construed as somewhat critical, they are unlikely to really be satire because the majority of other articles on the website clearly serve no critical purpose. In response to the arrest of FIFA officials by FBI agents in Zurich on 25 May 2015, *The Onion* published a spoof article entitled "FIFA Frantically Announces 2015 Summer World Cup In United States." The fake article reports that "matches [are] set to kick off today at 5 p.m. local time in Los Angeles" with Sepp Blatter "smiling broadly before unveiling the tournament's official logo, a hand-drawn stick figure kicking a soccer ball with 'USA 2015!' hastily scribbled in black marker above its head" (The Onion Staff 2015). The spoof gathered substantial media attention as it was mistaken as genuine by Jack Warner, one of the FIFA executives arrested that day. Without fault, various media identified the article as 'satirical' (Johnston 2015; Mackey 2015; Topping 2015). However, while this fake article on *The Onion* indeed mocks the corruption of FIFA, the context of the website precludes the sustained critical intent of satire. Appearing alongside other spoofs with typical titles such as "Man Takes Sober Moment to Reflect on Fact that Most of Meal Already Gone" (2016a) and "Hillary Clinton Sets Personal Single Rep Squat Record While Watching Bernie Sanders On Gym TV" (2016b), it is unlikely that *The Onion*'s mockery of FIFA corruption is part of a sustained critical take on society. Put metaphorically, if society is the bucket, *The Onion* cleverly exploits the hole in the bucket for mockery, but on the whole lacks satire's broadly moral intent to decry it. In this context, in-between cases that could be construed as gentle satire, including the USA World Cup 2015 spoof on *The Onion*, are more accurately classified as fooling around.

6. THE AMBIGUITY OF SATIRE RECONSIDERED

Admittedly, while there are many clear-cut cases, the classification of a work as satire is not always straightforward. The definition of satire I develop is of a historically negotiated but nonetheless abstract type, to which concrete and unwieldy tokens do not always strictly conform. Moreover, the doubleness of the type itself, stipulating a purpose oscillating between the broadly moral intent of critique and the pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures, is conducive to occasional ambiguity about the classification of particular tokens as satire. Such ambiguity does not compromise the validity of my proposed definition of satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. Instead, it is a virtue of my proposal that it cannot only accommodate satire's ambiguity but also elucidate it. While the distinction between satire and pseudo-satire is in many cases unproblematic, I will discuss some media in this section of which the satirical status is ambiguous. Importantly, while such problem cases are generally in the minority, I do not consider the ambiguity they highlight as peripheral to the nature of satire. Instead, I consider it indicative of a fundamental tension between the ethical concerns of critique and the aesthetic pursuit of entertainment, which singularises satire as a genre. I will explain that although it is crucial to acknowledge the moral seriousness of satire and oppose pernicious conflations with pseudo-satire, this ambiguity signals that its seriousness must also not be overestimated. By contrast, in the next section, I will discuss how this ambiguity and tension differentiates satire from critical representations which are straightforwardly serious.

In the previous section, I argued that in-between cases on *The Onion* that could be construed as somewhat critical are unlikely to really be satire because, on the whole, the website does not develop a sustained critique through its spoof articles. Yet, sometimes spoofs of *The Onion* are arguably really satirical and also received as such in art-critical circles. Like *Last Week Tonight* and *The Daily Show*, *The Onion News Network* (the website's former news parody TV show) has also been awarded a Peabody Award, specifically for "ersatz news that has a worrisome ring of truth" (2008). While such art-critical recognition might really be too generous, some spoofs on *The Onion News Network* are not in-between cases, but arguably reveal genuine satirical intent. One example is the spoof report "Judge Rules White Girl Will Be Tried As Black Adult" (The Onion Staff n.d.), a satire of white privilege in which a reporter explains that a sixteen-year old "photogenic" girl from Detroit, accused of stabbing a classmate to death, has "received the harshest possible sentencing from the judge. She will be tried as a black adult." While this spoof showcases a satirically critical dimension, again others on *The Onion News Network* are clear examples of fooling

around, including an ironic mockery of football as a sport not living up to American standards of heterosexual masculinity, entitled “Soccer Officially Announces It Is Gay” (The Onion Staff n.d.). The case of *The Onion News Network* showcases that the satirical status of media can be ambiguous, because some media which mostly indulge in fooling around can occasionally also reveal genuine critical intent. On these occasions, it is fair to say that such media, like *The Onion*, also produce satire.

Albeit there is a clear conceptual difference between satire and pseudo-satire, this distinction is not always as pronounced in concrete media. In this respect, hyperbolic appraisals of the moral seriousness of satire like *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report* and *Last Week Tonight* are arguably further compromised since many writers for these shows started their careers at *The Onion* (Shankbone 2007). This overlap in staff is no reason to argue that *The Onion* is really satirical after all, but rather signals that simply being funny at the expense of topical affairs is at least as much of an asset when pursuing a career in commercial satire as moral seriousness. A similar example to *The Onion* is the British ‘satirical’ website *The Daily Mash*, which also publishes fake articles that on the whole mock the hole in the bucket rather than critically oppose it. Paul Stokes, co-founder of *The Daily Mash*, explains that the website modelled itself on *The Onion* to fill a gap in the British market with “abuse, innuendo and smut” and describes its purpose as “helping people in offices to waste time” (Luckhurst 2008). Indeed, typical titles of spoof articles on *The Daily Mash*, including “Miliband hit on head by falling Russian spacecraft” (2015a) and “Wigan relegated despite being unpleasant” (2015b), indicate that the website generally sets out to entertain by fooling around, rather than to entertain and critique at the same time. Yet, Tim Luckhurst contends that “[o]ccasionally, as with all excellent satire, they [at *The Daily Mash*] offer real insight into why a policy proposal or idea is bad and wrong” (2008). Although I would be wary of calling most spoofs on *The Daily Mash* satire, it is important to acknowledge that media which mostly produce pseudo-satire can sometimes exhibit the insightfulness, if not moral seriousness, associated with good satire.

Importantly, even if the difference between pseudo-satire and satire is not only conceptually clear but also evident in concrete examples like *Mock the Week* and *Last Week Tonight*, the two can nonetheless interact in intriguing ways. A different example to *The Onion* and *The Daily Mash* is *Have I Got News for You* (BBC, 1990-pres.), marketed by broadcasting company Dave alongside *Mock the Week* as “the two titans of satire” (Dave Staff n.d.). Nevertheless, as opposed to *Mock the Week*, permanent panellist Ian Hislop

rightly contends that "*Have I got News For You* has smuggled quite a lot of satire – political satire – into what looks like a mainstream quiz show" (Fettis 2015). Starting with "the bigger stories of the week", panellists typically comment humorously but critically on selected news footage about current affairs. Similar to *Last Week Tonight*, when *HIGNFY* ("Series 47 Episode 6") addresses FIFA corruption, it oscillates between jest and seriousness. Discussing the exploits of FIFA executives, guest host David Mitchell highlights the critical intent of the show by exclaiming "[i]t's not funny, but these people are arseholes!" However, although a *HIGNFY* episode starts as straightforward satire, when it progresses into later rounds, it develops into the kind of fooling around characteristic of *Mock the Week*. Traditionally ending with the "missing word round", in which candidates have to complete headlines from a guest publication, the serio-comic treatment of politics and topical affairs is replaced by simple jest. When Mitchell starts this final round with the question "Alex Salmond loses grip after what?", team captain Paul Merton sets the tone by responding "Is it wrestling monkey in butter fat?" In this respect, *HIGNFY* highlights the ambiguity of the distinction between satire and pseudo-satire by incorporating both in the same format.

HIGNFY is a more ambiguous case than *Last Week Tonight*. Although Oliver's show also oscillates between a serio-comic investigation of current affairs and entertainment for its own sake, it does not have a similarly strict division in its episode structure between segments that entertain as well as critique and segments which only seek to entertain. In this regard, albeit that satire also seeks to entertain in its own right, there is no real satire without a constant interaction between the purposes of critique and entertainment. A striking counterexample is the magazine *Private Eye* (1961-pres.), established during the so-called British satire boom in the 1960s. While editor (and *HIGNFY* team captain) Ian Hislop describes *Private Eye* as a combination of "investigative journalism and jokes" (Moss 2011), the magazine is typically not in the same way "mixing comic diatribe with investigative reporting" as *Last Week Tonight* (Garrahan 2015). Instead, at least in recent years, *Private Eye* typically keeps its investigative journalism and entertainment fairly separate. Although the tone of *Eye* pieces on FIFA corruption (including Heather Rabbatts's belated resignation from FIFA's anti-discrimination taskforce, the BBC's poor coverage of the FIFA affair or auditing firm's KPMG's involvement in FIFA's sustained corruption) is colloquial and cheeky, they are in no real sense entertainment ("Eye 1394"). Crucially, satire is not simply a more casual investigative journalism, but pursues entertaining digressions which are strictly

speaking alien to the journalistic function of *Private Eye*. Moreover, the sections in *Private Eye* which are clearly demarcated as entertainment (including cartoons and spoofs) are typically either not intended to be critical or are too stale to be meaningful as critique. While it is not as if there is no satire in *Private Eye*, the magazine is an ambiguous case, because although it is in parts critical and entertaining, it often lacks the interaction between the two which characterises satire.

The satirical status of representations and the distinction between satire and pseudo-satire can be further ambiguous if a work critiques and entertains, but not very successfully. Satire is distinguished from journalism not only because of the constant interaction between the purposes of critique and entertainment, but also because unsuccessful critique compromises the seriousness of satire more significantly than journalism. An interesting case in point is the treatment of the FIFA scandals on *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* ("Kicking & Scheming" 27 May 2015), which was hyperbolically heralded as "brilliantly tak[ing] down Fifa [*sic*]" (i100 Staff 2015), "hammer[ing] FIFA" (Gorenstein 2015) and "Blast[ing] 24 Years of FIFA Corruption" (Oh 2015). However, while Jon Stewart does attempt to develop a critical argument in his nine minute segment on FIFA, it is (perhaps uncharacteristically so) rather limp. Crucially, if not paired to insightful critique, Stewart's attempt to entertain the audience (although that is a fundamental purpose of satire) appears gratuitous. Specifically, Stewart develops a long routine intended to highlight that the FBI investigation into FIFA lasted over two decades, by seeking to entertain the audience with wigs and props as he travels back and forth in time. As the critique of this routine falls flat, what remains is really only a silly joke. Importantly, whereas *The Daily Show with John Stewart* has been rightfully lauded as successful satire which critically investigated American and global society, when its critique misfires, it is not so dissimilar to the frivolities normally associated with pseudo-satire.

The ambiguity between satire and pseudo-satire which characterises various media is indicative of a fundamental tension between seriousness and triviality in the genre. This tension and ambiguity is evident in Jan Böhmermann's ironic poem "*Schmähkritik*", and helps to explain its problematic reception introduced above. Böhmermann's tongue-in-cheek poem about Turkish President Erdogan was a response to a request of the Turkish government to impose a ban on an earlier satirical song about Erdogan on the German TV show *extra 3* (ARD, 1976-present). Re-appropriating an old hit single of German pop star Nena, *extra 3*'s "Erdowie, Erdowo, Erdogan?" (2016) (Erdowho? Erdowhere? Erdogan?)

critiqued the Erdogan regime for limiting press freedom, disavowing gender equality and perpetrating human rights offences. Whereas Turkey requested that the German government ban the song, the German ambassador in Ankara instead affirmed the protection of political satire in Germany under the right to freedom of speech and freedom of media (Zeit Staff 2016a). In response, Böhmermann ridiculed Erdogan's peevishness with an ironically offensive poem in his show *Neo Magazin Royale* ("NEO MAGAZIN ROYALE mit Jan Böhmermann vom 31. März 2016."). However, by contrast to *extra 3*, the moral seriousness and satirical status of Böhmermann's performance was much more ambiguous. Accordingly, the reception of his poem was also much more problematic. This time, the German government did allow the prosecution of the comedian on behalf of the Turkish government (Spiegel Staff 2016b). A separate ruling later also prohibited Böhmermann from repeating most lines of the poem (Zeit Staff 2016b). This verdict was later upheld after appeal of the comedian (Fiers 2017).

The satirical status of Böhmermann's ironic poem is highly ambiguous. In response to Turkey's backlash against *extra 3*, Böhmermann reaffirmed that critique through satire was legal in Europe's liberal democracies. However, he also mentioned *Schmähkritik*, a judicial term introduced in German legislation exactly to penalise cases in which freedom of speech turned into libel. In a cheeky poem entitled "*Schmähkritik*", Böhmermann then set out to do exactly the forbidden. To Turkish-inspired tunes in the style of Nena, Böhmermann rhymed various insults together, amongst other things calling Erdogan a goatfucker, girlbeater and paedophile. Böhmermann's performance alluded to various existing racist and xenophobic stereotypes about Turkish people in German society. All the while, he kept his audience in the loop of his ironic joke, mock-seriously highlighting that publicising such a poem would be illegal in Germany (joking that if one nonetheless were to do so, the performance might even be deleted from ZDFneo's online media library!). I consider Böhmermann's "*Schmähkritik*" an interesting case because it highlights a fundamental ambiguity inherent in satire. On the basis of his performance and retrospective comments, it is difficult to be certain whether Böhmermann set out to sincerely critique Erdogan for disavowing freedom of speech and media, in the style of *Last Week Tonight*, or whether he simply revelled in the occasion for fooling around, in the style of *Mock the Week*. Although ambiguity of such a degree is rather extraordinary, it nonetheless signals a fundamental tension in satire between ethics and aesthetics, which I will further elucidate below.

Böhmermann's performance is continuously ambivalent between critical ridicule of Erdogan on the grounds of his undemocratic policies and uncritical ridicule simply for the fun of transgression. So while Böhmermann openly claimed to defend democratic freedoms against repressive despots like Erdogan, Marine Le Pen and Victor Orban, he also trivialised the issue by flippantly dismissing the concerns of German civil society in the wake of diplomatic tensions generated by *extra 3*. Likewise, his retrospective defences of "*Schmähkritik*" only add to the ambiguous character of his performance. Böhmermann has alternated between describing his poem as a "humorous university seminar" and a "fart joke" (Ebel 2016, my transaltion), and has also described himself both as a "mischievous joker" (*Spaßvogel*) and someone whose critical task it is "to ask questions, kick off debates and raise issues" (Kalle and von Uslar 2016, my translation). In one and the same interview, Böhmermann trivialised "*Schmähkritik*" as nothing more than a bumpy but complex joke, while also claiming he defended and investigated the limits of democratic freedoms (Kalle and von Uslar 2016). In this respect, while Böhmermann has fulminated at public perception for taking his poem out of context and consequently not getting it, he is himself nonetheless responsible for a degree of confusion about his aims (Böhmermann and Schulz 2016).

Intriguingly, despite *Neo Magazin Royale* being marketed as satire, Böhmermann explicitly disavowed the satirical status of his programme throughout the episode. Although he identified *extra 3* as a competitor in the German television market, Böhmermann explicitly stated that "[w]e are in the broadest sense not a satire programme, we are more a *Quatsch* programme" ("NEO MAGAZIN ROYALE mit Jan Böhmermann vom 31. März 2016", my translation). In German, *Quatsch* is slang for nonsense or fooling around. The word was also borrowed in English, but never became common usage (*OED*, third edition). Later in the episode, Böhmermann again stressed that *Neo Magazin Royale* is "Germany's number one *Quatsch* programme. That's us. We have nothing to do with satire" (my translation). He also ironically contended that *Neo Magazin Royale* does not aim to tackle such difficult issues as *extra 3*. His sidekick, Jan Kabelka, wholeheartedly agreed "[y]es, that's a wholly different league. Also the *heute-show* [German adaptation of *The Daily Show*]. How good is that!?" ("NEO MAGAZIN ROYALE mit Jan Böhmermann vom 31. März 2016", my translation). Albeit that their irony precludes a wholly stable interpretation, it is nonetheless clear that Böhmermann and Kabelka disavow the kind of moral seriousness associated with satire in the German tradition outlined by Tucholsky. However, when retrospectively defending the

democratic significance of *Neo Magazin Royale*, Böhmermann does embrace a satirical status, contending that "my team and I have made it our mission in the past three years to satirically tackle the top issues in politics, TV and gossip" (2016, my translation). In conclusion, not only throughout his performance, but also in his reactions, Böhmermann continuously oscillates between satire and pseudo-satire (or *Quatsch*).

The ambiguity of Böhmermann's "*Schmähkritik*" is relatively exceptional. By contrast, in most media, it is clear whether or not they showcase the sustained moral seriousness required for satire. In the end, even ambiguous cases like spoof articles on *The Onion* or *The Daily Mash* can be classified with some degree of certainty as satire or pseudo-satire. Similarly, in the episode structure of *Have I Got News for You*, it is possible to assess where the satire ends and the fooling around begins. Nonetheless, the fact that media which overplay entertainment or are limp in their critique are not dissimilar to pseudo-satire, such as *The Daily Show* in its treatment of FIFA corruption, nonetheless signals an instability in the genre's moral seriousness. Similarly, although the ambiguity of Böhmermann's "*Schmähkritik*" is on the one hand exceptional, on the other hand, it highlights a fundamental tension in the genre between the purposes of critique and entertainment. Crucially, as I will elucidate in the next section, other critical representations which do not set out to entertain lack this definitive ambiguity and tension of satire. In this respect, satire is singularised as a genre because it is at once hailed for its truthful moral interventions, enjoyed for its aesthetic pleasures, but also regularly dismissed as frivolous pastime that cultivates cynicism. Satire distinguishes itself from other representations by balancing on a knife-edge between the moral concerns of critique and the pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures in entertainment.

7. ETHICS VS. AESTHETICS

The reception of satire in scholarship has been ambiguous, with supporters and detractors disagreeing about the nature and significance of the genre. This ambiguity is the result of a fundamental tension between ethics and aesthetics in satire. On the one hand, supporters of satire have highlighted the ethical dimension of the genre. Many scholars have argued that commercially successful satire on American television contributes to a critical public sphere, builds communities, shapes civic identity and stimulates countercultural attitudes (Gray 2005, 94ff/169ff; Jones 2010, 211; McClennen 2011, 42ff/72ff; Day 2011, 13; Baym

2010, 5; Thompson 2010, 73-74). In particular, Peterson stresses that satire has moral and political value by ridiculing socio-political issues with emancipatory intent (2008, 13/23-25). Accordingly, satire distinguishes itself from pseudo-satire, which breeds cynicism and apathy. However, detractors of the genre disavow this distinction and argue that the aesthetic pursuit of entertainment in satire itself stimulates cynical indifference by cancelling moral seriousness and political efficacy. According to Julie Webber, commercially successful satire is but an "ersatz form of progressive democratic praxis" (2013, 133). Similarly, Lisa Colletta questions whether the "social and political satire of television shows such as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *The Simpsons* really [can] have any kind of efficacy beyond that of mere entertainment?" (2009, 859). I will argue that this ambiguity in the scholarly reception of satire is invited by its generic doubleness, oscillating between the moral concerns of critique and the pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures in entertainment. I will explain that this specific tension between ethics and aesthetics singularises satire and distinguishes it from other critical representations which are straightforwardly serious. This inherent tension in satire complicates the value and significance of the genre and introduces challenges which demand further investigation.

The tension between the moral concerns of critique and the unexalted aesthetic pleasures in entertainment is not restricted to the socio-historical context of commercial satire on contemporary American television. Niyi Akingbe discusses a similar tension between "the often opposed demands of art and commitment" or "the requirements of aesthetic satisfaction and social relevance" in the satire of contemporary Nigerian poets (2014, 65-66). Similarly, rooted in the work of Test (1991) and Griffin (1994), Marijke Meijer Drees and Ivo Nieuwenhuis discuss a "conflict" between "satire as play" and "satire as provocation" in late-eighteenth century Dutch satire (2010, 203, my translation). Drees and Nieuwenhuis highlight "the diffuse boundary between seriousness and amusement" (2010, 201, my translation) and specify that "the idea of satire as play does not preclude its seriousness, but introduces a tension" (2010, 207, my translation). Although they acknowledge that satire is context-specific, Drees and Nieuwenhuis nonetheless identify "the tension between play and provocation" as a recurring aspect of all satire (2010, 212, my translation). Likewise, Matthew Hodgart argues that "true satire demands a high degree both of commitment to and involvement with the painful problems of the world and a high degree of [aesthetic] abstraction from the world" (1969, 11). Highlighting that the satirist "usually offers us a travesty of the situation, which at once directs our attention to actuality

and permits an escape from it" (1969, 12), Hodgart stresses that satire "gives us both the recognition of our responsibilities and the irresponsible joy of make-believe" or the "delight at the creation of a beautifully absurd figure" (1969, 11). This specific tension between ethics and aesthetics in satire distinguishes the genre from critical representations which are straightforwardly solemn, including other critical forms of art.

The tension between ethics and aesthetics in satire does not only distinguish the genre from the frivolity of pseudo-satire or fooling around, which lacks the required moral seriousness to generate such a tension, but also from critical representations which are straightforwardly solemn and do not pursue aesthetic digressions. There is a consensus that the aesthetic pursuit of satirists to entertain sets them apart from other critical agents, including preachers, activists and philosophers (Harrington and Manji 2012, 9; Greenberg 2011, 3-4; Nokes 1987, 18-19; Rudd 1986, 1; Hodgart 1969, 11; Sutherland 1958, 6). Nevertheless, sometimes these aesthetic concerns have been reframed as instrumental to the ethical purpose of critique. In his legitimisation of satire, Horace argued that "[h]umour decides great issues more forcefully and more effectively than severity" (1993 *Satires* I.10, 15-16). Horace's instrumental defence of entertainment in satire was particularly influential in the Augustan age (Elkin 19731 71-73) and still informs modern discussions (Pollard 1970, 75; compare to Gray 2005, 104; McClennen 2012, 71ff; Jones 2010, 210). However, modern commentators of Horace have moderated his purported didacticism, for although he had moral concerns, his *Satires* also aspired to entertain for its own sake (Brown 1993, 11-12; Rudd 1979, 21). Similarly, while sometimes accused of overstressing satire's moral purpose (Griffin 1994, 14-24), John Dryden also valued the intrinsic delight of entertainment in satire. In his evaluation, Dryden professed to ultimately favour Juvenal over Horace, for while the former "is the more copious and profitable in his instructions of humane life", the latter "is the more delightful author" for he "gives me as much Pleasure as I can bear" ([1693] 1900, 81-84).

Irrespective of the merit of Horace's suggestion that aesthetic qualities associated with entertainment in satire can have cognitive value and accordingly contribute to the moral project of critique, which I will investigate in Chapter Three, the aesthetic value of entertainment in satire cannot simply be instrumentalised to the moral purpose of critique. Whatever Tucholsky may imply that we can derive from the arts beyond enjoyment, aesthetic delight is a purpose pursued for its own sake in satire and is not simply

instrumental to morality. As I argued above, the generic purpose of satire is therefore rightfully identified as critique *and* entertainment, not critique *through* entertainment. This equality between aesthetic and ethical concerns in satire differentiates the genre from critical practices which subjugate all other concerns to the aim of critique. In this respect, artists who do consider entertainment as wholly instrumental to critique do not create satire or ultimately move away from it. Concretely, as stand-up comedian Dick Gregory became increasingly involved as an activist in the civil rights movement, he left the showbiz of satire in favour of directly activist strategies such as hunger strikes and political rallies (Nachman 2003, 494-508). As an instrument to critique, Gregory found entertainment wanting, arguing that "[h]umor can no more find the solution to race problems than it can cure cancer. We didn't laugh Hitler out of existence" (quoted in Nachman 2003, 501). The trajectory of Gregory's career is indicative of the distinction between satire, which not only critiques but also entertains, and practices which are solely concerned with critique.

Similarly, the development of Stephanie McMillan's syndicated comic *Minimum Security* highlights a distinction between satire and critical art which does not seek to entertain in its own right. In the beginning of her career, McMillan's graphic work was characterised by the doubleness of critique and entertainment which singularises satire (fig.4). Accordingly, critics praised McMillan's comic as "[r]azor-sharp critique packaged as cute-kid-and-funny-animal cartoon" (Booklist Staff 2007) and "social satire at its wittiest and most engaging" (Zinn quoted in Seven Stories Staff2013). Over the years, however, some of McMillan's work has ceased to be entertaining in its own right. This development culminated in a series of graphic work for a book entitled *Capitalism Must Die! A Basic Introduction to Capitalism: What It Is, Why It Sucks, and How to Crush It* (2014). Published by an independent Marxist entity (Idées Nouvelles Idées Prolétariennes), *Capitalism Must Die!* incorporates didactic diagrams and lengthy prose which lack the entertainment dimension essential to satire (fig. 5). McMillan has stressed that her graphic work is not "art-for-arts-sake" but instead instrumental to "social change" (Leonard 2015). She explains that "colourful graphics help draw readers in to give longer texts a chance, which they otherwise might avoid as potentially boring" (Leonard 2015). Considering artistic practice exclusively as a "tool" in the service of a Marxist critique, McMillan's graphic work has gradually moved from a satirical combination of critique and entertainment to the straightforward didacticism of *Capitalism Must Die!* (Leonard 2015). Satire distinguishes itself from such

artistic practices exclusively in the service of critique because it also pursues entertainment in its own right.

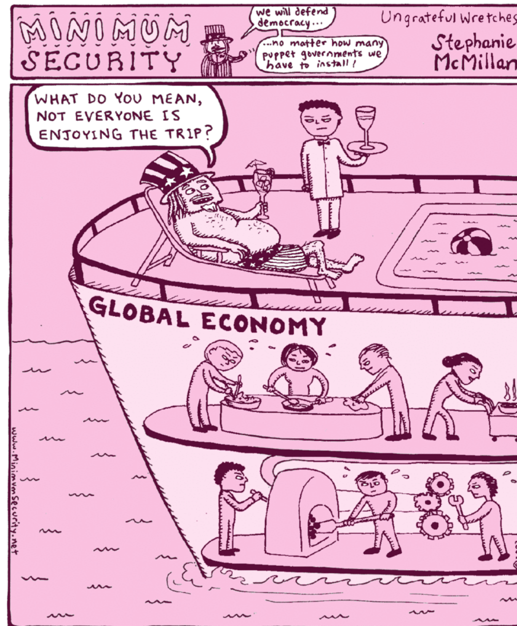

Figure 4

FLOW OF CAPITAL

M → C → M+

MONEY →
COMMODITIES →
MORE MONEY

Figure 5

Satire is distinct from other forms of critique, like activism and functional artwork, by its pursuit of aesthetic experiences in their own right. At the same time, some representations also critique and invite aesthetic appreciation, but are nonetheless distinct from satire. Reflecting on satire's variety in the context of his cluster account, Condren wonders "[i]f [Orwell's] *1984* is satirical, so too might be Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*" (2014, 662). However, since satire by definition incorporates the purpose to entertain, it distinguishes itself from critical art like *Guernica* which does invite aesthetic appreciation, but not the unexalted pleasures of entertainment. As explained, while what constitutes entertainment varies in socio-historical contexts, at least since Plato, the concept fundamentally denotes a pleasurable digression in a context distinguished from the seriousness of ordinary affairs (Shusterman 2003, 294). Although satire does incorporate a serious dimension of critique, it distinguishes itself from other critical representations which invite aesthetic evaluation because it also integrates play, fun and enjoyment. Concretely, whereas reading *1984* is designed as an intense emotional experience, at the same time, it can also be appreciated as a pleasurable pastime. By contrast, especially in a museum context of fine art appreciation, the appropriate aesthetic appreciation of *Guernica* incorporates a solemnity that satire lacks. Specifically, *Guernica* is not designed to deliver the kind of unexalted pleasurable feelings intrinsic to entertainment. For this reason, as nobody would challenge, *Guernica* is not entertainment. Similarly, while Jimi Hendrix's satirical "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock is as horrific a representation of war as *Guernica*, it also invites the kind of unexalted pleasures of a rock performance which are alien to the aesthetic evaluation of Picasso's painting. Hendrix's satire of the Vietnam may be emotionally intense, but, presented between the hit singles "Voodoo Child (Slight Return)" (1968) and "Purple Haze" (1967), is also designed as entertainment.

Another intriguing example of critical representations which invite aesthetic evaluation but are not satirical are most films in the tradition of British social realism. Take Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake* (2016), a bitter critique of the British welfare system. Interestingly, the lead actor Dave Johns is also a stand-up comedian and the film does have moments of absurd humour. However, despite (darkly) comic moments, *I, Daniel Blake* is a different kind of film than, say, Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). Whatever comic moments Loach's film may have, they are not pursued as entertainment for its own sake. Rather, any entertaining features in *I, Daniel Blake* are strictly instrumental to an artistic project which solicits bemused reflection, if not desperation, instead of pleasurable diversion. In other words, if

you were to leave the cinema after having seen *I, Daniel Blake* and say you had been properly entertained, you would have fundamentally misjudged the intentional design of the film. By contrast, if you were not entertained after seeing *Dr. Strangelove*, either the film failed in its intent to deliver a certain aesthetic experiences, or you misunderstood the work (probably the latter). Similarly, many political cartoons are not satire because they invite tears more than easy enjoyment. Take Khalid Albaih's "Worlds", about the European migrant crisis, which invites aesthetic appreciation in virtue of its minimalist composition, but is not entertaining (fig. 6).

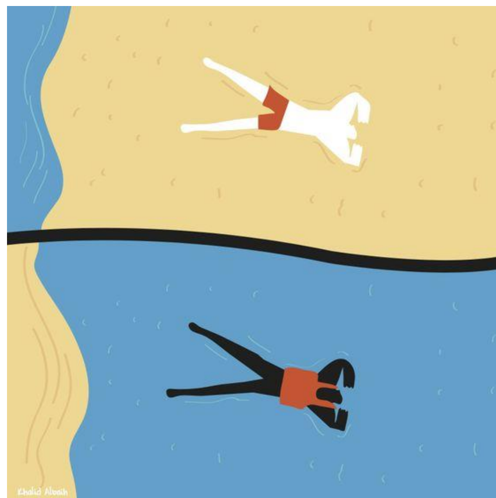

Figure 6

Similarly, critical art with a propagandistic or pamphletistic purpose may invite aesthetic appreciation, without pursuing the unexalted pleasures of entertainment. Whereas Cristy C. Road's poster *Protect Trans Lives* is beautiful in its own right, especially printed in a large format, the aesthetic delight it delivers does not constitute entertainment (fig.7). Rather, the symmetrical composition of Road's poster is designed to afford serenity, rather than entertainment, while the vibrancy of its colour scheme does not divert attention away from the issue at stake, but is designed exactly to highlight it.

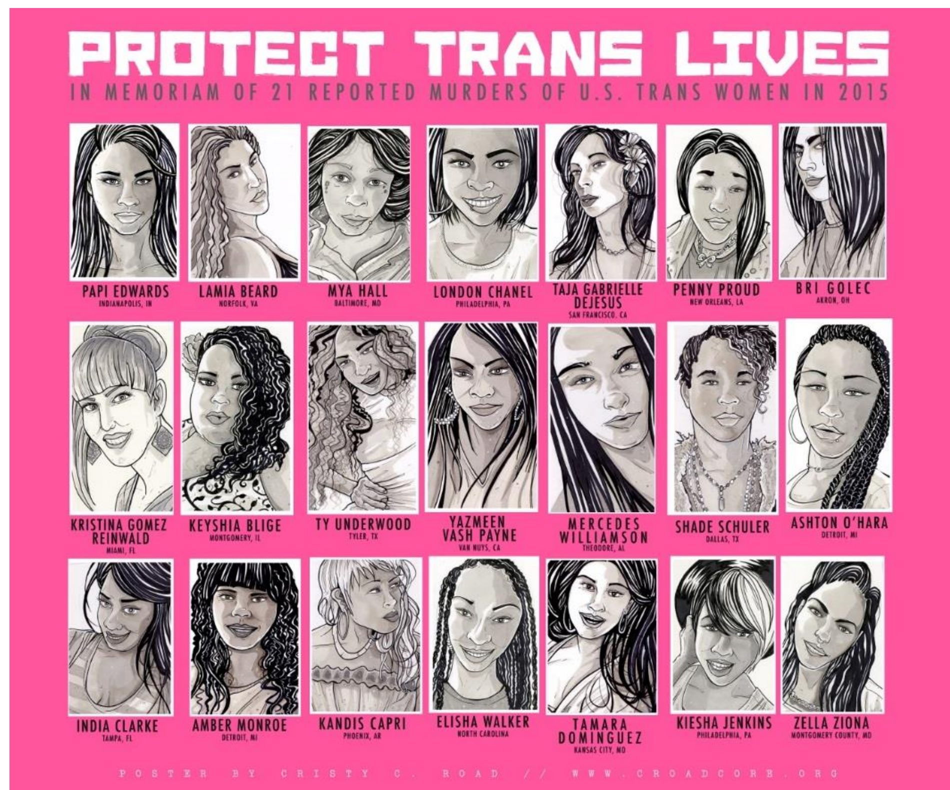

Figure 7

In conclusion, the kind of unexalted aesthetic pleasures invited by satire in a context of playful digression distinguish the genre from critical representations that also solicit aesthetic appreciation but are nonetheless much more straightforwardly serious or solemn. Contrary to satire, such critical representations lack the defining tension between the exalted moral purpose of critique and the aesthetic pursuit of unexalted pleasures associated with entertainment. Crucially, this specific tension between ethics and aesthetics singularises satire as a genre by problematizing its social and political value more so than in the case of other representations. Margaret Atwood highlights this fundamental tension in the reception of her satirical novel *The Handmaid's Tale.* Atwood explains that "[r]evellers dress up as Handmaids on Hallowe'en and also for protest marches – these two uses of its costumes mirroring its doubleness. Is it entertainment or dire political prophecy? Can it be both?" (2012). Satire is distinct from other critical representations which invite aesthetic appreciation because such confusion about the social and political value of, say, a Ken Loach film or Picasso's *Guernica* is unlikely to be equally pressing. In other words, there is something particular about the combination between critique and entertainment which makes satire more suspicious than other critical art.

As Atwood's doubt about the function of *The Handmaid's Tale* indicates, satirists are often the first to problematise the genre's value as critique. Much more pessimistically than Atwood, Tom Lehrer (who wrote popular satirical songs during the 1960s) evokes a cynical "Peter Cook, who, in founding the Establishment Club in 1961, said it was to be a satirical venue modelled on 'those wonderful Berlin cabarets which did so much to stop the rise of Hitler and prevent the outbreak of the Second World War'" (Thompson 2003). Lehrer contends that "audiences like to think that satire is doing something. But, in fact, it is mostly to leave themselves satisfied. Satisfied rather than angry, which is what they should be" (Thompson 2003). Irrespective of whether Lehrer is right about the cynicism inherent to satire, his comment highlights a specific tension between ethics and aesthetics in the genre which other representations lack. Although the cartoons of Khalid Albaih or Cristy C. Road's poster do invite aesthetic appreciation, accusations of cynicism on these grounds would nonetheless be odd. By contrast, in the case of satire, because of its definitive combination of critique and entertainment, it does makes sense to at least consider this problem. Take *South Park*. Although some would defend the critical value of the series, including myself, others have argued that its at times puerile entertainment cancels out any seriousness as critique or is indicative of the moral indifference it promotes (Frim 2014; Groening 2008). Even though I do not agree that *South Park* is on the whole cynical, I can nonetheless understand why someone would have such suspicions, whereas I would find it much more puzzling if someone were to say that *Guernica* or *I, Daniel Blake* manifests cynicism. In this respect, defining satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain elucidates why it commonly has such an ambiguous status, lauded as a moral intervention by supporters and dismissed as a cynical distraction by detractors.

As indicated, satirists themselves are often quick to pragmatically downplay the critical significance of the genre. Appearing on the news show *Crossfire* (CNN, 1982-2005) in 2004, Jon Stewart disavowed suggestions that he was anything more than a comedian on Comedy Central, whose show follows "puppets making crank calls" ("Jon Stewart on Crossfire"). Stewart argued that *The Daily Show* was in the same league as the sitcom *Seinfeld* (NBC, 1989-1998), only it was not as good. Years later, Sophia McClennen situated Stewart's disavowal in a long tradition of satirists who downplay the significance of their satire, explaining that "[a]ll political satirists make a point of insisting that they should not be a source of knowledge; they are just entertainers" (2016). McClennen considers such disavowals as pragmatic, but ultimately insincere. According to McClennen, Jon Stewart

does develop “the sort of satire that speaks truth to power” and she similarly refers to “the politically powerful satire of John Oliver” (2015). Indeed, despite his disavowals of moral intent on *Crossfire*, Stewart was berating the partisan journalistic practices of hosts Paul Begala and Tucker Carlson, asking them to stop “hurting America.” (A plea that seems have had some effect, for a year later, the show was cancelled.) By contrast, McClennen signals that Trevor Noah, who succeeded Stewart as host of *The Daily Show* in 2015*,* develops comedy which is “more mockery than satire” (2015). McClennen specifies that *The Daily Show with Trevor Noah* (Comedy Central, 2015-pres.) develops “the sort of comedy that turns people off entirely from politics rather than encouraging them to engage” (2015). As I have argued, I agree that the distinction between Stewart’s satire and Noah’s pseudo-satire is “a difference with political significance” (McClennen 2015). Nevertheless, the tension between critique and entertainment highlighted by my definition does signal that the value and significance of satire’s critical function requires further investigation.

Although not everybody is convinced (Webber 2013; Colletta 2009), the majority of recent scholarship about commercially successful satire on American television has in some way praised its value and significance as critique (Day 2011; Baym 2010; Jones 2010; Gray, Jones Thompson 2009; Peterson 2008; Gray 2005). In part, the definition I have developed in this chapter serves to theoretically support such appraisals, by highlighting critique as a necessary condition of satire (and therefore identifying good critique as a necessary condition for good satire). However, although I also defend that satire can have value and significance as critique, many important questions have remained unanswered in order to substantiate this appraisal. The idea that satire is a form of critique on a moral mission to reveal truth requires substantial philosophical investigation. For one, anxieties in the wake of postmodernism have problematised truth, especially in the moral domain. Moreover, suppose representations can teach moral truths, does it follow that fictional representations like satire can do so as well? Further, granted that critique and entertainment are not incompatible, the function of entertainment in satire is not simply instrumental to critique, as I have argued. So what value does entertainment for entertainment’s sake have in satire? Additionally, the pursuit of entertainment for its own sake in satire does problematise its critical function in the sense that at least some resources of satirists and audiences are directed away from critical activism towards unexalted aesthetic digressions. In this respect, the examples of Stephanie McMillan and Dick Gregory suggest that artists who are fully committed to critique ultimately tend to

outgrow satire. For this reason, detractors of the genre, inducing satirists like Tom Lehrer, are suspicious that satire's pursuit of entertainment cancels any value it may have as critique and ultimately makes the genre cynical.

In the rest of this thesis, I set out to address these fundamental questions about the nature, function and significance of satire. Pace detractors, I will dismiss that satire is necessarily cynical, because good satire can make moderate but nonetheless significant cognitive contributions to a moral project of critique. At the same time, I will also challenge what I consider to be overestimations of satire's critical function by some supporters, especially of its political impact. Although satire sets out to critique, I agree with Jon Stewart when he says, "if it's purpose was social change, we're not picking a very effective avenue" (Fettis 2015). Stewart may have had a hand in *Crossfire*'s cancellation, but his satire of journalistic standards in the US over the years has not prevented the current media malaise of post-truth politics. Similarly, John Oliver's or Samantha Bee's satire did little to prevent Trump from getting to the White House. Nevertheless, these critical limits of satire are not necessarily a defect. Instead, I will argue that satire has value and significance partly because it highlights the emancipatory limits of critique. Good satire acknowledges that even unbridled critique cannot wholly emancipate the world and part of the genre's value and significance is that it develops coping strategies through entertainment in response. In this respect, Stewart suggests that "[i]n some respects, the real outcome of satire is typically catharsis – and whether that's positive or negative I don't know" (Fettis 2015). Although Stewart adds that he means "catharsis for me, as far as the audience goes, I have no idea" (Fettis 2015), critics have similarly acknowledged his role as "equal parts news anchor and therapist for liberals of a certain persuasion" (Sugarman 2016). Accordingly, in my thesis, I will not only philosophically investigate how satire can have cognitive value in a moral project of critique, but also how it can have a therapeutic value in dealing with the limits of critique.

In order to clarify these fundamental, general and abstract issues about satire's nature, function and significance, I will introduce a philosophical methodology. To start, I will develop a meta-ethical investigation to safeguard satire's function as critique by normalising truth in the domain of ethics. Further, I will engage with recent debates in aesthetics about the cognitive function of narrative fiction to investigate satire's cognitive value as critique compared to epistemic best practices in philosophy or journalism. At the

same time, my meta-ethical investigation will also highlight the limits of critique, for unbridled critique is not only unlikely to wholly emancipate the world, but is psychologically destructive. In response, I will make it philosophically plausible that satire has therapeutic value to cope with the limits of critique because it entertains. Specifically, I will analyse how satirists often cultivate humorous and ironic strategies which are designed negotiate a psychologically traumatic gap between the demands of critique and its limits. This investigation will not only be grounded in philosophical methodologies, but also framed in relation to philosophy. Although satire is not philosophy, I argue it can complement philosophy in interesting ways. As explained before, the common comparisons between satire and philosophy rightfully situate the two in the same existential ballpark, although they play ball differently. Concretely, I will frame the significance of the definitive tension between critique and entertainment in satire as corresponding to a fundamental conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self. Albeit philosophy highlights this conflict, it cannot resolve it. Although satire does not resolve it either, I will argue it nonetheless stands to complement philosophy as a therapy to cope with its existential limits.

My investigation will highlight that the nature, function and significance of satire should be situated in an existential framework. In this respect, Matthew Hodgart frames satire against a bleak existential background (1969). According to Hodgart,

> [t]here would not seem to be any conceivable future less problematical than the troubled past, less full of absurdities than the nightmare of history. There are many ways of looking at this life, and satire's is one of them. To respond to the world with a mixture of laughter and indignation is not perhaps the noblest way, nor the most likely to lead to good works of art; but it is the way of satire (1969, 10).

Although I do not wholly agree with Hodgart's assessment of satire, it nonetheless points in the right direction. Satire need not necessarily be humorous, but does it does mix the respite of entertainment with the indignation of critique. Accordingly, Hodgart mentions the "aesthetic features which can cause pure pleasure in the spectator" as "the means by which the painful issues of real life are transmuted" (1969, 11-12). Irrespective of whether this satirical approach to cope with the absurdities life can claim any nobility, or predisposes the genre to be less good qua art (which I think it does not), I dismiss that it

necessarily makes satire cynical. By contrast, in this thesis, I will argue that satire's definitive combination of critique and entertainment is a therapeutically mature response to the absurd gap between critique and its limits, which is central to moral life.

8. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have defined satire as a genre which has since Roman times guided interpretation and evaluation of works on the grounds of their purpose to critique and entertain. This proposal has introduced a conception of genre which captures the protean variety of satire without appealing to vaguer alternatives, specifically mode and spirit. Further, my definition has challenged the scholarly consensus that satire can only be characterised by a cluster of non-essential family resemblances. The problem with a cluster account is that it obscures the nature, function and significance of the genre. Specifically, a cluster account supports undue comparisons between satire and frivolous fooling around or gratuitous shock humour, sometimes in the service of justifying downright nasty jokes. Accordingly, by unduly acknowledging the genre's essential moral function as critique, a cluster account sustains a problematic ambiguity around the label 'satire' in international media contexts and public discussions. At the same time, my definition distinguishes satire from critical representations which are straightforwardly solemn. As opposed to other critical art, satire pursues the unexalted aesthetic pleasures associated with entertainment. This combination of critique and entertainment makes the genre more suspicious than other critical art. Concretely, despite its aesthetic function, nobody is concerned about the value of *Guernica* as critique, but the critical function of a satire like *South Park* is not similarly unproblematic. Crucially, my definition roots this ambiguity of satire in the doubleness of its definitive purpose, as it oscillates between seriousness and diversion, whereas a cluster account gives the mistaken impression that satire is determined by a varied set of features which share no essential connection. For this reason, a definition of satire matters, because it highlights the fundamental tension which makes satire so intriguing, if vexed. Accordingly, my definition outlines pathways for further investigation into the nature, function and significance of satire, which I pursue in the rest of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO: ENTERTAINMENT AND THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I develop a philosophical framework to ground my investigation into the value and significance of satire. Previously, I have defined satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. This definition highlighted a fundamental tension between the exalted moral concerns of critique and the pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures. Crucially, this tension makes the value of satire ambiguous. In what follows, I will introduce arguments by detractors of the genre who dismiss the value of satire on the

grounds that its aesthetic pursuit to entertain precludes any meaningful ethical value as critique. In response, supporters of satire have often instrumentalised the genre's function as entertainment to critique. In doing so, they have commonly updated Horace's defence of satire that "[h]umour decides great issues more forcefully and more effectively than severity" (1993 *Satires* I.10, 15-16). However, it proves particularly difficult to substantiate the claim that satire is more effective as critique because it entertains. Since the political impact of satire is at best moderate, I suggest that its value lies elsewhere. Specifically, although I do not deny that entertainment can contribute to critique in satire, I will identify satire's pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures as a therapy to cope with the limits of critique. This argument will not only question the common assumption that critique in satire is more important than entertainment, but the underlying assumption that ethical concerns generally trump aesthetic ones.

My revaluation of satire's purpose to entertain in relation to critique will be rooted in a broadly Humean framework. Specifically, I will reassess common claims by supporters of satire about the moral value of the genre as critique by introducing a meta-ethical framework developed by Simon Blackburn (1998), rooted in Hume's sentimentalism. This meta-ethical investigation serves to redress anxieties about truth and goodness in debates about satire, common in the wake of postmodernism. If unaddressed, these anxieties risk wholly undermining defences of satire's value as critique. At the same time, detractors of the genre have often misconstrued satire by arguing it cultivates a postmodern relativism about truth and ethics. I will attenuate such postmodern anxieties by revealing talk of truth as fairly unproblematic, even in the domain of ethics. However, my investigation will introduce another, more substantial, anxiety about truth. While critical truthfulness reveals the horrors of the world, it cannot wholly resolve them. This absurd gap between the need for critique and its limits is psychologically traumatic. In this respect, I will argue that satire's purpose to entertain therapeutically abates its purpose to critique. I will develop this therapeutic dimension of entertainment in satire in relation to Hume's comments about dispelling philosophical melancholy through engrossment in avocations. I will argue that because of their self-justifying or autotelic nature, the unexalted aesthetic pleasures of entertainment in satire stimulate a life-affirming engrossment which soothes existential despair in face of the limits of critique. Ultimately, my investigation will frame the ambiguous tension between satire's purposes to critique and entertain as corresponding to a fundamental conflict in moral life between the care of self and the care for others.

2. ETHICS VS. AESTHETICS

An excellent example to elucidate the ambiguous tension between critique and entertainment in satire is Jimi Hendrix's iconic performance of "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock (1969). This satirical rendition of the American national anthem had become part of Hendrix's live repertoire as a protest to the Vietnam War. Musically distorting the tunes and associated lyrics of "The Star-Spangled Banner" (1814), Hendrix's satire exposes how American patriotism has been mutilated by warmongering. His guitar solo ironically comments on the anthem's first stanza, which recounts how the American flag at Fort McHenry withstood bombardments by the British during the War of 1812. Hendrix first signals his satirical intent with an abrupt drop in pitch, which bleakly undercuts the anthem's dignified admiration for "the broad stripes and bright stars" which have remained "gallantly streaming" despite a "perilous fight". Further, Hendrix mangles the anthem's serene description of "the rockets' red glare, the bombs bursting in the air" into the screeching sound of a rocket launching and exploding. His guitar solo combines the high-pitched, almost bestial screams of pain with the low distortion of material destruction. The distorted sounds of the anthem then warp into the opening chords of "The Last Post", commonly played at Commonwealth military funerals and remembrance ceremonies. This ironic comment on the many military casualties in the Vietnam War continues to reverberate in the rendition of the disfigured chords corresponding to final verses of the first stanza. Rather than waving "[o]'er the land of the free and the home of the brave", Hendrix's guitar solo ironically reminds audiences that the "star-spangled banner yet wave[s]" over war-stricken Vietnam. As the song draws to an end, Hendrix seamlessly leads his band into an up-tempo version of their record chart hit, "Purple Haze".

As a satire, Hendrix's "The Star-Spangled Banner" critiques the immoral American involvement in the Vietnam War by ironically juxtaposing patriotic idealism to hawkish imperialism. At the same time, while his rendition of B-52s dropping bombs over Vietnamese villages is harrowing as a critique, Hendrix's performance explicitly cues aesthetic admiration for his virtuosic skill as a guitar player. Hendrix is showing off and the audience is supposed to enjoy it. Seamlessly incorporated in the set of a rock concert, Hendrix's performance is not simply designed to critique but also to deliver the kind of unexalted aesthetic pleasures associated with entertainment. In this respect, there is an ambiguous tension between the aesthetic dimension of Hendrix's satire as entertainment and its moral dimension as critique. To start, one may doubt the cognitive value of the

aesthetic strategies employed by Hendrix to critique the Vietnam War when comparing it to, say, sustained journalistic investigation. Moreover, albeit Hendrix certainly reaches an audience, the political impact of his satire seems limited in contrast to public interventions by Martin Luther King Jr. or protest marches by US army veterans. Given these critical limits to attenuate the horrors of the Vietnam War, the unexalted aesthetic virtuosity of Hendrix's satire may start to seem gratuitous, if not cynical. His satirical performance could be framed as an aesthetic distraction, stimulating moral indifference to the intense suffering caused by the Vietnam War, rather than sincere protest. Conversely, perhaps Hendrix's performance does offer a valuable critical perspective which supplements other critiques of the Vietnam War, while his aesthetic virtuosity may have therapeutic value as a life-affirming response to the existential horror of war.

These ambiguities between satire's moral purpose to critique and its aesthetic purpose to entertain will be the focus of my investigation into the genre's value and significance in this chapter. Pace detractors who dismiss satire as gratuitous or cynical, I will argue that the genre can make moderate but legitimate contributions to a moral project of critique, alongside other emancipatory practices. Specifically, in the next chapter, I will defend that good satire can be informative. After all, Hendrix does succinctly sum up the internal contradiction of patriotic support for the Vietnam War. At the same time, pace overenthusiastic supporters of satire's cognitive value, I will concede that, as entertainment, satire like "The Star-Spangled Banner" does not rival epistemic best practice in investigative journalism or philosophy, although it may complement these in moderate but significant ways. Similarly, I will acknowledge that satire's aesthetic pursuit of entertainment limits its political impact as critique, especially when contrasted to directly activist strategies like protest marches or civil disobedience. Regardless, although satire's critical function is limited by its purpose to entertain, I disagree with detractors that the genre is therefore fundamentally flawed. Instead, I suggest that satire's purpose to entertain has a therapeutic function to complement the emancipatory limits of critique to change the world. In this respect, by the time of Woodstock, fierce opposition against the Vietnam War had been growing for years, to no direct avail. In this regard, rather than dismissing Hendrix's aestheticisation of the war as cynical, I suggest framing it as a coping strategy against its continuing absurdity. Below, I will ground this therapeutic function of entertainment in the self-justifying or autotelic nature of aesthetic experiences, which can

defy absurdity through life-affirming vitality. Accordingly, I seek to revalue satire's purpose to entertain as compensating for the limits of its purpose to critique.

