

## **INTRODUCING MORAL IDENTITY (IN)TO LITERARY METADISOURSE: SOME POSSIBLE GROUND RULES AND BASIC PROTOCOLS**

Ramona Hărșan

PhD, Assist. Prof., "Transilvania" University of Brașov

*Abstract: The relatively recent notion of „moral identity” is proper to the fields of ethics and moral psychology. Often used in connection to the „essential identity” of an individual or a (social) group, the concept basically describes a morally-defined identity, those articulations of moral values, options and engagements that are so important to person or a community that the given entity must necessarily and substantially be defined through them. But what if we could also use this same notion to discuss the ways in which issues related to culturally intermediated moral identities are set forth and reflected by contemporary fiction, applying it to individual or collective literary characters, to certain narrative devices, displays or settings used to fictionally approach the extra-literary moral identity of the group? And if we could, how can it be done? This paper attempts to draw a guideline concerning the main possible metaliterary uses of the concept and its importance as a means of updating current literary metadiscourse, its investigation methods and perspectives, in order to meet the immediate reality and necessities of present-day (globalised) societies.*

*Key-words: moral identity, cultural identity, fiction, hermeneutics, literary metadiscourse*

A notion rooted in philosophy (ethical theory) and having (more recent) developments in moral psychology, “moral identity” as a proper concept has an actual history that begins in the 1970s-1980s and has raised increasing scientific interest in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The concept basically describes a morally-defined identity, for which certain articulations of moral values, options and moral engagements can be considered essential, i.e. are capital to the description and identification of that specific entity. Or, in other words, when for an entity there are moral configurations and attachments that are so important that the person or group must necessarily and substantially be defined through them, we can say that the given

entity has a(n essentially) “moral identity”. Still referring mainly to persons and their self-definition (or different definitions of themselves) as moral beings and ultimate instances of moral responsibility, the notion has already begun to open towards (or extend to) the larger domain of cultural identity definition, and especially towards issues concerning culturally intermediated definitions of the self and of the group<sup>1</sup>.

In this sense, I will argue here that a possible and extremely resourceful application of the concept could very well concern literary metadiscourse and more precisely hermeneutics (in the broad sense of the term), providing the scientific interpretation of literary texts with a new and acutely socially engaging perspective on fiction in the context our globalised world. Bringing together ethics, cultural and moral psychology, axiology, comparative literature and cultural studies, this possible “hermeneutics of moral identity” could come in handy in discussing literary expressions of cultural identity, identitary (re)constructions through fiction of a group’s (or a community’s, a subculture’s) metanarratives<sup>2</sup> etc. through the thorough exploration of the “moral identities” of fictional characters (individual or collective) as significant (or representative) morally structured representations of identity. My present outlook thus implies three main steps: (1) retracing the history of the concept of “moral identity”, (2) selecting the definition (or definitions) that could be the most useful to literary metadiscourse and (3) establishing some preliminary instrumental and methodological “ground rules and basic protocols” for the “hermeneutic” use of the notion, i.e. for its possible usage in relation to fiction.

The intellectual history of “moral identity” has to take into account two fundamental lines of thought, corresponding to two main (and somewhat concurrent) areas of knowledge: ethics and moral psychology. Though interconnected, these two theoretical domains have had (to a certain extent, at least) independent, alternative or successive approaches to the matter, with the works of Charles Taylor as a fundamental confluence point.

In philosophy, the idea of “moral identity” can be traced as far back as to Aristotle’s and Epicurus’ ethical thinking, more precisely to their design of the person as an “end in itself”<sup>3</sup> and to the corresponding definition of morality as a rationalist-individualistic phenomenon, basically

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Allan Montefiore’s description of the concept, in Monique Canto-Sperber (ed.), *Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale*, 4e édition, Éditions Quadrige/PUF, Paris, 2004, art. „Identité morale : l’identité morale et la personne”, pp.883-891 et al.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Hackett Publishing, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 2014.