My investigation challenges the assumption that satire's purpose to critique is more important than its purpose to entertain or that the latter really only has value as an instrument to the former. In this respect, although some argue that satire only entertains (Griffin 1994), recent defences of the genre have commonly emphasised its moral value as critique, substantiated by entertainment (Day 2011; McClennen 2011; Baym 2010; Jones 2010). My revaluation of entertainment in satire in relation to critique can be framed in a larger conflict between ethics and aesthetics. Throughout the ages, it seems that ethics has consistently trumped aesthetics to justify why art matters, at least in public debates. According to René Wellek and Austin Warren, "[t]he history of aesthetics might almost be summarized as a dialectic in which the thesis and counter-thesis are Horace's *dulce* and *utile*: poetry is sweet and useful" (1966, 30). Specifically, although, for the "poet" or "those who like poetry", when in private, "[b]eauty is its own excuse for being", when the confronted by "utilitarians and moralists, or by statesmen (…) they naturally stress the 'use' rather than the 'delight' of literature" (Wellek and Warren 1966, 37). Accordingly, in the public sphere, the value of art is commonly equated to "its extrinsic relations" (Wellek and Warren 1966, 37). A recent example is the Cultural Value Project (2013-2016) of the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC). Although the Cultural Value Project sought to transcend the dichotomy between intrinsic and extrinsic value of art, it ultimately focuses primarily on social, political and economic value (Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 44-45). By contrast, the pursuit of aesthetic delight for its own sake, no doubt a major concern of many artists and audiences, is all but wholly ignored in the final report.

In these public debates about the value of art, aesthetic delight for its own sake is morally suspicious and requires a moral stamp of approval to become legitimate. Sometimes this instrumentalisation of aesthetics to ethics even informs defences of art's intrinsic delight. In this respect, according to Wellek and Warren, "the pleasure of literature, we need to maintain (…) is a 'higher pleasure' because pleasure in a higher kind of activity, i.e. non-acquisitive contemplation" (1966, 31). Yet, regardless of the aesthetic merits which follow from Kantian disinterestedness, the literary pleasure defended by Wellek and Warren is exalted not simply for aesthetic reasons, but also because it results from an activity that is morally better, because it is not driven by materialistic self-interest. Interestingly, this moral stamp of approval, which legitimises 'higher' aesthetic pleasures, is of course

unavailable to the unexalted pleasures of entertainment. In this respect, entertainment is aesthetic delight at its most morally suspicious. For this reason, supporters of satire have typically strived to legitimise the value of entertainment by making it instrumental to critique. My investigation below will challenge this instrumentalisation of aesthetics to ethics in satire. Still, a caveat is in order. I too argue that entertainment in satire has instrumental value, specifically as therapy. Yet, any therapeutic value of entertainment in satire depends fully on engrossment in unexalted aesthetic pleasures for their own sake. In other words, there is no therapy in satire without entertainment for entertainment's sake. Moreover, I will reveal this therapeutic value of entertainment in satire as morally ambiguous and in tension with its purpose to critique. Therefore, albeit I argue that entertainment in satire has instrumental value as therapy, I do not instrumentalise satire's aesthetic pursuit of entertainment to its ethical purpose to critique.

This tension between the demands of ethics and the therapeutic function of aesthetics has been acknowledged in philosophy. In particular, Søren Kierkegaard has outlined a conflict between ethics and aesthetics which informs the tension between critique and entertainment in satire. In the pseudonymous *Either/Or*, Kierkegaard has one character advocate an aesthetic lifestyle and another an ethical lifestyle (1987 [1843]). As Alistair MacIntyre explains, "[a]t the heart of the aesthetic way of life (…) is the attempt to lose the self in the immediacy of present experience. By contrast (…) the ethical [involves] a state of commitment and obligation through time, in which the present is bound by the past and to the future" (2007, 40). Likewise, Isaiah Giese clarifies that "Kierkegaard contrasts (1) an aesthetic mode of being whose *telos* is the sense of immediacy provided by beautiful and interesting stimuli with (2) an ethical mode of being where an agent makes passionate choices according to the universal principles of morality" (2011, 60). Kierkegaard considers the character who advocates an aesthetic lifestyle as "unethical in that his motivations for action are enjoyment and fascination" and dismisses his position as "devoid of any influence of moral responsibility" (Giese 2011, 61). This argument highlights the moral suspicion of (certain) aesthetic experiences and, in particular, concerns about the disparateness between critique and entertainment in satire.

Kierkegaard's ideas about aesthetics were informed by the contemporaneous idealist consensus, according to which art was an intermediate between the transcendent and material world (Pattison 1992, 141). Although this metaphysical framework is doubtful, Kierkegaard nonetheless develops valuable insights into the psychology and

phenomenology of aesthetic experiences. In an idealistic framework, good art makes the transcendent immanent and thus provides life with an uncharacteristic unity which is "one of the chief sources of the delight of aesthetic experience" (Pattison 1992, 143). Kierkegaard argues that

> [a]rt therefore reconciles us to life by presenting a harmonious and pleasing image of what life is like which anaesthetizes any sense of outrage we may feel in the face of suffering. Even in tragedy the aesthetic form persuades us to see suffering sympathetically, contemplatively and disinterestedly. In this way art cuts life's corners and smooths out its rough edges (Pattison 1992, 143-144).

Kierkegaard's description of the phenomenology and psychology of aesthetic experiences is equally available on a minimalistic account, according to which aesthetic experiences involve attending to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things for their own sake or the sake of an intrinsic payoff (Stecker 2010, 45). A minimalist account can similarly explain for the immediacy of aesthetic experiences, which diverts attention from real-world concerns to forms, qualities and meaningful features. It is because of this immediacy that Kierkegaard contends that "[t]he aesthetic heals the pain of life by helping us to forget our real existing self" (Pattison 1992, 144).

This self-forgetfulness stimulated by the immediacy of aesthetic experiences is morally suspicious on Kierkegaard's account. According to Kierkegaard, aesthetes are unable to sustain ethical commitments in the real world and instead pursue aesthetic distractions. Conversely, defenders of art may aim to repudiate Kierkegaard's ideas by arguing, correctly, that much modern art prevents aestheticist escapism by deliberately challenging, if not shocking, audiences. Art may be deliberately designed to prevent aesthetic experiences. Moreover, even if it is not, "not all valuable [aesthetic] experience need be pleasurable" (Shusterman 2008, 82). Richard Shusterman clarifies that

> [e]xperiences of disturbing shock, fragmentation, disorientation, puzzlement, horror, protest, or even revulsion that contemporary artworks often aim to arouse can be [aesthetically] valued for the novel feelings and thoughts they provide, whose provocative power can enrich our vision of the world beyond the artwork (2008, 81).

In other words, aesthetic experiences do not necessarily risk anaesthetising the faculties required for moral action in the real world, but may in fact stimulate them. At best, Kierkegaard's account of the phenomenology and psychology of aestheticism therefore

only applies to a specific kind of aesthetic experiences. However, although Kierkegaard's moral suspicion of aesthetic experiences is not universally valid, it is particularly relevant to entertainment. The unexalted pleasures of entertainment are morally suspicious because their easy enjoyment is in no sense a 'higher' pleasure, but something pursued "in a holiday mood by way of diversion" (Plato 276b).

Kierkegaard's critique of aestheticism as cultivating moral indifference resonates in common the suspicion of entertainment in the contemporary reception of satire. In the previous chapter, I already mentioned a cynical Tom Lehrer who deprecates the genre because "audiences like to think that satire is doing something. But, in fact, it is mostly to leave themselves satisfied. Satisfied rather than angry, which is what they should be" (Thompson 2003). Echoing Kierkegaard, Lehrer argues that the unexalted pleasures of entertainment in satire breed moral inertia because they numb the critical faculties required for emancipatory action. Similarly, political cartoonist Ted Rall criticised Jon Stewart (and his 2010 Rally to Restore Sanity and/or Fear) for impeding real change by stimulating ambivalence, if not indifference, instead of moral steadfastness (fig. 8). Although some of Rall's work is arguably satirical itself, it is no coincidence that his rough drawing style eschews the easy pleasures central to entertainment. To a certain extent, Rall's style is deliberately ugly to alienate audiences and, accordingly, stimulate their critical faculties. By contrast, the commercially successful satire of Jon Stewart is designed to be consumed as an enjoyable diversion and, so the worry goes, risks anaesthetising the moral emotions that would otherwise propel genuine change. As I will highlight in what follows, several critics and scholars share Lehrer's and Rall's worry that entertainment breeds aestheticism and therefore impedes the ethical value of satire as critique. Nevertheless, I will argue that such dismissals ignore the therapeutic merits of entertainment in satire as a complement to the limits of critique.

Figure 8

3. RECENT DEBATES ABOUT THE VALUE OF SATIRE

Recent debates about the value of satire showcase considerable anxiety that satire's purpose to entertain mars its purpose to critique. For this reason, some detractors consider satire a failed genre. These detractors argue that because satire sets out to entertain, it not only fails to be critical, but even stimulates apathy and cynicism. In line with Kierkegaard's suspicions, satirical entertainment is said to cultivate an aestheticism that breeds moral indifference and even hostility towards moral commitment. In response, supporters of satire have sought to attenuate these claims by arguing that, facilitated by entertainment, satire has significant political impact as critique. In effect, modern supporters of satire's political and social value have commonly updated Horace's defence of satire that "[h]umour decides great issues more forcefully and more effectively than severity" (1993 *Satires* I.10, 15-16). My problem with this line of argument is that it oversells the political impact of satire and, in the process, misconstrues the value of entertainment in satire by instrumentalising it to critique. Although I consider arguments that satire is cynical without adequate ground, there is similarly no evidence that the genre has a particularly significant political impact as critique. For this reason, seeking to validate satire primarily through its purpose to critique ultimately undermines its significance, for detractors can rightfully

highlight that satire is not as critically impactful as more directly activist strategies. In order to redress this issue and move debates about the value of satire forward, I will develop a philosophical framework to investigate the true significance it may have as critique and to revalue its function as entertainment.

Detractors of satire have often argued that its aesthetic pursuit of entertainment compromises its ethical value as critique. These detractions vary from sympathetic worry to outright dismissal. On the one hand, while Lisa Colletta acknowledges that "the informed satire of Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert can, arguably, be considered some of the most bracing and engaging commentary on the television landscape" (2009, 872), she nonetheless wonders whether the "social and political satire of television shows such as *The Daily Show*, *The Colbert Report*, and *The Simpsons* really [can] have any kind of efficacy beyond that of mere entertainment?" (2009, 895). Specifically, Colletta worries that these shows "actually undermine social and political engagement, creating a disengaged viewer who prefers outsider irreverence to thoughtful satiric critique and ironic, passive democracy to discerning, engaged politics" (2009, 895). Referring to Jon Stewart's appearance on *Crossfire*, discussed in the previous chapter, Colletta contends that "[t]he fact that there was a very real effect to Stewart's nonironic critique is perhaps a comment on the ambivalence of the satiric mode and suggests the limits of its efficacy" (2009, 871). In other words, Coletta's worry is that satirists may only have social and political impact when they stop doing satire.

More dismissingly, Julie Webber is sceptical about the idea that satire or "[p]olitical comedy is the new Lenin" (2013, 9). In particular, Webber targets the kind of hyperbolic appraisals of the political impact of commercial satire in online media. As previously discussed, some journalists and bloggers have a tendency to claim that John Oliver or Samantha Bee 'eviscerate' or 'destroy' the targets of their satire, like Donald Trump. By contrast, Webber argues that "[t]he point of political comedy like *TDS* [*The Daily Show*] is not, as many point out, to inspire [its] viewers to political activity" (2013, 115). Instead, she argues that "Stewart's comedy is an ersatz form of progressive democratic praxis" (Webber 2013, 133). Highlighting the alleged aestheticism cultivated by satire's entertainment, Webber contends that "[a]t its worst, *TDS* is a pleasing form of distraction, a way of avoiding the painful experiences of a present in politics that offers no particularly imaginative inroads into the future" (2013, 116). Along the lines suggested by Kierkegaard, Webber stresses that such aestheticism breeds moral inertia. According to Webber, satire "may not provoke

the audience to rise up off the sofa and march to Washington brandishing torches, but this is because the smart viewer already knows that this would be futile" (2013, 135). These worries of Colletta and more forceful dismissals by Webber are representative of criticisms by detractors of satire which supporters have regularly sought to mitigate. Although these proposals by supporters are often valuable, they nonetheless fail to wholly dismiss the scepticism of detractors, because they are overly focused on proving the extraordinary merits of satire as critique.

In response to criticisms by detractors, supporters of satire's value have often argued that satire has a significant positive impact on politics and society. Supporters also deny that the aesthetic pursuit of entertainment compromises satire's critical function. Instead, they even consider entertainment as an asset to critique. In interviews about *The Simpsons*, Jonathan Gray established that audiences commonly discerned "a 'simple,' 'visual,' or 'elementary' level of Homer's stupidity, Bart's wisecracks and slapstick; and a 'deeper' level of smart, parodic-satiric commentary" (2005, 131). According to Gray, "many of the interviewees claimed also to be fond of the show's slapstick and/or silly humor" (2005, 143). Yet, when defending the value of *The Simpsons*, interviewees did stress the profundity and significance of its critique, rather than its comic entertainment. Sometimes, interviewees even equated satire's generic purpose with critique, as Gray explains that "[t]o most, what this 'deeper' second level consisted of was relevant and topical parody and political satire" (2005, 131). While Gray does consider entertainment part of satire itself, he too instrumentalises its value to the aims of critique. Specifically, Gray has argued that contemporary satire like *The Simpsons* presents an important update to Jürgen Habermas's concept of the public sphere (Gray 2005, 104). Specifically, Gray has praised satire as "theory *prêt-a-porter*" which, because it entertains, has the cognitive value of elucidating complex critique and the political value of engaging audiences (2005, 104).

Gray's ideas about how entertainment contributes to critique in *The Simpsons* have resonated in discussions of commercially successful satire on American TV. Specifically, supporters of satire have dismissed the criticism that entertainment and critique cannot coincide as rooted in the outmoded modernist ideal of the informed citizen as rational-critical actor (Jones 2010; Baym 2010). Since this modernist model of civic duty only considers how ideal citizens pursue rational information that translates in direct democratic participation, it fails to appreciate how entertainment shapes political identities and opinions (Jones 2010, 33). Moreover, television audiences in the digital age have been

described as prosumers who actively appropriate media content, including entertainment, as a resource for citizenry (Baym 2010, 150ff). Contemporary satires like *The Simpsons, The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* have been praised exactly for blurring the outmoded distinction between "the political-normative and the aesthetic-expressive" (Baym 2010, 12; see also McClennen 2012, 166-167; Day 2011, 19-20; Jones 2010, 209-210). Following Gray, scholars have updated the modernist conception of the public sphere in order to accommodate satire's social and political contributions (Baym 2010, 133-134; McClennen 2012, 42-44/158-159; see also Day 2011, 131-133). Supporters have claimed that satire fulfils a political function in the public sphere because it makes critique more comprehensible and accessible than traditional media (see also McClennen 2012, 71ff; Jones 2010, 210). In other words, they consider entertainment in satire as a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine of critique go down. Many supporters of satire therefore agree with Sophia McClennen that "[i]t is not necessary to choose between entertainment and politics" because good satire "can have fun and make a difference at the same time" (2012, 167).

The revision of the modernist dichotomy between politics and entertainment by supporters of satire is an important update to a flawed model of political engagement. At the same time, the argument that satire has value because entertainment contributes to critique dates back at least as far as Horace. However, albeit an ancient idea, it has proven particularly difficult to prove empirically. Several empirical studies do claim that contemporary American television satire has (some) positive democratic effects, either on political knowledge acquisition and attentiveness (Bruce et al. 2014; Brewer et al. 2013; Young and Hoffman 2012; Xenos and Becker 2009; Cao 2010; Cao 2008) or political motivation and persuasion (Lee and Kwak 2014; Holbert et al. 2013) – or both (Lamarre 2013). Similarly, other empirical studies have claimed that satire combines entertainment and information in a way that produces substantive democratic outcomes (Young 2013; Landreville et al. 2010). Yet, such optimism has been mitigated by studies stressing that genuine causality between satire and democratic praxis is difficult to establish (Cao and Brewer 2008; Brewer and Marquardt 2007). Moreover, again other studies are downright pessimistic about satire's democratic effects (Hart 2013; Baumgartner and Morris 2008; Hart and Hartelius 2007). Similar pessimistic studies have argued that audiences of satire typically seek entertainment rather than information (Browning and Sweetser 2014), that satire has less cognitive benefits than traditional media (Kim and Vishak 2008) and that it

even enhances feelings of inefficacy, alienation and cynicism (Balmas 2014) – although another study established no such relation (Hoffman and Thompson 2009).

In the end, despite ample attention in the social sciences to the issue of satire's social and political impact, empirical research has not yielded conclusive evidence. Surveying over a decade's worth of research, R. Lance Holbert has concluded that "there is no clear evidence that political satire use is necessarily good or bad for democracy" (2013, 312). In order to address this issue, Holbert and colleagues have outlined new strategies to capture the democratic effects of contemporary satire (Young et al. 2014). More specifically, suggestions have been made to expand the conceptualisation of satire's democratic effect beyond easily measurable outcomes, like salience, knowledge, attitudes and political behaviour, to include more subtle outcomes, like joy, enthusiasm, curiosity, and an inner sense of political engagement (Young et al 2014, 1112-1117). Likewise, Amber Day has suggested focussing on the incremental shifts and changes that contemporary satire achieves in public debate (2011, 21-23), which she grants are difficult to measure empirically (2013, 427). In particular, the benefits of so-called 'preaching to the converted' have been revalued as fostering communities and substantiating the critical attitudes required for political action (Day 2011, 145-146; Gray 2005, 157-159). Nevertheless, similarly arguing that "'[p]reaching to the converted' is not a meaningless activity" (2015, 185), Sophie Quirk concedes that "[t]he contribution that most comedians make to social change is, perhaps, more ethereal" (2015, 203).

Moreover, not only have supporters suggested altering the parameters of social and political impact to include the more ethereal effects of satire, the limits of the genre as critique have been explicitly conceded. Ethan Thompson has distinguished between "subverting the political and subverting the cultural", explaining that satire typically succeeds in the latter rather than the former (2011, 147). Moreover, even supporters commonly understand a formal call to action as inimical to the genre, while satirists are often said to be most critically effective when they abandon their satirical framework – remember Jon Stewart on *Crossfire* (Young et al. 2014, 1123-1125). Similarly, satire seems most effective when combined with more directly activist strategies. As a case in point, Quirk discusses the work of Mark Thomas as "evidence of comedy's potential to produce real and significant change", but she also acknowledges that it is not just his satirical stand-up, but "[t]he protests and the pranks, and the links with official campaign groups, [which] are vital to his efficacy" (2015, 202-203). Similarly, Day mostly focuses on "hybrid satiric

genres", which combine the purposes of satire with those of documentary, journalism or political street theatre (2011, 8). While illuminating, conclusions about the effects of such hybrids are not representative of the genre satire itself. For these reasons, despite often enthusiastic appraisals of satire's social and political value, "[a]t best, the persuasive effects of political satire appear to be minimal" (Holbert 2013, 310), while "[t]he effects of political satire on the generation of political knowledge also appear to be minimal" (Holbert 2013, 311).

The argument that satire has extraordinary political impact because entertainment is a spoonful of sugar to help the medicine of critique go down cannot be substantiated by empirical evidence. At the same time, the tentative suggestions about the moderate social and political impact of contemporary satire on American television seem plausible. Nevertheless, these suggestions are unlikely to attenuate the scepticism of detractors who, evoking the Frankfurt School's Marxist distrust of the culture industry, consider these moderate benefits as wholly reversed by the complicity of commercial satire in consumer capitalism (see Adorno and Horkheimer 2002 [1944]). Case in point, from the moment *The Simpsons* generated scholarly attention, scholars wondered whether its satirical critique could be married to its commercial success (Alberti 2004). In response, Douglas Rushkoff has argued that commercially successful satire like *The Simpsons* can function as a 'media virus' or "a method for getting the mainstream media to unwittingly promote countercultural agendas" (1996, 7). However, Rushkoff later problematised his claims, acknowledging that a media virus can only be successfully subversive for a certain period of time, after which its message is co-opted after all (Rushkoff, quoted in Ortved 2009, 281-2). Indeed, despite Gray's (2010) claims to the contrary, episodes of *The Simpsons* did lose their critical bite as the franchise transformed from FOX's gadfly to its flagship (Hyden and Rabin 2007). Nonetheless, supporters may respond that the critical legacy of *The Simpsons* outweighs its economic complicity. Gray has argued that the critical value of satire lies in its "*potential*" to stimulate resistance (2005, 9, original emphasis), stressing that *The Simpsons* "must rely on the audience to carry that resistance further" (2005, 168). Nevertheless, although Gray has identified *The Simpsons* as a "generational touchstone", based on qualitative data from interviews, further empirical evidence that satire has significant political impact is sparse (2005, 128).

Perhaps a more promising rebuttal of Marxist-inspired pessimism is Gray's argument that a "Faustian bargain" is unproblematic for commercially successful satire (2005, 164-5). As

Gray argues, when progressive impulses and conservative realities clash, the latter do not necessarily prevail over the former (2005, 167). In this respect, Jeffrey P. Jones quotes Michael Moore, who has quipped that "[o]ne of the beauties of capitalism is that they'll sell you the rope to hang themselves if they believe that they can make money" (2010, 156). At the same time, Gray does concede that a Faustian bargain entails that commercial satire "is never completely subversive, for to be so would be to risk either termination, and/or charges of patronization and/or hypocrisy" (Gray 2005, 168). Similar to George A. Test (1991, 54), Gray (2005, 11-12) has further developed the relationship between complicit satirists and their powerful targets through the 'fool and king' analogy. Following this analogy, satirists are like medieval court jesters who receive a license from the king to subvert, on the condition that the subversion only goes so far. The fool and king analogy is insightful because it conceptualises how satire can have moderate social and political impact. At the same time, the analogy does not sustain any extraordinary value of satire as critique in a liberal democracy. By contrast, whereas the license to critique granted to fools may be particularly valuable in totalitarian regimes, it seems superfluous in liberal democracies, where everybody has a license to be critical to some degree. Surely, nobody would deny that there are ideas at least as critical as the satire of Samantha Bee or John Oliver widely available in bookshops and other fora.

Moreover, rather than substantiating the political and social value of satire, detractors may argue that the fool and king analogy ultimately undermines it. The fool and king analogy echoes Mikhail Bakhtin's ideas about medieval carnival and is vulnerable to the same rebuttals. Bakhtin has characterised the carnival as a time and space where official norms and laws were inverted (see Stam 1989). Similarly, scholars have identified artistic transgressions like satire, alongside those of comedy and animation, as contemporary manifestations of the 'carnivalesque' (Thompson 2011, 65; Gray, Jones and Thompson 2009, 10; Gray 2005, 107; Baym 2010, 108ff/129). In particular, the satirical transgressions of *South Park* have regularly been understood as a contemporary carnival (Thompson 2009; Johnson-Woods 2007, xii). However, since the carnival is only a temporary and institutionalised transgression, its subversiveness has been questioned by detractors. Specifically, drawing on Umberto Eco (1984a), who dismissed the authorised transgression of the carnival as a conservative tool to maintain the status quo, Julie Webber questions the social and political impact of commercial satire (2013, 6/147). Similarly, Dustin Griffin sceptically wonders whether satire is not just "a harmless way to allow the venting of

dangerous steam" (1994, 156). Still, albeit there is no real evidence that satire has significant critical impact, neither is there proof that it breeds cynicism. Moreover, even if satire were in part to function as emotional relief, such a therapeutic function need not necessarily be inimical to critical commitment. At best, the political impact of satire may indeed be more moderate than some supporters would have hoped, but the genre does therefore not necessarily uphold the status quo by fostering moral indifference.

In conclusion, the updated version of Horace's argument that satire is more effective as critique because it entertains proves a non-starter. At best, the political impact of satire is limited. Nevertheless, it does not follow that satire has no political value. By themselves, many other critical practices, including most scholarship, volunteering or charity, also cannot claim extraordinary emancipatory efficacy. Still, they may incrementally contribute to emancipation, with some practices having a larger impact than others. Maybe satire can be one practice among many that contributes to emancipation, even if it cannot claim extraordinary efficacy. It follows that supporters of satire need not prove that the genre has extraordinary political impact in order to refute accusations of cynicism. Moreover, overestimations of satire's political value are pernicious because they set the genre up for failure. Since the political impact of satire is not particularly significant, it may seem that the genre is on the whole rather insignificant. However, the significance of satire is not determined by its political impact to change the world. Instead, in the next chapters, I will develop the argument that satire has cognitive value because it informs about the world and therapeutic value because it develops strategies to cope with it. Still, in order to substantiate these arguments, some preparatory philosophical groundwork is required. The theoretical understanding of both entertainment and critique has remained philosophically underdeveloped in recent debates. In particular, ideas about critique have been negatively impacted by postmodern anxieties about truth and ethics. Addressing these anxieties, I will introduce a philosophical framework which will later permit me to investigate the cognitive value of satire as critique and the therapeutic function of entertainment to cope with the limits of critique.

4. POSTMODERN ANXIETIES ABOUT CRITIQUE

The political impact of satire as critique is at best moderate. Yet, even a moderate claim about satire's contribution to emancipation alongside other critical practices assumes that satire can convey truths about the world and, specifically, what is wrong with it. However, in the wake of postmodernism, the very idea of truth, especially in the domain of ethics,

has been problematised in debates about satire. Postmodernism introduced a relativism about truth according to which assertions have no objective validity but simply express personal opinion. In particular, such epistemological scepticism capitalised on anxieties about the legitimisation of moral judgements. Accordingly, postmodern relativism about moral truth deeply problematises the legitimacy of critique. These postmodern anxieties about critique have strongly informed recent debates about the value of satire. On the one hand, drawing on postmodern frameworks, deniers have downplayed satire's aspirations as critique, while detractors have dismissed the genre for its alleged relativism. On the other hand, supporters have commonly praised satire like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* or *The Colbert Report* exactly for opposing the soggy relativism of postmodern journalism. Nevertheless, these defences are themselves often compromised by postmodern anxieties about truth and ethics common in the humanities. Since these postmodern anxieties about truth and ethics have not been appropriately dispelled in recent debates about satire, I will propose a meta-ethical investigation to safeguard the function of the genre as critique.

As a form of critique, satire can be situated in a tradition of enlightenment. Manifesting itself in various socio-historical contexts, enlightenment is propelled by the will to truth in order to overcome untruth. Metaphorically speaking, enlightenment brings light where previously there was obscurity. In the West, the beginning of this anti-obscurantist project is commonly situated in the Ionian Enlightenment of the sixth century BC. More specifically, it is Thales of Miletus who has been remembered as the first real seeker-of-truth. Thales is said to have developed a method of inquiry into naturalistic phenomena which did not appeal to mythology and the supernatural, but exclusively to reason and naturalistic explanations. A century later, in Athens, Socrates transposed this polemical enlightenment from the natural sciences to the domain of ethics. More specifically, aiming to emancipate his fellow citizens by stinging them out of complacency, Socrates originated the tradition of critique in the West (Bronner 2011, 1). In this respect, comparisons between satire and philosophy, specifically philosophy as embodied by Socrates, are significant because they rightfully situate satire in a tradition of enlightenment (see Introduction). Incorporating the purpose to critique, satire too is propelled by the will to shine the light of truth in order to foster emancipation.

However, the ideals of enlightenment are fragile. Peter Sloterdijk has characterised enlightenment as a "polemical realism that declares war on appearances: Only the *naked* truths, the *naked* facts should be regarded as valid" (1987, 330, original emphasis).

According to Sloterdijk, this polemical realism is not “an unproblematic bringer of light. Where it has an effect, a twilight arises” (1987, 22). After the historical Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in the West, this twilight crystallised as postmodernity. Sloterdijk warns that “[t]o continue enlightenment means to be prepared for the fact that everything that in consciousness is mere morality will lose out against the unavoidable amoralism of the real” (1987, 82). Although the Enlightenment had great emancipatory ideals, its moral aspirations were problematised by the very real “technological atrocities of the twentieth century, from Verdun to the Gulag, from Auschwitz to Hiroshima” (Sloterdijk 1987, 11). According to Sloterdijk, reality’s resistance to modernity’s enlightened ideals stimulated “a universal, diffuse cynicism” (1987, 3). In postmodernity, this cynicism manifested itself in “a radical, ironic treatment (*Ironisierung*) of ethics and of social conventions, as if universal laws existed only for the stupid, while that fatally clever smile plays on the lips of those in the know” (Sloterdijk 1987, 4). According to Sloterdijk, a postmodern cynic “hears ‘fundamental values’ and involuntarily sees mushroom clouds rise up” (1987, 119).

Moreover, the values of the Enlightenment were not only challenged by historical developments in postmodernity. At the same time, academic postmodernism launched an attack on the theoretical foundations which sustained these values. In particular, postmodern philosophers interpreted Friedrich Nietzsche as outlining a nihilism according to which all ‘truth’ is relative to individual perspectives. Postmodernism therefore concluded there is “literally a plurality of worlds” to which a plurality of perspectives corresponds (Blackburn 2005, 36). For postmodernists, this situation justified a complete symmetry of standing between opinions, which are all equally ‘true’, since none has unmediated access to the ‘real’. Perhaps surprisingly, this Nietzchean perspectivism was celebrated by postmodernists as an emancipation from enlightenment and the tyranny of sameness imposed by its concept of truth (Lyon 1994, 5-16). Accordingly, while denouncing enlightenment’s commitment to truth, this postmodern celebration of difference recycled its emancipatory ideal. However, exactly by problematising and relativising truth, the emancipatory dream of postmodernism ultimately imploded. Postmodernism has been criticised because its relativistic understanding of truth is unable to support ethical praxis, including critique. If everything is only a matter of opinion, dismissing a practice or discourse as untrue becomes impossible. In this manner, postmodern relativism became associated with a soggy attitude of ‘everything goes’. At the same time, postmodernism’s

amorality was said to cultivate self-interestedness and cynicism, as highlighted by Ted Rall in his dystopian graphic novel, *2024* (fig. 9).

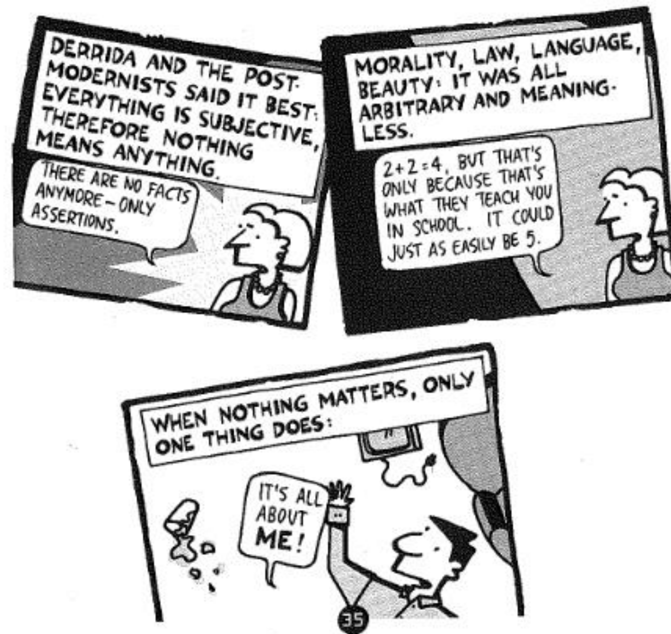

Figure 9

The postmodern challenge to enlightenment impacted the understanding of satire in scholarship. Writing in the mid-1990s, Dustin Griffin challenged the “consensus” established in the 1960s that literary satire has a moral function (1994, 1). Among the targeted consensus scholars was Northrop Fry, who understood satire as an art with “moral norms [which] are relatively clear” and “standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured” (1957, 223). By contrast, Griffin considered it naïve to think that satirists have relatively clear moral visions which they succeed in communicating to a receptive audience. Moreover, in true postmodern fashion, Griffin stressed that “[t]o assume that a satirist or a historian is simply referring to ‘truth’ or to ‘history’ is to be persuaded by that writer’s version of events” (1994, 132). Likewise, Charles Knight considered literary satire as “independent of moral purpose”, stressing that “norms are not essential to satire, which may make judgements by internal shifts of perception that do not appeal to external values or by identifying the satiric object as ridiculous rather than immoral” (2004, 5). Similarly, postmodernism impacted analyses of satire in popular media. In his analysis of *The Simpsons*, Duncan Beard argued that

> [b]ecause postmodern satire does not conform to earlier definitions of satire, which maintain that satirical criticism must be based upon an implicit or explicit set of values, the relative and reflexive ground of postmodern satire rarely finds a positive voice of rejuvenation to provide alternative visions for situations that have been satirically criticized as unfavorable (2004, 287).

While such postmodern understandings of satire were a cause of celebration to some, others, who were still upholding the modernist frameworks of the enlightenment, were alarmed by the relativism the genre was said to exhibit.

The impact of academic postmodernisms on the scholarly reception of satire did not inspire unanimous praise of the genre. Instead, worries about postmodern relativism informed arguments of detractors who dismissed satire as stimulating indifference and cynicism. Sticking to the reception of *The Simpsons*, Josh Ozersky argued that its postmodern relativism made audiences "less inclined to object to the continuing presence of unsafe workplaces, vast corporations, the therapy racket, and all the other deserving targets of *The Simpsons*' harmless barbs" (1991, 92). Similarly, Carl Matheson stated that "*The Simpsons* does not promote anything, because its humor works by putting forward positions only in order to undercut them" (2001, 118). For this reason, James Wallace dismissed *The Simpsons* as "nihilistic (everything is a target) and conservative (the traditional social order endures)" (2001, 246). Likewise, Carl Bybee and Ashley Overbeck criticised *The Simpsons* for formulating "a postmodernism of despair" and "den[ying] viewers any hope (…) for dealing with the postmodern world", since "all social or political action is equally futile and absurd" (2001, 10). Clearly, the influence of postmodernism in academia, especially in the humanities, problematised the idea that satire like *The Simpsons* affirmed a moral position.

By contrast, supporters of satire like *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and *The Colbert Report* commonly hailed these programmes as a defence of modernist enlightenment against pernicious postmodern journalism. Convinced that no representation of reality can ever be objective and encompassing, mainstream journalism aimed to avoid bias during the George W. Bush years by offering an overview of competing truth-claims on any given issue. However, aiming to avoid bias, postmodern journalism exactly provided a forum for what Harry Frankfurt has called 'bullshit' or hyper-partisan discourse that is indifferent to truth in pursuit of its own agenda (Baym 2010, 177ff). Ironically, although academic postmodernisms shared the emancipatory ideals of the political left, postmodern

journalism generated a free market of ‘truth’ in which the right was able to spin its imperialistic agenda – culminating in the 2003 invasion of Iraq (McClennen 2012, 42ff; Jones 2010, 43ff). In reaction, supporters of satire like *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* framed these programmes as an explicit critique of postmodern bullshit (Jones 2010; Baym 2010; McClennen 2012). In Britain, Armando Iannucci’s *The Thick of It* (BBC, 2005-2012) mounted a similar critique of political spin in a climate of moral relativism (Higgie 2012). As a critique of the proliferation of bullshit in postmodern times, satire has been praised by supporters as continuing the modernist legacy of truth and enlightenment.

However, at the same time, the resonance of academic postmodernisms has made such talk of truth, especially in the domain of ethics, uncomfortable. This ambiguity can be discerned in comments by Jon Stewart. On the one hand, Stewart has claimed that “there are—should be—you know, truths, actual truths and someone should be there to help arbitrate that” (quoted in Day 2011, 74). On the other hand, Stewart mitigates that “[o]ur audience can watch without feeling like we’re grabbing them by the lapels and shouting, ‘This is the truth!’ in their faces. Our show is about not knowing what the truth is” (quoted in Jones 2010, 76). Similarly, while supporters have praised satire for its critique, they are often ambivalent about its relation to truth. According to Russell Peterson, “[r]eal satire speaks truth to power” (2008, 128) and satirists present themselves as “telling us the capital-*T* Truth” (2008, 125). At the same time, Peterson argues that “‘truth’ is much less of a meaningful concept than we would like to think” (2008, 145). Peterson even advocates for some degree of bullshit in society, arguing that “[i]t’s fine for philosophers like Professor Frankfurt to pursue Ultimate Truth, but the rest of us have to live here” (2008, 205). These ambiguities in defences of satire as critique reflect some the unresolved anxieties about truth and ethics common in the wake of postmodernism. Very often, these anxieties are rooted in a mistaken conception of truth, especially moral truth, as something so ultimate that it cannot realistically be comprehended by satirists or anybody else. In order to redress this situation, I propose a meta-ethical investigation to normalise truth, including moral truth, and safeguard the function of satire as critique.

5. DISPELLING POSTMODERN RELATIVISM

In what follows, I set out to dispel anxieties about relativism by arguing that truth is far less a problematic concept than postmodernists have assumed, even in the domain of ethics.

The problematic of truth is commonly overestimated because postmodernism has targeted an erroneous conception of truth, rooted in Plato's metaphysics. According to Plato, the empirical world is in constant flux, which is why sensory perception does not produce knowledge (*epistème*), but mere opinion (*doxa*). On a Platonic metaphysics, true knowledge is nonetheless possible, but it only results from the intellectual contemplation of a transcendent world which is permanent and unchangeable. However, propelled by its own will to truth, enlightenment came to unmask the falsity of Platonic metaphysics and its historical manifestation, Christianity. Secularism destroyed the belief in a transcendent world and accordingly also the possibility of true knowledge. In a disenchanted universe, all that remained was the empirical world of impure opinions. Accordingly, postmodern philosophers argue that enlightenment unmasked the falsity of its own truth-conception. In response, they urge that the absolute conception of truth ought to be replaced by relativism.

However, the problem of postmodernism is that despite its dismissal of absolute truth, it nonetheless still adheres to a Platonic metaphysics. The Platonic understanding of truth demands that true knowledge must bear on an independent reality which is objectively accessible by reason. However, since Kant, it is common philosophical knowledge that reason can only access a reality constructed by its own categories. Access to reality as such is transcendental. In response to Kantian constructivism, postmodernism draws the Platonic conclusion that true knowledge about the empirical world is impossible. Not only do postmodernists consider the world in itself unknowable, but they argue that the conceptual categories which construct understanding of the world as it appears are not universal, but relative to socio-historical contexts. The result is epistemological chaos. Confined to Plato's world of mere opinions, postmodernism advocates a relativism about truth according to which all perspectives are equally 'true', since none has unmediated access to the 'real'. Crucially, it follows that critique becomes impossible, for one position can no longer be assessed as better or worse than another. For this reason, postmodern approaches ultimately dismiss satire as nonsensical or, as discussed above, disavow its moral motivation. However, this postmodern reasoning and its dismissal of critique is flawed, because it remains faithful to the mistaken Platonic demand that truth must bear on an independent reality.

The Platonic conception of truth as absolute because bearing on an independent reality is mistaken and must be replaced by a minimalist understanding (see Blackburn 2006). Minimalism about truth dismisses that the concept 'truth' is a substantial property shared by all true assertions. Instead, minimalism proposes that truth is not a property at all. Truth is transparent. It makes no difference to say "that it is raining, or it is true that it is raining, or true that it is true that it is raining, and so on forever" (Blackburn 2006, 60). By contrast, it does make a difference when saying that it is raining or that it is useful that is raining or that it is useful that it useful that is raining. The fact that truth is transparent entails no extra metaphysical issue about the nature of truth or an independent reality is introduced by asserting 'it is true that is raining' instead of 'it is raining'. The issue simply remains whether it is raining or not, which is not resolved by metaphysical reflection, but simply by checking the weather. According to minimalism, every assertion introduces an issue which needs to be settled on its own terms. So, on a minimalist understanding, what makes an assertion about a given issue true is what happens to be the case in that instant. Schematically, *p* is true if and only if *p*.

Minimalism about truth is related to Wittgenstein's conception of language games. According to minimalism, making an assertion is like playing a game, which comes with its own rules of establishing truth. Different games have different rules, but once those rules are agreed, it is simply a matter of following them in order to establish whether an assertion is true. According to postmodern thinkers like Jean-François Lyotard (1979), Wittgenstein's concession that assessing truth in various language games is not governed by one and the same rule entails a relativism about truth. However, although different rules apply to point-scoring in different games like football and basketball, which are relative to these respective sports, keeping score in these sports is itself not relative to human subjectivity. Similarly, in order to establish the truth about a given issue, there are rules in place which are relative to the issue in question, but not relative to subjective perspectives. Yet, postmodernists may again counter that Wittgensteinian minimalism does not provide an external foundation for the validity of the rules relative to specific language games. This postmodern concern need not trouble minimalists about truth. The right response to this argument is that the validity of the rules becomes apparent simply through playing the game. In this respect, the demand that these rules must be validated by unmediated access to an independent reality is a mistake rooted in Platonic metaphysics.

Concretely, suppose the issue is whether it is true that there is a bus bearing down on me as I try to cross the street. This issue comes with its own rules, which are the rules of empirical verification. I simply have to look if there is indeed a bus approaching or not. Nevertheless, suppose somebody suggested that the issue is equally well resolved by consulting the gods or listening to voices in one's head. There is indeed no foundation external to the language game of empirical verification to dismiss the validity of these religious or psychotic rules. Nonetheless imposing the rules of empirical verification as the only valid ones might therefore be dismissed by postmodernists as an ideological act, imposing a particular agenda. However, appeal to an external foundation or independent reality is not necessary to justify the validity of empirical verification in the domain of science. Science works. As opposed to religion and psychosis, it has a track record for getting things right in the empirical world. When crossing the street, empirical verification is a reliable method to establish whether or not a bus is approaching. Divine mediation or psychotic reasoning may get lucky a few times, but the results will be painfully clear when it does not. For this reason, there is no symmetry in standing between perspectives in the language game of science. As Blackburn quips, "[a]s it bears down on you, it is not possible to hold that the oncoming bus is a piece of text" (2006, 170).

The evident success of the scientific method attenuates postmodern anxieties about truth. Indeed, very few outside the academy have ever been disturbed by postmodern perspectivism about the natural world. However, the real sting of postmodern relativism concerns the domain of value. The idea that all values are relative is not exclusive to postmodern philosophies, but capitalises on anxieties many have experienced. Blackburn explains that

> [t]he contrast with science comes in just this: it is not so much that we must see science as taking us to an 'absolute conception' of things, but that there is no getting behind science to give any other explanation of the emergence of our scientific beliefs, than ones starting with the facts to which we respond. In ethics this is not so (1986, 198).

The force of postmodern anxieties in the moral domain is therefore far greater than in the natural world because, "[t]he explanatory demand to see how ethics can be an area of commitment in which we can talk without blushing of truth, knowledge, and error, is not met by the insistences generated by good moralizing" (1986, 198). In the domain of ethics,

it does not suffice to say that the issue is the issue. For this reason, a separate meta-ethical investigation is in order.

A meta-ethical investigation is necessary to rebut postmodern anxieties about truth in the domain of ethics. The concrete aim of this meta-ethical investigation is to justify the possibility of critique and, by extension, satire as a form of critique. This meta-ethical investigation will also introduce greater conceptual clarity in the debates about the value of satire than currently available. Further, this investigation will clarify the significance of the relation between ethics and aesthetics in satire. In what follows, I will outline a meta-ethical framework developed by Simon Blackburn, called quasi-realism. The appeal of Blackburn's quasi-realism is that it philosophically justifies the practices of "ordinary moral thought" in a strictly naturalistic framework (2007, 154). Blackburn's meta-ethical framework avoids grand metaphysical commitments for it has no aspiration of "grounding ethics in a special kind of fact, or detecting a special kind of authority for it" (1998, 313). In other words, quasi-realism about ethics is appealing because it allows moral truth at minimum cost. Still, quasi-realism does not equal having one's meta-ethical cake and eating it too. Albeit the theory justifies the practices of ordinary morality, it also highlights its tensions. Quasi-realism does not make ethics easy, but exactly introduces plausible explanations for why it is so difficult. That said, my investigation of satire's nature, function and significance does not stand or fall with the correctness of Blackburn's quasi-realism. I simply introduce quasi-realism as an excellent tool to address the issue of satire's nature, function and significance with greater conceptual clarity than currently available in the debate.

In essence, Blackburn's quasi-realism is a solution for the problem whether moral assertions have truth-value. Ordinarily, to have truth-value, an assertion must have propositional content and bear on a fact. Yet, Blackburn argues there are no moral facts (in the sense that there are scientific facts). He explains that "[w]hen we make an ethical assertion, we express an attitude, we do not describe the world as it is" (Blackburn 1998, 70). Blackburn is an expressivist who argues that ethical sentences are "prescriptive or directive" and therefore have "a different 'direction of fit' to the world" than "descriptive or representational" sentences (2007, 149). Nonetheless, Blackburn does consider the propositional appearance of moral assertions legitimate because they serve as "a focus for practical thought, as people communicate their certainties, and doubts about what to value" (1998, 50). According to Blackburn, there is an "isomorphism between propositional

structures and necessary practical states" which explains and justifies the 'quasi-realist' appearance of moral discourse form the perspective of evolutionary psychology (1998, 77). From an evolutionary perspective, humans need to engage in ethical deliberation in order to live and survive in the world and there is no better way to do so than using the recourses of logic which come with propositional formulation (Blackburn 2002, 127). Moreover, although he is an anti-realist (there are no moral facts) and a non-cognitivist (there are no moral propositions), Blackburn allows for talk of truth in the domain of ethics on a minimalist basis. According to Blackburn, it is possible to arrive at the truth about moral issues by applying rules of deliberation which govern the domain of ethics (2004, 201).

The rules that govern ethical deliberation, according to Blackburn, are outlined in the sentimentalist theory of practical reasoning originally developed by David Hume. According to Hume, practical deliberation presupposes the ability to abstract from particular preferences and take up a common point of view in search of "shared standards" (Blackburn 2003, 112). In the domain of ethics, such shared standards are "preferences that we 'demand' of others; that is, if they do not share them we find ourselves averse to them or in opposition to them" (Blackburn 2002, 125). Hume argued that this ability to abstract from particular preferences in favour of the common point of view is rooted in the natural tendency to "sympathize with the pleasures and pains of others" which is why we "naturally praise and encourage actions that promote pleasures and avoid pains, and dislike and discourage actions that do the reverse" (1998, 206). Moreover, Hume explained that "this sympathy we sometimes carry so far, as even to be displeased with a quality commodious to us, merely because it displeases others, and makes us disagreeable in their eyes" (Blackburn 1998, 203). According to Hume, the sentiment of sympathy for the common point of view is the motor of moral deliberation.

The tenets of Hume's moral sentimentalism were further developed by Adam Smith. According to Smith, we internalise critical voices with which we sympathise. Accordingly, we develop a moral conscience or "the voice of 'the man within the breast'" whose

> jurisdiction (…) is founded altogether in the desire of praise-worthiness, and in aversion to blame-worthiness; in the desire of possessing those qualities, and performing those actions, which we love and admire in other people; and the dread of possessing those qualities, and performing those actions, which we hate and despise in other people" (Blackburn 1998, 200).

In other words, it is because people do not want to be the kind of inconsiderate person whom they themselves would disdain and instead want to be a considerate person whom they could rightfully praise, that they are motivated to take up the common point of view. In this regard, ethical deliberation is in the sway of emotions, desires and attitudes "or what Hume called passion or sentiment" (Blackburn 2003, 95). Blackburn grounds the force of this sentimentalist mechanism by referring to "the human delight in gossip, or stories or soap operas" – not to mention social media – which force us "to realize that discussing and coordinating our reactions to human doings in general is a familiar, and indeed obsessive, concern" (1998, 204).

The sentimentalist justification of the concern for the common point of view is rooted in "a relatively optimistic picture of human nature" (Blackburn 1998, 206) according to which "an awareness that our behaviour could not survive the impartial scrutiny of others is uncomfortable, and in principle opens the gates to reform" (Blackburn 1998, 204). However, such optimism is fragile and, in practice, depends on the socialisation and education of our emotional natures (Blackburn 1998, 209). If successful, this process of socialisation and education instils human beings with "the benefits of a social order based on honesty and co-operation" (Blackburn 1998, 209). Yet, the success of this process is contingent on a myriad of contextual factors and may go wrong – as so often it does – at which time it might be "too late" to do something about it (1998, 209). Talking somebody out of becoming a suicide bomber might still be possible before they join a terrorist organisation, but is much more difficult and uncommon afterwards ("Mijn Jihad" 2015). In this respect, deliberation about ethics differs radically from scientific investigation (Blackburn 2003, 112). Whereas empirical verification generates conclusions about the world which, although not absolute, are nonetheless certain, the common point of view does not produce "reason[s] that everyone *must* acknowledge to be a reason, independently of their sympathies and inclinations" (Blackburn 2003, 94, original emphasis). This situation leads Blackburn to conclude that "[t]he concern for common ground, like any concern is just that: the contingent and fragile result of our sentimental natures" (1998, 233).

In order to describe our moral situation, Blackburn explains we are in Neurath's boat (1986, 196; see Introduction). Our moral values are like planks in a boat of which we must check the validity while in open sea. In the same way as there is no dry-dock from which to inspect the boat, there are no external foundations to justify moral judgements. Yet, being

in Neurath’s boat does not entail moral truths are impossible to establish. According to Blackburn, if “there is no skyhook, nowhere outside the swirl attitude, from which to judge attitude (…) [o]ne must simply bring other attitudes to help out” (2004, 8). Concretely, if the issue is “reflecting on the virtue of honesty”, it entails “invok[ing] other values” to see if “honesty stands up” (Blackburn 1986, 196). Fortunately, according to Blackburn, even from within Neurath’s boat, “there are countless small, unpretentious things that we know with perfect certainty”, for instance “[h]appiness is preferable to misery, and dignity is better than humiliation” (2003, 115). These attitudes serve as planks in our boat on which we can stand with confidence as we explore other planks in our own boat or that of others. Consequently, Blackburn’s quasi-realism permits talk of non-relativistic moral truths, rooted in Wittgensteinian minimalism (1986, 201). According to Blackburn, “[t]o worry whether a moral judgement is true is to worry which attitude to take towards something, and, as Wittgenstein was fond of saying, to say that a moral judgement is true is to repeat the judgement” (2002, 128).

More specifically, quasi-realism allows talk of truth and objectivity in the domain of ethics when “I have taken in all the [empirical or other] facts, seen the situation in the round, and am reasonably sure that no hidden subjective agenda, such as a desire for my own advantage, is driving the attitude. This is all that objectivity is, or can be” (Blackburn 2004, 93). Blackburn clarifies that

> [t]o claim knowledge of a moral judgement is to claim a standpoint such that no improvement will lead to a reversal of attitude. I know that child abuse is a bad thing, and in saying that I express my conviction that no further facts wait to come in. There is nothing further about human life or children’s’ lives that might come along and upset that verdict (2002, 128-129).

Of course, quasi-realist talk of truth and objectivity in the moral domain is a far cry from the certainties of scientific truth and objectivity, and might therefore appear as insufficient to dispel relativism. However, Blackburn argues that such a “sideways, scientific view would only be right if moral truth were scientific truth, which it is not” (1986, 201). According to Blackburn, “[t]his is the one point that can properly be taken from the later Wittgenstein. To find the truth in an area where the facts can seem fugitive (…) you do not put on physicalist spectacles, but learn to place the practice properly, so that its commitments become comfortable, even in a physical world” (1986, 201). Concretely, quasi-realism does not stipulate absolute truth in the domain of ethics, which allows access to the world as it

really is. Instead, Blackburn settles for a minimalism which "can be seen as a strenuous piece of practical advice: when there are still two things to think [about a moral issue], keep on worrying. Beaver away, and eventually, it is promised, one opinion will deserve to prevail" (Blackburn 2007, 155).

Accordingly, Blackburn's quasi-realist meta-ethical framework rebuts postmodern anxieties about truth in the domain of ethics. Consequently, quasi-realism safeguards critique and, by extension, satire as a form of critique. Moreover, Blackburn's sentimentalism accommodates the common understanding of satire as propelled by moral emotions. Specifically, in his programmatic first *Satire*, Catherine Keane explains that Juvenal introduced the idea that the genre is motivated by anger, which he identifies as "a kind of communal emotional pulse" (2015, 11). According to Keane, "[i]t seems that Juvenal has led many readers to believe that this [communal emotional pulse] is the true nature of satire" (2015, 11). As explained in the previous chapter, be they driven by anger or other moral emotions, satirists set out to protest discourses or practices which they refuse to tolerate. So, whether their critique is lofty or not, by virtue of actively opposing a certain discourse or practice, satire enters the broadly moral domain. Further, not only does a quasi-realist meta-ethics clarify the moral dimension of satire, but it substantiates how satirists can be right or wrong in their critique. When Juvenal rants that it is an outrage that eunuchs can get married, we can appeal to the common point of view to dismiss his insensitive conservativeness as morally misplaced. Similarly, the same process of ethical deliberation makes it sometimes possible to say without blushing that the critique of satirists is morally true.

The advantages of a quasi-realist meta-ethical framework is that it clarifies the generic purpose of satire as critique and introduces greater conceptual clarity than currently available in the debate. Adhering to quasi-realism entails that ethical truth-telling need no longer be appraised as some mystical faculty that satirists somehow possess, but is firmly rooted in everyday moral practice. Likewise, talk of capital-*T* Truth, so Ultimate and Absolute that it cannot realistically be comprehended by satirists or anybody else, can safely be abandoned. Since ethical truth-telling is fairly ordinary, satirists also no longer need to pragmatically downplay their intentions to say true things about the world. They may still aim to be insightful, but no longer need to worry about being exceptional. At the same time, while allowing talk of truth in the domain of ethics, quasi-realism also acknowledges that moral issues can remain uncertain and unresolved. While some moral

issues can be arbitrated with certainty, say, concerning human dignity, others are more ambiguous or unlikely to ever be resolved. Yet, as in science, what we do not know is no reason to doubt what we do know. Quasi-realism clarifies that good satire will provide non-trivial insights into issues where moral knowledge is to be had or highlight were caution and reservation is more appropriate. Accordingly, Blackburn's quasi-realism provides an excellent framework to develop the value of satire as critique in this thesis.

However, not everybody is convinced by Blackburn's meta-ethics. While it would be impossible to reply to all objections in the philosophical literature, it is nonetheless fruitful to briefly showcase how quasi-realism can withstand some major concerns outlined by its meta-ethical competitors. One challenge to quasi-realism comes in the form of its sentimentalist cousin, the constructed sensibility theory of Jesse Prinz (2007). Both theories stipulate that ethical judgements are propelled by the emotions, that there is no external foundation for ethical evaluation and that moral attitudes are constructed by socialisation (Prinz 2007, 24/307). Yet, whereas Blackburn is an anti-realist about moral properties, Prinz considers them as response-dependent (2007, 107). The upshot of Prinz's constructed sensibility theory is that observers in different circumstances will have different responses to the same action; they will observe different "moral facts" (Prinz 2007, 288). Consequently, Prinz subscribes to a relativism which posits that "[t]he truth conditions of a moral judgment depend on the context in which that judgment is formed" (2007, 174). In principle, the constructed sensibility theory stipulates a nihilism, according to which it can be true that eating babies is wrong to some and right to others. Yet, Prinz attenuates such nihilism by arguing that his theory can still account for "moral progress" (2007, 289). Nevertheless, such moral progress can only be justified by "[u]sing extramoral criteria" which reveal "that some moral values are suboptimal even from the point of view of those who endorse them" (Prinz 2007, 293). Concretely, although one cannot assert that eating babies is morally wrong, a society which allows eating babies is suboptimal because it will endanger its own survival.

The metaphysical argument between Prinz and Blackburn about the reality of moral properties is impossible to resolve as such because it is a transcendental issue. To be certain, we would need to step out of our skins and observe what we really attend to when we engage in moral judgments. Regardless, the quasi-realist can claim the upper-hand by arguing that the constructive sensibility theorist secretly still endorses moral values. Concretely, although Prinz can justify moral progress by appealing to extramoral criteria, it

is clear he values moral progress as a good by itself. Prinz does not really want to commit to a nihilism according to which eating babies can be right or wrong and while his theoretical framework can attenuate such nihilism, it cannot ground the desire to do so. Still, as opposed to Prinz, genuine nihilists may really accept that eating babies is ok for some and wrong for others. In face of such real nihilism, quasi-realists simply have to accept that there is no knock-down argument to convince their opponents of the good of the common point of view. This concession need not shake the quasi-realist's own commitment to moral truth and neither is it socially destructive. Genuine nihilism is exceptional in ordinary moral practice and also unlikely to upset moral and legal practices in liberal democracies. If some people claim that eating babies is right, they may be dangerous and should be dealt with, but they are unlikely to deeply disturb our values or jurisdiction.

Nonetheless, these concessions by quasi-realists leave some philosophers deeply unsatisfied. Instead, they maintain that moral truth must be "rationally compulsory" (Blackburn 2002, 130). Conversely, on their "Hume-friendly" account of reasoning, sentimentalists (or emotionists) only allow rationality to impact ethical deliberation in so far it affects attitudes which are already in place; it can never drive the process of ethical deliberation by itself (Blackburn 2002, 123). The latter is exactly what rationalists demand "[a]nd this is what Hume claims is impossible" (1998, 124). Famously, Hume declared that "reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (1986 [1739], 415). To Hume's credit, rationalism about ethics is certainly the harder sell. As Prinz explains, while "[a] knock-down argument for emotionism may be too much to hope for", it "enjoys convergent support from armchair intuitions and empirical work" (Prinz 2007, 49). I will add to this support for emotionism by arguing that when rationalists outline what we should do if we were fully rational, quasi-realists can rebut, we would do very little. In what follows, I will argue that rationalists are unable to deal with the limits of critique and the absurd, whereas quasi-realists can. Crucially, the strategies that quasi-realists suggest to overcome feelings of existential despair and depressive inertia point in the right direction to revalue entertainment in satire as therapy in relation to critique.

6. THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE

Quasi-realism is a plausible meta-ethical framework which normalises talk of truth in the domain of ethics and accordingly safeguards the function of satire as critique. In the next chapter, I will develop this critical function of the genre in more detail by investigating how satire can highlight what is wrong with the world. For now, I turn to the pressing issue of

the limits of critique and the absurd. Quasi-realism successfully dispels postmodern anxieties about truth and ethics which otherwise risk compromising the possibility of critique. At the same time, quasi-realism highlights another, more substantial anxiety about truth and ethics. Critique is a venerable practice which pursues truth in order to realise enlightenment and promote emancipation. However, the ideal that truth by itself will emancipate the whole world is naïve. Instead, a moral devotion to truth exactly highlights horrors of the world which cannot be fully attenuated by ethical praxis, including critique. Nonetheless insisting that critique can emancipate the entire world is not simply naïve, but psychologically destructive. Although quasi-realism highlights that critique is indispensable in light of the common good, unabated critique is certain to madden and depress. For this reason, quasi-realism reveals a psychological conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self. In order to negotiate this conflict, we need strategies to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. Crucially, such strategies are unavailable to rationalism, which fails to overcome the inertia of depression. Instead, I will explain how Hume's sentimentalism does dispel philosophical melancholy through engrossment in autotelic or self-justifying avocations. Importantly, this Humean solution introduces a strategy to revalue entertainment in satire as a therapy to cope with the limits of critique.

Quasi-realism has successfully dispelled postmodern anxieties about truth. Yet, the real problem is not whether there is truth, but *that* there is truth and that truth is unsettling. In this respect, while Nietzsche was appropriated as "the patron saint of postmodernism" (Blackburn 2006, 75), Bernard Williams has rebutted such postmodern interpretations by highlighting that

> [o]ne of Nietzsche's most striking qualities is the obstinacy with which he held to an ideal of truthfulness that would not allow us to falsify or forget the horrors of the world (…) [especially after he revealed that] the traditional metaphysical conceptions which have helped us to make sense of the world, and in particular to bear its horrors, have been terminally broken down (2002, 13).

Similarly, Blackburn explains that "[n]one of us honestly retain the consolations of religion or teleology – that it is the fault of the poor, or that they will get their reward later" (1986, 202). For this reason, critique is morally indispensable to reveal the falsity of the status quo and foster emancipation. At the same time, Williams rightly highlights that "[t]he hope can

no longer be that the truth, enough truth, the whole truth, will set us free" (2002, 268). In other words, while critique is indispensable, we would be naïve to think it can wholly emancipate the world. Painful as it may be, critique has its limits.

Regardless, although quasi-realists accept that the horrors of the world may not be wholly alleviated, we do have a responsibility in addressing them to the extent that we can. As Williams explains, while Blackburn argues that "we should be comfortable *with* our moral ideas", that is not the same as being "comfortable *from* our moral ideas" (1986, 206-207, original emphasis). In this regard, Blackburn highlights that

> [t]here are moral truths, and amongst them is the truth that we ought to concern ourselves more for those whose miseries we can alleviate; worse than that they may have the right that we should so concern ourselves, meaning that if we do not do so, we should feel no defence against their resentment (…). It is uncomfortable that these things are so, but they are (1986, 203).

Critique may have its limits, but that does not make its emancipatory ideal obsolete. In this respect, Blackburn argues that the contemporary difficulty about ethical thought, evident in the anxieties stimulated by postmodernism, "is really caused, not by loss of a golden age of teleology, but by the increased opportunities that the modern world offers for behaving better" (1986, 201). At the same time, although there are endless opportunities to do good, our resources to change the world for the better are limited. Accordingly, not only is it naïve to hope that critique could wholly emancipate the world, but devoting one's entire life to unabated critique is psychologically destructive. This painful gap between the demands of critique and its limits corresponds to a fundamental conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self.

There is a conflict in Blackburn's quasi-realism as he tergiversates between the care for others and the care of self (see Blackburn 1998, 232) On the one hand, Blackburn acknowledges an affinity between Hume's common point of view and the utilitarian point of view from the universe, which demands that one must act by wholly abstracting from one's personal concerns (2003, 75-79). On the other hand, Blackburn maintains that "[w]e need and cherish spheres within which we are completely absorbed by private concern and emotion, just as we need spheres of private property" (1998, 22). As opposed to utilitarianism's demands of impartiality, Blackburn argues that "[w]e simply cannot shoulder the burden of the entire world" (1998, 221). For this reason, Blackburn concedes

that "[w]e may not be able to solve all the world's problems, but we should do our best with the ones we can solve. So the right reaction is to look for moral principles that are not impractical, and not limitless in their demands" (2003, 43). Blackburn further argues that "something has gone wrong if *extreme* demands are placed squarely in the centre of ethics. The centre of ethics must be occupied by things we can *reasonably* demand of each other" (2003, 43, original emphasis). In this respect, Blackburn introduces mental health issues as the limit case, for we notice when things have gone awry when concern for the common good has become "obsessive and neurotic" (1998, 16).

This link between the limits of critique and mental health issues is important to redress rationalist criticisms of quasi-realism, as well as to revalue entertainment in satire as therapy in relation to critique. Critique is indispensable, but its truthfulness can be psychologically traumatic. In this respect, Williams highlights that Nietzsche had "a hyper-sensitivity to suffering" (2001, xiv) and accordingly grasped that "anyone who really understood and held in his mind the horrors of the world would be crushed or choked by them" (2001, xv). In this respect, Williams explains that "so far from his seeing truth as dispensable or malleable, [Nietzsche's] main question is how it can be made bearable" (2002, 13; 2001, xx). The psychological trauma of truthfulness is closely connected to the existential problematic of the absurd in philosophy. Specifically, the realisation of so much suffering in the world, which cannot be wholly attenuated by critique, nor dissolved in a metaphysical framework, may beget the feeling that life is properly absurd. This feeling of the absurd can be characterised as a "philosophical melancholy" or a psychologically disturbing scepticism about the difference our actions make in the larger scheme of things (Smith [Michael] 2006, 103). When it turns into an illness, philosophical melancholy becomes major depressive disorder (MDD). In this respect, there is a danger that the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits is so psychologically traumatic that it stimulates depression. Crucially, against the inertia of depression, rationalism is at a loss.

Clinical depression is a mood disorder (Godderis 2000, 173). Jan Godderis refers to the German equivalent to 'mood', *Stimmung*, with its musical connotations of 'tuning' (into something), to explain that depression is a disorder whereby an individual is 'out of tune' with their environment (2000, 175-176). This asynchrony in the connection between the depressed individual and the world manifests itself primarily as a disturbance of the sleep pattern or a discord in the rhythm between night and day (Godderis 2000, 176-7). In

extreme cases, this depressive disconnection from life translates itself in wanting to end it (Godderis 2000, 207). Similarly, in a philosophical discussion of existential absurdity, Albert Camus highlights the "incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary to life" (1955, 5). According to Camus, this feeling arises because "in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. (…) This divorce between man and this life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" (1955, 5). Moreover, Camus establishes "a direct connection between this feeling and the longing for death" (Camus 1955, 5). Similarly, Nagel contends that "[t]he final escape [from the absurd] is suicide" (2012 [1979], 22). Crucially, faced with the problem of suicidal depression, resulting from contemplation of the absurd, rationalism proves unsustainable as a meta-ethical framework. Discussing suicidal depression in face of the absurd, Camus contends that "[b]eginning to think is beginning to be undermined. (…) The worm is in man's heart" (1955, 4). Yet, while our rationality can foster sentiments of the absurd, it cannot by itself reason them away.

Suicidal depression poses the problem to rationalism that you cannot reason somebody into having a lust for life when they have lost it. A depressed individual cannot be forced into action by virtue of their rationality. There is nothing irrational about inertia, nor suicide. Nevertheless, although a depressed individual, out of tune with their environment, cannot be given a reason *to* live, somebody who is connected to their lifeworld will have multiple reasons *for* living, especially on a good day. The point is that those reasons explicate why living is desirable for that individual, but they are not rationally compulsive in the sense that all rational beings must acknowledge them on the ground of their rationality (see Schaubroeck 2014, 117). So, if rationalists aim to outline what we should do if we were fully rational, quasi-realists can rebut that we would not have a reason to do anything. In fact, if reason by itself was supposed to drive action, I doubt we would even get out of bed in the morning. Moreover, if we do not, there is no reason why we must do so in virtue of our rationality. In this respect, Thomas Nagel argues that "[i]f we tried to rely entirely on reason, and pressed it hard, our lives and beliefs would collapse — a form of madness that may actually occur if the inertial force of taking the world and life for granted is somehow lost. If we lose our grip on that, reason will not give it back to us" (2012 [1979], 20). Therefore, "[w]hat sustains us, in belief as in action, is not reason or justification, but something more basic than these" (Nagel 2012 [1979], 20).

Quasi-realism has the upper hand over its rationalist competitors because it can ground reasons for living in the naturalistic framework of Humean psychology. In this respect, Williams elucidates Hume's psychology of action by explaining "that we cannot have genuine reasons to act that have no connection whatever with anything that we care about" (Chappell 2015). It follows from Hume's psychology that beliefs cannot motivate action without desires. This conclusion poses no problem for quasi-realists about ethics, for they root moral motivation in the concern for the common good, motivated by our desire not to be the kind of person whom we would ourselves disdain (Blackburn 2002, 133). By contrast, the challenge for rationalists is either to deny Hume's psychology of action or somehow overcome the paradox that beliefs do govern desires. In response, Michael Smith considers moral action as what "people would all desire if they had a maximally informed and coherent and unified desire set, and that what it is for a desire set is to be coherent and unified needs to be spelled out in terms of the rational principles that govern desires" (2006, 101). Nevertheless, Smith acknowledges that sometimes he "cannot think of any convincing reasons to suppose that there are rational principles capable of delivering anything that we would all desire if we had a maximally informed and coherent desire set" (Smith 2006, 102). In such moments of existential doubt, Smith concedes the limits of rationalism by explaining that "[d]esires well up and confidence levels rise without reason or justification and, when they do, we go for it (…). In this way, we move forward in the only way we can given that a rational response to our circumstances is impossible" (2006, 105).

Since there are no rational reasons to act, rationalism is unsustainable as a meta-ethical framework. Specifically, if rationalism cannot explain why we act at all in face of the absurd, it also cannot explain why we act for moral reasons. According to Smith, "[i]t is unsettling to realise that our pursuit of value (…) is underwritten by such unreasoned responses. But unfortunately, (...) that really does seem to be all that there is" (2006, 106). However, such a bemused response to the human condition results from a mistaken rationalistic view on the world. The sentiment of the absurd arises when we stand back from the flow of life and rationally reflect on the justification of those details. Thus disturbing the flow, more rational reflection will not reconnect us to life. Yet, as Hume argued, what sustains us in life is not our rationality but our sentimental natures – our cares, concerns and desires. Crucially, when motivated by these cares, concerns and desires, we do not experience our actions as absurd. As Blackburn observes, "[m]eaning comes with absorption and enjoyment, the flow of details that matter to us" (2003, 70). In other words, although there

may be no reason to live that armlocks us in virtue of our rationality, this does not bother us when we have a lust for life. For this reason, pace rationalists, if someone "is half in love with easeful death, or sickened by the human carnival, he needs a change of government, or a tonic, or a holiday, rather than an argument" (Blackburn 2003, 64).

As opposed to rationalists, quasi-realists about ethics can appeal to a fairly straightforward strategy to dispel existential doubt, even when it develops into clinical depression. The solution is rooted in Hume's well-known dismissal of epistemological scepticism. When Hume highlighted that inductive reasoning was without rational ground, his philosophy made it impossible to rationally prove a causal relationship between, say, crashing into a bus and being flung away (with mortal injuries). Moreover, as highlighted by Nagel, enthralled by such rational scepticism, we can doubt "why we should take trouble over our own comfort at all" (2012, 19 [1979]; also quoted in Smith 2006, 19). For obvious reasons, Hume described the outcome of his rational scepticism as a "philosophical melancholy and delirium", stressing that "reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds" (1896 [1739], 269). Yet, "[m]ost fortunately it happens", according to Hume, that

> nature herself suffices to that purpose (…) either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther (1896 [1739], 269).

Hume's avocations may appear absurdly trivial when viewed, rationally, *sub specie aeternitatis*, but they really are the self-justifying details that provide life with meaning.

Again, as with most of Hume's solutions, rationalists will remain unsatisfied with avocations as a response to the absurd. In particular, Michael Smith dismisses Hume's "psychological strategy" of "distract[ing] ourselves", because it cannot be rationally justified why the ease of distraction is preferable to the doubt of philosophical melancholy or the torment of clinical depression (2006, 103). At the same time, acknowledging the impotence of rationalism in face of the absurd, Smith begrudgingly "agree[s] with Hume that some kind of distraction is the only practical response", but adds, "unlike Hume", that "distraction is

not supposed to bring about anything of any worth" (2006, 105). This rationalist dismissal echoes Blaise Pascal's criticism of digression (*divertissement*) as a false consciousness which follows from the inability of human beings to acknowledge the inherent misery of their condition (2011 [1669-1670]). For Pascal, Hume's avocations are what Nagel calls a "way to avoid the relevant self-consciousness" (2012 [1979], 21). Similarly, even Bernard Williams reduces Hume's solution to a "carelessness and inattention" (2001, xvii). In postmodernity, Williams argues, such digressions have manifested themselves in "a pleasantly undemanding and unreflective way of live, a dazed but adequately efficient consumerism" (Williams 2001, xiv). However, while such psychological flight is no doubt prevalent in contemporary Western culture, Hume's avocations are not by definition digressions in Pascal's terms.

First, the dismissal of Hume's avocations as mere distractions from man's inherent misery results from a mistaken rational perspective. While they may appear absurd when viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, those who are in the flow of such avocations that provide meaning to their lives do not experience them as digressions. Instead, in their engrossment, these avocations present them with undeniable experiences of value. So rather than dismissing Hume's avocations as digressions *sub specie aeternitatis*, they should be seen as autotelic or self-justifying engrossments from within his personal perspective. In this respect, Williams argues that "[p]hilosophers (…) repeatedly urge one to view the world *sub specie aeternitatis*, but for most human purposes that is not a very good species to view it under" (Smart and Williams 1973, 118, original emphasis). Second, Hume's engrossment in avocations is not necessarily a careless inattentiveness. Williams explains that the challenge outlined by Nietzsche in a post-metaphysical world is being able to say 'yes' to life, knowing full well that "a sense of the world's achievements and glories (…) cannot in common honesty be separated from the knowledge of the horrors that have been involved in bringing these things about" (Williams 2001, xiv). However, this challenge is particularly steep to overcome without succumbing to irrational faith. Case in point, unable to cope with a premonition of Nietzschean nihilism at the dawn of modernity, Pascal was driven into the arms of Jansenist Catholicism at Port-Royal. Of course, the horrors of the world cannot be denied, but given how psychologically traumatic it is to always keep them in mind, some therapeutic relief in the form of Humean engrossments is a more mature response than an irrational leap of faith.

In conclusion, my investigation to safeguard critique has ultimately highlighted the psychological trauma of its limits. Although the concern for the common good commands us to alleviate the plight of others when we can, even if we devote every living moment to unabated critique, we cannot wholly emancipate the world and neither would we be able to sustain our own psychological health. There is a painfully absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits, which translates into a psychological conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self. In order to cope with this psychological conflict, which may generate melancholy, if not depression, Hume's avocations are quintessentially important as details that provide life with meaning when our rationality fails to sustain it. At the same time, we cannot simply lose ourselves in pleasant engrossments all the time and ignore the demands of critique altogether. A balance needs to be struck between critique and psychological relief. In this respect, the definitive combination of critique and entertainment in satire is significant. Above, I have conceded that satire is not the most efficient or even committed form of critique, abated as it is by entertainment. Yet, in light of the psychologically traumatic limits of critique, the abatement of entertainment obtains significance as therapy. In this respect, Hume's avocations are particularly similar to entertainment. Indeed, he explicitly highlights how they provide him with amusement. Who knows, maybe Hume's friends were in the habit of sharing witticisms when playing backgammon or dining. In any case, in what follows, I will develop the therapeutic function of entertainment as stimulating exactly the kind of therapeutic engrossment as Hume's avocations.

7. REVALUING ENTERTAINMENT

I propose to revalue entertainment in satire as a therapy to cope with the psychologically traumatic limits of critique. This proposal links to popular ideas in folk psychology about how art and aesthetic experiences are crucial among those that provide reasons for living in face of absurdity. In this respect, at the end of Woody Allen's *Manhattan* (1979), the protagonist, Isaac Davies, breaches the question "why is life worth living?" He replies,

> [t]here are certain things, I guess, that make it worthwhile. (…) Groucho Marx – to name one thing – Willie Mays [a baseball player], and the second movement of the Jupiter Symphony, and Louis Armstrong, recording of "Potato Head Blues", Swedish movies, naturally, *Sentimental Education* by Flaubert, Marlon Brando, Frank Sinatra,

> those incredible apples and pears by Cezanne, the crabs at Sam Wo's, [his ex-lover] Tracey's face.

Interestingly, Isaac introduces (almost) exclusively aesthetic reasons for living. His list includes fine or highbrow art, alongside popular entertainment, as well as aspects of everyday aesthetics, including food, sports and sex (see Light and Smith 2005; Kupfer 1983). The point is not that aesthetic experiences are the only reasons which provide life with meaning. There are other reasons for living which are at least as strong, if not stronger. Most prominently, although Tracey's face presents Isaac with an experience of beauty, it also evokes feelings of love. Nonetheless, because they are so engrossing, aesthetic experiences are primary among those that keep individuals going in moments of existential doubt.

In philosophy, art and aesthetic experiences are similarly recognised as therapy for the absurd. Take Nietzsche's own strategy to cope with traumatic truthfulness in a post-metaphysical world. Camus explains, "Art and nothing but art," said Nietzsche; "we have art in order not to die of the truth" (1955, 69). Similarly, Williams clarifies that Nietzsche "does not mean that we possess art in place of the truth; he means that we possess art so that we can possess the truth and not perish of it" (2001, xix). In other words, Nietzsche highlights art as an exceptional source to deliver the kind of engrossments which invest life with value in a disenchanted universe. Likewise, Blackburn identifies a similar therapeutic use of art and aesthetics in Williams's own life as a philosopher. Portraying Williams as a philosopher troubled by his philosophy, Blackburn alludes to his love of opera as a strategy of therapeutic relief. Blackburn contends "I suspect that he [Williams] envied the artist" for "the result of acquaintance with opera, even tragic opera, is life-enhancing, renewing, rejuvenating, whereas the result of immersion in philosophy is too often impatience and melancholy" (n.d.). In other words, not just artists like Woody Allen, but philosophers too, often turn towards art and aesthetics to cope with absurd sentiments.

The idea that the experience of beauty can have a therapeutic effect has considerable traction in folk psychology and philosophy. Currently, Mark Wynn and Anastasia Scrutton are further developing these intuitions, alongside recent findings in psychology about the interaction between beauty and wellbeing, in a research project at the University of Leeds on "Mental Suffering, the Experience of Beauty, and Wellbeing" (2016). In my final chapter,

I will engage specifically with psychological research about the impact of humour on wellbeing to further develop the idea of satire as therapy. For now, I will ground the therapeutic function of entertainment in a theoretical investigation of the intrinsic value of aesthetic experiences. As I will explain, aesthetic experiences, especially the unexalted pleasures of entertainment, are self-justifying or autotelic. In other words, when we are engrossed in the aesthetic experience of entertainment, we are so for the sake of that experience itself. In such moments, we experience what the positive psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has called 'flow' (1990). According to Csikszentmihalyi, "[t]he autotelic experience, or flow, lifts the course of life to a different level. (…) When experience is intrinsically rewarding life is justified in the present" (1990, 69). Accordingly, what Hume described as engrossment in avocations, positive psychologists would nowadays qualify as flow. Similarly, when Blackburn suggests that we should take a holiday when we experience severe existential doubt, it is because we would reconnect to the flow of life when we have lost it. While positive psychology teaches that there are various ways to achieve such a self-justifying experience, I will highlight that the aesthetic pleasures of entertainment are particularly plausible candidates to stimulate flow, because of their intrinsic autotelic nature.

To clarify, I introduce the concept flow to lend some psychological support to my claims about the therapeutic function of engrossments in aesthetic experiences, specifically entertainment. Yet, my claims will remain philosophical, in the sense that I will philosophically analyse aesthetic experiences to highlight that they are autotelic in the same way as Csikszentmihalyi characterises flow. In other words, I do not set out to prove that aesthetic experiences stimulate flow, but to make it philosophically plausible. Further, I construe the therapeutic function of aesthetic experiences broadly alongside the lines of Hume's psychologically relaxing avocations. Accordingly, I am not making any claims about entertainment as therapy in a clinical setting. Such therapeutic function of aesthetic experiences in an everyday setting is in the line of the kinds of 'optimal experiences' flow is supposed to stimulate according to Csikszentmihalyi. I do assume flow has its uses in clinical psychology, but will not consider these here. I also do not claim that entertainment is the only aesthetic category with therapeutic relevance or potential to stimulate flow. I assume that aesthetic experiences which have a plausible therapeutic dimension are ones which are intrinsically pleasurable or delightful. This broad demarcation excludes aesthetic experiences that set out to shock or disturb, but certainly does not only include

entertainment. For one, the aesthetic experience of beauty in nature has been linked to wellbeing in recent psychological research (Zhang, Howell and Iyer 2014). Still, on the grounds of their kinship with Hume's avocations, I do consider the easy pleasures of entertainment as a particularly good candidate to exhibit the therapeutic benefits of flow and accordingly relax the mind and dispel clouds of melancholy.

Ironically, my appraisal of entertainment as therapeutic engrossment in unexalted aesthetic pleasures is reminiscent of Kierkegaard's dismissal of aestheticism as morally suspicious. As a reminder, Kierkegaard criticised aesthetes because they seek to "escap[e] the nothingness of existence by attempting to coincide with experiences of immediacy that are beautiful, interesting, and distracting" (Giese 2011, 64). This description may not cover all aesthetic experiences, but it is particularly applicable to engrossment in the easy pleasures of entertainment. By contrast, instead of aesthetic engrossment, Kierkegaard sought to cultivate existential fear and trembling in order to achieve an authentic way of life (Flynn 2006, 70-77). After intense guilt and inner suffering, this authentic life culminates in the complete devotion to God (Amir 2014, 118-199). However, dismissing speculations about the supernatural as transcendental, quasi-realists argue that it is Kierkegaard's religiosity, not aesthetic experiences, which presents the real escapism in face of the absurd. Moreover, what good is advice on life from someone who, like Hamlet, became known as the melancholy Dane (Martin 1950)? Pace Kierkegaard, there is nothing wrong with not wanting to cultivate depression by constantly lingering on the absurdity of life. Furthermore, as the example of Hume himself highlights, somebody who is at times engrossed in entertaining avocations does not necessarily cultivate an amoral lifestyle. Rather, life-affirming engrossment in entertainment can be a therapeutically mature strategy to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits.

Aesthetic experiences can be of great importance to stimulate flow in face of existential absurdity, especially if they only appear to be trivial avocations or mere entertainment. Take watching professional sport. According to Wolfgang Welsch, "the very fascination with sport derives from aspects that, in a different form, we are used to experiencing and admiring in the arts" (2005, 149). Welsch specifies that "aesthetic perfection is not incidental to sporting success, but intrinsic to it" (2005, 137). It is true that sport generally involves a focus on winning and its associated material or psychological rewards. However, especially to a sport "purist", rather than "partisan" (Mumford 2012, 134), it is equally true

that “appreciation of beautiful play exceeds the desire for victory” (Gumbrecht 2009, 154). Moreover, even someone who is partisan to a particular athlete, player or team will often concede that “[w]hat is crucial, especially from the aesthetic point of view, is *how* the score/win is made, not *that* it is made” (Kupfer 1983, 121, original emphasis). In this respect, sport talk shows usually do not pass the time simply reflecting on how the game can or should be won, but how it can and should be won beautifully. Likewise, supporters of professional road cycling leave their houses or switch on their TVs not simply to support one rider, if they do so at all, but in the hope of seeing a beautiful race.

At the same time, although professional sporting events have become aestheticised, they cannot claim the same highbrow status as art. Instead, sport remains somewhat distrusted as a “show for the amusement of the entertainment society” (Welsch 2005, 137). Yet, even as mere entertainment, Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht explains that “sports can become, both for athletes and spectators, a strategy of secular re-enchantment” (2009, 150). Watching sport can claim such an enchanting function in virtue of the aesthetic experiences it delivers, even if they are usually categorised, if not mistrusted, as mere unexalted pleasures. In this respect, Joseph H. Kupfer explains that “[t]he sport situation is in a very obvious sense outside the ‘real’ word. It is set up for the purpose of enjoying bodily activity toward no further extrinsic end” (1983, 114). On the one hand, this intrinsicality explains “why sport, viewed (and sometimes ironically assessed) from life’s perspective of necessity, often appears absurd” (Welsch 2005, 142). However, such an extrinsic viewpoint is once more a mistaken sideways perspective. Kupfer explains that “[t]he aesthetic attitude requires that we ‘distance’ ourselves a bit from such realistic, everyday concerns” (1983, 134). This distance is generated exactly by attending to the beauty of the game, rather than any other extrinsic concerns. As a result, to those who are under the spell of beautiful plays, sport does not seem absurd. Similarly, those engrossed in other entertainment and aesthetic experiences do not despair that life is without meaning. As positive psychologists would argue, the experience of flow is self-justifying or autotelic.

Aesthetic experiences can have a therapeutic function in face of the absurd or other existential doubt in virtue of their intrinsic value. As discussed before, making minimal metaphysical commitments, aesthetic experiences can be understood as “derived from attending in a discriminating manner to forms, qualities or meaningful features of things, attending to these for their own sake or for the sake of a payoff intrinsic to this very

experience" (Stecker 2010, 45). Robert Stecker clarifies that "[b]eing valued for its own sake (or for itself) can be defined negatively: if we value something for its own sake, we continue to value it even when we believe it brings us nothing *further* that we value" (2010, 54, original emphasis). So while a partisan may only be interested in sport in so far as their team's victory (somehow) benefits them, a purist values a beautiful game for its own sake. At the same time, Stecker further clarifies that "there is no reason why some things cannot be valued (valuable) both for themselves and for the things they bring about" (2010, 54). Similary, Csikszentmihalyi argues that "[m]ost things we do are neither purely autotelic nor purely exotelic (…), but are a combination of the two" (1990, 67). Accordingly, a purist may enjoy a cycle race for its suspense and spectacle, but also be content when their favourite rider wins. Similarly, aesthetic experiences, including entertainment, may have therapeutic value in face of existential doubt, but only in virtue of their intrinsic aesthetic value. As with most therapy, one may want an activity to have therapeutic effect, but it only has so when one becomes engrossed in it for its own sake. In the case of aesthetic experiences, specifically, its therapeutic value depends wholly on the engrossment in forms, qualities or meaningful features of things for their own sake.

Commonly, the intrinsic value of some aesthetic experiences is cashed out in terms of an intrinsic pleasure they deliver. As Blackburn argues, "[b]eauty is magnetic because pleasure is" (2010, 45). I do think pleasure derived from some aesthetic experiences is an important aspect of their therapeutic function, which is why shocking or disturbing aesthetic experiences are less plausibly therapeutic. However, pleasure by itself is not the reason why some aesthetic experiences are intrinsically valuable, nor why they can have instrumental value as a therapy for the absurd. What matters is the normativity of aesthetic pleasure. In other words, experiencing an aesthetic pleasure is not a matter of preference, but something one ought to experience, unless one is mistaken. In this respect, unlike normativity in the ethical domain, scepticism about aesthetic value seems irrelevant to those in thrall to aesthetic experiences. Many people may not care about professional road cycling, but their apathy equally does not bother those who are mesmerised by Paris-Roubaix or Strade Bianche. The fact that some find these cycle races boring, does not in the least diminish the conviction of others that they are in fact sensational. For this reason, Peter Kivy concludes that if we are enthralled by an aesthetic experience, we must be "some kind of *aesthetic realist*", convinced by the validity of our beliefs (2015, 80, original emphasis). In this respect, it does not really matter which meta-aesthetics one develops to

satisfy Kivy’s stipulation. What matters is that one cannot have an aesthetic experience without believing in the inherent validity of one’s aesthetic judgement. Although this self-justifying or autotelic nature of aesthetic experiences is metaphysically puzzling and requires further philosophical investigation, its phenomenology clarifies the intrinsic value of aesthetic pleasures and their therapeutic value in face of the absurd.

The intrinsic and therapeutic value of aesthetic pleasures, including entertainment, is explained by their inherent normativity. In this respect, somebody who is connected to their lifeworld and undisturbed by existential doubt, will no doubt value pleasure. In his life-affirming “Instant Karma!” (1970), John Lennon wonders, “Why in the world are we here?”, and is perfectly satisfied with the answer, “Surely not to live in pain and fear.” Yet, a depressed individual does not care in the same way about pleasure, including pleasures they may previously have enjoyed. Accordingly, in “Yer Blues” (1968), Lennon wails,

> Black cloud crossed my mind,
> Blue mist round my soul,
> Feel so suicidal,
> Even hate my rock and roll.

The depressed individual is not motivated by the pursuit of pleasure, including the memory of unexalted aesthetic pleasures previously experienced. For this reason, whatever therapeutic value entertainment may have, it has so only when one is engrossed in unexalted aesthetic pleasures for the sake of it. As with all therapy, it is difficult to pinpoint when and how aesthetic engrossment for its own sake happens. Yet, when it happens, and Lennon starts loving rock and roll again, engrossment in entertainment can be therapeutic because it commands that one *ought to* experience a particular kind of pleasure. Specifically, the therapeutic force of aesthetic pleasures is that engrossment in the aesthetic experience itself provides reasons which justify the normativity of their inherent evaluation. Accordingly, aesthetic pleasures, even if they are fairly unexalted, can have therapeutic value because they instil normativity in a world that may otherwise appear devoid of value.

8. ETHICS VS. AESTHETICS RECONSIDERED

My revaluation of entertainment as therapy challenges the assumption that satire’s ethical purpose to critique is more important than its aesthetic purpose to entertain. This

assumption corresponds to the intuition that when moral and aesthetic reasons clash, the former (ought to) prevail (see Kivy 2015, 52-54). By contrast, my meta-ethical investigation has revealed that, although indispensable, the demands of critique stand to madden and depress when unabated. In this respect, entertainment can function as a therapeutically mature strategy to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. For this reason, the relative autonomy of entertainment in satire in relation to critique is crucial. Although I do not deny that entertainment in satire can have instrumental value as critique, my investigation has highlighted that, when compared to more directly activist strategies, satire is not more impactful as critique because it entertains. Undeniably, entertainment in satire abates critique. Satirists cultivate an enjoyment of unexalted aesthetic pleasures for its own sake, irrespective of any moral impact, while audiences engrossed in entertainment spend time and recourses that could otherwise be wholly directed toward critique. However, albeit entertainment abates critique, engrossment in unexalted aesthetic pleasures for its own sake in satire is not necessarily cynical or morally indifferent, but may be a therapeutically mature response in face of the limits of critique. At the same time, aesthetic engrossment in entertainment is not necessarily morally optimal. In this respect, the ambiguous tension between critique and entertainment in satire corresponds to a fundamental and irresolvable conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self.

My meta-ethical investigation, rooted in Blackburn's quasi-realism, has grounded critique in the concern for the common good and the obligation to alleviate the plight of others when we can. At the same time, even unabated critique will not wholly emancipate the world and is psychologically destructive. As a result, ethical life is characterised by a fundamental and irresolvable conflict between the care for others and the care of self. This conflict is acknowledged by Susan Wolf in her dismissal of the "*moral saint*" (2015, 11, original emphasis). According to Wolf, a moral saint would be "a person whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be" (2015, 11). This moral saint would have to make considerable sacrifices, including aesthetic ones. Wolf explains that

> it seems to me that no plausible argument can justify the use of human resources involved in producing a *paté de canard en croute* against the possible alternative beneficent ends to which these resources might be put. (…) Presumably, an interest

> in high fashion or interior design will fare much the same, as will, very possibly, a cultivation of the finer arts as well (2015, 14).

According to Wolf, these demands are too steep and she therefore identifies "morality as having an upper bound" (2015, 23). According to Wolf, while "we have unlimited potential to be morally good", at the same time, "we have sound, compelling, and not particularly selfish reasons to choose not to devote ourselves univocally to realizing this potential or to taking up this opportunity" (2015, 25). One particularly sound reason is that we likely stand to lose our sanity when we aspire to live like moral saints.

The upshot of Wolf's argument is that moral reasons cannot always determine our actions and must be counterbalanced with non-moral reasons, including aesthetic ones. As Wolf argues, "our values cannot be fully comprehended on the model of a hierarchical system with morality on top" (Wolf 2015, 28). Perhaps such a stance sounds quite reasonable even from within ethics (one would certainly hope so). After all, somebody who is driven insane by the unabated command of critique is unlikely to still do much good. Yet, such an indirect moral stamp of approval cannot be the concern that guides our non-moral reasons for action. The point is exactly that we cannot always have ethical concerns in the foreground of our mind when we act, for doing so must surely drive us mad. Consequently, non-moral reasons for action, including aesthetic ones, must be able to claim some degree of autonomy in the face of ethics. And they do. Engrossment in an aesthetic experience, including entertainment, is valued for its own sake, not because it is indirectly allowed by morality. For the record, I do not dismiss that aesthetic and ethical value can interact, as I will further develop in the next chapter. Nevertheless, it is wishful thinking that the pursuit of aesthetic experiences like entertainment and the moral concern for the common point of view completely coalesce. Even if aesthetic engrossment in entertainment can be life-affirming and enable us to cope with absurd limits of critique, it never comes for free from a moral point of view. At every moment the world is burning somewhere, so when is it ever morally right to listen to music or watch cycling just for the sake of aesthetic engrossment? Sadly, there is no straightforward answer to this issue.

The tension between the legitimacy of moral and non-moral reasons for action, including aesthetic ones, is extremely difficult to settle. Blackburn shows particular awareness of this fundamental problem of ethical life in his obituary of Bernard Williams. According to

Blackburn "much of Williams's work is concerned exactly with the interplay between the universal and the particular, or the challenge that equality, liberty, justice, and the common point of view pose to the rooted and potentially blinkered perspectives of our everyday priorities and concerns" (n.d.). While Williams is often said to have highlighted this problem without offering practical strategies in response, Blackburn instead acknowledges that "[b]y refusing to countenance easy or self-deceptive solutions to this conflict, he was acknowledging its depth rather than turning his back on its importance" (n.d.). Similarly, I do not consider it a problem that the ambiguous tension between critique and entertainment in satire cannot be wholly resolved in most cases. Instead, the significance of satire's definitive tension between critique and entertainment is exactly that it resonates to this fundamental and irresolvable conflict in ethical life between care of self and care for others. For this reason, although entertainment abates critique in satire, it cannot simply be dismissed as cynical. At the same time, in light of the world's continuous suffering, such engrossment in unexalted aesthetic pleasures remains ambiguous. To further clarify this ambiguous tension between ethics and aesthetics in satire, I will conclude this chapter with an analysis of Iggy Pop's satirical "Louie Louie" (1993a).

Iggy Pop's "Louie Louie" is a satire of American globalisation following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its satirical status is accentuated by its inclusion as the opening score to Michael Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009). The aim of my analysis is to frame the ambiguous tension between critique and entertainment in satire in an existential framework. Setting out to critique and entertain at the same time, Iggy Pop is in the process of negotiating an appropriate response to the existential despair which looms large in the globalised world. As critique, Iggy Pop's "Louie Louie" sets out to teach an arguably important truth about the evils of globalised capitalism. At the same time, he cultivates the unexalted aesthetic pleasures of entertainment as a means to address the limits of critique in alleviating the evils of globalised capitalism. Yet, this therapeutic function of entertainment in Iggy Pop's "Louie Louie" makes his critique ambiguous. For one, his satire is not a sustained geopolitical or economic analysis, but is particularly succinct in its dismissal of globalised capitalism. This succinctness no doubt has aesthetic appeal as entertainment, but may appear rather rash as critique. Moreover, this rashness may even suggest that Iggy Pop's analysis of globalised capitalism is less concerned with truth than his own therapeutic needs. In "Louie Louie", Iggy Pop certainly advocates a therapeutic acquiescence in the evils of capitalism. Nevertheless, such acquiescence is not necessarily

cynical or morally indifferent, for Iggy Pop explicitly highlights how the traumatic truthfulness of critique compromises his psychological wellbeing if unabated. In this respect, Iggy Pop's "Louie Louie" develops the fundamental tension between critique and entertainment in satire, which corresponds to the irresolvable conflict in ethical life between care of self and care for others

"Louie Louie" was originally written by Richard Berry in 1955. The original version is a calypso in which a lover laments about his loneliness to a bartender named Louie Louie. In 1963, a rock and roll version was recorded by The Kingsmen. Ever since, "Louie Louie" has become a standard in popular music, with countless cover versions. In 1993, Iggy Pop recorded a "politically satirical" studio version of "Louie Louie" with alternative lyrics (Dorhmel 2012). Years earlier, however, the song was already part of Iggy and the Stooges' live repertoire. Reflecting on attending a concert of The Stooges in 1974, which they concluded by playing "Louie Louie" three times, Mike Kelley contends that

> [it] is hard to explain what "Louie, Louie" meant at that time, when rock music was trying to be important. It was the first song a hillbilly rocker would learn on his guitar to impress the girls at a school dance – a throwback to an embarrassing time when rock music was entertainment for fraternity boys, not an instrument for social change. It was a slap in the face of the audience (quoted in Levine 2013, 41).

Kelley's description of "Louie Louie" distinctly resonates with the song's function as apolitical entertainment in *National Lampoon's Animal House* (1978). Yet, for Iggy and the Stooges, the anti-political nature of "Louie Louie" was itself a statement about the political aspirations of contemporary popular music.

In general, the "crude anti-aesthetic and aggressive provocation" of The Stooges' punk rock was considered "an assault on self-important, 'progressive' music" and replaced the latter's utopian politics with sentiments of "dejection" (Levine 2013, 41-42). Punk rock is commonly associated with a bleak nihilism in combination with an assault on prevailing standards of beauty and celebration of the abject (Prinz 2014). Iggy Pop is no exception, with his psychodramatic performances that include abuse, self-harm and – on one memorable occasion – rubbing himself in peanut butter (Double 2007, 10-11). Nevertheless, although punk rock revels in what would traditionally be considered aesthetic defects, like "noise", it may nonetheless deliver aesthetic experiences and pleasures in its own right (Prinz 2014, 586-588). In this respect, Iggy Pop's outrageous performance rituals are "part of a carefully

considered aesthetic approach" (Double 2007, 11). Moreover, Robert Christgau has also described a tendency in Iggy Pop's oeuvre for "the nihilistic satire [to be] counteracted by the forward motion of the music itself" (n.d.). So punk rock need not necessarily be nihilistic, nor anti-aesthetic. Still, even when punk rock shares satire's critical agenda, its aesthetics may well eschew the unexalted pleasures of entertainment. For this reason, even when it is critical, a lot of punk rock is not satire.

Nevertheless, some works are hybrid punk rock satires, including Iggy Pop's 1993 cover of "Louie Louie". While Iggy and the Stooges have created music which is anti-aesthetic or otherwise not entertaining, "Louie Louie" is part of a rock and roll tradition which indulges in rapturous entertainment and the enjoyment of unexalted aesthetic pleasures. At the same time, as is not unusual for punk rock, Iggy Pop's "Louie Louie" also sets out to critique. As a satire, Iggy Pop's "Louie Louie" distinguishes itself from other versions of the song, including his own. This distinction is reflected in lyrical differences. Previously, Iggy Pop would also frequently alter the original lyrics to "Louie Louie" in live performances, usually playing around with some variant of the allegedly dirty lyrics that the FBI discerned in The Kingsmen's version. Still, these dirty versions remain true to the original spirit of the rock and roll classic as unrestrained entertainment. By contrast, the change in lyrics in Iggy Pop's 1993 version signals a satirical intent absent in previous versions. In this version, the original lyrics have transformed from a lover's lament into a political lament about globalised capitalism. Somewhat cryptic, the new lyrics to the satirical version of "Louie Louie" develop the tension between critique and entertainment in satire. This tension is particularly apparent when contrasting the ambiguously cynical studio version (1993a) to a live version which supports a more therapeutically nuanced interpretation of satire's aesthetic distance (1993b).

The studio version of Iggy Pop's "Louie Louie" starts as if it is an announcement ("And now… the news"). As opposed to the original, this lyrical alteration signals that what follows has social and political relevance. Immediately afterwards, the chorus follows, with virtually the same lyrics as Berry's original:

> Louie Louie, oh baby,
> I gotta go now.
> Louie Louie, oh baby,
> I gotta go now.

After the chorus, the original introduces a “fine little girl” in the first verse. She is presented as the narrator’s lover and the reason for his immanent departure (“she waits for me”). By contrast, Iggy Pop’s satirical version does not introduce a love interest in the first verse. Instead, the previously announced news report is continued with an update on the political status quo, four years after the fall of the Berlin Wall:

> The communist world is falling apart.
> The capitalists are just breaking hearts.
> Money is the reason to be.
> It makes me just want to sing “Louie Louie”!

Like the original, Iggy Pop’s satirical version of “Louie Louie” is still a lament, but the protagonist’s grief is not motivated by the absence of a lover. Instead, he is distressed by the political status quo.

Iggy Pop’s critique of globalised capitalism, presented in the first verse of his satirical “Louie Louie”, is indicative of satirical critique in general. Satirical representations of the world and its moral flaws are commonly simplified and exaggerated. Iggy Pop reduces the complexity of what Francis Fukuyama called the end of history to a couple of suggestive metaphors that put the spotlight on the grievance caused by the dominance of capital. The analysis does not invite careful reflection, but instead exploits quick and emotive judgment. This satirical representation is far from nuanced and does not do justice to the complexity of the situation it describes. For one, Iggy Pop’s critique ignores some of the benefits of globalisation. At the same time, he arguably gets something important right about the ills of globalised capitalism. Although far more succinct, his analysis draws very similar conclusions as more sustained scholarly or journalistic critiques of neoliberalism. Moreover, whereas those analyses are more detailed and nuanced, they do require more time to process. Sometimes, these detailed analyses even risk to lose track of the bigger picture. In this respect, the satirical succinctness of Iggy Pop’s “Louie Louie” might really be a cognitive virtue. I leave this issue unresolved for now, but I will develop it further in the next chapter.

For now, I return to the interaction between aesthetic and therapeutic value in satire. Iggy Pop develops this interaction between aesthetics and therapy in the second verse of his satirical “Louie Louie”. At this point, the narrator introduces his awaiting lover. Yet, as opposed to the original and (especially) the dirty versions Iggy Pop previously performed, something is clearly wrong:

> A fine little girl is waiting for me,
> but I'm as bent as Dostoevsky.
> I'm thinking about the meaning of my life again
> and I have to sing "Louie Louie" again!