defined as a moral sense of the self that helps a person lead a “good life” (*eudiamonia* with Aristotle)<sup>4</sup> and reflectively pursue his/her own self-interests or (higher-order/mental) pleasures (*ataraxia* with Epicurus)<sup>5</sup>, just as long as others are taken into account as persons as well (as means in themselves). In the same line of thought, Kant later defined morality as a product of rational thinking, as a standard of rationality we (as humans) commonly possess as a “categorical imperative”<sup>6</sup>. It is this “dignity of the rational agent” that made philosopher Charles Taylor reassess the deep connection between the self-identity and thoroughly rationalised moral beliefs in his capital work *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity* (1989) and later writings<sup>7</sup>. Linking “moral identity” to a hermeneutics of the self that brings him close to Paul Ricoeur’s theories of “narrative identity”<sup>8</sup>, he has championed in terms of influence over relatively similar contributions on the issue, even if influential philosophical standpoints concerning the attachment of value to a person’s moral autonomy and decision can also be found in Harry Frankfurt’s and Richard Hare’s descriptions of the formation of moral principles and judgements<sup>9</sup> or in Amélie Rorty’s definition of the person as a “*locus* of responsibility for a range of choices and actions”<sup>10</sup>. Consequently, the 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the dictionary of ethics and moral philosophy (*Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale*) edited by Monique Canto-Sperber<sup>11</sup> in 2004 has a special entry for the concept of “moral identity”. Authored by Alan Montefiore<sup>12</sup>, the dictionary article actually refers to moral identity as part of what he calls a

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. XIII *et al.*

<sup>5</sup> See Epicurus, *The Art of Happiness*, Penguin Books, New York, 2012.

<sup>6</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, followed by *Rethinking the Western Tradition*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2002.

<sup>7</sup> See Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self. The Making of Modern Identity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, M.A., 1989, p. 152 *et al.* and *A Secular Age*, Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, M.A. and London, 2007, p.134.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Arto Laitinen, “Charles Taylor and Paul Ricoeur on Self-Interpretations and Narrative Identity”, in Rauno Huttunen, Hannu Heikkinen & Leena Syrjälä (Eds.), *Narrative Research. Voices of Teachers and Philosophers*, SoPhi books, University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, 2002, pp.57-71. See also Kenneth J. Gergen, “Narrative, Moral Identity, and Historical Consciousness: A Social Constructionist Account”, in *Narration, Identity and Historical Consciousness*, Jürgen Straub (Ed.), Berghahn Books, New York, 2005, pp. 99-119.

<sup>9</sup> See Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” in *Journal of Philosophy*, issue no. 68, 1971, pp. 5–20, Harry Frankfurt, *The Importance of What We Care About*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 1988 and Richard Mervyn Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Oxford University Press, 1952, p. 65 *et al.*

<sup>10</sup> Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, *The Identities of Persons*, University of California Press, Berkeley/Los Angeles, 1976, p.309.

<sup>11</sup> Monique Canto-Sperber (ed.), *Dictionnaire d’éthique et de philosophie morale*, 4<sup>e</sup> édition, Éditions Quadrige/PUF, Paris, 2004.

<sup>12</sup> Allan Montefiore in Monique Canto-Sperber, *op.cit.*, ed.cit., art. „Identité morale : l’identité morale et la personne”, pp.883-891.

person's "essential identity". Via a definition of "individual identification" given by Rorty, Montefiore considers it to be constituted by the moral "characteristics [that] identify a person as *essentially* the person she is, such that if those characteristics were changed, she would be a significantly different person, though she still might be differentiated and reidentified as the same"<sup>13</sup>. The most interesting development signaled by Montefiore is that the idea of "moral identity" can be extended towards such issues as those of the person's moral attachment to / engagement with a group's or community's moral system and to the identification of groups as well, thus opening the issue to cultural approaches: "the same issues arise for the identity of groups"<sup>14</sup>, he argues, explaining in what ways "the «essential» identity of the persons will relate, in very different and often very complicated ways, to that of the groups to which these persons estimate they belong to, or to which others estimate they belong to"<sup>15</sup>. Moreover, he also points out that "the answers concerning «essential identity» depend largely on essentially contingent considerations regarding the historical and social circumstances, as well as on personal and social evaluations [that is to say on personal and social systems of moral values]"<sup>16</sup>. "Groups", he argues, "just like persons, can have their own moral identities – composed by their characteristic adhesions to certain values, those of a secular public domain open to all, for instance, versus those that are rather attached to the beliefs and social practices of a given religion"<sup>17</sup>.

In psychology, the idea of moral identity has a tradition starting with Jean Piaget's cognitive-developmental model for the study of moral behaviour<sup>18</sup>, continued and extended by Lawrence Kohlberg (who also discussed the relationship between ethics and moral

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<sup>13</sup> Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, *op.cit.*, ed.cit., p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Original fragment: "les mêmes questions se posent pour l'identité des groupes", my translation, R.H. Allan Montefiore, *op.cit.*, ed.cit., pp. 886-887.