The difference with a dirty version that Iggy performed only two years before in Paris is stark (1991). Then, the narrator already introduced his lover in the first verse as "the finest girl in all Paris" and left no doubt about his desires ("every night I think about fucking her"), nor about following up on them ("every night, at ten, I fuck her again"). The problematics of his hetero-chauvinistic machoism aside, the narrator is clearly mesmerised by his lover, exclaiming "[s]he's eternal, she's the one, she's the key to all my fun!" However, in the satirical version of 1993, fun has become elusive for the narrator, whose sexual lust has been replaced by existential doubt, due to the political situation outlined in the previous verse. Experiencing an existential crisis which reminds him of Dostoevsky's novels, the narrator introduces singing "Louie Louie" as the only way to cope. This recourse to aesthetic engrossment as therapy in face of the absurd resonates with the argument about the therapeutic function of entertainment developed in this chapter.

After the chorus and a musical interplay, the narrator continues in parlando. Here, the studio and live version of the song invite contrasting interpretations. In the studio version, the narrator stumbles:

> Oh man, I don't know like... health insurance,
> the homeless and world peace,
> and aids and education…
> I'm trying to do right, but hey.

In this interlude, the narrator introduces some of the concrete grievances caused by global capitalism, in particular social inequality, alongside some other of the most pressing issues of his time. He contends that he tries to live a moral life under these circumstances, but this contention seems half-hearted. He quickly acknowledges that he distances himself from this existential problematic and ultimately does not seem that concerned. Although the message of the narrator is not explicitly cynical, it does seem to have some dimension of moral indifference.

However, the live performance justifies a more complex interpretation of the work than advocating indifference or cynicism in face of global capitalism and the problems of the modern age. In the live performance, Iggy Pop also addresses the audience in parlando. This time, the message signals a therapeutically mature response to the tension between critique and its limits. Iggy Pop's spoken address begins with an acknowledgement of his own complicity in the globalised capitalism he critiqued:

> Yes, there is a mound of trash covering the whole world.
> And that trash comes from America.
> And if America is a giant hamburger,
> I am the bun on that hamburger.

After acknowledging his own complicity in the Americanisation of the world under the influence of globalised capitalism, he continues:

> I don't always want to have to think about aids,
> no health insurance,
> no fucking money,
> no education.

As these contemporary political problems are introduced and left lingering without a solution, he concludes, "[w]ell, fuck it, because right now, I'm going to sing my song." The final verse follows, which revisits the satirical assessment of the political status quo, only to outline the same solution:

> Life after Bush and Gorbachev:
> The wall is down but something is lost.
> Turn on the news it looks like a movie,
> it makes me want to sing "Louie Louie"!

The energetic performance concludes in accordance with the aesthetic norms of punk rock, as the pumped-up R&B-tunes of the chorus fade into a growl of "noise!!!"

The crucial difference with the studio version, and the main reason why the work ultimately does not promote apathy or cynicism, is that Iggy Pop's narrator does not say that he never

wants to consider the horrors of globalised capitalism, just not always. We do not know what the narrator does or does not do on other occasions, but we have no explicit reason to assume he is indifferent to these issues or does not do his bit to alleviate them at other times. We only know that, right now, he chooses to be engrossed in the aesthetic experience of singing “Louie Louie”. As explained, such an act of aesthetic distance is not necessarily apathetic or cynical. Instead, it may be a valid therapeutic strategy in face of existential despair. In this respect, the protagonist has indicated that incessant pondering about globalised capitalism depresses him to such an extent that life loses its flow. In response, the aesthetic experience of singing “Louie Louie” is a life-affirming activity. Moreover, should the lyrics not make this vital dimension of this aesthetic experience apparent, Iggy Pop’s energetic performance certainly does. I will leave it open for now whether satire like Iggy Pop’s “Louie Louie” really can function as a catharsis to depressive inertia, which makes critique possible in face of the absurd, but the autotelic or self-justifying nature of entertainment does make it plausible. I will return to an in depth investigation of this issue in the final chapter. In the next chapter, I will direct my attention to the cognitive and ethical value satire may have as critique.

9. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have situated debates about the value of satire into a larger debate about the value of art. In these debates, the value of aesthetics has often been instrumentalised to broadly ethical purposes. Similarly, the value of entertainment in satire has often been instrumentalised to critique. In defence of the genre, many supporters have argued that the combination of critique and entertainment increases the political impact of satire. However, this argument cannot be substantiated empirically. Satire is not more efficient as critique because it entertains. Still, it does not follow that satire is therefore a failed or cynical genre. Through a meta-ethical investigation, rooted in Blackburn’s quasi-realism, I have highlighted a psychologically traumatic gap between the demands of critique and its limits. In response, I introduced a revaluation of entertainment as therapeutic engrossments in face of the absurd, rooted in a development of Hume’s self-justifying or autotelic avocations. Crucially, entertainment can claim such a therapeutic function because its unexalted aesthetic pleasures instil normativity in a world which may otherwise be devoid of value. Accordingly, in spite of moral suspicions, engrossment in entertainment can serve a plausible therapeutically mature function in coping with the psychologically traumatic limits of critique. For this reason, the definitive tension between critique and

entertainment is significant, because it corresponds to a fundamental conflict in moral life between the care of self and the care for others. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will further investigate how satirists intentionally address this tension by developing humorous and ironic strategies. In the next chapter, I temporarily sidestep this issue of satire as therapy in order to investigate the genre's value as critique, even if it is moderate.

CHAPTER THREE: FICTION, COGNITION AND CRITIQUE

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter investigates the cognitive value of satire as critique. Previously, I have challenged claims that the value of satire as critique depends on its social and political efficacy. Still, although satire's critical force should be attenuated, I do think that good satire can incrementally contribute to emancipation alongside other critical practices. Yet, even this moderate claim about the critical impact of satire presupposes a significant cognitive claim. Specifically, if satire is to contribute to a project of critical emancipation, it must be able to teach morally relevant truths, especially what is wrong with the world. In other words, the ethical value of satire as critique depends on its cognitive value to deliver correct and insightful representations. In what follows, I will therefore investigate whether satire can rightfully claim such a cognitive function and accordingly contribute to a moral project of critique. For the record, I do not doubt that we can learn morally relevant truths from representations. The ethical quasi-realism introduced in the previous chapter makes it is possible (though perhaps not always) to arbitrate with a fair degree of objectivity whether some discourse or practice is justifiable in light of the common good. What is at stake is therefore not whether there are truths, and moral truths at that, but whether we can learn such truths from satire. In this respect, the cognitive function of satire is problematised by its purpose to entertain and its common classification as fiction.

In this chapter, I will outline and defend a careful cognitivism about satire in light of its common fictional status as entertainment. Concretely, I will argue that good satire can teach non-trivial truths, including moral truths, but, like an aphorism, satirical truth is best understood as an introduction to an issue which requires further investigation or a particular take which needs to be nuanced. Such a cognitive function can be valuable, but should not be overestimated. At the same time, I caution that satire can deceive in its pursuit of entertainment. The same fictional techniques which sometimes generate cognitive value in satire are also the ones responsible for cognitive flaws on other occasions. Accordingly, my careful cognitivism about satire will highlight the relative merits of the genre but also acknowledge its particular dangers. My investigation aims to intervene in a polarised debate between all too enthusiastic supporters and overly pessimistic detractors of satire's cognitive value. Although I acknowledge the value of satire as critique, I will avoid hyperbolic appraisals of its cognitive function because they set the genre up for failure by introducing expectations it cannot uphold. In response, satirists have

often pragmatically mitigated these hyperbolic expectations but, in the process, end up disavowing the critical nature of satire altogether. In this manner, these unrealistic expectations and pragmatic mitigations ultimately only corroborate suspicions about the value of satire outlined by detractors. In order to redress these misunderstandings, my careful cognitivism aims to determine realistic expectations about the cognitive function of satire in order to better assess the significance it may claim as critique.

2. VALUE INTERACTION IN SATIRE

My careful defence of satire's value as critique will not only stipulate that satire can have both cognitive and ethical value, but also that they interact. Therefore, before I outline this position in detail, a few words are in order about artistic values and their interaction. In this respect, I adhere to a pluralism about the value of art, including satire. I agree with Robert Stecker (2015) that artistic value cannot be reduced to a single value, but is instead a composite, which may include, aesthetic, ethical, cognitive, political, social, therapeutic or some other value. Crucially, such art-relevant values are effectively artistic values of artworks only if access or identification of them "requires understanding the works in possession of those values" (Stecker 2015, 394). For this reason, since the monetary worth of a work is commonly irrelevant to its interpretation, financial value is usually not an artistic value. Similarly, Daniel Auber's opera *La muette de Portici* has political value (at least to Belgian nationalists) because it stimulated patriotic feelings that initiated the Belgian Revolution against the Dutch after a performance in Brussels in 1830. Yet, this political value is not an artistic value of the work, for the interpretation of the opera is wholly unconcerned by its fostering the independence of Belgium. By contrast, if Jonathan Swift's satire of English absentee landlords in *A Modest Proposal* (1729) would have had any impact on housing conditions in Ireland, this political value of the work would also be an artistic value, since it is relevant to understanding the work and its aims.

Nevertheless, as discussed in the previous chapter, it is unfair to expect that the value of good satire is fundamentally determined by its political impact. Case in point, *A Modest Proposal* is still lauded as a great satire, even if it did not stimulate legislation that later alleviated housing conditions during the Great Famine. Instead of political value, I suggest that the artistic values most relevant to good satire are its aesthetic, ethical, cognitive and therapeutic value. Previously, I have discussed how the aesthetic value of satire is constrained by its purpose to entertain. In the next chapter, I will further investigate another hypothesis already introduced that aesthetic and therapeutic value in satire

interact. In what follows now, I focus on the cognitive and ethical value of satire and their interaction with aesthetic value. In this respect, the idea that art, including satire, can have artistically relevant ethical and cognitive value has been a topic of heated contestation in aesthetics. In these debates, the deniers have come to be known as autonomists, who argue that the only value relevant to the appreciation of art is aesthetic value (see Lamarque and Olsen 1994). Nevertheless, in the case of satire, it is axiomatic that the ethical value of a work can also constitute an artistic value. According to Noël Carroll,

> in the case of genres that have an ethical dimension, evaluating an artwork in terms of the quality of its moral perception (or misperception) is not invoking criteria alien to its value as the kind of artwork it is; it is a matter of evaluating the work in terms of the norms (genre norms) of the kind of artform to which it belongs (2000, 359).

In other words, since satire sets out to critique as well as entertain, the genre stipulates that artistically good satire must not only successfully realise the pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures, but also the ethical purpose of critique. For this reason, any ethical value of satire as critique would also constitute a genuine artistic value.

The ethical value of satire as critique, I argue, is best understood in terms of the cognitive value it has in highlighting morally relevant truths, specifically concerning what is wrong with the world. There are other ways for satire to successfully fulfil the ethical purpose of critique, but they are not equally relevant in stipulating appropriate expectations for good satire. For one, Robert Stecker refers to Upton Sinclair's "naturalistic, muckraking fiction" about the malpractices of the American meat industry in the 19th century to explain that the social consequences of an artwork can contribute to its ethical value, since the novel stimulated significant social reform (2010, 204). Yet, as explained, although satire may occasionally have such important social consequences, it is unrealistic to stipulate that good satire must do so consistently. Similarly, Stecker explains that a work can have ethical value because of its consequences on individuals, such as "deliver moral insight or enhance the moral sensitivity of at least some of its audience" (2010, 203). While such individual consequences would be relevant to the artistic value of satire, empirical research has established that such direct impact of satire on, say, democratic participation or knowledge acquisition of individuals is particularly hard to measure (Holbert 2013). As it stands, too little is known with certainty about the effects of satire on individuals for these to stipulate appropriate expectations about the ethical value of good satire. Instead, I suggest to focus on what morally relevant truths we can learn from satire, should we set out to do so. In this

respect, one important caveat is that if we were only able to learn the obvious from satire, it would have little actual value as critique (see Stecker 2010, 201). Accordingly, good satire would have ethical value as critique when it has non-trivial cognitive value, irrespective of the added value of any additional consequences.

In what follows, I defend that good satire has ethical value as critique when it has the potential to teach non-trivial morally relevant truths. It does not follow that all non-trivial truths highlighted by satire would therefore be morally relevant. Perhaps when reading *A Modest Proposal*, I learn what an absentee landlord is. While this may be valuable and new knowledge to me, it holds no significant moral relevance. Conversely, if somebody read *A Modest Proposal* in the eighteenth century and learned about the material deprivation endured by the Irish people, this knowledge would be morally relevant, because it constitutes information required to deliberate an accurate moral judgement about British rule in contemporaneous Ireland. In this respect, good satire can have ethical value as critique when it provides information required to make an objective moral judgment, a function which it shares with good journalism or historiography. Moreover, good satire can also have ethical value by engaging directly in moral deliberation and revealing moral truths, similar to good moral philosophy and moral practice. In this respect, *A Modest Proposal* cues appropriate moral evaluation of the practices of English absentee landlords. This process of determining the cognitive value of good satire like *A Modest Proposal* to an ethical project of critique is governed by the quasi-realist meta-ethical framework introduced in the previous chapter. For the record, although knowledge is commonly equalled to justified true beliefs, quasi-realists understand the acquisition of moral knowledge as developing an appropriate concern, rather than a belief. For this reason, quasi-realism faces an epistemological challenge. Yet, since there are epistemological frameworks which can accommodate that knowledge does not necessarily pertain to beliefs (Jenkins 2015), I will sidestep this challenge in what follows.

My proposal is that the ethical value of satire as critique is appropriately governed by its ability to teach non-trivial truths, whether they are truths relevant to moral deliberation or moral truths simpliciter. Before investigating if satire can effectively have such ethical value as critique, it is important to reflect on how such value would likely interact with the genre’s aesthetic value as entertainment. This issue resonates with recent debates about value interaction in analytic aesthetics. Stecker explains that aestheticians have mostly focused on the issue of “[e]thical-aesthetic (or e-a) interaction” which “is the view that

ethical merits and defects in work [*sic*] affect the degree aesthetic [*sic*] value possessed by the work" (Stecker 2010, 206). Similarly, although less explored, the issue of "[a]esthetic-ethical (a-e) interaction" pertains to "the corresponding thesis for the bearing of the aesthetic value of a work on its ethical value" (Stecker 2010, 206). Interestingly, interaction between ethical and aesthetic value in good satire has been claimed both ways by philosophers. Berys Gaut discusses the example of Lenny Henry ridiculing the anti-immigration policy of a British Prime Minister by quipping "Enoch Powell wants to give black people a thousand pounds to go back home, which suits me fine – it only costs me 20p on the bus" (quoted in Gaut 1998, 66). According to Gaut, "the [aesthetic] effectiveness and resonance of the joke centrally depend on its subversion of racist attitudes and assumptions" (1998, 66). Likewise, Stecker has claimed that interaction can also happen the other way around by highlighting that "to satirize a questionable aspect of society (…) [audiences] must be able to *feel* by way of vividly imaging (…) the folly of the satirized aspect of society or the bad consequences of the practice in need of reform" (2010, 210-211, original emphasis).

Philosophers are not the only ones to intuitively acknowledge that the genre's ethical purpose to critique and its aesthetic purpose to entertain fruitfully interact in good satire. In this respect, Josua Poole associated "Satyre" with a long list of adjectives which highlights how the genre's ethical value as critique was perceived to substantiate its aesthetic success in the seventeenth century:

> Girding, biting, snarling, scourging, jerking, lashing, smarting, sharp, tart, rough, invective, censorious, currish, snappish, captious, barking, brawling, carping, fanged, sharp-tooth'd, quipping, jeering, flouting, sullen, rigid, impartial, whipping, thorny, pricking, stinging, sharp-fanged, injurious, reproachful, libellous, harsh, rough-hewne, odious, opprobrious, contumelious, defaming, calumnious (1999 [1657], 176).

Concretely, adjectives like 'biting' or 'lashing' suggest how the ethical quality of satire as critique also informs the aesthetic appreciation of the genre. Likewise, appraisals of how aesthetic value substantiates the force of ethical critique remain common today. Take the reception of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). Inspired by the rise of the American Religious Right in the 1980s, Atwood's novel is a satire of religious fanaticism. In her review of Atwood's satire, Joyce Carol Oates contended that "[n]arrated in the breathless present tense (…) *The Handmaid's Tale* achieves the feat of rendering the bizarre, the ludicrous, and the improbable a new sort of quotidian" (2006). In similar vein,

she lauds Atwood for including a “startling appendix” which “makes of the novel an astute, provocative social commentary” (Oates 2006). Intuitively, Oates argues that certain aesthetic qualities which make the *The Handmaid’s Tale* an entertaining novel also substantiate its ethical value as critique.

Specifically, as suggested, the interaction between aesthetic and ethical value in satire is often cashed out in terms of cognitive value. In other words, the idea that satire is truthful is intuitively appreciated for aesthetic as well as ethical reasons. In this respect, Oliver Double explains that satirists like Lenny Bruce made truth central to stand-up comedy by introducing the “idea that it is about authentic self-expression” (2014, 160). Dismissing the stylised routines of Borscht Belt comedians as contrived, Bruce contended that “[a] comedian of the older generation did an act, and he told the audience, ‘This is my act.’ Today’s comic is not doing an act. The audience assumes he’s telling the truth” (quoted in Thompson 2011, 26). This idea that truthfulness contributes to the aesthetic success of satire has remained influential. John Oliver has claimed that “[w]e’re obsessed about making sure that all the things that we say are accurate [on *Last Week Tonight*], but that’s only because those things are the structural foundation upon which the jokes are based” (Marchese 2016). Nevertheless, this concern for truthfulness in satire is also ethically motivated. Ethan Thompson has explained that Bruce’s audiences expected “not just any truth”, but “a nasty truth about the supposedly normal mainstream” (2011, 26). In this respect, Bruce was lauded as “social critic and secular moralist” who wielded “truth and reason as weapons” (Kofsky 1974, 21). Similarly, despite pragmatic disavowals of satirists like Oliver, contemporary American satire has been praised as “a hard-knuckled critique of power” (Jones 2010, 83). In other words, the cognitive value of truthfulness in satire is commonly appreciated ethically as well as aesthetically.

However, albeit that ethical, cognitive and aesthetic value are commonly understood to interact in good satire, we should not assume too readily that when satire entertains, it also teaches us morally-relevant truths. Although Bruce and others introduced authenticity as an ethical and aesthetic value of modern stand-up comedy, Double explains that comedians often make a mockery of truth in the pursuit of entertainment (2014, 157-186). Satirists are no exception. Double discusses a stand-up routine by British satirist Stewart Lee who attacks the bullying humour of BBC’s *Top Gear* by misleading his audience to initially believe a fake story about one of its presenters (2013, 174-182). Double concludes that as Lee “play[s] pranks on the audience”, it leaves them with a lot of doubt “about exactly what

the truth is" (2014, 175). In particular, Double highlights a "kind of ambiguous interweaving of truth and fiction" in Stewart Lee's satire (2014, 179). Such ambiguity is indicative of a tension between the aesthetic function of satire as entertainment and its cognitive function in a moral project of critique. On the one hand, satire sets out to critique and accordingly has a cognitive function in pursuit of truth. On the other hand, since satire also sets out to entertain, it is not wholly constrained by truthfulness. Specifically, as entertainment, satire commonly capitalises on certain liberties associated with fiction that may compromise its cognitive value in a moral project of critique.

Two specific cognitive dangers which result from satire's status as fictional entertainment are aesthetic autotelism and aesthetic seduction. In this respect, Murray Smith explains that when watching

> *Blade Runner*, it is clear we are being invited to savor the visual and auditory textures of the film, and the fictional world it depicts, as an end in itself. And the fact that the film devotes so much of its energy to the aesthetics of the image is not a cost-free choice with respect to its cognitive ('philosophical') value: By making the sheer visual design of its images so salient, the role of these images in articulating an existentially charged narrative is compromised (2016, 195).

Smith's argument is that this level of aesthetic autotelism in *Blade Runner* depletes cognitive resources that could otherwise be devoted to ethical exploration. Transposed to satire, its pursuit of entertainment for its own sake risks distracting from its critical function. As explained in the previous chapters, although critique and entertainment can fruitfully interact in good satire, the latter cannot wholly be instrumentalised to the former. Moreover, not only are aesthetic pursuits to a certain degree independent of ethical or cognitive pursuits, they can also seduce audiences to overestimate the ethical or cognitive value of a work. Similarly discussing *Blade Runner*, Peter Lamarque and Gregory Currie have highlighted that "it is sometimes claimed that [its] visual aesthetic overwhelms, or perhaps compensates for failings in the cognitive content" (2014, 20). In other words, the additional problem highlighted by Currie and Lamarque is that fiction like *Blade Runner*, which is designed to be aesthetically successful as entertainment, may seduce us into overestimating its cognitive value.

Likewise, I suspect that when satire successfully entertains, there is a risk that we overestimate its success as critique. Consider the hyperbolic praise of contemporary

American satire like *Last Week Tonight with John Oliver* and *Full Frontal with Samantha Bee*. As mentioned, during the 2016 Republican Party presidential primaries, Oliver was commonly praised for "destroy[ing]" (Barrell 2016) or "annihilat[ing]" (Reed 2016) Donald Trump. While the course of the American presidential election would seem reason enough to abandon such hyperbolic praise, similar endorsements of *Last Week Tonight* (Dessem 2017) and *Full Frontal* (Juntwait 2017) remained popular after Trump took office. Such continuing overestimation of satire's value as critique indicates that the aesthetic success of satire risks marring the assessment of its cognitive or political value. Crucially, the right response to such danger of aesthetic seduction is not to dismiss satire's value as critique outright, but to proceed with caution. By contrast, in response to unrealistic expectations about satire's critical function, satirists like Oliver have often downplayed "any larger sense of mission", explaining that it is "weird (…) when people ask about the show's [*Last Week Tonight*] relationship to journalism. It's so clearly comedy" (Marchese 2016). However, such disavowals inappropriately trivialise the cognitive value of satire in an ethical project of critique. For this reason, I propose a careful cognitivism about satire which does not dismiss the dangers of aesthetic autotelism and aesthetic seduction in light of the genre's commonly fictional status as entertainment, but nonetheless acknowledges the cognitive value it may have in a moral project of critique.

3. FICTION AND TRUTHFULNESS

In what follows, I develop a careful cognitivism about satire in light of its commonly fictional status as entertainment. In this respect, most satire is classified as fiction, although there are exceptions. Standard cases which are clearly fictional include *A Modest Proposal*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *South Park*. There are some exceptions, such as Michael Moore's hybrid documentary-satires, which are classified as non-fiction. Again other cases are more ambiguous, in particular the currently popular late-night satire such as *Full Frontal* and *Last Week Tonight*, which exhibit typical characteristics of both entertainment and journalism. I will return to the significance of these exceptions and ambiguous cases later, but I begin by teasing out some intuitions about fiction and truthfulness in satire. As a reminder, supporters of satire have often enthusiastically appraised the genre's cognitive value on the grounds of its exceptional truthfulness. Take Gilbert Highet, who claimed that "[t]he satirical writer believes that most people are purblind, insensitive, perhaps anaesthetized by custom and dullness and resignation – he wishes to make them see the truth – at least that part of the truth which they habitually ignore" (1962, 19). Similarly, James Sutherland

contended that the satirist "comes round knocking us up from a comfortable sleep to face hard and uncomfortable facts" (1962, 6). However, although such grand claims about satire's truthfulness are common, they are paradoxical in light of the genre's common status as fiction.

The fictional status of satire is often intuitively understood as precluding its truthfulness, including in specialised contexts such as defamation law. In the American legal system, the fictional status of satire is often said to protect satirists against accusation of libel, which require proof "that the defendant made a statement with knowledge that it was false or with reckless disregard for whether it was true or not" (Penrod 2004, 20). In this respect, Grant Penrod highlights that "[t]he problem with applying this standard in the context of satire is that a satirist knows and intends that he or she is making false statements of fact" (2004, 20). Similarly, Steven Prince explains that something cannot be "understood in a defamatory sense" if "it's made up" and he adds "[t]hat's particularly the case where there are strong contextual indications that [something] is satire" (2013). Likewise, Kenneth Creech reports a decision of The New York Supreme Court that states, "[w]here it appears in the context of fiction and deliberate humor which does not purport to relate to actual events, or is obvious satire… a statement cannot reasonably be susceptible of libelous meaning" (2013, 281). Summing up, it is a common idea in American legal contexts that satire is "by definition fictional" and therefore "false" (Ryan 2003; see also Treiger 1989, 1215-1216).

Nevertheless, upon further reflection, the common intuition that satire is necessarily non-factual because it is (typically) fictional proves problematic. Take "Onward Christian Soldiers!", a satirical cartoon by Matt Bors about the Alabama senate allowing a church in Birmingham to establish its own law enforcement department (fig. 10). While the classification of this cartoon as fiction is evident, the initial report that "[t]he Alabama Senate voted to allow a mega-church to start its very own police force" is clearly factual, irrespective of other invented story content. In other words, albeit in a fictional cartoon, Bors introduces "a statement of actual fact" (Gibson 2017). For this reason, should this presented information be factually incorrect, it would legally count as an act of "actual malice" (Treiger 1989, 1215). In this respect, Bors explains that "there is sort of a journalistic element to it [his satire] that I don't think a lot of people know" (personal communication). He specifies that "when I do my comics [and] I send them to my syndicate, they're fact checked", adding that "when I'm basing something off of an abortion bill or

stating how many states in the US have restricted abortion (…) that has to be accurate" (personal communication). Bors emphatically stresses that "when considering a fact, the fact has to be accurate" (personal communication). As opposed to the legal advice discussed above, some legal counselling is aware that satire commonly "blurs the line between truth and outrageousness" (HG Staff 2017; RCFP Staff 2017). Nevertheless, the issue often remains misunderstood, for the real problem is not that "it is difficult to discern whether [a] publication is truthful or satire" (HG Staff 2017). Instead, the point is exactly that while satire is commonly fictional, it can also be truthful.

Figure 10

In fact, as discussed, supporters of satire regularly claim that truthfulness is at the very heart of the genre. Similarly, Matt Bors contends that "if you're stripping [satire] down to the core purpose, then maybe what we're all trying to get out is some truth" (personal communication). Crucially, these truths pursued by satire are not simply the kind of factual truths also found in journalism or historiography. More than anything else, satirists aim to reveal moral truths. Case in point, the purpose of Bors's satirical cartoon about the Alabama Senate vote is not simply to inform that a mega-church in Birmingham has been granted permission to set up its own police force, but to pass moral judgement. Bors clarifies that satirists sometimes express these truths in "a very direct, sledgehammer-to-the-face, way" or, more commonly, "in a roundabout way" (personal communication).

Concretely, Bors protests against granting a Christian mega-church its own police force, because he is convinced it is likely to stimulate morally undesirable consequences, such as legitimising unwarranted neoconservative backlash against Muslim citizens. Interestingly, while Bors clearly, albeit indirectly, asserts this argument as if it was morally true (not simply something he would agree to disagree about), he uses the roundabout strategy of fiction to do so. Specifically, in order to morally dismiss the Alabama Senate's decision, Bors makes up a story about the harassment of Muslim citizens as a plausible outcome of the legislation. Similarly, he invents a story about Christ to highlight that the very proposal of the Birmingham church is at odds with the values of Christianity. In conclusion, not only is satire able to highlight factual truths despite its fictional status, but it also seems able to communicate moral truths in a certain roundabout way exactly *because* it is fiction.

The centrality of truthfulness in satire problematises the common intuitions in legal contexts about the incommensurability of truth and fiction. At the same time, satire's truthfulness also seems to destabilise its fictional status. In this respect, discussing his curated comics platform, *The Nib*, Bors explains that the variety of graphic material on the website "all [falls] under an umbrella of things about the world that we live in. It's all non-fiction", including "serious journalism" but also "political satire" (personal communication). Still, when pressed, Bors does distinguish satire from non-fictional genres such as comics journalism. As opposed to comics journalism, Bors explains that "in most political [i.e. satirical] cartoons, you're fictionalising the setting, the drawings, the caricature" (personal communication). In other words, although comics journalism and satire both aim to be truthful, satire, because it is fiction, has greater liberties to develop imagined scenarios than comics journalism, which is non-fiction. Classification as fiction or non-fiction therefore does not necessarily determine whether a work can communicate truthfully, but does introduce different expectations and obligations as to how truth is communicated. Most strikingly, this difference manifests itself in Bors's own work as a contrast in drawing styles. While Bors explains that his political satire has a distinct cartoonal quality, the visual style of his comics journalism, such as *War is Boring* (Axe and Bors 2010) cultivates a more realistic and documentary-like aesthetic (fig. 11).

Figure 11

According to Bors, the common fictional status of satire provides the genre with certain freedoms it would lack if it was classified as non-fiction. Bors specifies that, in satire, "there is a lot of opinion and there is a lot of leeway with hyperbole and exaggeration" which would be problematic in comics journalism (personal communication). This insight about the liberties of fiction is important to help clarify the significance of such ambiguous cases as *Full Frontal* or *Last Week Tonight*. As explained, these programmes have journalistic qualities which make classification as non-fiction plausible. In this respect, Bors contends that *Last Week Tonight*, specifically, is "informative and filled with facts that are checked" and therefore has a real "journalistic element to it" (personal communication). Nevertheless, satirists often actively deny their journalistic credentials by "saying they're just comedians and they're just doing jokes" (Bors, personal communication). I have already indicated that such pragmatic dismissals of satire's critical function should be taken with a pinch of salt. Nevertheless, despite clear journalistic qualities, contextual indicators suggest that programmes like *Last Week Tonight*, *Full Frontal*, or *The Daily Show* are really intended as fiction. For one, Stewart denied that *The Daily Show* claimed similar journalistic aspirations to CNN's *Crossfire*, stressing it was not broadcast on a 24-hour news channel but followed a show about "puppets making crank calls" on *Comedy Central* ("Jon Stewart on

Crossfire”). Similarly, *Last Week Tonight* or *Full Frontal* actively solicit unrestrained audience behaviour which demarcates these shows as fictional entertainment, more akin to sitcoms than the news. Importantly, this association with fiction does not only allow satirists to unabashedly pursue entertainment for its own sake, but also deploy strategies in the service of truth, such as loose talk and invented content, which would be problematic in a strictly non-fictional context.

Ambiguous cases like *Last Week Tonight* or *Full Frontal* may seem exceptional, but they really signal that classification of satire as fiction or non-fiction is generally indeterminate to some degree. By virtue of its purpose to critique, all satire has a commitment to truthfulness which it shares with non-fictional genres, including clearly fictional examples like Matt Bors’s cartoon about the Alabama Senate’s decision. At the same time, by embracing classification as fiction, satire is seemingly not only able to communicate similar truths as journalism, but it also has certain liberties that non-fiction lacks. For one, as opposed to journalists, satirists can ridicule public figures by inventing things without being sued for libel. In this respect, legal counselling typically advises satirists to emphatically highlight the fictional context of their satire, in order to avoid accusations of factual misrepresentation (RCFP Staff 2017; Ryan 2003; Greenwald 2002). Moreover, satirists have greater freedoms than journalists to openly commit to moral judgement. If sued for libel, satirists can easily defend themselves by claiming their ridicule was a “fair comment” (Moloney 2006, 8; BBC Staff 1999) or “honest opinion” (Price 2013). A similar line of defence is available to journalists, but typically only in demarcated contexts like an editorial or op-ed piece, which disavow factual truthfulness. Furthermore, even in these special contexts, journalists cannot similarly exploit the liberties of invented scenarios or loose talk to pass moral judgement in the same way as satirists. Case in point, although the satirical cartoons and comics journalism of Matt Bors often express the same criticism of conservative politics, they do so in significantly different ways.

In conclusion, although the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is often porous in satire, common classification as fiction affords the genre certain liberties which would be considered problematic in a non-fictional context. As fiction, satire not only has a greater license to pursue entertainment for its own sake, but, perhaps paradoxically, it is also able to exploit certain imaginative and creative techniques in the service of truth more freely than non-fiction. However, such use of imaginative and creative techniques is likely to be restricted for good reasons in non-fiction. Specifically, even though these techniques

associated with fiction do not necessarily compromise truthfulness, they can generate imprecision, if not deception. Take Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), a hybrid documentary-satire about the presidency of George W. Bush and The War on Terror. While its status as a documentary classifies *Fahrenheit 9/11* as non-fiction, the work also exploits creative and imaginative techniques associated with satire's freedoms as fiction. Yet, whereas a news parody like *The Daily Show* can afford some degree of creative manipulation when ridiculing pubic figures, the problematic reception of Moore's documentary highlighted that *Fahrenheit 9/11* could not. Even on the left, *Fahrenheit 9/11* was harshly criticised for misrepresenting factual information in order to promote Moore's partisan agenda (Hitchens 2004). A specifically contested scene was Moore's use of creative editing to make Bush appear ineffectual when informed during a classroom visit about the attack on the second WTC tower. By contrast, those present actually considered his behaviour as composed in extremely difficult circumstances (Padgett 2011). Crucially, whereas similar use of creative editing is a staple of news parodies like *The Daily Show*, it is considered much more problematic in the non-fiction context of a documentary.

The liberties afforded by fiction do not entail that a satire like *The Daily Show* can indulge in factual misrepresentation because it is broadcast on Comedy Central and not CNN. Instead, the point is that because it is presented in a fictional context, *The Daily Show* has greater liberties to express moral judgement by exploiting creative and imaginative techniques than the non-fictional *Fahrenheit 9/11*. In this respect, although fiction can be truthful, classification of a work as non-fiction nonetheless imposes more stringent stipulations in the service of safeguarding truth, including restrictions on manipulations through creative and imaginative techniques. These creative and imaginative techniques do not necessarily compromise truthfulness, but do introduce a higher risk of imprecision and deception than the methods associated with non-fiction. Moreover, when subjected to the scrutiny customary in non-fiction contexts, use of such creative and imaginative techniques may prove less than cognitively robust, as the reception of *Fahrenheit 9/11* reveals. This issue is further accentuated by the advice in legal contexts that even though satirists can beat libel accusations by "proving what they said was true (…) [w]ith satire and comedy – which often rely on exaggeration – this is sometimes difficult" (BBC Staff 1999). In other words, although the intuition that satire cannot be truthful because it is (typically) fiction is naïve, it is legitimate to be concerned that the freedoms of fiction, including loose talk, invented content and creative manipulation, have a higher risk of compromising truthfulness than

the techniques associated with non-fiction. In what follows now, I will further substantiate these ideas by introducing some philosophical perspectives on fiction.

4. PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FICTION

The ideas about truthfulness in fiction developed above correspond to a contextual understanding of fiction. As opposed to essentialism, contextualism about fiction rejects necessary and sufficient conditions that would distinguish a fictional from a non-fictional work. Instead, the difference is contingent on contextual and historical factors, including practices surrounding the publication, reception or promotion of works. My defence of contextualism about fiction is modelled on a proposal by Stacie Friend (2012), which stipulates that the labels 'fiction' and 'non-fiction' have a function akin to genre classifications. As a caveat, Friend does explain that fiction and non-fiction are perhaps best understood as "super-genres" or "broader categories into which other genres fall" (2012, 181). For this reason, I doubt that fiction and non-fiction are strictly speaking the same kind of category as ordinary genres like documentary, or, for that matter, satire. Regardless, I do endorse the core of Friend's proposal that, like Waltonian categories of art, classification as fiction or non-fiction "shapes our practices of understanding and evaluating particular works" (2012, 179). In other words, whether a work is classified as fiction or non-fiction introduces expectations that guide interpretation and appreciation (2012, 200-201). In this respect, the idea introduced above is that common classification of satire as fiction permits greater creative and imaginative freedoms than classification as non-fiction.

Contextualism about fiction opposes the idea that fiction and non-fiction are essentially distinguished by a difference in communicative intentions and mental states. By contrast, orthodox essentialism stipulates that successful fictional communication requires an audience to recognise the intention of an author to make-believe or imagine the communicated content (Currie 1990, 25). More specifically, Gregory Currie proposed to distinguish fictive utterances, or speech acts which invite make-belief, from assertions, which invite belief (1990, 21). At the same time, Currie's fictive utterance theory acknowledges that works of fiction, as well as non-fiction, commonly combine utterances that invite make-belief with others that invite belief (2014, 353). On this proposal, Arthur Conan Doyle intends his audience to make-believe that Sherlock Holmes is a detective who lives on 221B Baker Street, but also believe that London is the capital of England. Similarly, in the docuseries *Cosmos: A Spacetime Odyssey* (FOX/National Geographic 2014), Neil deGrasse Tyson intends audiences to believe his assertions about the empirical world, while

make-believe that he is physically travelling through the universe in a 'spaceship of the imagination'. Nevertheless, Currie's original proposal does entail that classification of a work as fiction or non-fiction supervenes on its "intentional profile" (Currie 2014, 353). In other words, the sum total of an author's communicative intentions fixes a work's classification as fiction or non-fiction. For this reason, the fictive utterance theory faces the problem that both works of fiction and non-fiction typically consist of a patchwork of fictive and non-fictive utterances and accordingly solicit a mix of make-belief (or imagination) and belief to their content (Friend 2011, 167). In response, fictive utterance theorists must prove that the intentional profile of a work nonetheless essentially demarcates fiction from non-fiction.

One intentionalist approach to the patchwork problem is simply to deny it by arguing that truth in fiction is irrelevant to its appreciation, which entails adopting a fictive stance and imagine the content of a work (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 60). However, this proposal falters. As discussed, appreciation of Matt Bors's satirical cartoon depends on the belief that the reported decision of the Alabama Senate is real and likely to have morally undesirable consequences. Another response available to intentionalists is that fiction distinguishes itself from non-fiction because its content can only be accidentally true, in the sense that true propositions in fiction do not display counterfactual dependence on the facts (Currie 1990, 47). Yet, Bors's report about the Senate's decision is not accidentally true, since we can reasonably assume he intended his representation to have remained truthful if the facts had been different. Another intentionalist response is that the kind of make-belief or imagination invited in fiction is categorically different than in non-fiction. Nevertheless, one proposal that propositions in works of fiction can invite beliefs as long as these are necessarily connected to propositions that do not invite belief (Stock 2011) has been dismissed as insufficiently distinguishing fiction from non-fiction (Friend 2011). Case in point, similar to Bors' fictional cartoon, deGrasse Tyson combines assertions with propositions that do not invite belief in the non-fictional *Cosmos*, including alternative scenarios about the development of the universe. Likewise, the proposal that, as opposed to non-fiction, "imagination involved in our engagement with fictions is a richer attitude than the mere entertaining of propositions" is refuted by the richness of the computer-generated imagery guiding imagination in non-fictional examples like *Cosmos* (García-Carpintero 2013, 350, note 54).

Perhaps the strongest intentionalist proposal to overcome the patchwork problem is David Davies' revised version of the fictive utterance theory. According to Davies, "a narrative is fictional just in case (1) it is the product of an act, or acts, of fictive utterance that prescribes making-believe a fictive content of a real setting, and (2) the over-riding constraint on the construction of the narrative is not the 'fidelity constraint'" (2015, 44). The first part of Davies's proposal stipulates that an author prescribes make-belief only of the fictive content of a narrative, say, that Holmes is a detective, as opposed to its real setting, in this case, London. The second part stipulates that fiction, say, a biopic, as opposed to non-fiction, like a biography, is not governed by the constraint "on the narrator's part, to be faithful to the manner which she takes actual events to have transpired" (2015, 40). At the same time, Davies acknowledges that both works of fiction and non-fiction can contain fictional narratives (2015, 50-51). His proposal tries to bridge this explanatory gap between fictional narratives and works of fiction on the basis of "the relative place accorded to a fictional narrative in the *structural organization* of the elements making up the work" (Davies 2015, 54, original emphasis). Specifically, if a fictional narrative "serve[s] to illustrate, clarify or amplify something asserted within the work" it is a work of non-fiction, whereas when "what is asserted within the work serve[s] to clarify or comment on the fictional narrative", it is fiction (Davies 2015, 54). However, while this proposal has philosophical plausibility, it is problematised by actual examples. Concretely, although Bors's cartoon introduced above is fictional, its fictive content is developed in the service of an assertion about legislative changes in Alabama, not the other way around.

In response, a fictive utterance theorist like Davies may decide to bite the bullet and classify Bors's satirical cartoon as non-fiction. Yet, such classification would be counterintuitive, not only because it contrasts with actual practices of classification, but also Bors's intention for the work to be classified as fiction, highlighted by stylistic choices which distinguish his satire from his non-fictional comics journalism. In this respect, Friend argues that "[i]n attempting to distinguish between fiction and non-fiction, we should consider, not how the parts of a work add up to the whole, but instead how the whole work is embedded in a larger context: in particular, the practices of reading, writing, publishing, and so on" (2011, 175; see also 2012, 187). Moreover, she adds that "it is the intention that a work belong in a particular category, along with contemporary practices regarding categorization, that helps to determine classification—not the intention that certain parts of a work be believed

or imagined" (Friend 2012, 203; see also 2008, 164). Accordingly, Friend's contextualism stipulates that "[t]he effects of genre classification are not as simple as a straight dichotomy between belief/non-fiction and imagining/fiction" (2011, 176; see also 2016, 8). These conclusions have come to be endorsed by at least some fictive utterance theorists, including Currie, who has conceded that there are indeed "factors that contribute to weighting decisions [about fiction and non-fiction] which are not determined by an author's intentions" (2014, 359). Similar to Friend (2012, 187-8), Currie therefore concludes that "[w]e may continue to insist that communicative intentions contribute, in some way, to fictional status, but that is a comparatively uninteresting claim" (Currie 2014, 361). In other words, granted there are fictive utterances or even narratives, they do not essentially determine the classification of a work as fiction.

The upshot of the contextualist proposal is that there is no essential difference between mental states associated with fictional and non-fictional representations. Indirectly, this conclusion was already anticipated by Kendall Walton's theory of fiction (1990). It was Walton who introduced the idea that fiction involves a mandate to imagine propositional content (although he denied that mandate was governed by communicative intentions). Yet, Walton's concept of 'fiction' never corresponded to ordinary classificatory practices. Instead, both Stacie Friend (2012, 182; 2008, 154) and Derek Matravers (2014, 18-19) have highlighted that Walton introduced fiction as a synonym of "representation" (Walton 1990, 3). Significantly updating Walton's proposal, they have drawn on contemporary research in psychology to argue that all representation involves the same kind of cognitive processing in the form of constructing a situation model or mental model (Friend 2008, 156-157; 2016, 3; Matravers 2014, 63ff). Specifically, when processing a representation, we construct a mental model of its content which is compartmentalised and not directly integrated in our structures of belief. Irrespective of whether this process is adequately identified as involving imagination (Friend 2008, 156; see also 2016, 3) or not (Matravers 2014, 59ff), the process of selecting information from this mental model and incorporating it into our pre-existing structures of belief is fundamentally the same in the case of fictional and non-fictional representations. In this respect, Friend has argued, "there is no epistemic difference *in kind* between fiction and non-fiction" (2014, 232, original emphasis).

The epistemic sameness of fiction and non-fiction is further supported by the relevance theory of communication (Wilson and Sperber 2012). According to Deirdre Wilson and Dan Sperber, human cognition is a system that sets out to maximise cognitive benefits (2002,

601). Human cognition therefore scans the environment for inputs which are maximally relevant or worthwhile to process in terms of “expected cost/benefit ratio” (Wilson and Sperber 2002, 601). In the domain of human communication, specifically, Sperber and Wilson explain that “an input” is “relevant only if the output of its cognitive processing (…) lead[s] to cognitive gains” (1996, 265). There are many such cognitive gains in various contexts. In some circumstances, a piece of communication is relevant because one seeks “to be amused”, whereas it may not be relevant if one seeks to be informed (Wilson and Sperber 2002, 601). Nonetheless, even though cognitive gains are varied, Sperber and Wilson primarily associate them with “epistemic improvement, i.e. an increase in knowledge” (1996, 266). In this respect, they explain that “relevance has to do with considerations of cognitive efficiency, and the notion of cognitive efficiency cannot be divorced from that of truth. The function of a cognitive system is to deliver knowledge, not false beliefs” (1996, 263). Crucially, in light of the epistemic sameness of fiction and non-fiction, Wilson and Sperber highlight that an input which obtains relevance because it produces an output of epistemic improvement need not itself be literally or factually true (2002, 628).

In this respect, the relevance theory provides an important update to Paul Grice’s ideas about human communication. According to Gricean pragmatics, communication is governed by maxims, of which the maxim of quality (‘be truthful’) is considered the most important (Wilson and Sperber 2002, 585). It follows from the maxim of quality that speakers must not say what they believe is false, which problematises the use of loose talk and figurative speech, including metaphors or exaggerations, because these are literally false. Gricean pragmatics considers such exceptions which flout the maxim of quality as governed by the rules of conversational implicature, which guide audiences to infer communicative meaning. However, since such so-called exceptions are very common, Wilson and Sperber have dismissed that human communication is governed by the supermaxim of quality (2002, 593). According to Wilson and Sperber, “where hearers are interested in truth (…) [they] do not expect utterances to be literally true” (2002, 601). Specifically, the relevance theory prescribes that a particular communicative utterance “with [its] linguistic meaning is expected to provide a relevant piece of evidence and a point of departure for inferring the speaker’s meaning” (Wilson and Sperber 2002, 628, original emphasis). In this regard, Wilson and Sperber specify that “[l]iteral, loose, and figurative interpretations are arrived at in the same way, by constructing an interpretation which

satisfies the hearer's expectations of relevance" (2002, 599). In other words, pace Grice, "all utterances – literal, loose or figurative – (…) are approached with expectations of relevance rather than truthfulness" (Wilson and Sperber 2002, 559). Crucially, Wilson and Sperber have argued that these "relevance-oriented inferential processes are efficient enough to allow for a much greater slack between [literal] sentence meaning and speaker's meaning than is generally assumed" (2002, 600).

The relevance theory offers additional support for the claim that human beings can infer true knowledge from communicative cues which are not literally or factually true, including such staples of fiction as loose talk, figurative speech and invented scenarios. Concretely, Sperber and Wilson claim that "[w]hen you hear a parable, or read *War and Peace*, you may gain insight, through some form of analogical thinking, into yourself, your life, and the world as they are" (1996, 265). For this reason, they conclude that "[i]f only true inputs were relevant [for epistemic improvements], we would have to say such fictions were irrelevant. If truth of the output is what matters, then fictions can be relevant after all" (Sperber and Wilson 1996, 265). Specifically, Nicholas Diehl (2013) has developed the importance of analogical thinking to infer truth from satire. According to Diehl, "satire commonly uses analogy to establish a relationship between the fictional representation and the real-world target of the satire" (2013, 313). Diehl further explains that the satirical critique in such instances depends on continuing the analogy between "[t]he fictional representation [which] is deserving of criticism *m*" and "[t]he real-world target [which] is deserving of criticism *m*" (2013, 313). In this manner, satire can "form an argument by analogy with a normative conclusion about the actual world" (Diehl 2013, 313). Diehl substantiates his argument by discussing *A Modest Proposal*, in which the immorality of the proposal to alleviate famine in Ireland by eating children is analogous to the immoral altitude of English absentee landlords to the precarity endured by their tenants.

In conclusion, philosophical discussion so far has highlighted the epistemic sameness of engagement with fiction and non-fiction. In other words, there is no essential difference between mental states involved in fiction and non-fiction, specifically along the lines of a distinction between belief and make-belief. For this reason, it may seem tempting to claim, as Derek Matravers does, that "[t]he traditional distinction, between representations that are fiction and representations that are non-fiction, is entirely unhelpful" (2014, 47). However, although this proposal makes sense from the perspective of philosophy of mind, it does ignore the genuinely different expectations and stipulations introduced through

classification of a work as fiction or non-fiction. For one, Stacie Friend suggests that the very existence of the classification 'fiction' "is at least partly explained by the purpose of allowing authors to use their creative imaginations to make things up" (2008, 178). By contrast, the classification non-fiction primarily serves to safeguard truthful representations of the world. Accordingly, there are all sorts of vetting processes to ensure compliance to truth which are standard to non-fiction practices, such as journalism and historiography, but which are counter-standard to fiction (Gaut 2005b, 443). Likewise, Matravers himself also acknowledges that classification as fiction permits greater liberty to introduce representations which serve no further cognitive function than simply entertainment (2014, 96). Moreover, Matravers further admits that adherence to what David Davies calls the fidelity constraint is standard in non-fiction, but counter-standard in fiction (2014, 98). In this respect, Matravers concludes that "knowing that the author did not obey the fidelity constraint, readers are left to fend for themselves" and advised "to exercise a cautious scepticism" (2014, 100). Thus, although there is no essential epistemic difference between fiction and non-fiction, the difference in expectations and stipulations governing both classifications does make it more risky to learn from fiction than non-fiction.

The right response to the cognitive risks of fiction is not to dismiss fictional representations as inappropriate vehicles to stimulate learning, but proceed with caution. In this regard, while Gregory Currie and Jerrold Levinson acknowledge that fictions can stimulate "doxastic improvement" (2017, 11), they also warn that "fictions are rather perilous epistemic environments (…) where the overlap between what is fictional and what is true must often be guessed at" (2017, 13). However, even though "fiction presents us with relatively more difficult conditions for acquiring knowledge", Friend highlights that "[a] variety of psychological studies of persuasion suggest that for some kinds of information in fiction we are no more careful, and possibly less careful, than with non-fiction" (2014, 234-234). Such carelessness only increases the epistemic perilousness of fiction. Nevertheless, one way of overcoming these perils of carelessness, Friend suggests, is through genre familiarity (see also Ichino and Currie [forthcoming], 10; 12 note 25). According to Friend, "it is because of my extensive familiarity with [a certain] genre that I [can] discriminate appropriately" (2014, 244). For this reason, "the more skilled a reader is with certain kinds of [fictional] works, the more likely she is to acquire knowledge from those works" (Friend 2014, 44). Following this suggestion, I now turn to the most important fictional characteristics of satire that impact the genre's cognitive function.

5. A CAREFUL COGNITIVISM ABOUT SATIRE

In what follows, I will develop a careful cognitivism about satire in light of its common status as fiction. The aim of this investigation is to validate the cognitive value of satire to a moral project of critique, without indulging in hyperbolic praise about the genre's extraordinary truth-telling function. As a stepping-stone in the development of my argument, I take a lead from Paul Simon's "A Simple Desultory Philippic (Or How I Was Robert McNamara'd Into Submission)". In this song, the protagonist claims, "I learned the truth from Lenny Bruce". However, he does not really mean it. Simon's song gently satirises popular figures and conceptions in the Sixties, amongst them the idea that satire, like Lenny Bruce's, teaches you the truth. Perhaps Simon's ironic mockery signals that claims about the cognitive function of satire should be taken with a pinch of salt. That, I take to be valuable advice. Still, as far as the song itself has satirical qualities, it does function as a valuable stepping-stone towards developing insight about the appropriate expectations concerning the truthfulness of satire. Similarly, the position I defend acknowledges that good satire can teach non-trivial truths, but highlights that satirical truth is best understood as an introduction to an issue that requires further investigation or a particular take which needs to be nuanced. Such a cognitive function can be meritorious, but should not be overestimated. At the same time, I also caution that satire can deceive. The same fictional techniques that generate cognitive value in satire are also the ones responsible for cognitive flaws on other occasions.

My careful cognitivism outlines a moderate position between supporters and detractors of satire's cognitive value. On one hand, in early twentieth-century Germany, Kurt Tucholsky enthusiastically argued that "[t]he satirist is an offended idealist" who employs "merciless truth" in an attack on "malice" (1919, my translation). Similarly, Stephen E. Kercher argues that Lenny Bruce and others were driven by a commitment to "brutal truth" or "terrible honesty" (2010, 78). More recently, Jon Stewart's satire in *The Daily Show* has been praised for revealing "a truth the mainstream media were largely refusing to consider" (Baym 2010, 167). In particular, during the Presidency of George W. Bush, satire was praised as an enlightened response to postmodern media manipulation, now better known as post-truth politics (Jones 2010, 168). On the other hand, detractors like Julie Webber have retorted that Jon Stewart's satire "den[ies] objectivity" and instead offers audiences "a construction of accuracy that they can believe in" (2013, 117-118). Webber further argues that "Stewart's comedy is an ersatz form of progressive democratic praxis" (2013, 133). In other

words, Webber dismisses that satire has ethical value as critique because it indulges in pandering to preconceptions instead of stimulating real learning. In reaction to this polarised debate, my careful cognitivism aims to develop a moderate position by alleviating overly pessimistic concerns by detractors and tempering all-too-enthusiastic expectations of supporters.

Although the idea that satire is truthful has proven particularly enduring (Matz 2015, 28), it is in fact rather paradoxical on closer inspection. Robert Phiddian has highlighted that “the satirical is visceral and reductive in its appeal, so it has no necessary logical link with ethics or truth” (2013, 54). According to Phiddian, satire “simplifies. It is impatient. It apportions blame and caricatures issues with arbitrariness” (2013, 52). Similarly, even though he has enthusiastically defended the cognitive function of satire, Tucholsky acknowledged that “[s]atire must exaggerate and is, in its deepest nature, unjust. It inflates the truth to make it clearer, and it can do nothing more than work according to the bible verse: the just will suffer with the unjust” (1919, my translation). Likewise, Matthew Kieran has highlighted a paradox of satire’s truthfulness. According to Kieran, “[t]he point of satire is to ridicule” (2005, 180). For this reason, in satire, “[a] character may be exaggerated by concentrating wholly on her faults without recognition of her virtues or rendered absurd by concentrating on irrelevant yet easy to lampoon mannerisms” (Kieran 2005, 180). Kieran argues that “to achieve its aims, satire, caricature and ridicule are often unfair, morally distorted and vicious” (2005, 181). At the same time, Kieran also acknowledges “how important and effective it [satire] can be” and highlights the paradox that “such morally dubious distortions enable their works to debunk authority and challenge the unquestioning acceptance of attitudes, activities, institutions and cultures” (2005, 181).

The paradox that satirical representation has cognitive and ethical value despite (or perhaps exactly because of) its distortion can be clarified through a routine by Lenny Bruce about institutionalised Christianity. In this satirical routine, Bruce explains how Christ and Moses come to earth and attend a mass in New York City:

> Christ and Moses [are] standing in the back of St. Pat’s, [listening and] looking around. [Cardinal Spellman would be relating love and giving and forgiveness to the people.] Confused, Christ is, at the grandeur of the interior, the rococo baroque interior. Because his route took him through Spanish Harlem, and he was wondering what the hell fifty Puerto Ricans were doing living in one room when that stained glass window is worth ten G’s a square foot? And this guy [Cardinal Spellman] had a

> ring worth eight grand. And he would wonder at the grandeur. Why weren't the Puerto Ricans living here? That was the purpose of the Church – for the people (Cohen 1975, 18, with annotations from other live performances).

The point is that Bruce's satirical critique of institutionalised Christianity is exaggerated, simplified, selective and emotive. Herein lies both a significant aspect of its aesthetic appeal as well as the paradox of its cognitive value. Not only are we invited to laugh, but also to believe that Bruce teaches us something important about institutionalised Christianity.

More specifically, much like a historian, Bruce sets out to say true things about the history of institutionalised Christianity. He argues that the founders of the Church intended the institution to provide for the poor, but, throughout history, its leaders have all too often ended up providing for themselves, at the expense of the poor. This assertion is subject to the standards of truth-telling developed in historiography. Not only does Bruce need to get the facts right, but his selection and connection of those facts into a narrative must also adhere to standards of objectivity and rigour (Carroll 2001, 155-156). However, there is a risk that Bruce's satirical argument falls short of these historiographic standards. For one, he exaggerates the value of Cardinal Spellman's ring and the number of Puerto Rican immigrants housed together in a New York bedroom. He also simplifies the complexity of the Church by reducing it to its material excesses. Moreover, rather than relying on dispassionate reasoning, Bruce exploits emotive representations of the suffering Puerto Ricans and the vain clergy. No doubt, the routine is aesthetically successful, but is it also truthful? After all, the just do suffer with the unjust, for while some leaders and members of the Church have ignored the needs of the poor in favour of their own profit, Bruce's satirical critique ignores the sincere charity of many in the clergy.

Perhaps imposing the standards of historiography on Bruce's satire seems inappropriate. After all, his satirical routine clearly describes a made-up event. Still, even in a non-fiction context, historians often employ imaginative techniques (Friend 2011, 171). Similarly, through fiction, Bruce indirectly makes assertions about the actual history of institutionalised Christianity. Moreover, insofar as Bruce passes moral judgment, his claims are also subject to the rules of philosophical critique, which impose similar standards of objectivity and rigour as historiography. My point is that for satire to have cognitive value, it must adhere to current best practices in domains like history and philosophy. Yet, while classification of history and philosophy as non-fiction introduces stringent stipulations in the service of safeguarding truth, satire thrives on fictional techniques which are cognitively

risky. In particular, the cognitive risks of satire are linked to its extreme degree of manipulative control in representation. In this respect, Eileen John has explained that representation is controlled by imaginative techniques which manipulate information, including "selection, foregrounding and making salient, simplification, amplification, exaggeration and juxtaposition; we can imaginatively configure the elements of reality in many ways" (2013, 387). According to John, "specific genres and modes of art, such as satire and cartoons, highlight particular kinds of 'excessive' configurative control" (2013, 387). Crucially, John nuances that "though these functions are cognitively risky, they are also extremely basic and indispensable to inquiry" (2013, 387). The point I derive from John's nuanced position is that representations which showcase extreme configurative control, like satire, are particularly cognitively risky, but may perhaps also claim particular cognitive virtues. Accordingly, satire may have a valid role in knowledge acquisition, as long caution is exercised.

Satire is a form of representation characterised by an extreme degree of manipulative control. As explained, Bruce's satire of institutionalised Christianity is extremely exaggerated, simplified, selective and emotive. Yet, such an extreme degree of manipulative control is not unique in representations. In this respect, John (2013, 387) and Kieran (2005, 181) have referred to cartoons and caricatures as kindred types of representations. I also include aphorisms in that list. In what follows now, I will further investigate the cognitive function of satire by comparing it to these kindred types of representations. More specifically, I propose that satire, cartoons, caricatures and aphorisms exploit a similar process of narrative thinking (Goldie 2012). Narrative thinking is the mental process behind the creation of stories. Crucial to narrative thinking is emplotment, a process which first involves authors shaping a story by selecting (and leaving out) descriptions, in various degrees of richness (Goldie 2012, 9ff). They then organise that story material into a coherent whole by creating meaningful connections and commonly take an evaluative perspective that bestows the story with emotional import (Goldie 2012, 9ff). My proposal is that satire, cartoons, caricatures and aphorisms are characterised by a particular kind of emplotment and narrative thinking, which produces simplified, exaggerated, selective and emotive representations. In this respect, I have explained before that scholars like George A. Test have referred to satire as a mental "faculty" (1991, 12) or "spirit" (1991, 5). Altghouh I have introduced some challenges to this proposal, is is nonetheless valuable insofar as satire is characterised by a specific narrative thinking, albeit

this mental process is not unique to satire. The point is exactly that satire shares the cognitive virtues and risks of kindred types of representations that exploit similar mental processes.

An important kindred types of representation of satire is cartooning. For this reason, the two have often gone hand in hand historically. Cartooning is a drawing style which produces abstracted representations. Scott McCloud explains that “[w]hen we abstract an image through cartooning, we’re not so much eliminating details as we are focusing on specific details” (1993, 30). McCloud argues that cartooning produces visual representations which amplify the interpretative significance of certain features at the expense of others. Accordingly, McCloud identifies cartooning as “a form of amplification through simplification” (1993, 30). Although cartooning is a way of drawing, McCloud has suggested that “[s]implifying characters and images toward a purpose [i.e. cartooning] can be an effective tool for storytelling in any medium” (1993, 31). He specifies that “[f]ilm critics will sometimes describe a live-action film as a ‘cartoon’ to acknowledge the stripped-down intensity of a simple story or visual style” (McCloud 1993, 31). McCloud is right that cartooning may correspond to a transmedial process of representation, but it is not unique as a form of amplification through simplification. Much earlier than McCloud, Ernst Gombrich argued that “simplification and emphasis” are “the means of all art” (1945, 3). Nonetheless, McCloud rightly signals that cartooning differs from other forms of representation in the extreme degree of simplification and emphasis. Similarly, satire, like Lenny Bruce’s routine about institutionalised Christianity, is typically so succinct because it puts the spotlight on only a few aspects of an otherwise very complex issue.

Likewise, Gombrich highlighted caricaturing as “the ultimate resource of the cartoonist’s armoury” (1963, 137). Whereas cartooning is a highly selective representational process, caricaturing is “a process of ‘overloading’ or adding to an image” which exploits so-called physiognomic representation (Gombrich and Kris 1940, 3). Physiognomy is the pseudo-Aristotelian idea that character can be derived from similarities between a person’s face and the head of an animal. This idea was crucial in the historical development of portrait caricature. Although scientifically disproven, physiognomic representation has remained a staple of contemporary cartooning. Take Mr Burns from *The Simpsons*, whose appearance clearly evokes that of a bird of prey to signify his ruthless nature as a capitalist. Gombrich argues that the exploitation of metaphorical associations which characterise physiognomic perception does not strictly apply to animal likeness and human character, but more

broadly to expressive features of art like “sounds, colours or shapes” (1963, 48). This idea that metaphorical associations guide the cognitive processing of abstract concepts “in terms of embodied image schemata, related to concrete sensorial associations of hearing, seeing, and tasting” was later vindicated by the conceptual metaphor theory (Fahlenbrach 2014, 58). Concretely, conceptual metaphor theory explains that metaphorical mapping shapes cognition of abstract concepts like emotions and morals through associations with sensory phenomena (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Similarly, Gombrich has explained that metaphor “links the familiar with the unfamiliar” (Gombrich 1996, 342). For instance, Gombrich discusses the association of light and darkness to moral goodness and badness in visual art (Gombrich 1963, 137). Since caricaturing relies strongly on this mental process identified as physiognomic thinking, Gombrich and Ernst Kris are justified in arguing that it really “is a psychological mechanism rather than a form of art” (1940, 11).

The mental process identified by Gombrich as physiognomic thinking anticipates what contemporary cognitive psychology would call a dual process theory of human perception. Describing how human beings process their environment, Jenefer Robinson explains that

> [o]n the one hand there is a ‘quick and dirty processing system’, which responds very fast, warns the organism that something dangerous may be around without identifying it very carefully, and gets the organism to respond appropriately to whatever it is. And on the other hand, there is a slower, more discriminating processing system which operates through the cortex and figures out whether the thalamo-amygdala ‘affective appraisal’ is appropriate or not (2005, 50).

Similarly, Gombrich traces the origins of physiognomic perception in the way humans constantly scrutinise their environment to distinguish what is threatening from what is not (1963, 47). According to Gombrich, we cognitively process a gloomy shape, colour or sound in the same way as a gloomy face and a gloomy sky. When the sky looks gloomy, we automatically understand there is danger afoot and run for shelter. Only on further reflection, we realise a thunderstorm is on its way and decide not to hide under a tree. Similarly, someone’s face may strike us as gloomy, and our gut reaction is to avoid that person. However, our gut reaction might be wrong. The person’s considerate actions and friendly words may disprove our initial hypothesis. Somebody with a gloomy-looking face is not always gloomy. At least, in the real world. In a cartoon, however, somebody with a

gloomy face is bound to have a gloomy personality, as exemplified by *Disney* villains like Jafar and Cruella De Vil.

Importantly, worries about the deceptive impact of the quick and dirty mental processes driving caricaturing and cartooning can be transposed to satire. McCloud acknowledges that "the cartoon may seem to omit much of the ambiguity and complex characterization which are the hallmarks of modern literature, leaving them suitable only for children" (1993, 45). Similarly, Gombrich introduces the worry that "[p]erhaps we are like children who are easily fobbed off with an answer" (1963, 132). In particular, Gombrich links the danger of quick and dirty perception to aesthetic seduction. According to Gombrich, cartoons and caricatures may paint a picture "so satisfying that you have the illusion of an explanation while really the analogy is rather incomplete" (1963, 132). He adds that "the neatness of the formulation may even effectively block our reflection whether or not it contains the truth" (1963, 131). Gombrich considers such aesthetic seduction in cartoons and caricatures as particularly risky because "[w]hen perplexed and frustrated, we all like to fall back on a primitive, physiognomic picture of events" (Gombrich 1963, 140). Moreover, Gombrich warns that such quick and dirty thinking "carries strong and immediate conviction" (1963, 47) and is "so convincing to the emotional mind" (1963, 139) that it is like a "myth-making faculty" which risks Disneyfying the world (1963, 140). In other words, the risk is that Lenny Bruce's satire about institutionalised Christianity is a frustrated response which misconstrues a complex situation by introducing unwarranted simplifications and exaggerations, but is too seductively funny for us to notice the deception.

The quick and dirty process of perception which characterises cartoons, caricatures and satire is prone to the kind of distortions that characterise unconscious biases and ideological deception. For instance, the same mechanisms of exaggeration, simplification, selectiveness and emotiveness which characterise Bruce's satire of institutionalised Christianity were also exploited in anti-Japanese propaganda during the Second World War. Take *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944), an infamously racist anti-Japanese war cartoon, which relies on the exaggerations and simplifications of caricaturing, as well as their direct emotive impact, to represent the enemy as weaselly and menacing. Similarly, Saam Trivedi highlights that Aristophanes' "far from truthful satire of Socrates [in *The* Clouds] contributed to poisoning the climate in Athens against Socrates, leading to his trial and death" (personal communication). Trivedi stresses that "here, then, we have an example of

satire that not only deceives and misleads (…) but also has bad ethical consequences, even if they may not have been intended or foreseen by the artist." Cognitive deception in cartoons, caricatures and satire is therefore not merely an academic issue, but has been responsible for actual epistemic malice. For this reason, caution about the cognitive function of these kindred types of representations is warranted.

At the same time, although caution is in order, my careful cognitivism does not deny that satire can have cognitive value. Despite the risks, the particular narrative thinking which satire shares with cartooning and caricaturing also has cognitive virtues. In particular, critics and scholars are in agreement that cartooning "can summarize a vast body of data in a succinct symbol" (Harrison 1981, 69). Accordingly, cartooning is often praised for its "ability to reduce an intricate and bewildering aspect of the social or the political scene (…) to its basic ingredients" (Geipel 1972, 33). In this respect, McCloud argues that exactly "[b]y stripping down an image to its essential 'meaning,' an artist can amplify that meaning in a way that realistic art can't" (1993, 30). A striking example is Michael Goodwin and Dan E. Burr's *Economix* (2012), a cartoon introduction and critical overview of economics. Reviewers praised *Economix* by explaining that "[y]ou could read ten books on the subject and not glean as much information" (David Back quoted in Goodwin and Burr 2012, 4). Adapting to the cartoon medium, Goodwin also acknowledges that "it forced me to write the story in a different way" because "working in comics made me think things through differently. Writing for comics forces you to boil everything down to the essence" (personal communication). Crucially, this process of narrative thinking allows *Economix* to get to the heart of complex issues at a minimum of cognitive cost.

As exemplified by *Economix*, succinctness can be a significant cognitive merit of the narrative thinking which characterises cartoons, caricatures and satire. In this respect, James O. Young has developed a toolkit of imaginative techniques which helps to highlight how representations with extreme configurative control, like *Economix* (see fig. 12), can succinctly deliver both descriptive and evaluative information about complex situations, such as the impact of neoliberal policies (2001, 80-93). For one, since *Economix*'s emplotment of recent economic policies is extremely selective, it accentuates the most important events. Similarly, *Economix* succinctly communicates the economic effect of tax cuts for the rich by simplifying it to an image of people rushing out of the US Treasury with big bags of cash. Moreover, by juxtaposing story events like the deregularisation of Wall Street with the demise of education, *Economix* concisely highlights causal relationships that

may otherwise not be evident. Importantly, these imaginative techniques not only provide descriptive information about the impact of neoliberal policies, but also cue moral evaluation through emotive means. The dirty smoke coming from the factory pipes exemplifies the pollution of big business and further correlates to its moral uncleanliness. Likewise, the amplification of the fat cat endorsing tax cuts for the rich, with his bulging cheeks and double chin, symbolises that he has claimed more than his fair share, while his dirty cigar and complacent countenance embody social indifference. Finally, the amplified sadness of teachers and pupils, correlating to the destitute school building, emotionally cues moral allegiance, especially juxtaposed with Wall Street's crazy and blind greed depicted above.

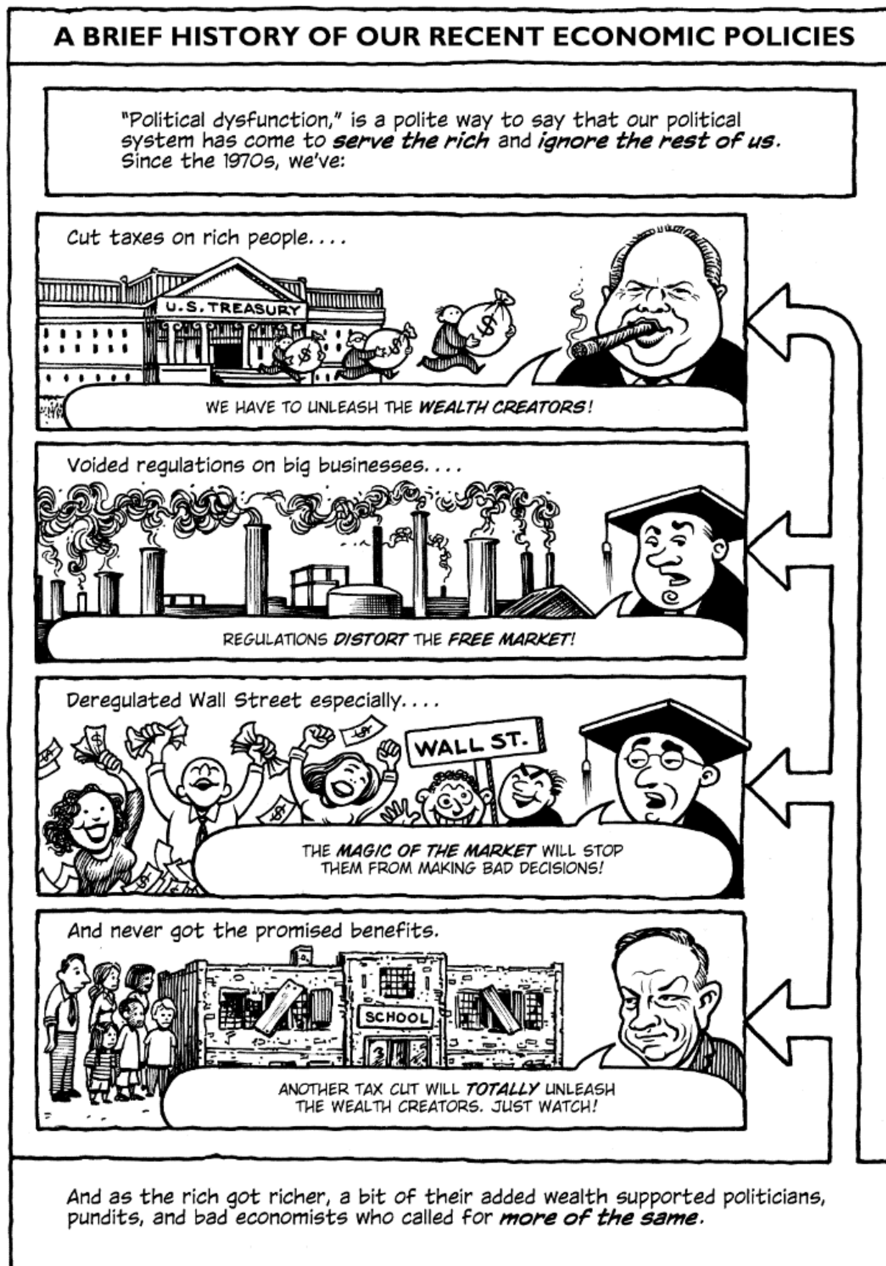

Figure 12

As a non-fiction publication, *Economix* is bound by a social contract to provide true information about its subject. Yet, as a comic, it is able to really exploit specific imaginative techniques normally associated with fictional representations. Although these techniques can sometimes deceive, *Economix* highlights that they can nonetheless also be cognitively valuable. Specifically, *Economix* has cognitive value because its extreme degree of manipulative control in emplotting the impact of neoliberal policies succinctly communicates the most crucial information about a historically complex development. Moreover, the comic also viscerally cues appropriate moral evaluation of economic policy

and its impact on the economy. Concretely, *Economix* rightfully cues moral allegiance with ordinary citizens and schoolchildren against complacent academics and politicians, indifferent tycoons and money-crazed stockholders. In doing so, *Economix* capitalises on techniques of what Noël Carroll has called "*criterial pre-focusing*" (2012, 378, original emphasis). Through criterial pre-focussing, the comic "depicts narrative events in a way that is pre-filtered emotively or pre-digested in its details so as to promote and then sustain certain emotional responses rather than others" (Carroll 2012, 378). Accordingly, these emotional responses, which "size up circumstances automatically", cue moral evaluation by "draw[ing] our attention quickly and sharply to the pertinent moral variables involved, weighing them differentially and subtly, thereby enabling us to assess and to understand the situation rapidly and clearly" (Carroll 2012, 380). In other words, *Economix* passes moral judgement by capitalising on quick and dirty emotive processes of emplotment that appeal to the pre-reflexive mind. While problem cases like *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* highlight that such criterial pre-focusing can be epistemically malicious, *Economix* reveals it can nonetheless stimulate evaluation that is morally on target.

At the same time, *Economix* has genuine cognitive and ethical value because it does not exclusively rely on quick and dirty emotive persuasion, but also develops more reflective arguments supported by peer-reviewed sources or empirically verifiable facts. In other words, although it exploits imaginative techniques associated with fiction, the comic also relies on methods typical of non-fiction in the service of safeguarding truth. Still, the real test of *Economix*'s cognitive merit is further investigation. In this respect, Young rightfully warns that "[a]ny form or representation can be misleading (…) [and] needs to be tested" (2001, 91). Likewise, Gaut further specifies that in order to verify the truthfulness of a representation, whether it is fictional or non-fictional, "one needs to go outside the text, research its generative conditions, and so appeal to experience" (2005b, 443). Similarly, Carroll adds that "[n]either a typical narrative with respect to moral issues nor a comparable moral argument is self-certifying. We need to evaluate both in terms of broader experience" (2012, 381). In this respect, although quasi-realism argues that moral judgement is governed by the emotions, ethical deliberation is a far more reflective process, which may incorporate, but is certainly not exhausted by, quick and dirty emotional responses. Hence, criterial pre-focusing may "start the emotional ball moving" but needs to be supplemented with careful moral deliberation (Carroll 2012, 380). In the case of *Economix*, further deliberation does substantiate its moral judgment. Specifically,

experience confirms that the neoliberal economic policies it critiques are at odds with the Humean common point of view, because they favour the monetary interests of a financial elite at the expense of public investments needed to sustain basic social rights, such as high-quality education.

Crucially, while knowledge acquisition and ethical deliberation should always be a process of checks and balances, grounded in experience, extra alertness is warranted for the narrative thinking which characterises cartoons, caricatures and satire. Although it is a significant cognitive virtue of *Economix* to let us see the bigger picture about complex issues such as the impact of neoliberalism, its aesthetically pleasing succinctness should not seduce us into dismissing more detailed investigation. As Goodwin acknowledges at the end of *Economix*, "We've covered a lot… But we've also barely scratched the surface. I hope you use this book as a *foundation* for further reading, observation, and thinking" (2012, 291, original emphasis). This insight that representations like *Economix* have real cognitive value when they are complemented by further investigation is key to an appropriate evaluation of the cognitive value of satire as critique. Although good satire often supplements quick and dirty narrative thinking with more reflective deliberation and argumentation, it is not exhaustive. On the contrary, the specific epistemic virtue of satire is exactly that it sacrifices a level of detail through its extreme degree of manipulative control in emplotting, in order to highlight those features and relations which are most saliently relevant (see Wilson and Sperber 2002, 600-601). When it does so successfully, satire's succinctness has the epistemic virtue of cognitive efficiency. Nevertheless, the cognitive function of satire remains akin to that of an introduction which requires further investigation or a particular take that needs to be nuanced.

In this respect, the cognitive value of satire to critique is similar to that of aphorisms to philosophy. Ben Grant defines the aphorism as "a short statement which encapsulates a truth" (Grant 2016, 2). Highlighting similar imaginative techniques as discussed above, Grant refers to Freud's theory of condensation in dreams and jokes to clarify "the brevity of the aphorism as so compressing thoughts, ideas, images, or words together as to bring about a change in the relationships between them, or in the logic that connects them" (2016, 48). Similarly applying Freud's ideas to cartooning and caricaturing, Gombrich argued that "condensation, the telescoping of a whole chain of ideas into one pregnant image, is indeed the essence of wit" (1963, 130). The cognitive value of such aphoristic narrative thinking, which can offer an insightful perspective on complex issues, has been used to

good advantage in philosophy. Take Simon Blackburn's introduction to philosophical debates about truth, in which he introduces a "sublime thumbnail sketch" developed by Nietzsche, which succinctly summarises "the entire progress of metaphysics since the time of Plato" (2006, 79-80). This sublime thumbnail sketch is a short paragraph in aphoristic style, which Blackburn uses in his philosophical investigation of truth because it makes insightful connections between key aspects of an issue that could easily dazzle specialists with its complexity. At the same time, Nietzsche's aphorism obviously does not exhaust all there is to know about the history of metaphysics, which is why Blackburn introduces it as a stepping-stone to more detailed philosophical investigation.

Similarly, my careful cognitivism endorses appraisals of satire's cognitive value by supporters like Jeffrey P. Jones, who claims that good satirists "strip [an] encounter bare and offer up the essence of [a] situation" (2010, 4). After all, Lenny Bruce's satire of institutionalised Christianity does get to the heart of an important moral contradiction which deeply problematises the ethos of the Church. Crucially, Bruce's satire has such cognitive value because it is an exaggerated, simplified, selective and emotive representation. Bruce reduces the complexity of institutionalised Christianity to a simplified contradiction between the exaggerated opulence of contemporaneous clergy and the humble charity of Christ and Moses. Similarly, by contrasting the amplified poverty endured by Puerto Rican immigrants to the grandeur of St Patrick's Cathedral, his satire viscerally cues appropriate moral allegiance. Still, albeit Bruce offers a perspective from which true knowledge can be derived, his representation must not be mistaken as exhaustive. Further investigation is required not only to complement Bruce's satire with the appropriate nuance that does justice to the sincere charity of many in the clergy, but also to establish whether his argument holds water when tested against information gathered from verified domains like history and philosophy. In conclusion, my careful cognitivism stipulates that satire can have significant cognitive value, as long as the knowledge it provides is complemented and tested by further inquiry. In other words, we can learn some truths from Lenny Bruce, but not the exhaustive truth.

In conclusion, supporters of satire's cognitive value need not be overly concerned that its fictional status impedes truthfulness. Albeit satire typically exploits a mental process of narrative thinking which utilises imaginative techniques that generate extremely manipulated representations, such narrative thinking can have significant cognitive value. Specifically, like cartoons and caricatures, satire can succinctly highlight key information

about complex issues, as well as viscerally cue appropriate moral allegiance. However, the quick and dirty processes exploited by such narrative thinking can also deceive. Supporters of satire's cognitive value are therefore advised to heed Gombrich's warning that "[t]he weapons [this psychological mechanism] contains can be used in good causes and sinister ones" (Gombrich 1963, 142). For this reason, knowledge acquisition from satire should always be complemented by further investigation to verify correctness. Moreover, the cognitive value of satire is best understood as a foundation to more in-depth inquiry. Satire may offer a valuable perspective on an issue by highlighting the importance of previously unnoticed aspects or connections, but it does so at the cost of eliminating some level of detail and nuance. Concretely, while the satire of John Oliver and Samantha Bee is well-researched and balanced, it does not develop exhaustive representations and needs to be complemented by more substantial and in-depth inquiries, including good investigative journalism and scholarship. For this reason, my careful cognitivism about satire may sound disappointing to supporters who had hoped for more extraordinary cognitive contributions of satire. Yet, my position does not dismiss the cognitive function of satire as negligible. In what follows now, I will highlight some modest but nonetheless distinct cognitive contributions of satire to a moral project of critique.

6. SATIRICAL THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS

The commonly fictional status of satire does not preclude its truthfulness but is nonetheless reason to exercise extra vigilance when learning from satire. Nevertheless, I now want to argue that, sometimes, the fictional status of satire actually fosters non-trivial learning in ways which would be unavailable when classified as non-fiction. Crucially, although both fictional and non-fictional representations can employ imaginative techniques, representations classified as fiction standardly have a license to exploit the imagination to a greater degree. Insofar as we stand to learn from the imagination, fiction therefore has the inherent potential to stimulate learning to a greater degree than non-fiction. In this regard, Berys Gaut has outlined a "continuum, where we gradually move towards literary-style devices, to help make those imaginings more vivid, precise and powerful, and at the same time (not coincidentally) more cognitively instructive" (2007, 164). The crux is that because it is fiction, satire has a greater license to develop such literary-style techniques in the service of vivid imagination than if it were non-fiction. To be clear, these freedoms of fiction can also stimulate deception. The imagination only contributes to learning when it is to a certain extent disciplined (Gaut 2007, 155). Yet, while such discipline of the imagination is

common in non-fiction, it can similarly govern fiction, albeit typically less stringently (Gaut 2007, 153). Even so, in these cases, fiction can, in some respects, stimulate learning in ways unavailable to non-fiction, because it has a license to develop imaginative techniques more fully.

The imagination commonly contributes to learning. In particular, aestheticians have frequently discussed philosophical thought experiments to dismiss claims to the contrary (John 1998, 342; Gaut 2007, 160-161; Carroll 2002, 7). Some, like Catherine Elgin, have further argued that fictions can function as "extended, elaborate thought experiments" (2014, 232). Specifically, Elgin contends that "[l]iterary and cinematic fictions help us out" when philosophical thought experiments are "so austere that in their philosophical settings we do not know what to think" (2014, 236). For this reason, Elgin explains that "there is a continuum of cases from Maxwell's demon and trolley problems through the myth of the cave and *Emile* to 'didactic fictions' like *Animal Farm* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, to *Middlemarch* and *Oedipus Rex*" (2014, 240). Similarly, Gaut argues that the novel *Sophie's Choice* "deploys in fully developed form the devices that lie in embryonic form" in a thought experiment by Bernard Williams (Gaut 2007, 164). Yet, whereas Elgin "doubt[s] that there is a sharp boundary between thought experiments, strictly so called, and works of fiction", I do think there is a chief difference (2014, 240). Crucially, ordinary philosophical thought experiments should not be understood as fictional narratives in a non-fiction work. Instead, they are exercises of the imagination in a non-fiction context. Accordingly, philosophical thought experiments are goverened by different rules and expectations than fiction. For this reason, whatever added value fictions may have as extended thought experiments, they have this value exactly because their use of the imagination is not bound by the epistemic stringency of philosophy.

For the record, I do not argue that fiction, including satire, overall stimulates better learning than philosophy or that it is itself philosophy. Instead, like Carroll, I argue that narrative fiction can be "supplemental" to philosophy (2012, 381), especially moral philosophy, and agree that "there is no reason to opt for one of these mediums of moral understanding if we can have both" (2012, 387). Likewise, I concur with Murray Smith that "[m]any works of art are rightly valued in cognitive terms (…) [b]ut artworks do not pursue or offer us knowledge in the manner of philosophy, and we honor neither art nor philosophy by conflating or cross-dressing them (2016, 196). Certainly, insightful fictions can stimulate similar conceptual improvement as philosophical thought experiments (Carroll 2002, 11;

John 1998, 332). Yet, to argue, as Thomas Wartenberg does, "that, if we regard films as thought experiments, we can see how narrative fiction films can do philosophy" is to overlook principal contextual differences between fiction and philosophy (2016, 179). Philosophical thought experiments operate in a non-fictional context governed by stipulations and regulations alien to fiction (see Smith 2016, 187). These stipulations and regulations demand that philosophical thought experiments are embedded in a larger structure of formal argumentation typically absent in fiction. In other words, as opposed to fictional contexts, imaginative exercises do not stand by themselves in philosophy. Although some fictions are like philosophical thought experiments in isolation, they are therefore not strictly speaking philosophy.

The contextual difference between thought experiments in philosophy and imaginative exercises in fiction entails different expectations and regulations. Concretely, Smith explains that in a fictional context, imaginative exercises have a particular license to entertain which they lack in philosophy (2006, 39). The point is not that philosophical thought experiments cannot be entertaining (Wartenberg 2016, 174) or even be philosophically better because they do so (Carroll 2002, 18). Yet, because it is non-fiction, philosophy does not have a similar licence as fiction to pursue entertainment for its own sake. Smith develops this distinction in terms of the difference between kinds of imagining standard to philosophy and fiction (2006, 39). Whereas philosophical thought experiments standardly develop hypothetical imagining which involves "pose[ing] the possibility of some counterfactual in a spare and abstract way", fiction usually exploits dramatic imagining which "involves elaborating and ramifying the bare counterfactual in one or more ways" (Smith 2006, 39). According to Smith, whereas hypothetical imagining prudently serves the philosophical goal of conceptual investigation, dramatic imagination is apt to foster artistic qualities, including complexity and ambiguity, which are not only valued differently in philosophy, but may even mar philosophy's epistemic regulations. For this reason, Smith contends that "no matter how 'philosophical' the theme of a narrative, to the extent that it is designed as an artwork it is apt to put a spanner in the philosophical works" (2006, 40). As a case in point, Diehl highlights that good satire may have cognitive value, but "in order to meet the requirement of displaying wit or entertaining the audience" is also prone to succumb to what philosophical practice would identify as fallacies, like *ad hominem* attacks (2013, 312).

At the same time, Smith's account does grant, in principle, that fiction sometimes has specific cognitive virtues that philosophy lacks. Smith explains that dramatic imagining, which standardly characterises fiction, makes it so "that we are much more likely to be engaged emotionally than we would be if the same scenario were imagined in hypothetical fashion" (2006, 39-40). Crucially, such emotional engagement can develop what Berys Gaut calls a "cognitive-affective persepective onto the world" which is able "to bring home an understanding of the world through affective means" (Gaut 2007, 171). In other words, Gaut argues that narratives have a cognitive-affective dimension because they can engage the emotions in the function of acquiring knowledge. For this reason, some philosophers have acknowledged that "some typical narratives would appear to have differential advantages over moral theory for some purposes" (Carroll 2012, 381). Most prominently, Martha Nussbaum has turned to literary fiction because moral philosophy is commonly "a written form that expresses only intellectual activity and addresses itself only to the intellect of the reader" (1990, 8). Accordingly, Nussbaum explains that the style of philosophy insufficiently acknowledges that "powerful emotions have an irreducibly important cognitive role to play", especially in moral education (Nussbaum 1990, 8). On the ground of their exceptional contributions to moral education, Nussbaum argues that "certain novels are irreplaceably works of moral philosophy" (1990, 148). Yet, while Smith does not dismiss the potential moral impact of cognitive-affective imagination in fiction, he sceptically wonders whether such fiction "is to count as a kind of moral *philosophy*, or whether it is more aptly regarded as an extension of ordinary moral experience" (2010, original emphasis). Pace Nussbaum, the pivot is exactly that fiction has particular affective-cognitive value because it is not philosophy, for it were, it would be bound by the same stipulations and regulations of non-fiction that problematise imaginative engagement in philosophy in the first place.

The affective-cognitive advantages afforded by the liberties of fiction are crucial to appreciate the cognitive value of satire to critique. Occasionally, these fictional advantages have also been exploited by philosophers themselves, in philosophical fictions like Voltaire's *Candide* or novels by Iris Murdoch and Albert Camus. Yet, although these fictions develop philosophically significant thought, they only really constitute philosophy when complemented by traditional philosophical methods, either by the authors themselves or by philosophical exegetes. Similarly, satire may complement moral philosophy and critique, but is not by itself philosophy. Crucially, exactly because satire is not philosophy, but fiction,

the genre has a license to develop fantastical scenarios to a richer degree than thought experiments in philosophical non-fiction. In this respect, while satire may be realistic (Matz 2014; Wight 1964 [1936], 7), Northrop Fry has highlighted the prevalence of "fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd" in the genre (1957, 223). Focussing on fantasy in satire, I will analyse *South Park*'s "The Hobbit" (2013) as a fantastical analogy, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) as a fantastical prediction and Neill Blomkamp's *District 9* (2009) as a fantastical counterfactual. Each of these fantastical satires, in some respect, exploits the liberties of fiction to foster learning through the imagination in ways unavailable to thought experiments in philosophy. To be clear, this position does not deny that, in many other respects, philosophy has greater cognitive value than satire, but nonetheless legitimises the genre's significant cognitive value in a moral project of critique.

My first case study is the final episode of *South Park*'s seventeenth season, "The Hobbit". In some fan circles, this episode was praised as "the series' most biting social satire of the whole season" (Crow 2013). Specifically, "The Hobbit" satirises the effect of Photoshopped imagery on the self-esteem and well-being of young girls and women. I will argue that this episode has non-trivial cognitive value to a moral project of critique. In other words, even if one already knows that Photoshopped imagery is morally wrong, one nonetheless stands to learn from how the issue is addressed in "The Hobbit". In particular, *South Park*'s satire has cognitive value because it develops various analogies that highlight salient aspects of the problematic of Photoshopped imagery. In this respect, *South Park*'s "The Hobbit" is not unlike some philosophical thought experiments, including Judith Jarvis Thomson's violinist argument in "A Defence of Abortion" (1971, 48-49). In this short thought experiment, Jarvis Thomson aims to make it plausible that abortion can be justified by developing an analogy for unwanted pregnancy. Concretely, we are supposed to imagine how we would react if a famous violinist has been attached to our body without our consent and is using our physical resources to stay alive for a period of nine months, after which he will be cured and disconnected. Intuitively, we are supposed to respond that we have no obligation to sustain the violinist's life for nine months and draw analogous conclusions for relevant pregnancies.

However, whereas use of the imagination in Jarvis Thomson's thought experiment is disciplined and austere, *South Park*'s imaginative analogies are characteristically raunchy and, at times, morally ambiguous. As argued by Diehl, such ambiguity in satire "typically results in features that are considered philosophical deficiencies but which are nonetheless

embraced as positive features of the work [qua satire]", including "joyous *ad hominem* attack[s]" (2013, 319). Yet, although I agree that *South Park*'s raunchiness generates philosophical deficiencies, I argue it also stimulates learning in ways philosophical thought experiments could not, exactly because its use of the imagination is not similarly disciplined. In other words, I take seriously Matthew Kieran's suggestion that "morally dubious distortions" in satire may, in some respects, significantly contribute to critique (2005, 181). My exploration of this suggestion through *South Park*'s "The Hobbit" is in line with the careful cognitivism about satire developed above.

The story of "The Hobbit" focuses on the body image of nine-year old Lisa Berger, a member of the South Park Elementary cheerleading squad. Lisa lethargically complains that "[e]very cheerleading squad has 'the fat ugly cheerleader' and that's me." In response, the squad captain, Wendy Testaburger, retorts that Lisa simply suffers from "a bad self-image" and should go on a date, which would do "wonders for [her] confidence." However, when Lisa asks a boy out she likes, Butters Stotch, he obliviously responds, "I appreciate the offer, but you're too fat for me." After hearing what happened, Wendy angrily confronts Butters and shouts at him that Lisa is "a little overweight, but that's pretty normal for a girl in the fourth grade!" Butters steadfastly responds, "Kim Kardashian is skinny and she just had a baby!" He continues, "I have a different standard when it comes to my women. I want a woman who takes care of herself and knows how to look good, who's got perfect skin and no splotches on her legs, and perfect everything". Baffled and furious, Wendy responds, "This is a fantasy, you moron! Have you ever heard of Photoshop?! Kim Kardashian is a short, overweight woman who manipulates her image and makes average girls feel horrible about themselves! Look it up, stupid! In real life, Kim Kardashian has the body of a hobbit!" Afterwards, Butters informs the school councillor, Mr Mackey. Surprisingly, the councillor sides with Butters and reprimands Wendy for having "called Butters' girlfriend a hobbit." Dismissing Wendy's defence that she is "the biggest feminist in this school", Mr Mackey ignorantly brands her "a hater", who is "jelly" of Kim Kardashian's looks and success.

The satire of "The Hobbit" targets the problematic of Photoshopped imagery by developing various analogies between the storyworld of *South Park* and contemporary society. Its critique focuses on Kim Kardashian, who had recently appeared in a music video of her then-fiancé Kayne West, with her post-pregnancy weight airbrushed away in postproduction. Through the woes of Lisa Berger, *South Park* investigates the effect of such manipulative media practices on the self-esteem of young girls and women. Butters, a

notoriously naïve character in *South Park*, is a stand-in for unreflective heterosexual boys and men who are fooled by the standards of female beauty imposed by Photoshopped imagery. Similarly, Mr Mackey, who has a track record of incompetence as a school councillor, represents the qualified authorities who have failed to adequately respond to the issue. Finally, the predicament of Wendy, always the voice of progressive reason in *South Park*, is analogous to feminists whose appropriate critique of Photoshop is sometimes perversely dismissed as sexual jealousy. These satirical analogies are further developed when Wendy shows Butters how easy it would be to turn Lisa Berger into a 'hot bimbo' using Photoshop. However, mistaking the Photoshopped image for the real Lisa, Butters now desperately wants to take her out on a date. Yet, he is too late. After the Photoshopped picture went viral, Lisa is already dating another boy, Clyde. Ironically, Clyde was among the boys who had previously mocked Butters because he "got asked out by a fat girl" (fig. 13).

Figure 13

Nevertheless, he now gleefully parades Lisa's Photoshopped image around the school, while holding the real Lisa by the arm, much to the approval of the other boys (fig. 14).

Figure 14

The analogy between the problematic of Photoshopped imagery in contemporary society and the storyworld of *South Park* is witty as well as insightful. Amplifying the absurdity of Photoshop's quasi-magic spell on society, the simplicity of character motives and plot development in "The Hobbit", alongside the exaggerated responses of a few selected characters in the *South Park* universe, is both aesthetically and cognitively successful. At the same time, some imaginative techniques associated with satirical narrative thinking in "The Hobbit" are morally ambiguous and philosophically deficient. For one, Wendy's comparison of Kim Kardashian to a hobbit is not only an *ad hominem* attack, but mean-spirited. Still, not only is this visceral comparison funny, but it also emotionally cues the appropriate moral evaluation of Kardashian's Photoshopped deceit. Similarly, although the caricatural representation of Lisa Berger criterially pre-focuses an appropriately sympathetic response, it may also perpetuate exclusive beauty standards of its own. Not only is Lisa designed to look unattractive, but, most ambiguously, although somewhat overweight, she is not fat. The relative sameness of Lisa's body size to other characters in *South Park* serves exactly to highlight the absurdity of Butters's judgment and the perniciousness of aesthetic standards perpetuated by Photoshopped imagery. Yet, *South Park*'s representation of Lisa Berger as only overweight may ironically also constitute a form of 'fat oppression' (Eaton 2016), especially in contrast to the body of Eric Cartman, whose physical largeness is connected to his insatiable greed and downright nastiness. This symbolic immorality of fatness is further exploited in "The Hobbit" when an increasingly celebrity-like Lisa Berger comes to feel entitled to her surge in popularity on the grounds of her Photoshopped image.

As Lisa Berger develops from a victim of Photo-shopped imagery to a celebrity-like bully, her body transforms from overweight to fat. Although morally ambiguous, this transformation is crucial in the development of *South Park*'s insightful critique of neoliberal meritocracy, which the cartoon reveals as sustaining Photoshopped standards of beauty. When the other cheerleaders express annoyance at Lisa's newly-found popularity, she consoles them by advising, "[i]f you want to look really hot, like me, you just got to be willing to sweat. Get down to the gym and work!" However, her advice is ironically undercut by the layers of fat bulging out of her skimpy outfit, viscerally triggering aesthetic disgust and moral antipathy (fig. 15). This transformed representation of Lisa links to a parody of Britney Spears's "Work Bitch" (2013), in which the similarly scantily dressed celebrity proclaims, "You wanna hot body? You wanna Bugatti? You wanna Maserati? You better work bitch!" (fig. 16). Through Lisa's grotesque representation, *South Park*'s satirical parody visually undermines the truthfulness of Spears' meritocratic credo that a hot body and its associated material riches are the appropriate reward of hard work. Instead, Lisa's fat body signals deceit, highlighting the undeservedness of her popularity rooted in manipulated images, analogous to Spears and other celebrities. Albeit this symbolic association between fatness and immorality is morally problematic, it nonetheless is a constitutive part of a successful critique of Photoshopped imagery in "The Hobbit".

Figure 15

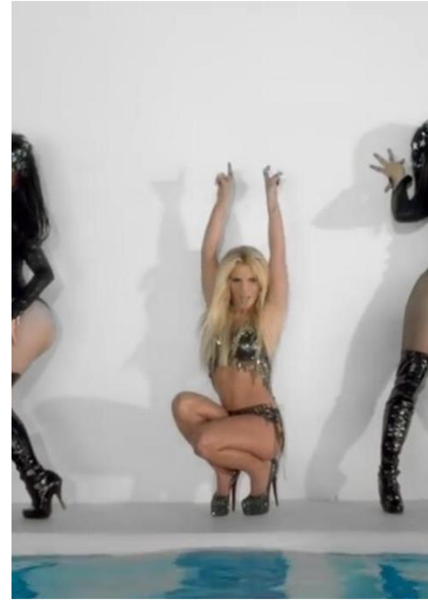

Figure 16

South Park's satirical parody of Britney Spears's "Work Bitch" is not only successful as entertainment, but also as critique of a pressing issue. Professional media critics generally praised Spears' "club jam about good work ethic" (Kessler 2013), further giving "Brit an 'A' for 'Abs.'" (Roschke 2013) for a video clip "in which Spears shows off her bikini body" (Sundstrom 2013). Most disturbingly, "Work Bitch" was co-opted into a questionable feminist project, as one critic argued that "the song is about the fact that women can and should work hard and find success" (Highfill 2013). *South Park* successfully critiques the pernicious meritocratic ideal which sustains the celebration of unattainable standards of physical beauty by succinctly revealing its fakeness, rooted in Photoshop and other manipulative techniques in postproduction. *South Park*'s parody of "Work Bitch" further juxtaposes images of Lisa showing off her fat body to the other cheerleaders manipulating their prepubescent bodies into sexualised objects. Through this montage of young girls 'working out' on Photoshop, *South Park* not only accuses Photoshopped imagery of perverting childhood, but also cultivating racism and ableism. Specifically, in a reduction to absurdity of society's obsession with airbrushing so-called aesthetic imperfections, a picture of a black cheerleader, Nicole, is shown to be whitewashed on Photoshop, as her dark skin colour is toned down and her frizzy hair straightened (fig. 17). Similarly, Timmy, a boy in a motorized wheelchair, is stripped of his mental and physical handicaps as if they were aesthetic imperfections (fig. 18). In this manner, *South Park* succinctly and insightfully highlights how malicious the standards propagated by Photoshopped imagery really are.

Figure 17

Figure 18

South Park's "The Hobbit" is a successful satire, in which aesthetic and ethical value continuously interact in fulfilment of the genre's purpose to critique and entertain. Greatly developing the medium of the animated cartoon, the satire of "The Hobbit" does not only deliver unexalted pleasures, but also has non-trivial cognitive value to a moral project of critique. Through extremely selective, simplified, exaggerated and emotive emplotment, *South Park* highlights salient aspects and intricate connections underpinning the problematic of Photoshopped imagery. The satire does not simply dismiss Photoshopped

imagery as morally wrong, which would be rather trivial, but visually captures the absurdity of its continued appeal, alongside its entanglement with the pernicious values of meritocratic neoliberalism. Moreover, exploiting the quick and dirty processes of satirical narrative thinking, *South Park*'s critique capitalises on the epistemic virtue of succinctness. Albeit the cognitive contribution of "The Hobbit" to a moral project of critique is ultimately moderate and requires further (philosophical) investigation, the satire nonetheless has distinct value as a neat introduction and sharp perspective, much like a philosophical aphorism. Interestingly, *South Park*'s satire has this specific cognitive value because it can develop imaginative techniques in ways which philosophy could not. Although the undisciplined use of the imagination in "The Hobbit" generates some philosophical deficiencies and moral ambiguities, its characteristic raunchiness does substantiate the episode's satirical critique. Pace Diehl, although a more disciplined use of the imagination would perhaps make it "possible to practice philosophy through satire", such philosophical austerity would here altogether undo the cognitive value of "The Hobbit" (2013, 320). Albeit the imaginative freedoms of fiction constitute a double-edged sword in satire, which necessitates cognitive caution, the genre would stand to lose much of its supplemental value to philosophy if similarly sanitised.