<sup>15</sup> Original fragment: "„Bien entendu, l'identité «essentielle» des personnes sera liée, de manières différentes, et souvent très compliquées, à celle des groupes auxquels ces personnes s'estiment appartenir, ou auxquels les autres estiment qu'elles appartiennent. De plus [...], les réponses aux questions relatives à la question de l'identité essentielle dépendent en grande partie de considérations, essentiellement contingents, portant sur les circonstances historiques et sociales ainsi que sur l'évaluation personnelle ou sociale [...]", my translation, R.H. Allan Montefiore, *op.cit.*, ed.cit., pp. 885-886.

<sup>16</sup> See above.

<sup>17</sup> Original fragment: "Mais les groupes, autant que les individus, peuvent avoir leur propre identité morale – faite de leur adhésion caractéristique à certaines valeurs, celles d'un domaine public laïque ouvert à tous, par exemple, ou celles qui s'attachent aux croyances et pratiques sociales d'une religion donnée." My translation, R.H. Allan Montefiore, *op.cit.*, ed.cit., p. 890.

<sup>18</sup> Jean Piaget, *The moral judgment of the child*, Free Press, New York, 1932.

psychology)<sup>19</sup>, and by Erik Erikson's conviction that ethical capacity is the essential criterion to identity construction, whereas "identity and fidelity are necessary for ethical strength"<sup>20</sup>. As one of the most important contributors to the concept, Augusto Blasi argued that moral identity can differ in configuration from person to person and that all persons are not essentially morally defined<sup>21</sup>, that "the ideal of being a good or moral person may occupy different levels of centrality in peoples' self-concepts"<sup>22</sup>. Hart *et al.* used the term to define "a commitment to one's sense of self to lines of action that promote or protect the welfare of others"<sup>23</sup>. Post Charles Taylor, some of the recent influential psychology scholars preoccupied by "moral identity" are David Carr, Albert Bandura, Daniel Lapsley, Darcia Narvaez, as the latest developments in psychology seem to focus on the relationship between personality and cognition, concentrating on generating integrative models of moral functioning and research on the ideal moral self<sup>24</sup>. Another prominent viewpoint on moral identity in psychology, starting with the 1990s, is the one that considers it to be a part of a person's "social identity", in the sense that the value system implied by the construction of moral-identity may be influenced by the person's appurtenance to certain groups or minorities, such as vocational, political, religious, or ethnic groups, sexual minorities, subcultures etc. (see in this sense Fekken & Holden<sup>25</sup>, Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Ethier<sup>26</sup>, Skitka & Maslach<sup>27</sup>, Sheila K. Marshall<sup>28</sup> *et al.*).

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<sup>19</sup> Lawrence Kohlberg, "From is to ought: How to commit the naturalistic fallacy and get away with it in the study of moral development" in T. Mischel (Ed.), *Cognitive development and epistemology*, Academic Press, New York, 1971, pp. 164–165; *Essays on moral development. I. The Philosophy of Moral Development*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1981; *Essays on moral development. II. The Psychology of Moral Development*, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1984.

<sup>20</sup> Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and responsibility*, NY: Norton, New York, 1964, p.39.

<sup>21</sup> Augusto Blasi, "Moral identity: Its role in moral functioning" in W. Kurtines & J. Gewirtz (Eds.), *Morality, moral behavior and moral development*, Wiley, New York, 1984, pp. 128–139.

<sup>22</sup> Karl Aquino, Americus Reed, "The Self-Importance of Moral Identity", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 2002, Vol. 83, No. 6, pp. 1423–1440.

<sup>23</sup> Hart, D., Atkins, R., & Ford, D., "Urban America as a context for the development of moral identity in adolescence" in *Journal of Social Issues*, issue no. 54, 1998, p 515.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Daniel Lapsley, "Moral Identity and Developmental Theory" in *Human Development*, ISSN: 0018-716X (Print), eISSN: 1423-0054, Vol. 58, no.3, 2015, pp. 164–171. Available online (free access): <https://www.karger.com/Article/FullText/435926> [visited: 10.05.2015].