My second case study is Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Although markedly different in tone than *South Park's* "The Hobbit", *The Handmaid's Tale* similarly develops a fantastical scenario to make a critical point. Atwood's novel is a satire of the rise of the Religious Right and Moral Majority during Ronald Reagan's presidency. Atwood has described her satire as "play with hypotheses", specifically "some of the statements that are being made by the 'Evangelical fundamentalist right.' If a woman's place is in the home, then what? If you actually decide to enforce that, what follows?" (Rothstein 1986). Such prediction is analogous to thought experiments in non-fiction, including philosophy and journalism (Friend 2011, 172-173). Nevertheless, as fiction, Atwood's satire can develop its predictive fantasy in ways unavailable to an imaginative exercise in non-fiction. The fantastical premise of *The Handmaid's Tale* capitalises on typical satirical narrative thinking. In the nearby future, a group of puritan hardliners has instituted a patriarchal theocracy in which a class of fertile women, the handmaids, serve as concubines and surrogate mothers to a ruling class of commanders, whose wives have become infertile due to environmental pollution and STD epidemics. Once a month, every handmaid must engage in a bizarre mating ritual with her commander, alongside his wife, until she bears him a child, an act of

simultaneous polygamy justified on the grounds of Biblical principles. Presented in summary, Atwood's predictive fantasy is not unlike a philosophical thought experiment, like Judith Jarvis Thomson's violinist argument. Indeed, both constitute a feminist critique of religious laws that compromise a woman's right to control her own body. However, as fiction, *The Handmaid's Tale* has the imaginative freedom to solicit emotional responses that contribute to moral learning in ways unavailable to philosophy like "A Defence of Abortion" (1971).

The cognitive value of *The Handmaid's Tale* is connected to its classification as fiction. Specifically, despite critical recognition of *The Handmaid's Tale* as science fiction, Atwood has always insisted that her novel be classified as speculative fiction. According to Atwood, classification as science fiction suggests a world where humans have developed hitherto unknown abilities and technologies, whereas speculative fiction implies a certain fidelity to what is possible in the world at the time of publication (2005). In this regard, Atwood has argued that the fantastical events of *The Handmaid's Tale* "all had precedents, and many were to be found not in other cultures and religions, but within western society, and within the 'Christian' tradition, itself" (Atwood 2012). At the same time, she acknowledges that classification as speculative fiction facilitates "things these kinds of narratives can do that socially realistic novels cannot do", such as "explore proposed changes in social organisation, by showing what they might actually be like for those living within them" (Atwood 2005). Although unavailable to realistic fiction, such a fantastical scenario could nonetheless be developed as an imaginative exercise in non-fiction. Yet, whereas the bare premise *The Handmaid's Tale* is similar to the violinist argument in "A Defence of Abortion" (1971), classification as fiction permits Atwood to develop this premise in her hybrid satirical novel in ways unavailable to Jarvis Thomson. Specifically, the freedoms of fiction permit Atwood to invest the fantasy with an emotional depth that is uncharacteristic of philosophy.

The argument that fictional narratives permit an emotional development unavailable in non-fiction, in particular philosophy, is common. According to Martha Nussbaum, the complexity of concrete moral issues "cannot be fully and adequately stated in the language of conventional philosophical prose" (1990, 3), but can be captured "only [in] the style of a certain sort of narrative artist" (1990, 6). We need not make a claim as strong as Nussbaum to acknowledge that narratives can contribute to moral investigation. In this respect, Noël Carroll argues that "what typical narratives possess and which general moral theories lack is

detail, particularity, and concreteness" (2012, 374). At the same time, narratives "are patently more abstract than ordinary events, since the detail they afford has always been selected from an indefinitely larger array of further potential details" (2012, 375). Specifically, through techniques of emplotment, including criterial pre-focussing, narrative authors can cue emotional responses to the plot's particular events that correspond to general moral dispositions (Carroll 2012, 378). For instance, through flashbacks, *The Handmaid's Tale* elucidates the brutal details of how the protagonist is separated from her husband and daughter, further relating how she remains maddeningly ignorant of their fate in the present. Similarly, through subjective narration, audiences are privy to her eerie emotional disconnection during the monthly ritual rape. Importantly, exactly by focussing intently on the details that make the protagonist's suffering emotionally salient, *The Handmaid's Tale* stands to enrich moral disposition towards the oppression of women in general. Moreover, the emotional richness of *The Handmaid's Tale* can supplement and refine moral knowledge about gender oppression we already possess (Carroll 2000, 369; 2012, 181). In particular, the novel cannot only afford insight into previously unknown or otherwise inaccessible experiences, but it can similarly deepen understanding of previous incidents without actual harm.

These benefits to moral education of detailed emotional development in narrative fiction are theoretically sustained by a quasi-realist meta-ethical framework. For quasi-realists, in particular (though not exclusively), rational argument is barren without cultivation of the emotions. Quasi-realists therefore stress that "[r]eflection on the ethical climate is not the private preserve of a few academic theorists in universities" (Blackburn 2003, 5). Blackburn specifies that

> the satirist and cartoonist, as well as the artist and the novelist, comment upon and criticize the prevailing climate just as effectively as those who get known as philosophers. The impact of a campaigning novelist, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Dickens, Zola, or Solzhenitsyn, may [even] be much greater than that of the academic theorist (2003, 5).

Most recently, in response to the rise of post-truth politics and Trump's gender policies, audiences have turned in great numbers toward dystopian satires like *The Handmaid's Tale* "for guidance and insight" (Alter 2017). Similarly, the recent 10-part adaptation of *The Handmaid's Tale* on Hulu (2017) has been appraised as a timely "warning, about how

oppression can creep up on you, and what happens when women's lives are no longer their own" (Nicholson 2017). In particular, critics have linked the series' cognitive impact to criterial pre-focusing in Elisabeth Moss's performance as the eponymous handmaiden. Specifically, acknowledging the successful use of televisual techniques, Rebecca Nicholson praised "the closeup on Moss's face" during the ritual rape as "particularly disturbing" and "horrifying, as it should be" (2017). Overall, Nicholson lauded Moss's performance aesthetically as well as ethically for its emotive address that visualises "powerful resistance and seething rage" (2017).

By contrast, thought experiments in moral philosophy like "A Defence of Abortion" (1971) enrich moral understanding in different ways than narrative fiction. Concretely, the violinist argument serves as an intuition pump to the idea that a foetus inherently has no more a right to the non-consensual use of a woman's physical resources as a diseased violinist attached to her body without permission in order to keep him alive. However, while the violinist argument substantiates the legitimisation of abortion in principle, it does not (and neither does it intend to) resolve the actual moral ambiguities and doubts of concrete cases. In order to do so, Jarvis Thomson would have to combine the detail of a specific case with the emotional resonance typical of novels like *The Handmaid's Tale*. Yet, if she similarly were to focus on particulars and emotional detail, her argument would lose its abstract generality and rational force, which are important epistemic virtues in philosophy and beyond, including a legal context. Therefore, as argued by Carroll (2012, 381), amongst others, the cognitive function of narrative fiction is appropriately understood as supplementing rather than replacing philosophy. In particular, the fictional status of satire permits the genre to cultivate moral understanding in ways unavailable to philosophy, specifically through emotional development in response to narrative detail. For the record, such rich emotional development is more closely associated with narrative forms like the novel or television drama than the quick and dirty emotive processes of satirical narrative thinking. Regardless, hybrids like *The Handmaid's Tale* exemplify that the epistemic virtues of a succinct satirical premise can be complemented by careful novelistic development.

My third and final case study is the film *District 9*, directed by Neill Blomkamp. What is interesting about *District 9* is how its fantastical scenario about the moral responsibilities of humans towards alien visitors is reminiscent of a counterfactual thought experiment developed by Bernard Williams. Specifically, in "The Human Prejudice" (2009), Williams

argues against critics that species-membership, more specifically, humanness, is a morally significant property. These issues surrounding speciesism and the responsibilities of humans toward non-human animals have had considerable philosophical and political resonance, often crystallised in discussions about dietary obligations. At the same time, Williams highlights that these discussions are somewhat muddled due to the contingent fact of evolution that humans inhabit a lifeworld in which they do not have to deal with "any creature that in terms of argument, principle, worldview and whatever, can answer back" (2009, 148). In order to fully explore the issue of speciesism, Williams therefore develops a few philosophical thought experiments by borrowing "a possibility familiar from science fiction: that one day, we might encounter other creatures who have a point of view on our activities – a point of view which, it is quite vital to add, we could respect" (2009, 138). While there is no indication of influence between William's article and *District 9*, one of his thought experiments is strikingly similar to the plot and characterisation of the film. Crucially, although Williams typically fosters imaginative engagement through literary-like details in his thought experiments (Gaut 2007, 161-162), he is more constricted to do so in a philosophical context than he would be in narrative fiction. Exactly because *District 9* does have these freedoms of fiction, the film complements "The Human Prejudice" by stimulating imaginative learning unavailable to philosophy.

According to Williams, when science fiction films typically represent interspecies conflicts, they facilitate allegiance either by making hostile invaders appear "slimy and disgusting, or rigid and metallic", and friendly visitors "furry (…) or ethereal [like] fairies" (2009, 149). In order to explore the underacknowledged complexities of the speciesism debate, Williams introduces a more challenging scenario, suggesting that

> [t]he arrivals might be very disgusting indeed: their faces, for instance, if those are faces, are seething with what seem to be worms, but if we wait long enough to find out what they are at, we may gather that they are quite benevolent. They just want to live with us – rather close with us. What should we make of this proposal? (2009, 149).

Strikingly, Williams's concise philosophical thought experiment introduces the very same aesthetic and ethical challenge as *District 9*. Concretely, when more than a million undernourished and apparently aimless aliens are stranded without any recognisable leadership in a spaceship above Johannesburg, *District 9* investigates the moral

responsibilities of human beings toward alleviating their plight. The appearance of these aliens is uncannily close to the characterisation in Williams's thought experiment. They are large bipedal crustacean-like creatures, who look truly disgusting by human standards. Their most eye-catching characteristic is a set of slimy tentacles that covers the area of the nose and mouth (fig. 19). Moreover, the plot of the film sets up an interspecies conflict that expands on Williams's thought experiment in interesting ways.

Figure 19

As a satire, the function of the imaginative exercise in *District 9* does not wholly overlap with the cognitive aims of Williams's philosophical thought experiment. Acknowledging the purpose of *District 9* to entertain for its own sake, Blomkamp explains that "[o]verall, I just want[ed] to make a film that audiences would find compelling" (Oldham 2009). Still, Blomkamp stresses how entertainment interacts with critique in *District 9*, specifying "I wanted to take the structure of this apartheid society but also just deliver a very cool sci-fi film on top of that" (Oldham 2009). When the aliens first arrive, the South African government decides to house the aliens in a temporary holding zone, District 9. Yet, District 9 soon becomes permanent, fenced and militarised, symbolising the strict segregation between humans and aliens. Set in Johannesburg, the eponymous District 9 alludes to the racially segregated District 6 during Apartheid (Johnson 2009). Further, the segregation imposed on the aliens does not only parallel the racist policies of the Apartheid regime, but also mirrors the situation of black immigrants from Zimbabwe and Nigeria in contemporary South Africa. Blomkamp explicitly acknowledges that "[i]n essence, there is no difference

except that in my film we have a group of intergalactic aliens as opposed to illegal aliens" (Savage 2009). In this regard, the shacks inhabited by the aliens in *District 9* were real places of habitation in Johannesburg where people waited to be allocated government-subsidised housing (Woerner 2009). At the time of shooting, similar townships had been "ravaged by outbursts of xenophobic violence perpetrated by indigenous South Africans upon illegal immigrants from Zimbabwe, Malawi and elsewhere" (Itzkoff 2009). Against this contextual background, *District 9* develops a critique of racism and xenophobia through a fantastical interspecies conflict. Crucially, although not set up as an investigation of speciesism as such, the film nonetheless complements in "The Human Prejudice" in cognitively valuable ways unavailable to philosophy.

In "The Human Prejudice", Williams does not commit to a position about the dilemma whether humans should allow ugly aliens the right to cohabitation on Earth. His thought experiment merely serves as an intuition pump to signal that, as opposed to racial or gender identity, species identity would be a morally significant property in the context of migration. By contrast, *District 9* sets out to argue exactly that racial differences are irrelevant in granting humanitarian rights to immigrants. Analogous to the plight of immigrants in contemporary South Africa, the film shows how the autochthonous population of Johannesburg classify the aliens as subhuman, derogatively referring to them as 'prawns'. Tensions between the aliens and humans ultimately run so high that the government orders a private military contractor, Multi-National United, to relocate the entire alien population of District 9 to a tent camp outside (and out of sight) of Johannesburg. In this process, Wikus van de Merve, the speciesist bureaucrat put in charge of the eviction, becomes contaminated by alien technology and gradually starts to transform into an alien himself. Desperately seeking to undo this transformation, Wikus decides to collaborate with an alien, who has been allocated the human name Christopher Johnson. Over the years, Christopher Johnson and his young son have been working to reach and restart the alien mothership, where appropriate medical care for Wikus's condition can be found. Over the span of their collaboration, Wikus's alliance starts to shift, especially after discovering (and having himself been subject to) the kinds of medical experiments that MNU performs on the aliens to uncover the secrets behind their military technology. As the plot develops, the film cues its audience to choose the side of the aliens against Wikus's former employers' (and by extension, the human race).

The plot of *District 9* adds complexity to the philosophical thought experiment developed by Williams in "The Human Prejudice". In his analysis of *District 9*, Murray Smith argues that "the film dramatizes the idea that the concept of a person is not identical with the concept of an individual human agent. While human individuals are our typical model of what a person is, individual members of other species in principle might come to warrant that description" (2017, 325). This conclusion may seem to counteract Williams's argument that the human concern for other humans cannot be reduced to a set of morally relevant properties that constitute personhood. Yet, the dramatisation of *District 9* exactly reveals how personhood cannot be symbolically divorced from humanness, although it can so biologically. Smith explains that *District 9* sets itself an intriguing "aesthetic challenge" in seeking to cue allegiance with a character type that is designed to revolt at first sight (2017, 319). In order to meet this challenge, Smith clarifies that "it is no surprise we find the filmmakers helping themselves to a few aspects of human facial expression, above all through the eyes (…) and many expressive human bodily postures and gestures, counterbalancing the alien otherness of their facial features" (2017, 322). Similarly, Blomkamp acknowledges that the aliens "had to be human-esque because our psychology doesn't allow us to really empathize with something unless it has a face and an anthropomorphic shape" (Oldham 2009). In other words, *District 9* seeks to cue allegiance with the aliens by endowing them with quintessentially human characteristics. Despite their appearance of biological otherness, the film cues us to sympathise with the aliens as beings who symbolically incarnate humanness.

Through fictional means, *District 9* highlights a complexity in the debates about speciesism unacknowledged in Williams's philosophical thought experiment. As indicated, *District 9* capitalises on prereflexive processes of cognition that cue audiences to recognise the aliens' physiognomy and physique as exhibiting distinctly human characteristics. The point is that these characteristics contribute to the symbolic humanness of the aliens, but are not all morally-relevant features that constitute necessary conditions for personhood (for instance, a human-like posture or countenance). Thus, the imaginative exercise of *District 9* substantiates Williams's argument that the moral significance of humanness is not reducible to a set of morally-relevant properties that constitute personhood. At the same time, the film adds complexity to Williams's position by highlighting that humanness is morally relevant on a symbolic level and could, in principle, be divorced from biological species membership. Though an elaborate fantasy, *District 9* makes it plausible that an alien

species could similarly exhibit humanness, in which case we would have similar moral obligations as toward humans. Crucially, *District 9* has such cognitive value because it exploits cinematic techniques in ways unavailable to philosophy, specifically, digital compositing and motion/performance capture. The emotive force of these digital techniques is particularly evident from their absence in Blomkamp's short film *Alive in Joburg* (2006), in which the aliens are actors in suits with prosthetic tentacles and body armour. Although *Alive in Joburg* develops a similar plot to *District 9*, it is unable to cue the same affective engagement without the use of digital technology. Albeit such digital techniques are strictly speaking not unique to fiction, the fictional status of satire nonetheless does permit the film to criterially pre-focus emotional responses and moral allegiance in ways unavailable to non-fiction, including philosophy.

In conclusion, while fantastical satires like "The Hobbit", *The Handmaid's Tale* and *District 9* develop similar imaginative exercises as philosophical thought experiments, in some respects, they stimulate learning through the imagination in ways unavailable to non-fiction like philosophy, because they are fiction. Specifically, through criterial pre-focusing, these fantastical satires can imaginatively engage the emotions in a moral project of critique in a manner that thought experiments in philosophy cannot. This conclusion about the cognitive-affective advantages of fiction addresses a challenge by Gregory Currie and Anna Ichino ([forthcoming]). While Ichino and Currie acknowledge that techniques associated with fiction, including "processes of belief formation that bypass rational reflection" can result in knowledge, they do argue it remains to be shown "that certain kinds of fictions, in certain situations are apt to produce true (or better) beliefs [or knowledge] by such means" ([forthcoming], 8). My analyses do not resolve this challenge completely. Non-fiction, including philosophy, might have alternative strategies that engage the emotions in a moral project of critique which stimulate learning that is at least as good as the imaginative techniques exploited by narrative fictions, including satire. Still, my analyses do highlight that narrative fictions like satire can complement the cognitive aims of philosophy by stimulating "our affective engagement with fictional characters and situations" in ways which philosophical thought experiments cannot (Ichino and Currie [forthcoming], 8). Accordingly, satire can make moderate but significant cognitive contributions to a moral project of critique.

7. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have developed a careful cognitivism about satire in light of its common classification as fiction. As opposed to intuitions in contexts such as defamation laws, classification as fiction does not fundamentally preclude the truthfulness of satire. On a contextualist approach, there is no epistemic difference in kind between fiction and non-fiction. Specifically, both fictional and non-fictional representations commonly utilise imaginative techniques to stimulate learning about the real world. Nevertheless, classification as non-fiction does introduce regulations in the service of safeguarding truth that are absent in fiction. For this reason, fiction presents a riskier context for cognitive improvement than non-fiction. Moreover, specific caution is warranted in the case of satire, which exploits a quick and dirty narrative thinking that is equally prone to deception as truthfulness. Nevertheless, satirical narrative thinking can sometimes afford good satire the genuine cognitive virtue of succinctness. Accordingly, good satire can have moderate but genuine cognitive value, akin to the cognitive value of aphorisms in philosophy. Furthermore, the fictional status of satire permits the genre to further complement philosophy by developing the imagination in ways unavailable to non-fiction. In particular, the emotive address of satire permitted by its fictional classification can sometimes stimulate learning, especially in the moral domain, in a manner unavailable to philosophy. Regardless, satire is itself not philosophy, nor does its cognitive function replace or live up to the epistemic constraints of philosophy. Rather, while good satire must always be complemented by further philosophical investigation grounded in experience, it sometimes also complements philosophy in moderate but significant ways.

My careful cognitivism about satire acknowledges the role of good satire in a moral project of critique. In the case of such good satire, its aesthetic pursuit of entertainment will successfully interact with its ethical and cognitive purpose to critique. Still, overall, the cognitive function of satire in a moral project of critique is less extraordinary than supporters of the genre have often asserted. Satire has its cognitive role to play in critique, but only in assistance to philosophy and other epistemic best practices. Similarly, I have stressed that any political function that satire may claim as critique will typically be modest in comparison to more directly activist strategies. Ironically, my defence of satire as critique may therefore really seem to substantiate its triviality. However, critique is a holistic endeavour in which many practices incrementally contribute to emancipation, often modestly, including satire. Moreover, the demand that satire has extraordinary cognitive

and political value as critique is not only asking too much, but to do the genre a disfavour. Consider the issue of post-truth politics. If the value of satire was exclusively determined by its success in safeguarding journalistic standards or keeping Donald Trump out of the White House, detractors might rightly argue that we can do without it. Not only has contemporary satire failed to accomplish these objectives, other media can inform us better about these issues, while again other practices have more substantial political impact. At the same time, it is crucial that the generic purpose of satire is not exhausted by critique, but also incorporates entertainment. In this respect, I will conclude my investigation by arguing that the true significance of satire is its combination of critique alongside aesthetic and emotional strategies to cope with the limits of critique.

CHAPTER FOUR: HUMOUR, IRONY AND THERAPY

1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will investigate the value of satire as therapy, more specifically, a coping strategy to deal with the limits of critique. This investigation of satire's therapeutic value will highlight the significance of the genre's definitive combination of critique and entertainment. In the previous chapter, I have argued that satire can have moderate but distinct cognitive value as critique. Good satire capitalises on entertaining techniques associated with fiction to highlight what is wrong with the world. At the same time, the aesthetic seduction of entertainment makes the genre cognitively risky, while even good satire needs to be complemented by further and more detailed investigation. In other words, although satire can make distinct cognitive contributions to a moral project of critique, it does not overall constitute cognitive best practice. In this respect, it has been a constant theme in this thesis that there are more effective avenues to pursue critique than combining it with entertainment. However, it does not follow that satire is simply second-rate critique, perhaps replaceable by more effective critical strategies. Instead, I will argue that the true significance of satire is that its purpose to entertain complements the limits of its purpose to critique. This argument develops in further detail the idea previously introduced that the unexalted aesthetic pleasures of entertainment have therapeutic potential as a life-affirming force in light of existential absurdity.

The significance of the definitive tension between critique and entertainment in satire relates to the moral conflict between the care of self and the care for others. Before, I have introduced a quasi-realist meta-ethical framework to root the eminent importance of critique and its aim to realise emancipation in the moral concern for the common good. In this respect, it is a virtue of satire that it sometimes contributes to critique, even if only moderately. Yet, although critique is eminently important, it is also limited. It is not simply satire which struggles to change the world, but even more effective forms of critique are limited in their pursuit of emancipation. Crudely put, the ideal to wholly emancipate the world seems hopelessly absurd in light of the everyday horrors of the world. Given its limits, relentless fixation on critique is bound to madden and depress. Accordingly, critique, although indispensable, compromises the care of self if unabated. These existential concerns lie at the heart of satire and substantiate the significance of its definitive tension between critique and entertainment. Specifically, in this chapter, I will investigate how satirists introduce humorous and ironic perspectives to cope with their critical limits in

fostering emancipation. Satirists often cultivate a humorous irony both to attack the ills of the world and to cope with their relative inefficiency in curing them. In this respect, many satirists frame their satire as a way to remain sane in mad world they cannot wholly amend.

2. SATIRE AS THERAPY

The idea that satire constitutes a form of therapy is commonplace, albeit there are different interpretations of what the genre supposedly cures and how. Since the inception of the genre in Roman times, it has been popular to claim that "satire is a literary medicine for a world morally and socially out of health; and, if this holds good, the satirist is a kind of doctor" (Wight 1964 [1936], 8). Accordingly, in literary criticism, it has become common to argue that a satirist like Juvenal "believes that the case of man and society is desperate, and he applies appropriate therapeutic treatments: the whip, the scalpel, the strappado, the emetic, the burning acid" (Kernan 1959, 22). This understanding of satire as a curative and punitive practice, which heals through painful remedies, remained influential during the Renaissance and was further developed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when satirists often framed their work in relation to contemporaneous medical practice (Gallagher 2013). Augustan satirists commonly presented satire as a medicine against moral corruption and as a particularly effective remedy to society's moral ills (Elkin 1973, 74/79). Similar ideas about the therapeutic function of satire are also evoked in other historical contexts. Discussing late-18th century Dutch satire, Marijke Meijer Drees. E. and Ivo Nieuwenhuis signal that "[s]atire is often presented as a bitter but necessary medicine for a society that wants to cure itself from all sorts of social and moral ills, and the satirist is the doctor who delivers this medicine as a cure to the patient, the target of the satire" (2010, 209, my translation).

However, although common, the idea of the satirist as doctor who cures the moral ills of the world is problematic. Throughout my investigation, I have argued that the social and political impact of satire must not be overestimated. Similarly, many satirists have acknowledged the limits of satire. Take Jonathan Swift, who ridiculed the consensus about satire's therapeutic function in the Augustan age and mocked his fellow "satirists [for intending] to use the public much at the rate that pedants do a naughty boy ready horsed for discipline" (2009 [1704], 32). According to Swift, satire "will only serve to vex Rogues, though it will not amend them" (quoted in Elkin 1973, 86). Nevertheless, the idea of satire as therapy remains informative, if construed differently. Here, I take a lead from Jon Stewart, who acknowledges that "if [satire]'s purpose was social change, we're not picking

a very effective avenue" (Fettis 2015). Instead, Stewart suggests that "[i]n some respects, the real outcome of satire is typically catharsis – and whether that's positive or negative I don't know" (Fettis 2015). Stewart further clarifies "catharsis for me, as far as the audience goes, I have no idea". Similarly, James Sutherland explains, "[w]e need not take Persius too literally when he says that he must speak out or burst; but much of the world's satire is undoubtedly the result of a spontaneous, or self-induced, overflow of powerful indignation, and acts as a catharsis for such emotions" (1958, 4). Likewise, Catherine Keane presents Juvenal's early satires as "a cathartic anger therapy" (2015, 38). This idea was later transposed to Eminem's satirical hip-hop, who, like Juvenal, programmatically suggests "that by venting his spleen, he is able to calm himself down" (Rosen and Baines 2002, 114).

The therapeutic benefit of satire is not changing the world as much as coping with it. This function as therapy does not result from satire's punitive success as critique, but rather the unexalted aesthetic pleasures associated with its pursuit of entertainment. Thus, instead of stressing the bitterness of the genre's remedy, James Sutherland highlights "the relief, or even pleasure, that [satire] gives to the satirist" (1962, 153). Sutherland qualifies this pleasure as "a means of relief for [the satirist's] own outright feelings" (1962, 154). The same therapeutic function of entertainment in satire has also been transposed to its audiences. While Jon Stewart avows ignorance about the cathartic effects of his satire on audiences, his role as a satirist on *The Daily Show* has been described as "equal parts news anchor and therapist for liberals of a certain persuasion" (Sugarman 2016). Similarly Andrew Horton, discussing Soviet satire, argues that "the satiric impulse as demonstrated in jokes, ironic comments, and such is a necessary ingredient of daily life for citizens within a totalitarian or authoritarian state if they are to maintain their own sense of worth, individuality, and self-esteem" (Horton 1993, 6). Crucially, while Jon Stewart's America may seem a very different context than the totalitarian Soviet Union, it shares an essential hopelessness with satirical contexts from Juvenal's Rome to Swift's Ireland. Whatever the socio-historical context, satire has often served as an outburst against an absurd social and political situation that seems unlikely to change. For this reason, David Nokes rightfully highlights the therapeutic dimension of satire as "an instrument not for change but for grumbling acquiescence" (1987, 17).

The therapeutic dimension of satire puts its relatively moderate success as critique in perspective. Satire should not be understood as second-rate critique, but as a balancing act between the moral need to critique and the therapeutic need to accept the limits of

critique. Nevertheless, there is an obvious tension between these needs. Nokes clarifies that "[b]y allowing anger and indignation to vent themselves in laughter, rather than build into action, satire may be a substitute for, not a summons to, revolution" (1987, 17). The danger is that although the pursuit of entertainment in satire may be therapeutically beneficent, it may also stimulate undue acquiescence. In particular, the humorous and ironic techniques exploited by satire have often been mistrusted for allegedly breeding cynicism and indifference. Conversely, humour and irony have sometimes also been identified as a therapeutic panacea in the face of existential doubt and absurdity. The position I set out to develop below is that the therapeutic value of humorous and ironic strategies in satire lies somewhat in the middle. As opposed to detractors, I will argue that the distance introduced by humour and irony in satire need not necessarily compromise moral commitment. Yet, I will also mitigate claims by supporters who argue that humorous irony introduces a perspective from which the absurdities of life simply dissolve. Instead, I will argue that humorous irony in satire does not resolve the limits of critique, but can function as a mature way of coping with them. Accordingly, satire can have therapeutic value in addressing the fundamental conflict in ethical life between the concern for the common good and the care of self.

This conflict between the concern for the common good and the care of self has often been addressed in moral philosophy. Martha Nussbaum introduces this conflict by explaining that philosophers are fortunate to live "[a] life of leisured self-expression" in "a world in which hunger, illiteracy and disease are the daily lot of a large proportion of the human beings who still exist, as well as the causes for many of who do not still exist" (1994, 3). Whereas Nussbaum stresses the need for critical strategies that "support relevant types of political action and social service", to which philosophers can actively contribute, she also introduces philosophy as a therapy for "addressing the most painful problems of human life" (1994, 3). Nevertheless, Bernard Williams sceptically wonders "can we really believe that philosophy, properly understood in terms of rigorous argument, could be so directly related to curing real human misery, the kind of suffering that priests and doctors and – indeed – therapists address?" (1994, 25-26). Irrespective of whether Williams's scepticism is fully justified, I do think that rigorous philosophical argumentation is apt to highlight existential issues which it cannot resolve by itself. The limits of critique strike me as one such existential problem which good philosophy highlights but cannot wholly attenuate. Irrespective of any therapeutic strategies philosophy may itself develop, I will investigate

humorous and ironic strategies in satire as coping devices that can complement this therapeutic process in significant ways.

3. ADDRESSING ANXIETIES ABOUT HUMOUR AND IRONY

The idea that humorous and ironic strategies in satire have therapeutic value is problematised by the suspicion that these strategies make satire whimsical by introducing too much distance from the seriousness of critique. Often, these dangers of humorous irony in satire have been understood in relation to suspicions about postmodern relativity. Although praised by some, many have dismissed such allegedly postmodern uses of humour and irony in satire as non-committal and cynical. Granted, these anxieties and suspicions signal a genuine danger that humorous and ironic strategies in satire may flirt with moral indifference. Take Jan Böhmermann's poem "*Schmähkritik*", which is problematic as a satire because of its ambiguity in attacking Turkish president Erdogan. Throughout, Böhmermann's humorous and ironic flippancy undercuts any sustained critical intent. As Böhmermann rhymes stereotypical and hyperbolic insults together, it is unclear whether he sets out to critique Erdogan's undemocratic policies or to simply indulge in a gratuitous attack. Accordingly, Böhmermann's tongue-in-cheek putdown of Erdogan flirts with moral indifference and critical disengagement. However, problem cases like "*Schmähkritik*" are not indicative of humorous and ironic strategies in satire generally. As opposed to "*Schmähkritik*", humour and irony in good satire often function as mature coping devices to deal with existential issues bound up with critique. For this reason, I will mitigate postmodern and other anxieties about the immorality of humorous and ironic strategies in satire by revisiting *South Park*'s "The Hobbit" and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. At the same time, I also discuss Fay Weldon's *Sacred Cows* (1989) to highlight that humorous irony in satire can be therapeutically ambiguous.

Humorous and ironic strategies in satire have often been understood in a postmodern framework, as is clear from the scholarly reception of *The Simpsons.* Depending on their take on postmodernism, scholars have either praised or condemned *The Simpsons*' so-called postmodern use of humorous irony. Supporting postmodern politics, Kevin Dettmar has argued that what *The Simpsons* does "and at a very profound level that only irony can plumb, is heighten our awareness of the radically contingent nature of every choice we make" (2004, 104). Endorsing another tenet of postmodernism, Brian Ott has argued that "[f]ew shows today are more reflexively fake self-aware of their status as images and representations for which there is no external reality than *The Simpsons*" (2003, 60).

Accordingly, Ott has praised *The Simpsons* as "a show that not only knows it is a television show, but also ironically or cynically comments on that fact" (2008, 71). Similarly, Peter Steeves has argued that "*The Simpsons* is masterful in its use of quotational discourse" which reflects that there is "no escaping language" (2016, 242). However, Doyle Greene has exactly criticised the lack of depth in "the postmodern humour approach pioneered by *The Simpsons* [which] made the cultural reference an end – the joke in and of itself" (2007, 206). Likewise, Ted Gournelos has denounced the humorous irony of *The Simpsons* "in which surface levels of play create a system of camp, pastiche, and an 'anti-aesthetic' that conveys a detachment or hedonistic/nihilistic overinvolvement with the status quo and popular culture" (2009, 89). Similarly, Carl Matheson has argued that *The Simpsons* cultivates a "hyper-irony" and "does not promote anything, because its humor works by putting forward positions only in order to undercut them" (Matheson 2001, 118).

This reception of ironic and humorous strategies of *The Simpsons* echoes common links between the tenets of postmodern and humorous irony. Some postmodernists have explicitly acknowledged that "[b]ecause we cannot step outside our language games, we can only play ironically within those games" (Colebrook 2002, 3). In particular, Umberto Eco has suggested that those who know that communication can only repeat "the already said" will "consciously and with pleasure play the game of irony" (1984b, 45-48). As postmodernism claims to reveal language as a closed system, from which a complete symmetry in standing of opinions results, humorous irony is commonly introduced as "a therapy that will free us from language, for we will now regard language neither as representation nor as a law to which we are bound but as material for play and self-creation" (Colebrook 2002, 8). Similar ideas have been developed by Richard Rorty, in particular, who advocates an ironic attitude in response to the "contingency of language" or "the fact that there is no way to step outside the various vocabularies we have employed and find a metavocabulary which somehow takes account of all possible vocabularies, all possible ways of judging and feeling" (1989, xvi, original emphasis). Accordingly, Rorty introduces the concept "'ironist' to name the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires" (1989, xv). Rorty further qualifies that ironists are therefore "never quite able to take themselves seriously" (1989, 73-74).

Typically, the postmodern cultivation of humorous irony is linked to an individualistic aestheticism. Rorty argues that by accepting the contingency of selfhood, a postmodern

ironist can "get out from under inherited contingencies and make his own contingencies, get out from under an old final vocabulary and fashion one which will be all his own" (1989, 97). This individualistic aestheticism problematises traditional conceptions of morality as it overthrows the "distinction between the moral and the 'merely' aesthetic" (1989, 82). For the ironist, the guiding principle for a good life is not moral truth but fashioned creativity. At the same time, Rorty has nuanced that "[i]rony seems inherently a private matter" and has dismissed the idea of "a culture which socialized its youth in such a way as to make them continually dubious about their own process of socialization" (1989, 87). For this reason, Rorty suggests that theories of irony are "pretty much useless when it comes to politics" (1989, 83) and introduces a "public-private split" in his political philosophy, specifically endorsing a politics of liberalism in the public domain (1989, 85). However, critics of *The Simpsons* have contended that its politics is encapsulated exactly by its humorous irony. For this reason, humorous and ironic strategies in satire like *The Simpsons* or *South Park* have often been criticised for cultivating cynicism and moral indifference (Wallace 2002; Bybee and Overbeck 2001; Groening 2008). Especially during the so-called 'age of irony', this dismissal of humorous irony in satire resonated with anxieties about widespread cynicism and moral detachment in youth culture (Becker 2008; Bewes 1997; Owen 1997).

These postmodern anxieties and suspicions about humorous irony can be further framed in a philosophical model introduced by the early Kierkegaard. Under the influence of Hegel, Kierkegaard defined irony as an attitude of infinite absolute negativity, an attitude which he saw embodied by Socrates. John Lippitt (2000, 149) has specifically linked Kierkegaard's conception of irony as infinite absolute negativity to Wayne Booth's concept of "unstable irony" (1974, 240), a nihilistic attitude which refuses to affirm anything. On Kierkegaard's idiosyncratic reading, Socrates was a nihilist who wholly rejected the established order of his society, without offering any values in return (1989 [1841], 217/131/145). Kierkegaard specifically identified Socrates's irony as a pretence which feigns adherence to the values of society while really undermining them (1989 [1841], 264). Accordingly, Kierkegaard identifies irony as "something that at rock bottom is comic" (1989 [1841], 131) but without any "redeeming feature" as it "reinforces vanity in its vanity and makes what is lunatic even more lunatic" (1989 [1841], 257). In other words, the ironist's pretence may ridicule social values, which are in need of critique, but this ironic ridicule does not itself bring about something of value. In this regard, Brad Frazier has described the early Kierkegaard's

conception of Socratic irony as “the rejection of earnestness about anything” (2006, 114). For this reason, Brain Söderquist argues, Kierkegaard’s “Socrates is best understood as a self-centred and politically apathetic figure” (2007, 82). Similarly, the humorous irony of *The Simpsons* is denounced as politically apathetic by its critics because it allegedly ridicules the fundaments of society without offering any values in return.

A similar kind of philosophical critique of humorous irony has been developed by Simon Blackburn, especially in response to the position developed by Richard Rorty. Blackburn specifically targets the “aestheticism or the weightlessness that Rortyan irony seems to suggest” (2006, 167). While Blackburn acknowledges that the success of moral deliberation is not rationally compelling but contingent on the socialisation of our emotions, his quasi-realism nonetheless permits talk of truth and objectivity in the domain of ethics. For this reason, Blackburn argues that “irony appears philosophically out of place in the philosophical situation that Rorty recommends” (2006, 167). Since ethics is not simply a matter of contingency, quasi-realists like Blackburn condemn Rorty’s “weightless aesthete, to whom all real commitment is a subject of joke or parody” (1998, 290). Thus, although Blackburn admits that humorous irony can “certainly be attractive”, especially in the sense of “the flexibility and humour that an appreciation of one’s own peculiarities can engender”, he nonetheless concludes that in our moral lives “we can safely set the irony aside” (1998, 290). However, Blackburn’s dismissal of humorous and ironic strategies may be a bit rash. As highlighted, Blackburn’s quasi-realism is characterised by a fundamental conflict between the concern for the common good and the care of self. Concretely, whereas the concern for the common good makes a commitment to critique indispensable, unabated critique is not only unlikely to wholly emancipate the world but also likely to compromise personal wellbeing. For this reason, the limits of critique necessitate some therapeutic distance. In this respect, I suggest that humorous and ironic strategies can sometimes serve as mature therapy to cope with the limits of critique, especially as exemplified in good satire.

Strategies of entertainment in satire, specifically humour and irony, do not necessarily signal the whimsicality of the genre. As previously discussed, these strategies can contribute to the moderate but significant cognitive value of satire in a moral project of critique. Yet, the real significance of satire’s generic purpose to both critique and entertain is a balancing act between a critical commitment to improve the world and a therapeutic acceptance of our limits in doing so. Through its purpose to entertain, good satire has the

potential to negotiate an appropriate therapeutic distance to cope with the limits of critique. In this respect, satire is more intriguing than other forms of entertainment, such as sports. Although the cultivation of aesthetic engrossment in sports can be therapeutic, unlike satire, it does not by itself address the conflict between the common good and the individual good. Whereas aesthetic engrossment in sports puts the concerns of everyday life aside, good satire combines the therapeutic dimension of entertainment with the moral demand for critique. Accordingly, good satire offers a space to negotiate the fundamental conflict between the care for others and the care of self in moral life. In particular, humour and irony in satire can introduce appropriate therapeutic distance from the emotionally painful gap between critical ideals and reality. Accordingly, humorous irony in satire does not simply promote merriness, but typically features into a complex emotional negotiation that sits somewhere between hope and despair. Hence, insofar as good satire is cathartic, its catharsis does not stimulate forgetfulness of the world's horrors, but instead serves as a therapeutic coping strategy to critically face them without succumbing to distress.

My proposal that humorous and ironic strategies in satire can have therapeutic value goes beyond other suggestions that have aimed to redeem humorous irony in satire like *The Simpsons*. One such valuable suggestion follows from Linda Hucheon's assessment of so-called postmodern critique as "bound up, too, with its own complicity with power and domination" (1989, 4, original emphasis). Concretely, Hutcheon introduces the issue that a satire like *The Simpsons* critiques consumer capitalism and television culture, but is itself complicit in these systems. According to pessimists like Frederic Jameson, such complicity destroys "critical distance" and impedes critique (1984, 22). Yet, alleviating such anxieties, Hutcheon suggests "[i]t is the function of irony in postmodern discourse to posit that critical distance and then undo it" (1989, 15). In this respect, Simone Knox (2006, 78) and Jonathan Gray (2005, 154/160-2) have argued that by ironically highlighting its own complicity as a commercial product, *The Simpsons* creates the distance necessary for critique. Gray has explained that humorous irony in *The Simpsons* not only sidesteps hypocrisy and naivety, but also avoids preachiness and patronising audiences (2005, 165). The force of Gray's suggestion is exemplified by the absence of humorous and ironic strategies in Aaron Sorkin's *The Newsroom* (HBO, 2012-2014), which has often been unfavourably compared to satires like *The Daily Show* or *The Colbert Report* for its patronising critique of American journalism (Jarvis 2013; McNamara 2012; Stanley 2012). Still, my proposal goes beyond identifying humorous and ironic strategies in satire as

contributing to a reflexive critique which avoids taking itself too seriously. Instead, I suggest that humorous irony in satire contributes to a therapeutic negotiation between the demands of critique and its limits.

A concrete (and by now familiar) example of such therapeutic negotiation through humorous and ironic strategies in satire is *South Park*'s "The Hobbit". As discussed, *South Park*'s satire ridicules various targets which contribute to the pernicious pervasiveness of Photoshopped imagery. Crucially, this use of humour and irony in *South Park*'s satire not only has a cognitive function in revealing the malice of Photoshopped imagery, but also a therapeutic function in dealing with the absurdity of its continued prevalence. Specifically, through the humorously ironic pushback experienced by Wendy Testaburger in her attack on Photoshopped imagery, "The Hobbit" negotiates a therapeutic response to the limits of critique. For one, the ironic ridicule of targets who are too blind to see the falsity of Photoshop when it is right in front of them affords Wendy a symbolic superiority when a political victory is out of reach. Moreover, the cultivation of humour and irony in "The Hobbit" repeatedly takes the sting out of Wendy's inability to change the world. In this respect, the ending of the episode is crucial. When everybody at South Park Elementary ignores her critique, Wendy takes her grievances about Photoshop to national television. She succinctly sums up the critique of "The Hobbit" when she explains that "[w]atching what Photoshop is doing to society... Little girls are aspiring to have bodies they can't possibly have! We have to put a stop to it." However, once more, Wendy's feminist critique is dismissed as sexual jealousy. In response, Wendy still adamantly refuses to let the indifference of society stop her crusade on Photoshopped imagery. Yet, surprising Wendy in her sleep, Kayne West later emotionally blackmails her by standing up for his fiancée's deception. Ultimately, Wendy yields and transforms her own image into a sexualised bimbo on Photoshop. The episode draws to an end with a powerful image of Wendy crying as she emails her fake picture to everybody in the school (fig. 20).

Figure 20

Culminating in Wendy's ultimate defeat, *South Park*'s "The Hobbit" ends with a reflection on the limits of critique. Throughout the episode, Wendy's mission to attack the malice of Photoshop parallels that of *South Park*'s creative team, specifically creators and executive producers Trey Parker and Matt Stone. In this respect, Wendy's painful failure to beat the cult of Photoshop is a sobering comment on the limited social and political impact of *South Park's* satire and, by extension, other forms of critique that have unsuccessfully sought to redress this issue. At first sight, it may seem that the end of "The Hobbit" offers precious little coping strategies to deal with the painful limits of critique, viscerally embodied by Wendy's sorrow. In a review for *The A.V. Club*, Ryan McGee argues that there is ultimately "no catharsis for the audience, which in turn potentially speaks to the anger with which Parker and Stone treat this topic. (…) We don't get [something] (…) to deflate the tension and send us merrily along our ways" (2013). Although McGee is right to highlight the bleakness at the end of "The Hobbit", some ironic and humorous catharsis does follow in the form of an outro or kicker after the credits. "The Hobbit" does not really conclude on Wendy's sorrow, but reprises earlier ironic ridicule of Kayne West, desperately failing to provide reasons why his fiancée is really not a hobbit. Accordingly, at the very last moment of the episode, ironic laughter tops emotional pain. This conclusion of "The Hobbit" is indicative of how humorous and ironic strategies throughout the episode serve to counterbalance the despair inherent in the absurd prevalence of Photoshopped imagery.

The ending of "The Hobbit" signals how *South Park* develops humorous and ironic strategies to cope with the limits of critique, without altogether succumbing to

indifference. A similar mix of commitment to critique and acquiescence in its limits also characterises Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, albeit the humorous irony is more subdued. As a dystopian satire, *The Handmaid's Tale* is an extremely bleak prediction about the contemporaneous growing influence of the religious right. Throughout, Atwood combines the careful emotional development of her protagonist's plight as a handmaid with a wry and sardonic attack on the absurdity of the regime's patriarchal monotheism. These two tendencies in Atwood's storytelling are particularly apparent in her description of the monthly 'ceremony' during which the commander tries impregnate his handmaiden while she lies between the open legs of his infertile wife. As the commander works his way toward climaxing "with a regular two-four marching stroke" and his wife pretends "as if it is she, not [the handmaid], who's being fucked", Atwood's description of the situation is at once chilling and farcical (1996 [1985], 105). A similar mix of intense distress and sardonic solace speaks from the handmaid's interior monologue, as she "remember[s] Queen Victoria's advice to her daughter. *Close your eyes and think of England*. But this is not England. I wish he would hurry up" (Atwood 1996 [1985], 105, original emphasis). In the recent adaptation of the novel as a drama series (Hulu 2017), Elisabeth Moss's performance of the protagonist similarly incorporates a sardonic perspective which affords her a symbolic superiority over her political oppressors. In this manner, not unlike *South Park*'s "The Hobbit", *The Handmaid's Tale* incorporates humorous and ironic strategies which introduce distance and, accordingly, relief in a depressingly awry political situation.

At the same time, the ending of *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals a complexity about the therapeutic function of humorous and ironic strategies in satire. While dystopian, Atwood's satirical novel is not wholly pessimistic about the future. Similar to Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal*, which features as an epigraph at the beginning of *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood ultimately reveals the eponymous handmaid's tale as presented by two editors, who happened to stumble on it in 2195. Atwood has explained that she modelled the ending of *The Handmaid's Tale* on the final chapter about newspeak in George Orwell's *1984*, "written in standard English, in the third person, and in the past tense, which can only mean that the regime has fallen, and that language and individuality have survived" (2003; see also Atwood 2012; Atwood 2004; Rothstein 1986). Similarly, the "partial transcript of the proceedings of the Twelfth Symposium on Gileadean Studies", at the end of *The Handmaid's Tale*, signals that the Gilead regime is now history (1996 [1985], 331). Moreover, the planned fishing trip and nature excursion during the symposium indicate

that the ecological disasters of the 21st century have been overturned, while Professor Marryan Crescent Moon's role as conference chair makes it evident that women are once more able to pursue professional careers. Nonetheless, the optimism of this final chapter is tempered by Atwood's wry representation of one of the co-editors' keynote address, Professor Pieixoto, as he frequently indulges in shamelessly sexist remarks, much to the delight of his audience. Accordingly, although *The Handmaid's Tale* ends on a hopeful note, it also sardonically acknowledges the advances of feminist critique as only intermittent.

The ending of *The Handmaid's Tale* signals the ambiguity of humorous and ironic strategies in satire, which may not exclusively promote therapeutic distance through merriment, but cultivate a certain bitterness. This therapeutic ambiguity of humorous irony in satire is particularly evident in Fay Weldon's satirical pamphlet *Sacred Cows. A portrait of BRITAIN post-RUSHDIE, pre-UTOPIA*. Constantly flirting with cynicism, Weldon satirises the social conditions in the UK that bred extremist reactions to Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. While Weldon denounces Islamist extremism, she also chastises Britain's liberal cultural elite for its spineless pluralism and soggy multiculturalism that tolerated such extremism. Weldon develops her satire by introducing a dark parable, comparing contemporary Britain with a woman who in advance of a wedding feast "took weevily meal and brackish water and set them in a cracked bowl and [saw] there was no good in them" (1989, 1). Sarcastically, Weldon clarifies that the "weevily meal" refers to "wholemeal flower, the stuff of self-congratulation. 'My diet is natural so my conscience is clear.'", while the "brackish water" refers to "tap-water, symbol of our apathy. London water is rich in oestrogen; it comes from the urine of the women in Reading, where the birth pill's popular" (1989, 2). Chastising Britain's liberal elite, it is clear Weldon also targets her own complacency. She later also sarcastically acknowledges that "being white, middle class and prosperous, nothing deeply hurts me" (Weldon 1989, 12). Throughout *Sacred Cows*, Weldon cultivates darkly humorous and ironic techniques which seem to introduce not so much therapeutic distance as cultivate self-defeatism and self-loathing.

Nevertheless, Weldon's *Sacred Cows* does not wholly succumb to cynicism. While Weldon pessimistically stresses "[n]othing good without something bad", she also optimistically suggests that "the bad need not be permanent" (1989, 16). Weldon writes that the mix of weevily meal and brackish water can nonetheless yield nutritious bread, albeit her own elitist demographic of so-called "active citizens (…) must put on sackcloth for a time, and smear ourselves with ashes, and repent our various follies and self-deceptions" (1989, 2).

Specifically, Weldon highlights Salman Rushdie's *Satanic Verses* as a catalyst which may help to transform "our awful, awful society" (1989, 2). In other words, whereas Weldon's work flirts with cynicism, it ultimately settles for a mix of hope and despair about the improvement of society, which also characterises "The Hobbit" and *The Handmaid's Tale*. Still, the darkness of *Sacred Cows* signals an important ambiguity in the use of humour and irony in satire. Although it seems that such humorous and ironic strategies in satire may introduce a healthy therapeutic distance from the limits of critique, there is also a risk that they stimulate a problematic cynicism. In other words, humorous irony in satire is not obviously therapeutically beneficent. This suspicion highlights the issue of when and how the use of humorous and ironic strategies in satire can positively or negatively impact psychological wellbeing. In what follows now, I will address this issue by introducing some psychological and philosophical perspectives on humour and irony as therapeutic strategies.

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON HUMOUR AND IRONY

The idea that art can have therapeutic value is common and has been widely investigated in scholarship (see Crossick and Kaszynska 2016, 100-112). This idea can be traced back as least as far as Aristotle's *Poetics*, which introduced the idea that tragedy delivers catharsis. Over time, this notion of catharsis has been transposed to various artistic contexts, including satire. There are several interpretations of this Aristotelian idea of catharsis and how it relates to tragedy as well as art more broadly, but I will not engage with these debates (see Belfiore and Bennet 2008, 79-91). I will also sidestep debates about personal wellbeing and art in general; neither will I engage with the rich literature on art therapy (see Belfiore and Bennet 2008, 92-106). Instead, I will engage with debates on the therapeutic function of irony and humour. More so than irony, empirical studies in psychology have addressed the impact of humour on personal wellbeing. Yet, although some useful conclusions have been drawn about humour as a character virtue and the correlation of some humour styles to mental health issues like depression, methodological difficulties prevent to transpose these findings to humorous and ironic strategies in satire. For this reason, philosophical research remains necessary to conceptualise how comic and ironic strategies in satire could have a therapeutic function. In philosophy, the idea that humour and irony can have a therapeutic function has been usefully framed in relation to the absurdity of life, albeit these ideas need further development. In this respect, I will

suggest to frame the therapeutic function of humour and irony in satire as narrative strategies to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits.

The idea that humour and its bodily manifestation as laughter may function as therapy dates back at least as far as ancient Greece (Halliwell 2008, 16-17). The idea still persists in the contemporary practices of laughter therapists and professional organisations such as The Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor (AATH). Over time, the therapeutic benefits of humour and laughter have specifically come to be associated with psychological wellbeing. Lydia Amir (2014) has traced a similar line of thought in Shaftesbury's philosophy, rooted in ancient Greek humoral medicine. According to ancient humoralism, illness was a matter of imbalance between the various body fluids or 'humours'. In particular, melancholy, or spleen, was conceptualised as an excess in black bile (*melaina chole*). Around the turn of the seventeenth century, Shaftesbury still referred to this ancient view by identifying "melancholy as 'ill-humor'" and suggesting mirth as a therapy to restore psychological equilibrium or so-called "good humor" (Amir 2014, 31). Shaftebury's distinction between humour, as a strategy against melancholy, and good humour, as the resulting virtuous disposition, is indicative of complex taxonomic distinctions at the time. Yet, drawing on the work of Wolfgang Schmidt-Hidding (1963), Willibald Ruch has explained that, under the influence of humanism, the mostly neutral concept 'humour' gradually became equivalent to 'good humour' or "*humanitarian*, *tolerant*, and *benevolent* forms of laughter" (1998, 6, original emphasis). By the nineteenth century, Ruch argues, humour was considered "a specific English cardinal virtue, joining others such as *common sense*, *tolerance*, *compromise*" (1998, 9, original emphasis). This idea of humour as a character virtue which contributes to wellbeing has not only remained part of contemporary folk psychology, but has been actively developed by the positive psychology movement.

Positive psychology came to prominence around the turn of the millennium as a psychological programme which did not focus on curing psychopathological conditions but instead on "building positive qualities" (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, 5). Specifically, synthesising philosophical and religious works from various cultures, positive psychologists identified twenty-four character strengths that correspond to six universal virtues contributing to the good life (Dahlsgaard, Peterson and Seligman 2005; Dahlsgaard 2004; Peterson and Seligman 2004). Grounded in correlational studies based on self-report and surveys, humour has been identified as one such character strength, compatible (in various degrees) with the six core virtues, i.e. wisdom, humanity, transcendence, courage, justice

and temperance (Beermann and Ruch 2009a; Beermann and Ruch 2009b; Müller and Ruch 2011). The character virtue of humour has also been said to strongly relate to life satisfaction and psychological wellbeing (Peterson et al. 2007). Moreover, positive psychologists claim that humour can be morally virtuous, including corrective humour, such as satire, which “involves moral-based ridicule” (Ruch and Heintz 2016, 5). On the grounds of correlational studies and surveys, such corrective humour has been identified as “correlating most strongly to strengths of the virtues wisdom, courage, and justice” (Ruch and Heintz 2016, 2). These findings seem to substantiate some previously introduced intuitions about the virtuous role of comic and ironic strategies in satires like “The Hobbit” and *The Handmaid’s Tale*. Nevertheless, these findings about the virtues of humour in positive psychology are not without problems.

First, there are philosophical issues with positive psychology’s rather impatient approach to ethics and the good life. In its desire to spell out and empirically measure the psychological criteria that constitute the good life, positive psychology glosses over significant moral complexities. For one, its model of virtue ethics is too optimistic, since individual life satisfaction does not necessarily correspond to the wellbeing of others (Blackburn 1998, 212-214). In other words, there is a gap between character virtues and moral goodness which remains unaddressed in the framework of positive psychology. Second, there are some methodological issues with the theories and taxonomies of humour employed in positive psychology. In particular, Willibald Ruch, the driving force in this field, almost exclusively relies on a taxonomy introduced by Wolfgang Schmidt-Hidding in the 1960s. Similarly, recent considerations about irony in positive psychology showcase a lack of engagement with wider discussions in pragmatics and aesthetics (Bruntsch, Hofmann and Ruch 2016). Third, other psychologists have problematised positive psychology’s presumption that “humor as a strength is unipolar” (Müller and Ruch 2011, 369). Specifically, positive psychology does not address the issue that some forms of humour may have a negative psychological effect and that psychological wellbeing may depend as much on the presence of beneficial humour styles as the absence of detrimental ones (Edwards and Martin 2014; Maiolino and Kuiper 2014). Although these criticisms do not wholly invalidate the findings about humour in positive psychology, they introduce considerable complications.

Apart from positive psychology, one other major strand of psychological research into humour is associated with the Humor Styles Questionnaire (HSQ) developed by Rod Martin

and colleagues (2003). This model outlines maladaptive and adaptive humour styles on the basis of how they influence agency (i.e. individual autonomy and control) and communion (i.e. social connectedness) (Kuiper and Martin 2016, 503). On the whole, the HSQ considers self-enhancing and affiliative humour styles as adaptive, while self-defeating and aggressive styles are maladaptive (Kuiper and Martin 2016, 505). Using the HSQ, several correlational studies have established that depression is negatively correlated to affiliative and self-enhancing humour, but positively to self-defeating humour (Rnic, Dozois and Martin 2016; Tucker et al. 2013; Hugelshofer et al. 2006; Kuiper et al. 2004). These findings seem to support the therapeutic ambiguity of humorous and ironic strategies in dark satires like Fay Weldon's *Sacred Cows*, which verges on self-defeatist cynicism. Nevertheless, despite the widespread acceptance of the HSQ, its methodological soundness has been challenged by positive psychologists (Heintz and Ruch 2015, 16). Specifically, Ruch and Heintz have argued that the strong correlations generated between humour and psychological wellbeing are really governed by non-humorous components in the contextual description of the HSQ's questions and not by the actual existence of humour styles (2013, 17). These methodological suspicions introduce significant problems to the findings of the HSQ.

Moreover, an additional methodological drawback of both the HSQ and positive psychology is the exclusive reliance on correlational studies. In other words, most findings about humour and wellbeing in the current psychological literature result from comparing various questionnaires for statistically relevant correlations. Irrespective of the reliability of self-report, it is a significant methodological drawback of this approach that it cannot establish causal relationships between humour and dimensions of wellbeing (Martin 2007, 281). At the same time, while experimental research could address this issue, such tests are rather artificial and divorced from the everyday contexts of humour (Martin and Kuiper 2016, 501). Moreover, for my purposes, it is a methodological issue that most psychological research on humour and wellbeing focuses on humour as a character trait or an aspect of ordinary conversation. By contrast, investigations about the therapeutic impact of comedy performances on audiences are sparse, if not dismissed as irrelevant. Specifically, Martin acknowledges that he focuses exclusively on conversational instead of performance humour, as he assumes that "[s]pending a lot of time laughing at sitcoms on TV is likely to make you less healthy, rather than more healthy!" (Martin and Kuiper 2016, 508). Albeit that the veracity of this presumption is debatable, it nonetheless indicates that

psychological research about the impact of conversational humour styles on wellbeing does not necessarily map onto the therapeutic value of humorous strategies in satire.

Still, current research in psychology on humour and wellbeing can to some degree inform my investigation into the therapeutic value of humour (and irony) in satire. Positive psychology has substantiated the idea that humour can be a character virtue, correlating to life satisfaction, while the HSQ introduces necessary caution about some humour styles augmenting rather than alleviating mental health issues like depression. Nonetheless, due to current methodological difficulties, I will not transpose empirical conclusions about humour and wellbeing to the therapeutic value of satire. Instead, I will investigate philosophically how the therapeutic function of humorous and ironic strategies in satire can be conceptualised. I do so partly to redress a lack of conceptual clarity in the psychological debates outlined above and partly in the hope that these conceptualisations may one day foster empirical testing. Specifically, I will further develop philosophical intuitions about humour and irony as coping devices in face of existential absurdity to conceptualise how humorous irony in satire is designed to address the conflict between the demands of critique and its limits. My intervention in these philosophical debates will be to conceptualise the therapeutic function of humour and irony in face of absurdity as strategies in a process of narrative thinking.

In philosophy, humour and irony have sometimes been introduced as responses to the absurdity of life. Thomas Nagel has conceptualised existential absurdity as epistemological scepticism resulting from mankind's inability to cosmically justify their values (2012 [1979], 17-18). According to Nagel, "[w]ithout developing the illusion that they [human beings] are able to escape from their highly specific and idiosyncratic position, they can view it *sub specie aeternitatis* – and the view is at once sobering and humorous" (2012 [1979], 15). Seeing ourselves this way, Nagel observes, "we return to our familiar convictions with a certain irony and resignation" (2012 [1979], 20). Thus, Nagel suggests that a humorous irony makes the absurdity of life bearable. Yet, Nagel stresses that such an attitude is strictly a coping mechanism, for it is "[n]ot that irony enables us to escape the absurd" (2012 [1979], 20). Lydia Amir has introduced similar ideas, although there are some important differences. Amir understands "[t]he absurdity of our situation (…) as a case of desires frustrated by the awareness of the impossibility of fulfilling them" (2014, 229). As Camus (1955) highlighted, this understanding of the absurd is symbolised by the labour of Sisyphus, who has been charged to forever pursue a task he can never complete. Amir

specifically borrows the idea from Kierkegaard that "the humorous emerges as soon as one is aware of instances of existential contradictions" (2014, 129) and concludes that "[t]he reason humor is basic to human life is that contradiction is basic to human life" (2014, 163). By contrast to Nagel, Amir ultimately does argue that a particular humorous attitude can set us free from the absurd.

Further developing and adapting ideas introduced by Kierkegaard, Amir argues that "contradiction is both humorous and tragic" (2014, 163). In this regard, she explains that "[t]he tragic sense of life originated in tragedy, but (…) now wanders freely without the much-needed cathexis that the aesthetic form gave it" (Amir 2014, 220-221). At the same time, she highlights that "[t]he greatest challenge the tragic view of life presents, I believe, is to produce a cathexis or therapy that does not deny its contents" (Amir 2014, 222). In response, Amir proposes that "the tragic sense of life requires the therapy that humor is able to provide" (2014, 219). Although Amir stresses that "the humorous mood is transitory" and offers "no steady results" in resolving existential absurdity (2014, 9), she argues that existential absurdity ultimately dissolves when we accept our ridiculousness (2014, 206). Amir stresses that "[i]n contradistinction to the joy arising out of the humorous mood, which is transitory, the joy that follows from embracing one's ridicule is constant" (2014, 281). She continues to evoke a Nietzschean *amor fati* (or love of fate) by suggesting that "[o]nce joy is attained as a permanent state one's relation to life changes, for joy enables the affirmation of everything" (2014, 281). In conclusion, rather than identifying humour as a coping device in face of the absurd, Amir makes the bolder claim that "[t]ransmuting suffering into joy, the alchemy of humor reveals itself as redemptive in bringing about a harmonious state and a serene joy that rivals the highest philosophic and religious ideals" (2014, 275).

However, although Amir interestingly highlights links between humour and the absurd, her position is indicative of somewhat overly optimistic claims about the therapeutic value of humour. Concretely, not only is there no empirical evidence that humour can transmutate suffering into serene joy, but this argument is also inconsistent with the idea of a therapy that does not deny the absurd dimensions of life. Further, the Nietzschean overtones of what Amir describes as "a constant, serene, and affirmative joy, otherwise empty of content" suggest a similarity between her position and the postmodern celebration of difference which precludes ethics and critique (2014, 280). Indeed, transmutating the suffering caused by, say, social injustice, into joyous affirmation is to deny part of the

emotional motivation for critique, including satire. This mismatch between satire and serene joy is acknowledged by Amir in her discussion of Shaftesbury, who was "not interested in the satirical method but rather in a 'sober kind of cheerfulness'" (2014, 37). Specifically, Shaftesbury stressed that "[a]ll splenetic people (…) have a necessary propensity to criticism or satire" (quoted in Amir 2014, 36) and he considered a sober cheerfulness exactly as a "remedy for the melancholy of satire" (Amir 2014, 37). Yet, such sober cheerfulness, without some melancholic acknowledgement of the world's horrors, is really an escapism which does not sustain the need for critique. In this respect, the constant mix of despair and relief in satires like "The Hobbit", *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Sacred Cows* reflects a necessary negotiation between the demands of critique and its limits, which cannot simply be transmutated into a constant, serene, and affirmative joy.

In this respect, this attitude of a constant, serene, and affirmative joy is exactly the target of Juvenal's caricature of the ancient philosopher Democritus in his tenth *Satire*. While literary reception has traditionally considered the introduction of Democritus as a programmatic shift from anger to ironic mockery in Juvenal's satirical oeuvre, Catherine Keane has argued that such readings miss a more complex point (2015, 117ff). Specifically, Keane has highlighted that Juvenal's characterisation of Democritus is not so much programmatic as it is caricatural and really serves to express concerns about the "amorality that his [Democritus's] laughter gives" (2015, 123). As represented in Juvenal's caricature, "Democritus found cause for laughter in *all* human occupations" (2015, 122, original emphasis). Through this caricatural characterisation, Juvenal does not aim to endorse such an attitude but to highlight exactly that "it is difficult to write culturally meaningful satire as a laughing nihilist" (Keane 2015, 146). At the same time, Juvenal contrasts the nihilistic laughter of Democritus to the weeping Heraclitus, who acts "as a symbol of unrelenting melancholy" (2015, 125). According to Keane, Juvenal's point is that the attitudes of both philosophers "are technically justifiable by the conditions of human life" and that "the satirist neither immediately approves of nor immediately dismisses either 'philosophy'" (2015, 125). Crucially, Juvenal acknowledges that an appropriate response to the human condition incorporates emotional characteristics associated with both Democritus and Heraclitus (Keane 2015, 147). Dismissing the wholesale cheerful detachment and tranquillity of Democritus as an illusion, satire also includes a melancholic dimension associated with Heraclitus (Keane 2015, 165-166).

Therefore, whatever therapeutic dimension humour in satire may have, it does not foster a constant joy or sober cheerfulness. By contrast, satire inevitably incorporates melancholic qualities because its purpose to critique constantly highlights what is going awry in life. Moreover, insofar as critique is limited in its efforts to wholly emancipate the world, a degree of melancholy seems inevitable in negotiating between the demands of critique and its limits. In this respect, critique is somewhat of an absurd endeavour, not unlike a Sisyphean labour, doomed to never fully succeed in its efforts. There is a danger that acknowledging this absurdity develops into the full-blown inertia of depression. In response, I consider part of humour's function in satire as a therapeutic strategy to cope with the melancholy of critique. Here, I take a lead from Herbert Lefcourt, a psychologist who introduced a moderate conception of "humor as an emotion-focused coping response" (2001, 111). According to Lefcourt, many of life's tragic aspects are both insollubable and beyond our control. He therefore considers "accepting what is uncontrollable" as a more optimal response than "continuously beating our heads against the wall in attempts to master insoluble problems" (Lefcourt 2001, 5). According to Lefcourt, "[h]umor seem[s] to offer itself as one possible avenue toward the study of acceptance" (2001, 5). Developing this suggestion, I consider it fruitful to investigate how humour in satire "help[s] relieve despair" through coping with the uncontrollable tragic dimensions of life (Lefcourt 2001, 112).

Similarly, in combination with humour, I suggest that irony in satire can serve a therapeutic function in accepting the inevitable limits of critique. This therapeutic function of irony has been highlighted by Wilhelm Schmid, who calls it "the *art of distancing*" or "[t]he art of living with contrarieties" (1998, 375, original emphasis, my translation). Crucially, through irony, "[t]he contrarieties [of life] are not denied and not dissolved" (Schmid 1998, 357, original emphasis). More specifically, without ignoring them, irony allows individuals to distance themselves from their inability to live up to their ideals as well as the absurdities of the world. In Schmid's own words, irony allows for "distance in face of the internal contrarieties of the subject itself, in order not to be torn by them, and distance in face of external contrarieties, in order to bring contrary elements together from a distance, but, as Kierkegaard says, 'not in a higher union, but in a higher folly'" (1998, 376, original emphasis, my translation). In other words, an ironic attitude can acknowledge the absurdities of life without dissolving them into a metaphysical union that would make them less horrific than they really are; instead irony turns them into folly, in order to deal with their unresolvable

absurdity. However, such an ironic attitude is not without risks. In particular, Schmid identifies the "*dangers*" of humorous irony as "the habit of the subject to resign in unbearable contrarieties and only ironise them" and thus "never speak seriously anymore, show no spine, support nothing, so that everything goes" (1998, 380, original emphasis, my translation). These genuine risks of irony in satire are exemplified by Böhmermann's ambiguous attack on Turkish President Erdogan, discussed above, which is so ambiguous that it ultimately fails to make a clear moral commitment.

In what follows, I will investigate how certain humorous and ironic strategies in satire are designed to cope with the absurd dimensions of life, without ignoring the risks of the therapeutic distance they introduce. Although there is currently too much methodological and other uncertainty to make interesting empirical claims about the therapeutic effects of humour and irony, empirical research does not make it implausible that humorous and ironic strategies could have a moderate but positive impact on wellbeing. Irrespective of actual therapeutic benefits, a lot of satire can be shown as intentionally designed to cope with the limits of critique, specifically through humour and irony. My suggestion is to conceptualise this therapeutic design of humour and irony in satire as narrative techniques. In this respect, the therapeutic function of narratives is well-established. Talking therapies are commonly acknowledged to have a strong narrative dimension and professional therapists regularly tell stories of their own or recommend novels to clients in order to address therapeutic needs (Kottler 2015, 29). In psychiatric and psychotherapeutic contexts, "story-making" is regularly framed "as a life-supporting process, a psychic resource, a defence against futility, emptiness, and formless terror" (Roberts 1999, 13). Similarly, in philosophy, it is commonly acknowledged that stories help people to make sense of the world (Williams 2002, 233). Often, this therapeutic dimension of narrative sense-making has been traced back to the function of myths and folktales in making sense of a bewildering and frequently hostile world (Gersie and King 1990, 23).

This link between therapeutic storytelling and myth-making does raise the caveat that stories may function as a therapy to cope with the world because they misconstrue it. Certainly, a narrative interpretation of wrongdoings in the past which absolves someone's guilt may be therapeutically beneficent for them, but is not necessarily true. In particular, Peter Goldie has highlighted the risks of therapeutic storytelling if "[w]e cannot accept the thought that sometimes stuff happens, stuff for which there is no rational explanation, and for which no meaning can be given"(2012, 172). Similarly, Bernard Williams has warned

aainst the phenomenon of “wishful thinking”, explaining that “the steps from its being pleasant to think of P, to its being pleasant to think that P, to thinking that P, cover no great psychological distance” (2002, 83). In order to address this danger, Williams argues that “the disciplines of the virtues of truth” should be directed against the “hidden and indirect process” of wishful thinking in order to prevent that beliefs “become hostage to desires and wishes” (2002, 83). In the previous chapter, I have similarly appealed to the virtues of truthfulness to mediate the risk that fictional strategies in satire may deceive. Yet, although satire does not present the most epistemically safe environment, satirical narratives are not by definition untruthful. Moreover, in what follows, I will argue that humorous and ironic strategies in satire may serve exactly as a defence against wishful thinking about the efficacy of critique. Specifically, by introducing distance from its demands, certain humorous and ironic strategies in satire are designed to cope with the difficult truth that critique cannot wholly emancipate the world. As long as such humorous and ironic distance in satire does not turn into indifference, it can plausibly serve a mature therapeutic function in coping with the absurd gap between ideal and reality.

For the record, my argument about the therapeutic function of humorous and ironic strategies in satirical narratives sidesteps any assessment of satire’s value as therapy in a clinical setting. Instead, I am concerned with therapy as an ordinary practice of confronting life’s everyday psychological difficulties, especially in response to suffering and injustice in the daily news. This daily suffering and injustice motivates the demands of critique and the need for emancipation, but also introduces the need for psychological distance in light of the limits of critique to realise emancipation. In this sense, therapy cannot be divorced from ethics, for the response to suffering and injustice in the world is a negotiation between the critical care for others and the therapeutic care of self. The idea that the therapeutic function of humour and irony in satirical narratives to cope with the limits of critique also includes an inalienable ethical dimension corresponds to the role of narratives in ethical life more broadly. Noël Carroll has specifically highlighted the “*orientational*” role of narrative thinking in deliberating what we ought and ought not to do (2012, 390, original emphasis). Similarly, my suggestion is that humorous and ironic strategies in satire can function as part of an at once therapeutic and ethical deliberation of what should be done and what cannot be done in the service of critique. My suggestion about this ethical and therapeutic function of humour and irony in satirical narratives is based, in part, on Peter Goldie’s analysis of dramatic irony in narrative thinking, as a way of coming to terms with

the past and work through specific emotional processes, like grief (2012, 26-75). In what follows now, I will explain how Goldie's ideas can be further developed to clarify the therapeutic role of a particular kind of humorous irony in satire.

5. HUMOROUS IRONY IN SATIRE

My argument is that satire incorporates a therapeutic and ethical negation between the care for others and the care of self in its defining combination of critique and entertainment. Specifically, entertaining strategies in satire like humour and irony can contribute to critique, as previously discussed, but they can also serve a therapeutic function by introducing psychological distance from the limits of critique. A promising model to understand this therapeutic function of humorous and ironic strategies in satirical narratives has been introduced by Peter Goldie. According to Goldie, engaging with narratives involves understanding and appreciating "divergences" in perspectives, for example between perspectives of characters internal to the story or between the internal perspective of a character and the external perspective of the author, etc. (2012, 30). One such divergence in perspectives is dramatic irony, i.e. when audiences are aware of salient information lacked by a character internal to the story. Dramatic irony can have a tragic function, as in *Oedipus Rex*, but is also often exploited for comic purposes, especially in comedies of error like Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing,* in which the audience has an overview of how the various characters aim to deceive each other, which they themselves lack. According to Goldie, in our own narrative thinking, dramatic irony can be a strategy to come to terms with the past and negotiate the at times painful tension between what we know now but did not before (2012, 36-37). Along similar lines, I will argue that humorous irony in satire can function as a therapeutic strategy to cope with the demands of critique and its limits.

Humorous strategies in satire not only serve an obvious entertaining function, but are also closely connected to the genre's purpose to critique. Take the critique of *South Park*'s "The Hobbit", which thrives on ridiculing various targets and their response to Photoshopped imagery. This function of ridicule in satire can be conceptualised by drawing on the incongruity theory of humour, which outlines how we cognitively process humour (Martin 2007, 5-10). Noël Carroll has argued that the incongruity relevant to humour is "a deviation from some presupposed norm" or "an anomaly (…) relative to some framework governing the ways in which we think the world is or should be" (2014, 17). Carroll further explains that "in some cases, humour may even function to *enforce* norms – to serve as a corrective"

(2014, 76, original emphasis). Ridicule in satire typically serves exactly such an enforcing function. In “The Hobbit”, *South Park* sets out to ridicule various targets whose behaviour falls short of the moral norm that one should denounce Photoshopped imagery (embodied by Wendy Testaburger). Throughout the episode, various other norm-violations further substantiate the moral wrongness of these targets. Butters Stotch is ridiculously naïve about Kim Kardashian’s photos, Mr Mackey is ridiculously incompetent as a school counsellor and so are the media who wrongfully condemn Wendy as jealous, etc. Thus, apart from its evident function as entertainment, such ridicule based on moral and other norm-violations is an important strategy to substantiate satire’s purpose to critique.

The function of ridicule in satire can be further conceptualised by drawing on the superiority theory of humour. Not all, but some forms of humour involve expressing an attitude of superiority toward a target (Lintott 2016, 365). Concretely, *South Park*’s “The Hobbit” ridicules the viewpoints of Butters, Mr Mackey and others on Photoshopped imagery as morally and intellectually inferior, portraying them as too short-sighted to spot Photoshop’s falsity when it is right in front of them. This cultivation of moral and intellectual superiority through ridicule serves the genre’s purpose to critique, but also has an important therapeutic dimension. In “The Hobbit”, Wendy, as stand-in satirist, may be morally and intellectually superior, but her efforts have little political efficacy. In this respect, ridicule in satire often serves as a symbolic victory to cope with the lack of political success. Dustin Griffin explains that “[i]n some readers (and satirists too) satire no doubt induces a gratifying sense of moral victory to compensate for their status as political underdogs or outsiders. (...) The special compensations of satire have to do (...) with the sentiment it fosters of superiority in morality or in wit or in power” (1994, 156). The therapeutic dimension of such ridicule is evident, for example, in a short story by LeAnne Howe on how her Choctaw ancestors were tricked into selling New Orleans to the French. Superiorly mocking the French colonist Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville for his thick accent, short-temperedness and boorishness, Howe comes to terms that ultimately “the joke was on us” (2013, 46). In this respect, Dean Rader explains that “at almost every moment when one expects [Howe] to veer toward trauma or drama, she opts for comedy” (2013, vi).

The therapeutic dimension of humour to deal with emotional distress resonates with some versions of the relief theory, associated with Freud’s idea of laughter as a physiological release of psychological energy (Morreall 2007, 222). Irrespective of whether humour (or

laughter) involves such a release, it is commonly accepted that cognitively processing humorous incongruities stimulates a feeling of mirth (Martin 2007, 7) or humorous amusement (Carroll 2014, 2). According to Rod Martin, mirth refers to “the distinctive emotion that is elicited by the perception of humor”, which generates “a unique feeling of well-being” in the form of a pleasurable biochemical response in the body that is “closely related to joy, and contains an element of exultation and a feeling of invincibility” (2007, 8). Typically, the non-verbal expression of this emotional state manifests itself as laughter or smiling (Martin 2007, 9). Carroll further specifies that humorous amusement is triggered by normative incongruities which are “neither threatening nor anxiety producing nor annoying but which can, on the contrary, be enjoyed” (2014, 34). Moreover, in this emotional state “we are not concerned to discover legitimate resolutions to incongruities”, as when addressing a puzzle or a problem, but instead are quite happy to let them “simply joll[y] us” (Carroll 2014, 36). For this reason, mirth or humorous amusement is characterised by a feeling of “levity” or “an experience that accompanies the disappearance of a cognitive demand into nothing” (Carroll 2014, 49).

Regardless of the impact of mirth in dispelling negative emotions, the therapeutic dimension of humour can be conceptualised in terms of what Carroll has called “humorous distance or humorous anaesthesia” (2014, 32). Carroll explains that “in order for humorous amusement to obtain” one “must regard the incongruity not as a source of anxiety but rather as an opportunity to relish its absurdity” (2014, 29). For this reason, “what is potentially threatening, frightening, or anxiety producing about [humorous incongruities] must be deflected and/or marginalized” (Carroll 2014, 30). The therapeutic function of such humorous distance is developed explicitly in Christine-Jane Wilson’s “cartoons about the fears and foibles of crossdressers”, published under the pseudonym Kris (Gardner 2016). Discussing feelings of guilt and shame in coming to terms with her gender identity, Wilson explained that “[t]he one thing I thought I would never ever be able to laugh about was my transvestism” (Gardner 2016). Nevertheless, Wilson acknowledged that “[a]ll my life, the main savior of my sanity has been my sense of humor. When I grew depressed, if I feared ridicule or rejection, eventually the funny side would hit me and I’d be able to laugh and climb out of the depression” (Gardner 2016). Wilson explains how she eventually started to find “humor in being a transvestite”, which resulted in a body of cartoons that incorporated this therapeutic dimension (Gardner 2016). In other words, regardless of the emotional

impact of mirth or amusement on depression, the very act of laughing at anxieties and worries may introduce a therapeutic distance which robs them of their sting.

The concept of humorous distance or anaesthesia has sometimes been explicated in terms of non-seriousness or play. According to Martin, "[t]he social context of humor is one of play" (2007, 5) and "[w]hen they engage in play, people take a nonserious attitude toward the things they are saying or doing (…) rather than having a more important goal in mind" (2007, 6). Tom Cochrane has further argued that humour is non-serious in the sense that its norm-violations lack the pragmatic force necessary for substantive attitude change as "we manage to shift into a playful mode of thought, where we are no longer practically, emotionally engaged with the world in the same way" (2017, 58). Thus, according to Cochrane, "if a humorous work reveals the absurdity of something, we can either find it funny and not have our attitudes significantly influenced, or else be significantly influenced but not find it funny" (2017, 52). However, there is a problem with the idea that "play is disengaged from life" and "that it is not serious" (Carroll 2014, 43). Concretely, Wilson has explained "[i]t's not that I regard crossdressing as an entirely humorous activity" but "[w]hile I realize it's a sensitive and serious subject, I think we can sometimes be a little too serious about it. Surely there's room for a few laughs" (Gardner 2016). Granted, humour robs its objects of seriousness by putting them in perspective. Nevertheless, that act in itself may have a serious goal, as is clear from the therapeutic function Wilson ascribes to her humorous cartoons. Moreover, pace Cochrane's pessimism about humour's impact on attitude change, the point of Wilson's cartoons is exactly to change people's attitude about their gender identity through humour, more specifically, attenuate an otherwise crushing seriousness.

Humour can have a therapeutic function not only when it is directed outwards, specifically by putting down otherwise more powerful targets, but also when it is directed inwards, by putting in perspective one's own worries and limits. These two therapeutic functions of humour frequently coincide with ironic strategies in satire to substantiate an attitude of humorous irony (or ironic humour). Albeit humour and irony are not the same, there are at least four distinct phenomena which are commonly identified as irony and all of them can incorporate a humorous dimension. First, as discussed, there is dramatic irony, a narrative strategy which results from a clash between what audiences know and characters do not, often exploited for comic purposes. Second, situational irony, which, as Gregory Currie specifies, "requires a contrast between a norm or expectation or ambition on the one hand

and reality on the other" (2011, 164). Situational irony is often darkly humorous, as Alanis Morissette highlights when singing, "isn't it ironic" that "life has a funny way of sneaking up on you/ When you think everything's okay and everything's going right/ And life has a funny way of helping you out when/ You think everything's gone wrong and everything blows up/ In your face" (1996). Third, irony is also an attitude, especially in response to existential absurdity (which really is situational irony on a cosmic scale). As indicated, such an ironic attitude can range from nihilistically dismissing life as a joke to humorously coping with the absurdities of life. Fourth, perhaps in its most common usage, irony refers to a communicative strategy which is often humorous, whether it be playfully or sarcastically.

In what follows, I will clarify the therapeutic function of humorous irony in satire by intervening in debates about communicative irony in aesthetics and pragmatics. The kinship between irony and humour is rooted in norm-based incongruity. Specifically, communicative irony involves a clash between perspectives that may produce a humorous incongruity. That said, there has been considerable theoretic disagreement about the linguistic mechanism underpinning this clash of perspectives in communicative irony. In classical rhetoric, irony came to be identified as a figure of speech which involves saying one thing and meaning its opposite. This idea has remained influential in folk psychology and in some scholarly quarters, especially among interpreters of H.P. Grice's work in pragmatics (1989 [1975]). To this day, neo-Gricean scholars like Martha Dynel understand communicative irony as "a *trope/rhetorical figure/figure of speech* (…) through which one wishes to convey the opposite of what one says" (2013, 403, original emphasis), albeit with the caveat that "meaning negation is not typical of all irony" (2013, 404). Instead, what really matters, according to neo-Griceans, is that "the literal import of an ironic utterance differs from the implicit meaning the speaker intends to communicate" (Dynel 2013, 404). Neo-Griceans conceptualise this implicitness as a Gricean conversational implicature which results from flouting the maxim of truthfulness, similar to metaphor (Dynel 2013, 406). Yet, as opposed to metaphor, irony "intrinsically expresses the speaker's attitude and carries an evaluative judgement/evaluation of the referent: an utterance, action, event or situation" (Dynel 2013, 422, original emphasis).

However, the neo-Gricean understanding of communicative irony is problematic. Grice's ideas about irony were significantly challenged by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson's (1981) echoic theory of irony, developed in the context of their general relevance theory of pragmatics (which offers an alternative to Gricean pragmatics altogether). According to

Sperber and Wilson, “what irony conveys is not a figurative meaning but an attitude, the speaker’s attitude to an attributed thought” (2012, 33). More specifically, Sperber and Wilson argue that an ironic speaker engages in a speech act by which they echo a viewpoint attributed to some party in order to dissociate themselves from that (or a related) viewpoint as defective. Crucially, whereas “[f]rom the classical point of view, the fact that irony expresses an attitude while metaphor does not is puzzling”, Wilson and Sperber highlight that on “the echoic account, the ironical attitude is not a puzzling feature added to a specific kind of trope, it is constitutive of irony” (2012, 33). This line of criticism is also shared and addressed by the other rival of the neo-Gricean understanding of irony, the pretence theory, originally introduced by Herbert H. Clark and Richard J. Gerrig (1984) and later reformulated in its strongest version by Gregory Currie (2006; 2008; 2010 and 2011). Elaborating ideas originally introduced by Kendall Walton about fiction (1990), Currie considers ironic utterances as props in a speaker’s act of pretending to adopt another perspective in order to evaluate it. Albeit the pretence and echoic theory share many characteristics, especially in opposition to the neo-Gricean alternative, they are genuine rivals that offer significantly different interpretations of communicative irony (Currie 2008, 19).

The echoic theory of irony, as mentioned, is an offshoot of Wilson and Sperber’s relevance theory of communication, according to which an utterance represents a thought of the speaker that it resembles in content (2012, 127). In this framework, an utterance is echoic if that thought is about “another thought that it resembles in content, which the speaker attributes to some source other than herself at the current time” with the intention “to convey her own attitude or reaction to that thought” (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 128). More specifically, ironic communication is “tacitly attributive” because “the audience is left to infer that the thoughts they represent are being attributed to some source other than the speaker” (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 129). This idea of tacit attribution serves to accommodate the non-literal surface of ironic commination. Irony further differs from other echoic communication because “the attitudes conveyed are drawn from the dissociative range: the speaker rejects a tacitly attributed thought as ludicrously false (or blatantly inadequate in other ways)” (Wilson and Sperber 2012, 130). This idea of dissociation explains the clash in perspectives that underpins ironic communication and sometimes makes it humorously incongruous. For example, suppose I convey my disagreement with a colleague’s suggestion by ironically saying “That’s a great idea!”. On

the echoic theory of irony, I am tacitly attributing that thought to my colleague in order to communicate that I find its content ridiculous. Further, my ironic remark may be humorous, if it involves a relevant norm-violation (for example, if my colleague's idea is really stupid).

Alternatively, according to the rival pretence theory, communicative irony is a matter of "pretending to do something rather than really doing it" (Currie 2006, 112). According to Currie, "[t]he ironist pretends to assert/question/endorse and in doing so expresses an attitude to those who do or would say or question or endorse in this way" (2006, 113). In other words, "the speaker pretends to adopt a limited perspective, and in so doing expresses something about some person's occupancy of that perspective", i.e. the target of the ironic utterance (Currie 2006, 116). This idea of pretence accommodates the non-literal surface of ironic communication, for it suggests a level of communicative covertness; pretence works best when it is not obvious (Currie 2011, 167). The targeted perspective in ironic communication which the ironist pretends to adopt may be identical or merely resemble it, in which case one perspective "puts us in mind of the other by virtue of having certain limitations that resemble the limitations of the other" (Currie 2006, 117). In this manner, the function of ironic communication is to represent "its target as unreasonable in some way, or at least as falling short of some salient standard of reasonableness" (Currie 2006, 119; see also Currie 2010, 157). Accordingly, on the pretence theory of irony, when I dismiss my colleague's suggestion by ironically saying "That's a great idea!", I am pretending to assert this viewpoint in order to ridicule my colleague for genuinely occupying a similar perspective. On the pretence account, such an ironic remark is humorous under the same conditions as it would be under the echoic theory.

The echoic and pretence theory are both strong proposals. It is therefore perhaps no surprise that the debate seems to have developed into in a stalemate, with either theory unable to really dismiss its rival. Defending the pretence theory, Currie has argued that the echoic theory cannot adequately distinguish between irony and sneering on the grounds that the former but not the latter involves pretence (2008, 22-23; 2011, 159-161). However, this proposal somewhat begs the question, since it does not address why sneering could not be a particular form of ironic communication. Alternatively, Wilson and Sperber have sought to vindicate their theory as "more parsimonious" because they claim that Currie's pretence theory must also incorporate the idea that irony attributes a viewpoint to some party that really holds it (2012, 25-32). Nonetheless, even if they are right (see Currie 2008, 18-19), appealing to Occam's razor does not invalidate the claim that

there is no irony without pretence. It is therefore rather rash of Wilson and Sperber to state that the issue of communicative irony has been "resolved", especially since the pretence theory of irony remains influential in scholarship (see MacDowell 2016). Conversely, a real advance in the debate would be proof that pretence is incompatible with some form of communication that is undeniable ironic. In this respect, l will discuss what I call ironic characters in satire as a form of ironic communication which the echoic theory can accommodate but the pretence theory cannot. Importantly, identifying the correct mechanism behind these ironic characters is crucial to understand the therapeutic function of humorous irony in satire.

On my proposal, ironic characters in satire do not communicate ironically in the fictional world, but serve as a ploy in the ironic communication of satirists. Specifically, ironic characters in satire assert viewpoints which audiences are cued to understand as deficient viewpoints about real-world affairs. In contrast to dramatic irony, authors not only intend for audiences to have knowledge lacked by these ironic characters, but also to dissociate themselves from their viewpoints. For example, Jen Sorensen is one satirist who often successfully employs ironic characters in her cartoons to critique viewpoints as falling short of a standard of progressive reason. Take the first cartoon below, in which Sorensen introduces ironic characters as a strategy to satirise climate change deniers (fig. 21). In this cartoon, all speaking characters are ironic characters because they assert viewpoints in the fictional world which audiences are cued to understand as the kind of deficient viewpoints (reduced to absurdity) which are typical of actual climate change deniers. This kind of communication concurs with the phenomenology of irony as identified by both the echoic and pretence account. Through staging a fictional story, the satirical author (implied or real) dissociates herself from viewpoints ascribed to unidentified but real targets who are the butt of her critique. By contrast, in the fictional world of the cartoon, the child in the pool is not an ironic character because her reaction is not cued as defective compared to a progressive standard of reason (quite the opposite, her expression of dread is a reasonable response to the actions of climate change deniers). Likewise, in the second cartoon, Sorensen introduces ironic characters to critique the viewpoints of xenophobes, racists and defenders of *Charlie Hebdo*'s satire, whereas her portrayal of the immigrant character falls outside the scope of her ironic critique (fig. 22).

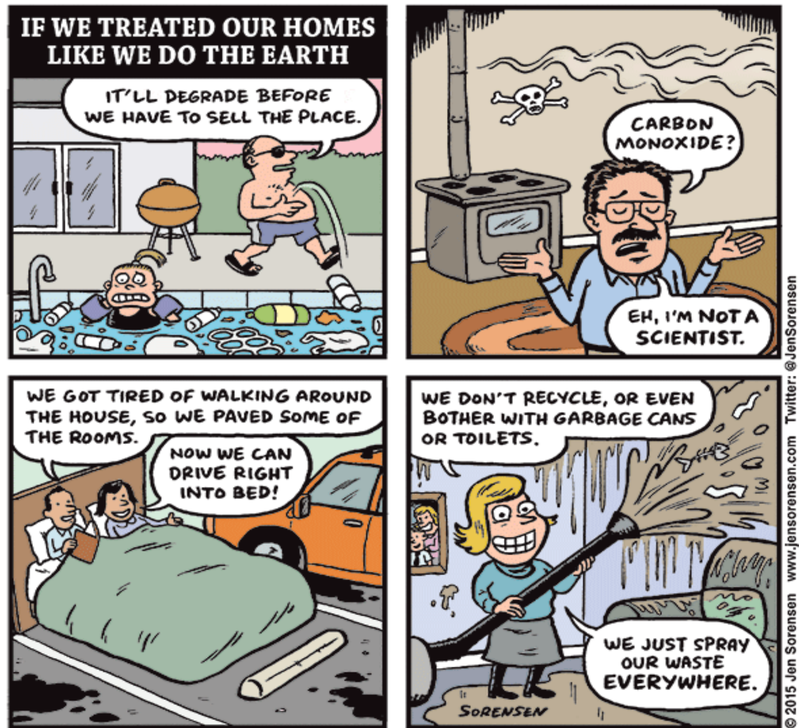

Figure 21

Figure 22

Although the echoic theory and pretence theory can both account for standard cases of ironic communication, my proposal is that only the former can explain the function of ironic characters in satire. On the echoic theory, the function of such characters in the ironic communication of satirists is fairly straightforward. In the first cartoon, Sorensen introduces an ironic character to echo a viewpoint sometimes endorsed by climate change deniers, specifically that they cannot assess the danger of climate change because they are not scientists (fig. 23). Although this echoic attribution is not tacit in the sense that the defective viewpoint is explicitly attributed to a fictional character, the audience is nonetheless left to infer that a similarly defective viewpoint should be attributed to real-life climate change deniers. Moreover, the author also does not explicitly communicate her dissociative attitude toward this tacitly attributed viewpoint (although a reader would have to be particularly undiscerning to miss the irony and its target). Likewise, in the second cartoon, Sorensen does not make it explicit that she sympathises with the character of the unemployed immigrant and that his attackers serve as a ploy in her ironic communication about defenders of *Charlie Hebdo*'s blunt satire (fig. 24). Since Sorensen does not communicate her critique explicitly, it is not wholly implausible that somebody who happens to agree with the reactions of the ironic characters actually mistakes the immigrant character for an ironic character, echoing (what they perceive as) the ridiculous political correctness of progressives (albeit there are enough implicit cues to the contrary for the ironic communication in this cartoon to be successful). Accordingly, Sorensen's attribution of deficient viewpoints to real-world parties through ironic characters incorporates the characteristic implicitness of ironic communication.

Figure 23

Figure 24

By contrast, although the function of ironic characters in satire is fairly straightforward on the echoic account, the pretence theory fails to accommodate the function of such characters in ironic communication. In this respect, Currie has discussed what he calls ‘supressed irony’ as a phenomenon which is quite similar to ironic characters, but concludes that it “isn’t really irony in my sense, though it is an exploitation, usually for comic purposes, of the mechanisms by which irony operates” (2006, 129). However, the fact that the pretence account similarly does not accommodate the function of ironic characters does not entail they are not genuinely part of ironic communication, but rather reveals a weakness of the pretence theory. As a concrete example of supressed irony, Currie (2006, 130) discusses a dialogue from Woody Allen’s *Love and Death* (1975):

> Sonja: And before Seretski, Aleksei, and before Aleksei, Alegorian, and before Alegorian, Asimov, and…’
>
> Boris: How many lovers do you have?
>
> Sonja: In the mid-town area?

Currie specifies that in the fictional world, Sonja’s question is posed in earnest, which makes it so that she is “occupying [an] absurdly defective perspective” (2006, 130). According to Currie, while this example exploits the mechanisms associated with irony for comic purposes, he specifies that the remark is “funny because [it is] *not* ironic” (2006, 130, original emphasis). However, while I agree that Sonja is communicating earnestly in the fiction, my proposal is that she could nonetheless be a ploy in the genuine ironic communication of the author (although I do not specifically set out to prove that Sonja is indeed an ironic character similar to the ones in Sorensen’s cartoons).

Similar to suppressed irony, ironic characters must be contrasted to characters communicating ironically in the fiction, as Currie explains. Incidentally, communicating ironically on Currie’s pretence account is the same as creating a fiction on some accounts of fiction (Searle 1975). Although Currie (1990) has himself developed an influential alternative account of fiction, which he later again problematised (2014), I will not further complicate matters and agree, for argument’s sake, that “pretence creates fiction” (Currie 2006, 129). Consequently, when a fictional character communicates ironically, “[t]his gives us nested fiction” (Currie 2006, 129). One example of such nested fiction is Emma Woodhouse’s ironic remark to George Knightly in Jane Austin’s *Emma*: “To be sure—our discordancies must always arise from my being in the wrong” (2006, 129). Currie clarifies

how this example works as nested fiction by explaining that "[i]t is fictional (in *Emma*) that {Emma's utterance makes it fictional (in her game of pretence) that [she, Emma, seriously asserts that her disputes with Mr Knightly always arise from her being in the wrong]}" (2006, 129) By contrast, on Currie's proposal, we get "suppressed irony when we remove the second, small-scope fiction operator" (Currie 2006, 129). In this hypothetical case it would be fictional (in *Emma*) that [Emma, seriously asserts that her disputes with Mr Knightly always arise from her being in the wrong]. To clarify, Emma would then not herself communicate ironically, but, similar to Sonja in *Love and Death* and, more to the point, ironic characters in satire, seriously assert a perspective which is absurdly defective.

In contrast to Currie, I argue that such characters who seriously assert absurd perspectives in the fictional world can function as ploys in the genuine ironic communication of authors, especially in satire. The reason why Currie assesses these examples as suppressed rather than genuine irony is because the pretence theory cannot accommodate such ironic communication. Currie specifies that "the pretence that is fundamental to irony is not a pretence of doing; it's a pretence of being. In pretending to assert or whatever, one pretends to be a certain kind of person—a person with a restricted or otherwise defective view of the world or some part of it" (2006, 116). However, in the cartoons I have discussed, Sorensen (or her implied persona) is not pretending to be any of the ironic characters any more than she is pretending to be one of the non-ironic characters. Specifically, revisiting her satire of climate change denial, if the homeowner asserts in the world of the fiction, "Carbon monoxide? Eh, I'm not a scientist!", it is not Sorensen who pretends to assert this proposition in order to ridicule him (and neither does the fictional character engage in act of pretence, for his assertion is sincere in the fictional world). If Sorensen engages in any pretence at all, it is pretence which invites the make-belief that there is a fictional world in which the homeowner seriously asserts this proposition. Crucially, such pretence does not constitute ironic communication, for it is the same authorial pretence which makes it fictional in her other cartoon that the immigrant character seriously asserts "I believe in free speech and I am horrified by the killings." Put differently, the successful function of ironic characters in the ironic communication of satirists can only be conceptualised by the echoic theory and not the pretence theory of irony.

Ironically, the function of ironic characters in satire is akin to "[t]he [one] type of irony that does involve pretence", according to echoic theorist Deirdre Wilson (2006, 1741). Wilson

refers to so-called "'impersonation irony'' through which "the speaker (or writer) adopts a persona in order to criticise or make fun of those who speak or think in similar ways", e.g. Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (2006, 1741). However, whereas the pretence theory can explain the function of ironic narrators/authors in satire, it cannot accommodate ironic characters. Although it makes sense to say that, in *A Modest Proposal*, Swift pretends to be Dr. Swift in order to satirise those who defend similarly absurd viewpoints, it does not make sense to say that Sorensen pretends to be the ironic characters in her cartoons. Moreover, Wilson's concession to the pretence theory is unnecessary, for like ironic characters, ironic narrators/authors can also be conceptualised as echoing defective viewpoints attributed to some party that really holds similar perspectives. Further, the echoic theory of irony avoids the undesirable upshot of the pretence theory that the success of communicative irony depends on its covertness (Currie 2011, 167). Indeed, if communicative irony were to depend on pretence, weekly satirical cartoons would be rather heavy-handed, for no audience familiar with Sorensen's work could genuinely entertain her pretence to endorse conservative viewpoints. For these reasons, although I do not dismiss that in some cases it may be fruitful to think of irony in relation to pretence, the echoic theory of irony is overall preferable to the rival pretence theory.

Summing up, the point of communicative irony is to express a dissociative attitude toward a viewpoint attributed to someone other than the speaker at the time of utterance. Linda Hutcheon has specified that such ironic disassociation "can range from minimal to maximal in terms of emotional involvement, from cool detachment to engaged hostility" (1994, 38). For this reason, ironic strategies in satire can supplement the ridicule of targeted viewpoints as morally, intellectually or otherwise defective with a wide range of emotions, including anger, despair, frustration, etc. Such humorous irony in satire contributes to the genre's purpose to critique, but also incorporates a dimension of therapy. In this respect, ironic communication is directed at those in the know, whereas the targets of irony often do not get 'it' (Hutcheon 1994, 17). So while ironic strategies in satire help to substantiate a stable message of critique (Booth 1974, x), that message is likely to be understood primarily, if not exclusively, by a likeminded in-crowd, rather than the actual satirical targets. This esoteric dimension of irony helps to frame why the true political impact of most satire is not convincing political opponents but rather uniting the already converted in an imagined or real community (see Gray 2005, 157-159). In combination with ridicule, such ironic strategies in satire have a plausible therapeutic dimension in dealing with the political

difficulty to realise emancipation, especially through cultivating a symbolic victory of shared superiority. Nevertheless, it is difficult to really test the accuracy of this hypothesis without the kind of empirical research which is beyond the scope of this investigation. Instead, I will further elaborate the function of ironic characters to reveal how humorous irony in satire is often intentionally designed as a narrative strategy to cope with the limits of critique.

6. HUMOROUS IRONY AND THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE

Satire often expresses a humorously ironic attitude which oscillates between hope and pessimism about the emancipatory effects of critique. As a conclusion to my investigation, I will focus specifically on how satirists often introduce a humorous and ironic distance between the hopefully idealistic perspective of characters in the story world and their own external perspective, which is more realistic, if not pessimistic, about the political impact of critique. These hopefully idealistic characters in satire are ironic characters in the sense that they have unreasonable expectations about their ability to change the world, from which satirists humorously and ironically distance themselves. Yet, as opposed to the ironic characters discussed above, they do not serve as ploys in the satirical ridicule of morally or intellectually inferior characters. Instead, these hopefully idealistic characters are typically stand-ins for the satirists themselves. Accordingly, by ironically and humorously distancing themselves from their hopefully idealistic counterparts in the story world, satirists aim to come to terms with their limits to emancipate the world. Likewise, in interviews and speeches, many satirists cultivate a similar humorous irony in response to the experienced absurdity of their profession, through which they aim to change the world, knowing full well this ideal remains forever out of reach. Satirists often frame such an attitude of humorous irony as a strategy to remain sane in a sick world that they cannot fully cure. In this manner, satirists introduce humorous irony as a therapeutic coping device to negotiate between the demands of critique and its limits.

A particularly striking example of how satirists capitalise on humorous irony to cope with the limits of critique is Aaron McGruder's characterisation of Huey Freeman in *The Boondocks*. Originally a syndicated comic strip (1999-2006), *The Boondocks* was later developed into an animated television series on Adult Swim (2005-8; 2014). Set in the same story-world, both the comic strip and the animated series revolve around the lives of an African-American grandfather, Robert Freeman, and his two young grandchildren, Huey and Riley, who left the inner city of Chicago to settle in the nearly all-white fictive suburb Woodcrest. From an Afrocentric perspective (Tyree and Krishnasamy 2011), McGruder

develops a satire of contemporary society, frequently dealing with issues of race, but more often than not taking a wider critical focus (Swanigan 2012, 38). Spokesperson of Afrocentric critique in the story world of *The Boondocks* is Huey Freeman, named after Black Panther Party co-founder Huey P. Newton. Huey is staunchly committed to a "radical-left black militancy" (Swanigan 2012, 34). Similarly, although McGruder is not particularly pleased with this image, public perception has imposed a "persona of this angry revolutionary" on him (Rabin 2005), quite similar to that of Huey as a "black socialist" (Swanigan 2012, 29). Nevertheless, even though there are significant similarities between Huey's critique in the story world and the critical purpose of McGruder's satire, there is a distinct difference in their ethos. Specifically, through humorous and ironic strategies, McGruder continuously distances himself from Huey's unabated critical zeal.