<sup>25</sup> G. Cynthia Fekken, Ronald R. Holden, „Response latency evidence for viewing personality traits as schema indicators", in *Journal of Research in Personality*, 26, 1992, pp. 103–120.

<sup>26</sup> Kay Deaux, Anne Reid, Kim Mizrahi, Kathleen A. Ethier, "Parameters of social identity" in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 68, February 1995, pp. 280–291.

<sup>27</sup> Linda J. Skitka, Christina Maslach, "Gender as schematic category: A role construct approach" in *Social Behavior and Personality*, 24, 1996, pp. 53–73.

<sup>28</sup> Sheila K. Marshall, "A Developmental Social Psychology of Identity: Understanding the Person-in-Context", in *Journal of Adolescence*, November 1996, 19, pp.429–442.

Now, putting together the two conceptual histories of the term, we will notice that (a) in both fields, there are developments concerning the role of cultural determinations in moral self-definition, that (b) more generally cultural notions such as “essential identity”, “group identity”, “narrative identity”, “social identity” tend to be attached or linked to “moral identity”, and that (c) axiology is rather implicitly linked to these (in one word) *cultural* definitions of the concept. It is mainly this broader, socio-cultural dimension that actually interests my present approach, even though the mechanisms of personal, inner self-construction of an individual’s moral identity are sometimes implied and can be useful as well.

Of course, both the inner and “outer”/cultural understandings of the matter could very well concern literary studies: fiction could constitute a fertile “playground”, a raw resource waiting to be explored through philosophically, psychologically or culturally infused metaliterary investigation. However, the foremost relevance and importance of literature in this direction – since it can be considered a particular type of cultural discourse itself – would probably be not that of offering primary, unbiased data about the way in which the moral identity of the person or group is constituted in terms of inner functioning (because the author is, in this case, an instance that fictionally intermediates information), but that of providing extremely pertinent clues in what concerns the culturally shaped systems of values implicated in the structuring of culturally significant, problematic / conflicting or socially representative moral identities.

More precisely, interpreted by means of this possible “hermeneutics of moral identity”, fiction could regain general interest in such essential narrative elements as *plot / story, character* or *social / historical / anthropological setting* as fictional structures worthy to be taken into account scientifically because they are able to offer insights on the mechanics of “harmony and dissonance”<sup>29</sup> within the narrations concerning the moral identity of cultural groups or exponential individualities, on the different sets of moral values that articulate political convictions or viewpoints<sup>30</sup>, on the various ethical “world model(s)” that influence the

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<sup>29</sup> The concepts belong to Paul Ricoeur when linked to “narrative identity”. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative I*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1984, *Oneself as Another*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992 *et al.*

<sup>30</sup> In this sense, the metaliterary approach could also use sociological studies and theories such as Ronald Inglehart’s “Culture and Demoacracy” (in *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*, Lawrence E. Harrison Samuel P. Huntington (Ed.), Basic Books, New York, 2000, pp. 79-96), in which the sets of values corresponding to traditional/fundamentalist/totalitarian cultures differ from those corresponding to modern/secular/democratic



construction of moral identities or on the “cultural clash(es)” characterizing our present-day globalized societies. Such hermeneutics could also, on the other hand, decipher the (often) hidden ethical attachments and views of influential authors or signal the pertinence of certain ethical fictional discourses under particular historical and political conditions such as totalitarianism etc.

Some “ground rules” that might concern this type of hermeneutic (meta)discourse can be derived from the basic (and capital) “protocol” of avoiding morally judgmental rhetoric or prescriptive assertions and favouring sheer, phenomenological exploration/interpretation of the fictional data. In other words, the researcher’s task should be to discover and set forth the existing configurations of moral identity or identities in the text. *The moral neutrality, the moral relativism of the hermeneutic discourse and its concern for the phenomenon itself* are thus the first and probably the key methodological rule.

For instance, when discussing the moral identity of a certain fictional *morally significant or exponential character*, the researcher should observe and expose (or “translate”) the essential moral appurtenance or disengagement of that character to certain groups, communities, moral systems existent in society, the relevance for the non-literary context of a protagonist’s moral-identitary status, possible resemblances to real, non-fictional moral identity configurations of individual or collective characters, moral statements that a specific character can make through its particular articulation of moral identity or through the (creditable or non-creditable) moral identity “narratives” (of himself or of a certain group) that he proposes to the reader etc. On the contrary, it would be recommended that the researcher should restrain from assigning morally positive or negative value to the moral identity of the character he discusses (i.e. judging the character’s values as being ethically “right” or “wrong”, “good” or “bad”, morally profitable or damaging for society in general etc.).