In *The Boondocks*, Huey is relentless in his critique of contemporary society. Although often targeting Eurocentrism, Huey's concern about social issues is encompassing, much to the dismay of those in his immediate environment, who would rather ignore the difficult truths he constantly unearths (fig. 25).

Figure 25

In contrast to the rebellion of his younger brother Riley, an aspiring neighbourhood threat weaned on gangsta rap, Huey's militancy is taken "fairly seriously" in *The Boondocks* (Swanigan 2012, 36). Pamela Swanigan even argues that McGruder's satire "form[s] a kind of negative-shape composite that offers a different way of approaching life and its difficulties, and that composite often assumes the form of Huey Freeman (…) [and] his own espoused creed of Marxist socialism" (2012, 45). There are indeed similarities between Huey's behaviour and McGruder's characterisation of his job as a satirist. Much like Huey is a gadfly who seeks to sting his environment out of complacency, McGruder has argued that "[g]ood satire (…) teaches you how to think critically" and serves to impart "a message

about the lies a society tells itself" (Cavna 2008). Nevertheless, despite these important similarities, McGruder has stressed that "[i]t would be inaccurate to say that Huey's opinions are my own" (Carbin 2001). Specifically, even though McGruder shares Huey's revolutionary ideals in principle, he explains that "revolution is very difficult, and I'm not optimistic for any kind of dramatic change" (Rabin 2005). Accordingly, portraying Huey's idealism as without bounds, McGruder humorously and ironically highlights its problems. Concretely, McGruder often presents Huey as an ironic character whose idealism is absurdly optimistic and makes jokes at Huey's expense as he struggles to come to terms with his failure to emancipate the world (fig. 26).

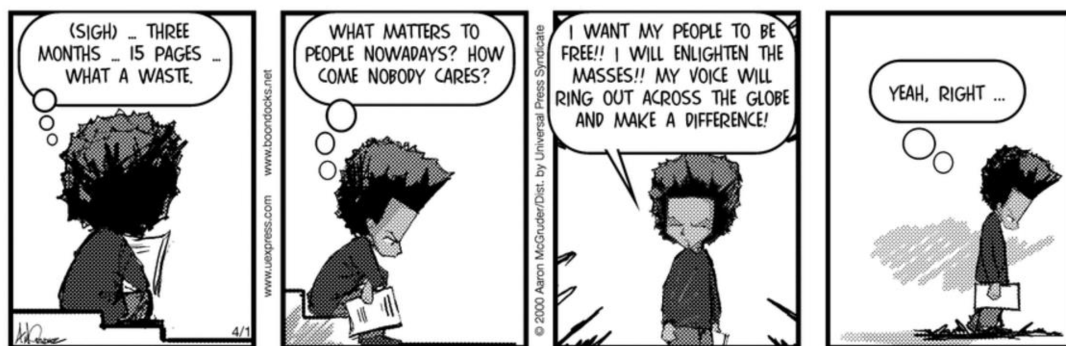

Figure 26

In *The Boondocks*, McGruder often cultivates a humorous irony at Huey's expense as a therapeutic means to cope with the limits of critique. Not only in the comic strip, but also in the animated series, Huey's revolutionary attempts are typically less successful than he would hope. Take the first episode of the second season, "…Or Die Trying" (2007), in which the Freeman family sneaks into the local cinema to see the trashy terror- and blacksploitation film "Soul Plane 2". Although Huey offers to pay for the tickets, his grandfather is adamant to see the film for free. Ever astute and with a satirical sense of irony, Huey expresses his frustration to the viewer that "Robert Jebediah Freeman had sworn a lifetime intifada against the movie theatre industry for exhorting prices and poor customer services, which, interestingly enough, did not stop him from going to see movies." Huey's adaptation of revolutionary language, usually restricted to uprising against oppression in the Arab world, contrasts sharply with Granddad's self-serving way to get back at the overcharging and understaffed neighbourhood cinema. Further, the miserly behaviour of Robert is in direct opposition to Huey's own revolutionary action to oppose the capitalist oppression of the cinema. Specifically, upon arrival at the cinema, Huey converses with a bellboy who complains about his working conditions. In response, Huey

suggests that he and his colleagues should consider forming a union, an alien idea to the unwitting bellboy. Yet, as Huey is trying to forward his revolutionary agenda, he is once more the target of ironic ridicule. While explaining some basic tenets of socialism to the bellboy, his grandfather capitalises on the occasion to sneak into the cinema for free, leaving Huey awkwardly positioned as the butt of a visual joke (fig. 27).

Figure 27

As the episode progresses, Huey's revolutionary tactics nonetheless seem to germinate. Not long after talking to Huey, the bellboy explains to his colleagues that "what Marx was saying is that the oppression of the proletariat is an essential facet inherent in the exploitation of the system." Still, there are already some overtones of ironic ridicule here, as the bellboy has adopted the stereotypical jargon and arcane vocabulary associated with Marxism in a surprisingly short time. This humorous and ironic distance from Huey's revolutionary ideals as adopted by the bellboy culminates at the end of the episode. When Huey and his family get ready to go home, they are surprised to learn from a guard that "[t]he cinema's closed indefinitely. Looks like everyone walked out. Something about a union." Bumping into the bellboy as they walk back to the car, Huey congratulates him for unionising and staging a walkout so quickly. Yet, he is taken aback by the bellboy's bitter response that "[o]h, yeah, we unionised. Then someone called corporate headquarters and they shut down the whole place. Fired everybody." A baffled Huey needs a second to regain his composure, but then quickly, albeit somewhat questioningly, reaffirms his militancy by striking a Black Panther salute and stating, "Power to the people!" To no avail. The

disillusioned bellboy walks out on Huey, telling him to "shut up" and leaving him visually isolated as the butt of an ironic joke at the expense of his revolutionist politics (fig. 28).

Figure 28

Importantly, the ironic mockery of Huey's critical radicalism in *The Boondocks* should not be dismissed as a cynical endorsement of critique's futility and the cultivation of moral indifference. The message of McGruder's satire is more nuanced, as he acknowledges that the world "seems to be going in a really bad, bad place really quickly, and I don't have the answers and I don't have the solutions and I don't know what's gonna happen to change it. But the continued apathy will only lead to a worse situation for everybody" (Rabin 2005). In other words, McGruder acknowledges the demands of critique but at the same time highlights his own emancipatory limits. In this regard, Joshua L. Lazard has claimed that, due to McGruder's humorous and ironic treatment, "Huey comes off with a type of *hopeful nihilism* that I think is rather prevalent in the black community" (original emphasis). This paradoxical attitude of hope and despair is one of a community whose plight is so enduring that total emancipation is both desperately necessary and painfully out of reach. In order to cope with this emotionally disturbing conflict between ideal and reality, Tia C.M. Tyree and Adrian Krishnasamy have highlighted that "[l]aughter allows African Americans to put their desires, situations, and ideals into perspective" (2011, 24). They further explain that *The Boondocks* similarly pursues **"**a mix of social commentary and humorous relief" (Tyree and Krishnasamy 2011, 26). Crucially, while McGruder consistently distances himself from Huey's unabated critical zeal, his humorous irony does not express cynical indifference, but rather introduces psychological relief that comes to terms with the limits of critique.

McGruder's humorous irony introduces a necessary psychological distance which Huey's relentless critique lacks. By contrast, Huey cannot accept that his ideals will never become reality, and, as his unabated critical zeal consumes him, he is continuously moody, if not depressed (fig. 29). In this respect, Shaftesbury already discussed the psychological function of humour to put overly enthusiastic zeal and fanaticism in perspective, which is otherwise sure to breed melancholy (Amir 2014, 25/33/51). As opposed to Huey, and often at his expense, McGruder introduces humorous irony as a therapeutic strategy which puts the seriousness of critique in perspective. Concretely, McGruder not only regularly distances himself from the seriousness of critique by ironically frustrating Huey's revolutionary aspirations, but also by ridiculing the self-aggrandisement of his suburban plight, especially when Granddad forces him to mow the lawn (fig. 30). Albeit Huey's revolutionary aspirations most often targets important issues, this occasional ironic ridicule of his self-serving agenda puts the sustainability of his altruistic critical zeal in perspective. Moreover, highlighting Granddad's complete ignorance of Garry Trudeau's satirical comic *Doonesbury*, McGruder suggests to take the critical force of his own satire with a pinch of salt. In this regard, attenuating the praise of his satire as hard-hitting critique, McGruder explains "I keep telling people, 'Powerful corporations allow you to see that strip every day so it's not the revolution'" (Younge 2005). In other words, unlike Huey, McGruder is aware that his satire has limited political impact and he regularly introduces comic and ironic strategies to address his critical limits. Such humorous irony in McGruder's satire introduces a therapeutic distance lacked by a constantly moody, if not depressed, Huey.

Figure 29

Figure 30

The humorous irony cultivated by McGruder in *The Boondocks* can be framed as a therapeutic coping mechanism to avoid Huey's psychological problems as he becomes consumed by unabated critique. In this respect, McGruder himself has argued that watching satire like *The Colbert Report* "keeps you sane" (Cavna 2008). In interviews, other satirists also regularly highlight this therapeutic dimension of satire, albeit they stress that the psychological distance introduced by humorous irony does not ignore the demands of critique. Accordingly, Matt Bors explains "I don't *like* the fact that the world is run by a revolving cast of douche bags, but I do like cartooning about it! I like addressing reality, the way things are, without sugar coating them. Satire is a way to stay sane amid all this" (Arrant 2012, original emphasis). Similarly, Jen Sorensen stresses the therapeutic dimension of humorous irony in satire as she explains that "[m]any cartoons [of mine] are not overtly political. One can only write so many strips about torture before one needs to lighten up with a riff on Gucci flipflops" (2008, 7). Likewise, Dan Perkins, aka Tom Tomorrow, explains how "sometimes a reader will write to say that a cartoon on a given topic is 'depressingly accurate,' or that they would laugh if they weren't too busy crying" (2013). Yet, he adds, "I hope they laugh anyway. Cause that's the whole point of this job. It's a two pronged assault. There are lot of things in this world you need to be outraged about, but outrage unchecked by laughter will eat you up inside. You need to laugh. That's where we come in" (2013).

Crucially, this therapeutic benefit of humorous irony in satire is designed to benefit satirists themselves at least as much as their audiences. In particular, Perkins has explained that "[y]ou have to want to save the world in order to get up every day and do this work, but in order to maintain your sanity, you simultaneously have to understand that you're just not going to" (Rall 2002, 28). In this respect, the humorous irony cultivated by satirists can be framed as a coping strategy to continue their critique without succumbing to despair about

their limits. The therapeutic benefits of humorous irony which uses humour and irony to come to terms with the limits of critique is all the more clear when contemplating its absence, as McGruder does in his representation of Huey in *The Boondocks*. Similarly, political cartoonist Andy Singer cultivates a humorous irony in order to come to terms with his limits as a satirist. As exemplified by Singer's sardonic self-representation, the satirist who exaggerates their critical impact is downright insane (fig. 31). Moreover, if not insane, satirists who cannot cope with the gap between the demands of critique and their emancipatory limits are unlikely to keep going. Take Lloyd Dangle, who early on in his career affirmed his critical zeal with slogans like "no weapon prevails like the pen!" (1993, front cover). However, after a career of considerable length, Dangle ceased to publish satirical cartoons in 2011. Addressing himself in his last cartoon, he decried his inability to make even "a dent" in all the world's problems after "22 year", going as far as suggesting that his "cruel caricatures" even made matters worse (see fig. 32).

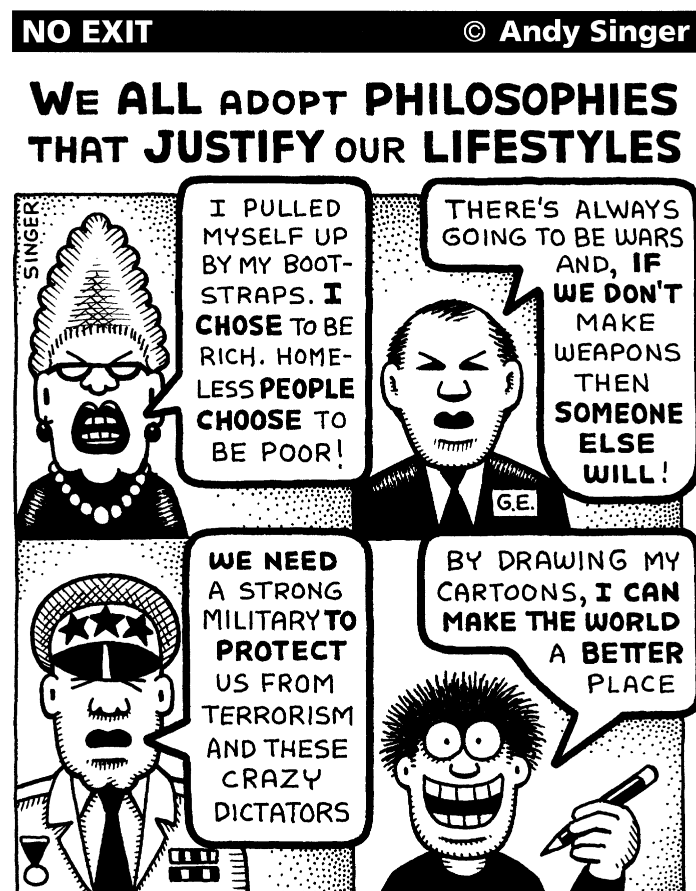

Figure 31

Figure 32

The humorously ironic attitude cultivated by many satirists is a therapeutic strategy to create satire without despairing about the lack of emancipatory impact. This attitude incorporates a commitment to critique while introducing the necessary psychological distance to cope with its limits. In this respect, Perkins acknowledges that his “little weekly cartoon” is “not going to change the world” but he nonetheless “think[s] it’s useful to point out absurdities” (Elias 2003). He further adds that “I wouldn’t do what I do if there wasn’t an inherent optimism there. It’s an optimism tinged with bitterness and frustration but if I didn’t believe that things can get better then I would go live in some remote farmhouse somewhere and ignore the world entirely” (Hansen 2003). Likewise, Ted Rall has quipped, “[c]artooning won’t change the world, but that’s no reason not to try” (2002, 7), adding that “I don’t think cartooning can change the world, but you need the illusion that it could to produce earnest, meaningful work” (2002, 120-121). In this respect, Michael Charrington has referred to Rall as “a hopeless optimist; he’s optimistic while entertaining no hope” (2001, 6). Such an attitude of humorous irony which oscillates between optimism and pessimism characterises a lot of satire, in various ways, including the examples introduced at the beginning of this chapter. *South Park*’s “The Hobbit” tempers Wendy’s frustration and pain with the relief of ironic ridicule. Margaret Atwood’s wry irony in *The Handmaid’s Tale* introduces psychological distance from the protagonist’s suffering while attenuating all

too grand aspirations about the advances of feminism. Likewise, Fay Weldon's *Sacred Cows* verges on cynicism but nonetheless expresses some hope of improvement regarding the prospects of contemporaneous Britain. Whatever its tone or quality in individual works, humorous irony in satire is on the whole a therapeutic coping device to mediate the gap between the demands of critique and its limits.

7. SATIRE, PHILOSOPHY AND THE ABSURD

Humorous irony in satire is a therapeutic response to the absurdity of the emancipatory ideal to change the world, which is at once morally indispensable and practically impossible. Contemplating the limits of critique, Matt Bors has argued that

> [s]ometimes the only thing you can do is mark up public surfaces and get everyone to laugh at the people running things. It's a small form of resistance, a minor annoyance at best to those in power. But if they insist on doing us this way, I'm at least going to make them come out every morning and repaint the damn walls (2013, vi).

In this respect, the satirist's mission to critique is akin to a Sisyphus labour. According to Greek mythology, Sisyphus was condemned by the gods for all eternity to roll a heavy rock to the top of a mountain, only for it to roll back each time. Similarly satirists try to change the political status quo, knowing that they can never fully realise their emancipatory ideals. As a therapeutic response to the absurdity of their critical efforts, satirists often cultivate a humorous irony. The therapeutic significance of such humorous irony in satire can be further elucidated in contrast to Albert Camus's existential philosophy (1955). Camus identified Sisyphus as an absurdist hero whose labour defies the absurdity of life. Likewise, satirists keep creating satire despite the ultimate absurdity of their critical efforts. However, satirists are no absurdist heroes and the difference between the two clarifies the existential significance of humorous irony in satire. Further, a comparison to existentialism places satire in a philosophical framework which is crucial to fully appreciate the value of the genre's definitive combination of critique and entertainment.

In his philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus introduces the image of Sisyphus's labour as a metaphor for the absurdity of life (1955). Camus describes the absurd as a sentiment which arises from the unbridgeable divide between mankind's spiritual desire for existential meaning and the universe's cold indifference towards all meaning that human beings invest in life (1955, 15). Camus contemplates various responses to existential absurdity, including suicide as the ultimate response to the unbearable meaninglessness of

life (1955, 4). Less dramatically, a more common response is "eluding" the absurd through the "hope" that life does have meaning, albeit at the price of self-deception (1955, 7). In this regard, Camus is critical of other philosophers who have developed "a metaphysic of consolation" in light of the absurd, which he characterises as an untruthful "leap" (1955, 34). By contrast, Camus introduces Sisyphus as an absurdist hero who has formulated an appropriate response to the absurd without succumbing to hope or suicide. According to Camus, Sisyphus is reflexive because he knows that his efforts are pointless and meaningless. Yet he revolts against this pointlessness and meaninglessness by passionately engaging in those efforts anyway – even if they do not make a difference at all (1955, 83). For Camus, Sisyphus is an absurdist hero because he lives passionately without hope in face the absurd.

There is a striking similarity between the continued passionate efforts of Sisyphus to push the boulder over the mountain and the commitment of satirists to emancipate the world, despite their reflexive awareness of the ultimate futility of these efforts. Like Sisyphus, satirists do not deceive themselves by leaping away from the absurdity of their critical efforts, even if self-deception would be psychologically more comfortable. In this respect, Camus highlights that the lack of psychological comfort "is not likely to stop the absurd man. Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable" (1955, 31). Both absurdist heroes and satirists are committed to what Bernard Williams has called "[t]he value of truthfulness [which] embraces the need to find out the truth, to hold on to it, and to tell it – in particular, to oneself" (2002, 13). Drawing on Nietzsche, Williams has specified that such commitment to truthfulness rests in a moral conviction, rather than a calculus of utility (2002, 14). In this respect, Dan Perkins contends that when creating satire, "[m]y concerns are: is it funny? and is it true? And sometimes you can even fudge it on funny, as long as it's true enough to matter" (2014c). At the same time, Perkins has highlighted the psychological challenges of creating satire during

> the years after 9/11 (…). The intensity of the vitriol and the hate mail from those days - those were tough times to be a political satirist. There's a reason many of today's prominent liberal voices either supported the wars or just kept quiet. In a way I wish I'd had the option, but I had a weekly deadline to meet and a nagging compulsion to speak the truth as I saw it (2014a).

The message to take away from this comment is that satirists like Perkins are driven by a moral compulsion to find out the truth and share it with others, even if their truthfulness is unsettling.

The commitment to truthfulness of satirists like Perkins in the face of psychological disturbance is no exaggerated bluff. Existential absurdity is a prevalent theme in the satire of Perkins. Take a cartoon published in the summer of 2014, when the news was dominated by yet another violent conflict in Gaza, the shooting of the civilian aircraft MH-17 and the whippings of young people in Iran for dancing to Pharrell Williams's "Happy" (fig. 33).

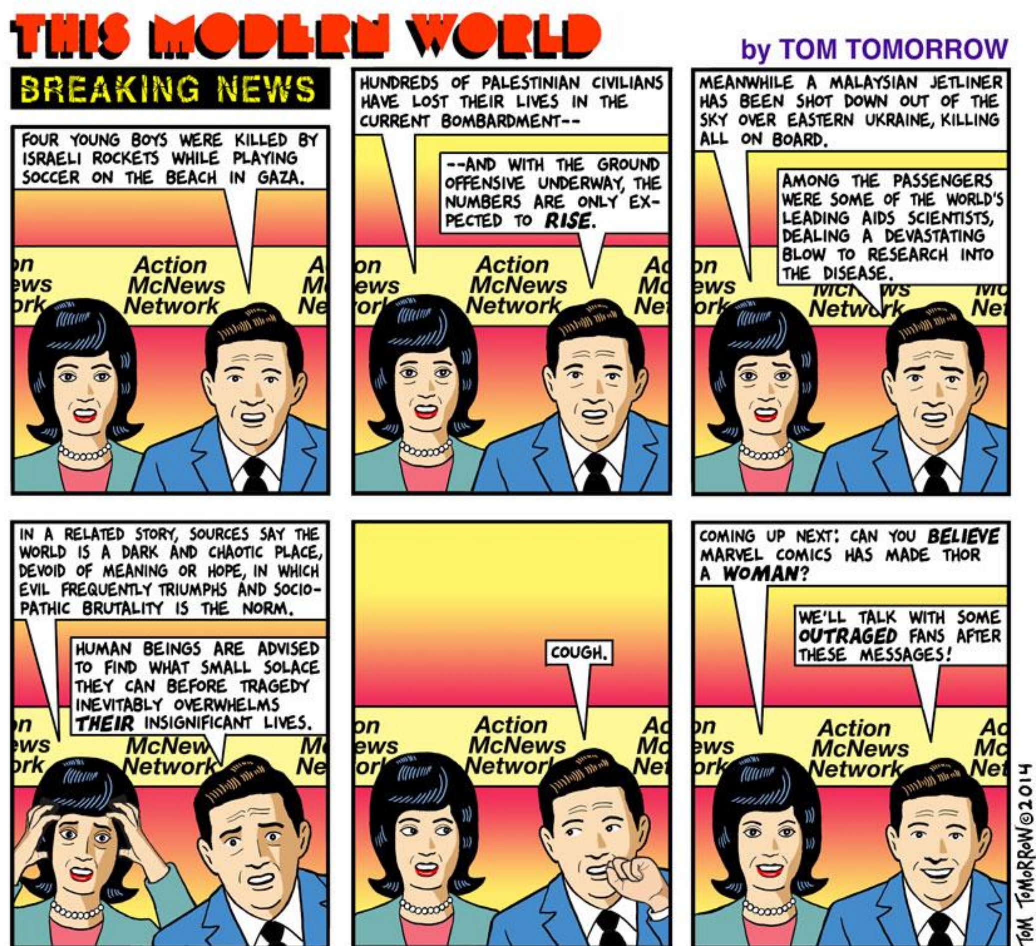

Figure 33

In face of this news, Perkins's characters evoke sentiments of nihilism and absurdity, concluding that "the world is a dark and chaotic place, devoid of meaning or hope" and that "human beings are advised to find what small solace they can before tragedy inevitably overwhelms *their* insignificant lives". The absurdity of the situation is only intensified by further reflections on corporate mass media (the story airs on the "Action McNews

Network"), as well as the obstinateness of sexism and the trivialities of fandom. Although Perkins introduces ironic ridicule to distance himself from these absurdities, the cartoon does not wholly dissipate the existential despair which it introduces. Crucially, this psychological disturbance is not merely a satirical strategy but corresponds to Perkins's own inner turmoil. To people who subscribe to his mailing list he explained that "I'm just kind of beat from this [cartoon]... need to turn off the tv [sic] and computer and go outside" (2014b). Similarly, he told me in personal communication how he hoped things in the world would improve in 2015, because it had been a tough year for political cartoonists.

In his satire, Perkins does not shy away from addressing the psychological disturbance of existential absurdity. This theme of existential absurdity of *This Modern World* has often been acknowledged by commentators. In this respect, Glenn Dixon states that Perkins's satirical cartoons are "the outcry of an exasperated, angry, even baffled voice in times that are absurd beyond imagining" (2008). Likewise, Glenn Greenwald has argued that "our political dialogue has degenerated well into the realm of the absurd, and the cartoons [of Tom Tomorrow] convey that absurdity in a visceral though highly accurate way" (2006). Crucially, part of the absurdity of the political status quo highlighted by *This Modern World* is the inability of the satirist to change it. Consider the "generic Tom Tomorrow cartoon" published in 2000, which is "applicable to any breaking news story that may occur during Tom's current vacation!" (fig. 34). In this cartoon, Perkins has his exasperated stand-in, Sparky the Wonder Penguin, face the conclusion that his progressive critique is "unlikely to [ever] gain widespread acceptance". As is typical of satire, Perkins cultivates a humorous irony to distance himself from his own critical ideals as a satirist. Perkins's ironic ridicule does not only target the false consciousness of conservative mouthpiece Biff, but also Sparky (and ultimately himself) for nonetheless continuing to pursue his critical mission. In *This Modern World*, the joke is both on those who stand in the way of enlightenment as well as those who pursue it, especially the satirist himself.

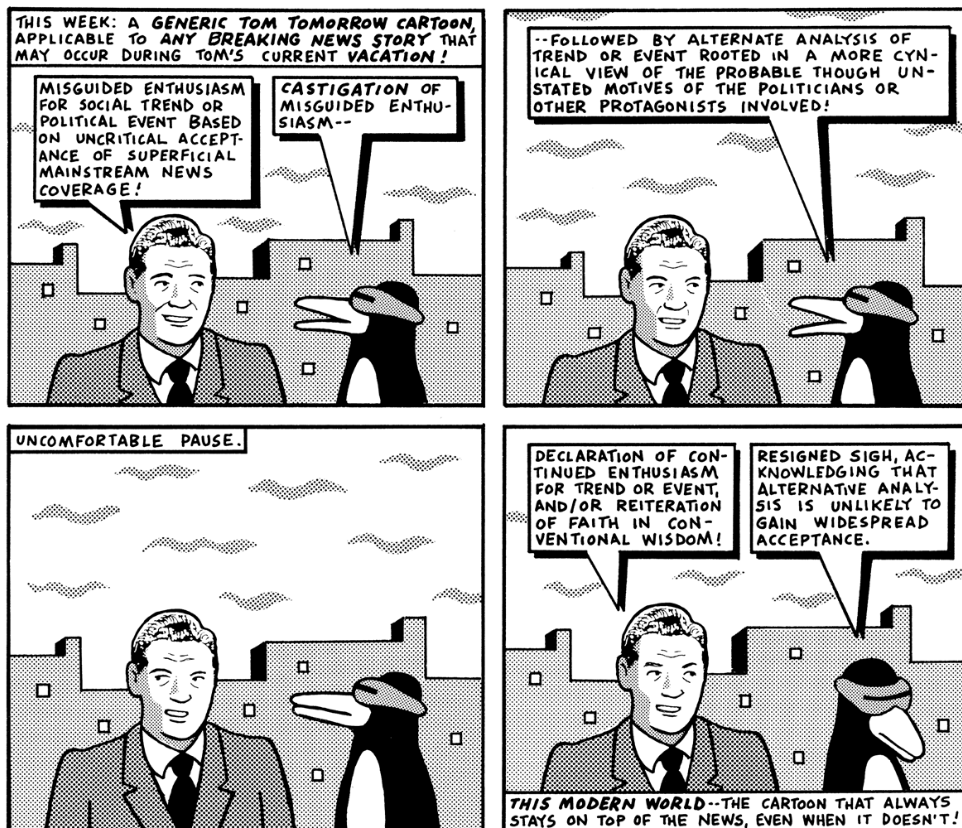

Figure 34

This idea that the ironic ridicule of Perkins's satire is directed at everybody, including himself, is accentuated by the visual style of his comic strip. A parody of futuristic advertisement found in fifties magazines (most notably *Life*), *This Modern World* combines a clip-art aesthetic with an anachronistically old-fashioned depiction of the future (Perkins 2003, 2). Many of Perkins's characters have outdated hairdos and are repeated in (almost) identical clip-art poses throughout the multi-panel sequence of the comic strip. This visual style serves to accentuate the ironic ridicule of characters like the conservative strawman by providing them with a distinct simpleminded quality and air of stupidity. Moreover, their almost identical repetition in various panels lends them a robotic and mechanical quality, suggesting that they are incapable of independent and critical thought. At the same time, progressive characters in *This Modern World*, like Sparky the Wonder Penguin, are also represented in Perkins's futuristically anachronous clip-art style. Thus, the visual style of *This Modern World* cues affordances that these characters too are targeted by the overall ironic ridicule of the satirical comic strip – and in an important sense they are. Whether it is Sparky the Wonder Penguin or somebody else who stands in for the satirist as the voice of progressive reason, they typically are ironic characters who are revealed as hopelessly

naïve in their critical commitment. The affordances of *This Modern World*'s visual aesthetic thus support a scope of ironic attribution which extends to 'this modern world' in its totality, including those who continue to try and overcome its absurdity through critique.

This Modern World is a typical example of how satire cultivates a humorous irony to negotiate the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. As a satirist, Perkins is passionately committed to critique, but also aware of the ultimate futility of his actions to wholly emancipate the world. This passionate commitment of the satirist to an ultimately absurd task is similar to Camus's characterisation of the absurdist hero who passionately revolts against the meaningless of life. Yet, there is an important difference between satirists and absurdist heroes. Camus's proposed response to the absurd is a happy nihilism. As Camus puts it, "[b]elief in the meaning of life always implies a scale of values, a choice, our preferences. Belief in the absurd, according to our definitions, teaches the contrary" (1955, 45). In other words, the absurdist hero has risen to the challenge of the absurd by accepting fate without any hope or desire to change it; everything that happens is of equal value, i.e. no value at all. The absurdist hero revolts to any feeling of lethargy that may arise from this realisation by living life to the fullest in the present (1955, 45). So what counts, according to Camus, "is not the best living but the most living" (1955, 76). In other words, it does not matter what one does, be it push a rock up and down a mountain every day or something else, as long as one does it with passion and without hope, one is freed from the despair of the absurd. For this reason, Camus explains, "[o]ne must imagine Sisyphus happy" (1955, 123).

Crucially, the happy nihilism advocated by Camus sharply contrasts to the humorous irony typical of satire. This contrast is accentuated by Camus's specification for absurdist art. According to Camus, "the absurd joy *par excellence* is [artistic] creation" (1955, 93). Camus specifies that "an absurd attitude, if it is to remain so, must remain aware of its gratuitousness. So it is with the work of art" (1995, 102). In other words, it follows that artists have to give up all hope that their efforts will achieve anything, for if the work "sacrifices to illusions and arouses hope, it ceases to be gratuitous" (1995, 102). According to Camus, '[t]o work and create "for nothing,' (…) this is the difficult wisdom that absurd thought sanctions" (1955, 84). However, such gratuitous aestheticism is not the way of satire. As opposed to nihilistic acceptance, satirists introduce a real revolt against the absurdities of the political status quo, even if they know the impact of their critique to be limited. In this regard, Matt Bors wryly jokes "I hope that a few of my cartoons will be

unearthed from the ruins of our forthcoming apocalypse as proof that we weren't all on board with the way things were going" (2003, v). In other words, whereas absurdist heroes overcome existential absurdity in the oblivion of a happy nihilism, satirists typically cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits by cultivating a humorous irony that oscillates between hope and despair about changing the world.

The crucial difference between satirists and absurdist heroes elucidates the significant therapeutic function of humorous irony in satire. Camus's existential philosophy stipulates that as long as one lives life with passion, the horrors of the world are indifferent. Yet, this happy nihilism is as much a leap away from the absurd as the metaphysics of consolation he dismisses. By contrast, satirists do not ignore the horrors of the world, but critically oppose them in their satire, even if their emancipatory impact is limited. So rather than cultivating a happy nihilism, the critique of satirists is exactly motivated by emotional disturbance. In this respect, Jen Sorensen has wryly described her satirical profession as "worrying about how humanity is destroying itself" (2014). Sorensen's comment is at once indicative of the critical commitment of satirists, despite emotional disturbance, as well as the humorous irony they often cultivate as a therapeutic response. As already suggested in passing by Thomas Nagel, such humorous irony is more mature than depressive "despair" or the dramatic "heroism" developed by Camus (2012 [1979], 23). The maturity of satire's therapeutic function is all the more significant since humorous irony is regularly distrusted in philosophical circles for allegedly cultivating exactly a happy nihilism and amoral aestheticism. Specifically, in his critique of Rorty, Blackburn has argued that quasi-realists can safely set irony aside. However, my analyses suggest that humorous irony in satire can be a mature therapeutic strategy in negotiating the conflict between the care of self and the care for others, so painfully highlighted in quasi-realism. Albeit further investigation is necessary, satire makes it plausible that humorous irony is a real character virtue which substantiates a therapeutic maturity by avoiding the melancholy of unabated critique and the ignorant bliss of moral indifference.

The therapeutic function of humorous irony in satire to cope with absurdity has been acknowledged in critical reception. Take Ben Bagdikian, who argues, "[t]he current political scene creates two impulses, to jump off a bridge or to laugh. Luckily, Tom Tomorrow gives us a chance to laugh" (Perkins n.d.) Importantly, humorous irony in satire has a plausible therapeutic effect on audiences not only because it introduces psychological distance which relieves emotional despair, but also because it fosters a community of like-minded

individuals who seek to come to terms with the absurdity they experience all around them. Perkins explicitly acknowledges the idea that satire can have such a therapeutic dimension by comparing his cartooning to "sending out these little smoke signals to let people know that they're not crazy and they're not alone, that there are other people out there who feel the way they do" (Elias 2003). Similarly, satirical cartoonist Ward Sutton has explained "[i]f our nation is going down the toilet, I want to spell out the truth. With drawings. And hopefully make people laugh. This isn't a movie. I'm not alone. You're not alone" (2005, 6). The same function of satire in fostering a therapeutic community has been highlighted by McGruder, who contends that "[t]here is a silent majority that is opposed to the direction of the country and my strip gives them a small outlet every day to feel like they're not crazy" (Younge 2005). Albeit such an investigation is beyond the scope of this thesis, it would be interesting to see if such statements about the therapeutic function of satire can be empirically verified.

For now, I conclude by reflecting on how the contrast between satirists and absurdist heroes informs the comparisons between satire and philosophy introduced at the beginning of my thesis. As a reminder, many scholars have framed the value of satire by comparing the efforts of satirists to those of ancient philosophers like Socrates. My investigation has validated such comparisons in the sense that, put metaphorically, satirists can be situated in the same existential ballpark as philosophers. Specifically, what unites them in this existential ballpark is a moral concern for truth, critique and emancipation. Traditionally, in the West, this moral concern has been traced back to the philosophy of Socrates, the gadfly who set out to improve society by stinging his co-citizens out of complacency. Moreover, as Pierre Hadot highlighted, Socrates himself cultivated a humorous irony that enabled him to come to terms with the limits of his wisdom (2002, 26). Accordingly, while satirists and philosophers like Socrates cohabitate a large existential ballpark with various other critical voices, the two do share humorous irony as a therapeutic coping device. Regardless, satirists and philosophers ultimately play ball very differently. Although Pierre Hadot has deplored, perhaps rightfully so, that professional philosophy has progressively eliminated its original existential as well as humorously ironic dimension, philosophers could never cultivate humorous irony in the way satirists do (2002, 50).

Granted, philosophy could critique in a moderately entertaining fashion. Likewise, philosophers, including quasi-realists about ethics, may stand to benefit from cultivating a

humorous irony that therapeutically attenuates the moral conflict between the care of self and the care for others. Yet, philosophy does not, nor could it, set out to critique and entertain in the same fashion of satire. Throughout this thesis, I have argued that the generic purpose of satire cannot be reduced to critique in an entertaining fashion. For better or for worse, satire sets out to critique and entertain, and while those two purposes can fruitfully interact, neither can be wholly instrumentalised to the other. Previously, I have acknowledged that satire's purpose to entertain for its own sake does compromise its purpose to critique. While satirists can make moderate cognitive contributions to a moral project of critique, which need to be supplemented by further investigation, there are more efficient ways to critique than through satire. Satirists themselves are usually the first to acknowledge these emancipatory limits of their critical efforts. Nonetheless, many satirists are also acutely aware that the emancipatory impact of critique as a whole is limited, for unabated critique is not only unlikely to wholly emancipate the world, but also risks to breed despair and depression. In response, because satire also incorporates the purpose to entertain, satirists can fully develop the therapeutic qualities of entertainment, specifically through capitalising on humorous and ironic strategies. In conclusion, although its purpose to entertain does limit its critical efficacy, satire's pursuit of entertainment has significant value in therapeutically negotiating between the demands of critique and its limits.

8. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have further elaborated the relationship between critique and entertainment in satire by focussing on humour and irony as two standard features of the genre. I have introduced but ultimately dismissed anxieties that an attitude of humorous irony in satire necessarily translates into a morally weightless aestheticism or happy nihilism. First, by endorsing the incongruity theory of humour and the echoic theory of irony, I have explained that humorous and ironic strategies in satire often go hand in hand as instruments of critique. Such an attitude of humorous irony fosters critique by highlighting the normative deficiency of targets, often through so-called ironic characters. Second, and most importantly, humorous irony in satire introduces a therapeutic distance from the psychological disturbance that follows from its purpose to critique. More specifically, in line with the quasi-realistic framework introduced before, I have highlighted that we cannot be critical all the time, nor always be successful in our critical efforts. In response, satirists have often cultivated a humorous irony which has a plausible therapeutic function in coming to terms with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its

limits. Such humorous irony typically manifests itself as a hopeful pessimism or hopeless optimism, which permits satirists to sincerely critique and pursue truth without being crushed by the existential absurdity that such critical truthfulness is bound to reveal. Summing up, through this combination of humour and irony, two standard features of the genre, satire typically sets out to make the truths of its critique bearable.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I aimed to establish what satire is, what it can do and what not, and why we should care about it. In order address these fundamental issues about satire's nature, function and significance, I challenged arguments that satire cannot be defined. Although a cluster account has been favoured in recent scholarship, it insufficiently distinguishes satire from more frivolous or gratuitous representations. For this reason, a cluster account sustains a problematic ambiguity around the label 'satire' in international media contexts, which contributes to the confusion about the genre's nature, function and significance in public discussions. In order to redress this confusion, I proposed to define satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain. Concretely, I argued that the classification 'satire' has since Roman times guided interpretation and evaluation of works on the grounds of the purpose to critique and entertain. This definitive purpose to critique and entertain has informed and remains to inform the creation and reception of satire by artists across the ages and in various media. At the same time, my definition also explains why the reception of satire has been so ambiguous. Although critique and entertainment fruitfully interact, there is nonetheless a fundamental tension between satire's two generic purposes. In this respect, satire is defined by a tension between the moral concerns that propel critique and the pursuit of unexalted aesthetic pleasures in entertainment. This fundamental tension between critique and entertainment in satire clarifies its nature, function and significance, and situates the genre's ambiguity in an existential framework.

My definition of satire as a genre with the purpose to critique and entertain clarifies the doubleness of its nature. On the one hand, satire incorporates the moral seriousness of critique, which distinguishes it from frivolous fooling around or gratuitous shock humour. On the other hand, satire also incorporates the recreation of entertainment, which sets it apart from more ardent forms of critique, as well as more solemn forms of critical art. The paradox of satire's double nature is that it exposes what should change in the world at same time as indulging in the respite of unexalted aesthetic pleasures. This doubleness of satire's nature translates itself in paradoxical functions, which explains the genre's ambiguous reception. Satire serves a broadly moral function in taking a stand against discourses and practices which it identifies as undesirable. Specifically, satire has moderate but significant cognitive value to a moral project of critique. Although satire needs to be complemented by further investigation, it can supplement philosophy or investigative journalism by succinctly grasping the essence of a complex issue or highlighting previously

underacknowledged connections. Yet, satire does not have greater political impact as critique because it entertains. By contrast, although entertainment and critique fruitfully interact in good satire, satire's aesthetic function to entertain audiences ultimately abates its moral function as critique. However, satire is therefore not a failed or cynical genre. Instead, I revalued entertainment in satire as a therapy to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits. Accordingly, the significance of the tension between critique and entertainment in satire can be framed as negotiating a fundamental conflict in ethical life between the care for others and the care of self.

My philosophical investigation into the nature, function and significance of satire has been rooted in a continuous dialogue with the rich scholarly literature on the subject. The vast majority of this literature has been invaluable to my investigation, including when I ended up disagreeing with a certain idea or position. Likewise, I hope that my own research can fruitfully contribute to further investigation about satire. Specifically, I have aimed to move debates about satire forward by introducing greater philosophical clarity about key concepts and issues. For one, my investigation has introduced a new conception of genre into the debates which replaces vague concepts such as 'spirit' or 'mode'. My investigation has also philosophically grounded the moral function of satire as critique in a meta-ethical investigation which has normalised talk of truth, including in the domain of ethics. Further, although satire is not philosophy, I have revalued comparisons between the two as rightfully situating the genre in an existential framework. Moreover, I have suggested avenues for further investigation into how satire can complement the cognitive aims of philosophy exactly because it is not philosophy. Similarly, I have argued that entertainment in satire has a therapeutic dimension in addressing existential issues that philosophy highlights but not resolves. Accordingly, I have argued that the value of entertainment in satire is not simply instrumental to critique. Moreover, insofar as entertainment in satire is instrumentally valuable as therapy, it is so because audiences are engrossed in unexalted aesthetic pleasures for its own sake. Further, I have developed a careful cognitivism about satire which highlights its cognitive virtues, without ignoring the risks. Finally, I have tempered suspicions about humorous irony in satire as substantiating a happy nihilism, specifically by introducing ironic characters as both a critical and a coping strategy.

Throughout my investigation, I have tried to connect ancient to modern satire and I have addressed the genre's manifestations in different media. Further, although I have mostly focused on humorous satire, my discussions of Jimi Hendrix's "The Star-Spangled Banner"

and Iggy Pop's "Louie, Louie" have highlighted that satire is not necessarily designed to be funny. Nevertheless, my corpus has its limitations, which can hopefully be addressed in further investigation. Although I strived for a representative and relatively diverse corpus, my selection focuses exclusively on Western satire. I hope that further investigation can assess if my fundamental claims about satire also have a more global ambit. In this respect, a few years ago, *The Guardian* published an article on satirists in the Muslim world, which suggested a particularly rich, and to my knowledge, largely unexplored tradition of satire "from Iraqis poking fun at the Islamic State (Isis) to Saudi standup comics, and Palestinians grinning and bearing life under a corrupt government and Israeli occupation" (Black et al. 2015). Further, it would be interesting to compare the function of satire as therapy in liberal democracies to authoritarian or theocratic regimes. In this respect, while the satire of Bassem Youssef in post-Arab Spring Egypt, modelled on *The Daily Show*, has already received some international attention, especially under impulse of Jon Stewart himself (2013), it would be interesting to further investigate the comparison between the two satirists. Similarly, the satirical culture of Turkey has already received scholarly attention internationally (Dinc 2012), but as the authoritarianism of the Erdogan regime has only increased, it would be interesting to compare satirical strategies of Turkish satirists to those of American satirists coping with Trump.

In this respect, as discussed, my main suggestion for future research is not to focus on how satire changes the world, but how it copes with it. In this respect, while some scholars have investigated how satire shapes communities between satirists and audiences (Gray 2005), I suggest to also explore how these communities incorporate a therapeutic dimension. As discussed, some satirists, like Dan Perkins (Tom Tomorrow) consider their satire as "sending out these little smoke signals to let people know that they're not crazy and they're not alone" (Elias 2003). It would be worthwhile to investigate whether such therapeutic satirical communities really exist and how they operate, perhaps by obtaining data from interviews. No doubt, if they exist, these therapeutic communities are largely symbolic, but there is also often an actual dialogue between satirists and audiences through fan mail. In this respect, as mentioned, Perkins has explained how "sometimes a reader will write to say that a cartoon on a given topic is 'depressingly accurate,' or that they would laugh if they weren't too busy crying" (2013). To my knowledge, this kind of exchange between satirists and audiences in fan mail has not yet been investigated in scholarship, but it could shed light on how satirists and audiences frame satire in an existential and therapeutic context.

Granted, this research would face some obstacles, not in the least obtaining permission from satirists to explore their personal archive and anonymise any data obtained. Another way of obtaining data would be to conduct interviews with satirists themselves, but this strategy also comes with its own challenges. To some extent, I have tried to talk to satirists about a therapeutic dimension in their work whenever I had the opportunity during this project. Yet, I found it difficult to get them to talk about such a sensitive subject. Therefore, while I think this kind of research would be fruitful to pursue, it does require the right framing to be effective.

Apart from satire, in particular, I think that mass entertainment generally has an underdeveloped therapeutic function to provide relief from everyday worries and concerns. The concept 'flow', as developed in positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi 1990), may be a useful tool for film, TV and media scholars to further investigate how entertainment is designed to stimulate the cultivation of autotelic pleasures in audiences. Perhaps such an investigation could shed light on contemporary practices of media consumption such as binge watching, which may suggest that autotelic engrossment in entertainment is not necessarily healthy. On the other hand, I do hope that psychological research into humour and wellbeing overcomes its modernist anxieties and considers the therapeutic benefits of popular media, including film and television (Martin and Kuiper 2016). Specifically, I hope that my suggestions about watching or reading satire as a form of therapy can be substantiated by empirical testing. It would also be rewarding if my philosophical exercise to introduce greater conceptual clarity in debates about satire informs future theoretical frameworks in empirical investigations. In this respect, I think philosophical investigation could specifically contribute to further exploring the correlation between particular styles of humour and detrimental effects on wellbeing, as suggested by the Humour Styles Questionnaire (Martin et al. 2003). In turn, establishing greater conceptual clarity about which kinds of humour negatively impact wellbeing and why would shed further light on the therapeutic ambiguity of dark satires like Fey Weldon's *Sacred Cows*.

Further, one particularly fruitful avenue for future investigation into the relation between humour and wellbeing would be stand-up comedy. To some degree, a stand-up comedy performance facilitates the assessment of the interaction between comedians and audiences in a non-artificial context (at least phenomenologically). Specifically, I hypothesise that the manifested behaviour of audiences at a stand-up comedy performance indicates their emotional response to a comedian's set. Assessing this

manifested behaviour might provide insight into the therapeutic dimension of humour. Crucially, this manifested behaviour is much more varied than laugher. Audiences of a stand-up comedy performance do not just laugh, but clap, jeer, stomp, heckle, sigh, shout, etc. Accordingly, they expresses a range of emotional states, including enjoyment, anger, hope, despair, endorsement, dismissal, etc. By itself, a phenomenology of attending a stand-up performance might shed light on the therapeutic dimension of such experienced emotional engagement, but it would be particularly interesting if this kind of investigation could be complemented by empirical research. In general, I think that empirical and theoretical research about humour and wellbeing stand to enrich each other both ways. Hopefully my own investigation of satire can contribute to such a valuable exchange.

Finally, my careful cognitivism about satire could contribute to further research into the cognitive value of narrative fiction. I specifically think that cartoons are a particularly rich medium to continue to explore in these debates. As explained, under the right circumstances, cartoons may have the cognitive advantage of introducing a lay audience to topics which might otherwise be considered too complex to approach. Mike Goodwin and Dan E. Bur's *Economix* (2012) is one example of a cartoon that aspires to such a function, but there are others. Perhaps most prominently, Larry Gonick has created a multi-volume cartoon history of the universe and various spin-offs, including cartoon introductions to chemistry, physics or algebra (2016). What is interesting about these cartoons is that although they are non-fiction, they capitalise on imaginative techniques normally associated with fiction, including extreme simplification, exaggeration and quick and dirty emotive processes. Accordingly, further investigation of such educational cartoons may shed light on how and when imaginative techniques associated with fiction can contribute to knowledge acquisition. Moreover, exploring cartoons offers interesting possibilities for public engagement. To some extent, my investigation in this thesis has already benefitted from delivering workshops about *South Park*'s "The Hobbit" to prospective film and media students. In the future, I aim to explore how my research in this area can be further informed by teaching in a context of public engagement. Another upshot of this kind of public engagement through cartoons is that it creates a forum to introduce philosophical aesthetics to non-specialised audiences and creates opportunities for interdisciplinary partnerships. For instance, historians and aestheticians could work together on a public engagement project which explores how cartoons can be used to engage pupils with history.

In this respect, throughout my investigation, I have sought to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue, especially between analytic aesthetics and film, TV and media studies. While philosophers can learn a lot from the expertise developed over the years in these related art-interested disciplines, I do think aesthetics can enrich the theoretical investigation of moving images and other popular media in ways which are currently underdeveloped outside of philosophy. In the process of my own investigation, I have gradually been persuaded by the methodological richness of aesthetics. Looking forward, I am convinced that aesthetics can enrich debates and investigations beyond its inner circle and even beyond the academy. As discussed, satire is a popular genre, of interest to fans, critics, journalists, politicians and moral authorities alike. In this respect, I hope my investigation has done justice to analytic philosophy's celebrated conceptual clarity and ease of expression, so it may be of interest not just to scholars but, in principle, to all who care about satire. That said, I do think aestheticians generally face an important challenge of how exactly to disseminate their ideas to the art-interested beyond the academy. Similarly, aesthetics currently faces the challenge to legitimise its importance within philosophy. In this regard, my investigation aimed to showcase that a meta-ethical framework like Blackburn's quasi-realism cannot only inform the study of satire, but an analysis of humorous irony in satire can also redress common anxieties in meta-ethics. Concretely, the humorous irony developed by satirists to cope with the absurd gap between the demands of critique and its limits is a plausible and legitimate strategy to address the fundamental tension between the care for others and care of self, highlighted by quasi-realism.

On the whole, my philosophical investigation set out to establish the right expectations about what satire is, what it can do and why should care about it. Accordingly, I aimed to redress tendencies in scholarship and public debate which either overestimate or undervalue satire. In the end, I identify myself as a cautious supporter of satire. My investigation sought to philosophically substantiate claims by other supporters in order to challenge detractors who have undervalued the genre, because they think it is frivolous, cynical or otherwise without significant merit. I have specially argued that satire is not an excuse for fooling around or a fig leaf to legitimise nasty humour; such activities are really something else, because they do not incorporate a moral dimension of critique. It does not follow that there is no bad satire, but even satire which is morally off-target is not frivolous or gratuitous. At the same time, my claims about the value of satire are more moderate than some positions of other supporters. Specifically, I acknowledge that satire is politically

limited as critique because it entertains, especially contrasted to directly activist strategies. Still, the genre may have significant cognitive value as critique, but even then only as a complement to epistemic best practices in philosophy or investigative journalism. Any higher expectation of satire's value as critique sets the genre up for failure. However, my investigation has revalued the therapeutic significance of satire's function to entertain. Crucially, when we enjoy satire's unexalted aesthetic pleasures, we are not (by some indirect process) more effective as critical agents, but our attention is temporarily directed away from the demands of critique. Such respite from critique can be a therapeutically mature way to cope with its limits. In conclusion, the key aim of my investigation has been to highlight that satire is significant because its definitive tension between critique and entertainment reflects a fundamental conflict in ethical life. For this reason, satire merits our continued attention as moral agents.

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