Similarly, when approaching the *historical or social setting* of a certain work of fiction, the hermeneutist should focus on distinguishing and bringing to light communautary or cultural moral identities implied by the text through the construction of anthropological setting and/or on the ethical judgements attached to them by the writer which can be deduced from the overall *mise en scène* of a certain context. In this case, the atmosphere, symbolism, utopic or anti-topic

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societies, or Iuri Lotman’s cultural semiotics (in *Studii de tipologie a culturii [Studies in the Typology of Culture]*, trad. Radu Nicolau, Editura „Univers”, București, 1974).

descriptions, the dynamics between the setting and the protagonist's moral ideals could be important clues hinting to the moral profile of the macro-group, to the profile attributed to it by the protagonist or by the author himself etc.

Finally, when exploring the *story*, the main interest should be constituted by the evolutions or developments in moral identity of individual protagonists or groups. Again, it would be recommended to "show" these transformations in terms of position shifts in the moral values that articulate a personal or a socio-cultural identity, to perceive modifications that cause moral conflict or solve it within the story, to expose events or actions that suggest that such changes have intimately occurred, rather than "tell" if such mutations are morally "correct" or not<sup>31</sup>.

Obviously, this type of analysis should permanently relate the fictional universe or selected elements to "real-life" contexts and to their scientific assessment in fields of knowledge other than that of literary studies. *Relation* (to the real world and to other discourses – scientific or cultural) is thus a crucial principle for the "hermeneutics of moral identity" I am proposing. This being said, it might be important to mention that the principle of relation does not necessarily imply reducing fiction to its "mimetic" aspects. Of course, the way in which *mimesis* is achieved (i.e. the fictional representation of reality) and the reasons determining certain representations are essential interests to such explorations. But technical or aesthetic considerations – such as narrative structure, narrative voices and points of view, aesthetical devices (metaphors, allegories, correlatives, accuracy in fictional rendition etc.), narrative discourse in general or the envisioned *cathartic* effects of the literary text – are not irrelevant either, since they ultimately contribute to the transmission, outside the actual text, of a certain message or attitude related to the moral identity issues described. Consequently, the principle of relation actually refers rather to the fact that in the context of the metaliterary interpretation of moral identity issues, the subject of the analysis itself (i.e. the notion of moral identity) imposes instruments and a vocabulary of culturally broader, interdisciplinary nature.

In other words, all elements proper to the comparative approach on literature or to literary interpretation in general can be considered on condition of their *relevance*. The principle of relevance should thus be taken into account when discerning between the fictional elements or

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<sup>31</sup> I am using here Wayne C. Booth's concepts of "telling" and "showing" in a somewhat dis-placed manner, i.e. applying them not to fictional, but to metaliterary discourse.



characteristics of a certain text to be analysed or left out, but it should also be kept in mind when selecting the texts themselves. In this second respect, the text/texts itself/themselves should be either relevant to the topic (i.e. they should deal with the issue by explicitly or implicitly discussing the way in which or the reasons why certain exponential individuals or groups define themselves according to particular moral identity models or patterns) or should be treated from well-chosen theoretical grounds, able to make the text(s) relevant to the topic (i.e. it is a matter of finding, for instance, relevant descriptions of moral identity of secondary importance for the intended message of the text that are however socially or culturally significant if the appropriate theoretical viewpoint is applied).

Therefore, another critical “ground rule” is that of the right selection and of the *adequacy of the theoretical instruments* to the phenomenon in question. We have seen that the concept of moral identity can be used from many different perspectives corresponding to multiple different domains of knowledge or schools of thought. Consequently, one could use these perspectives alternatively, in relation to his or her incident interests (e.g. a perspective rooted in developmental psychology might be most adequate for treating certain individual characters and their evolutions, while a viewpoint originating in the theories of social identity could be more suitable for others; then again, an axiological point of view might be more pertinent when analysing communitary moral identities, conflicting or eclectic moral identities etc.).

And of course, last but not least, in what concerns the ethics of any such hermeneutical approach, *political correctness* is of the essence: the researcher should bear in mind at all times the cultural and (consequently) moral diversity of the world and stick to a discourse that favours policies intended not to offend or disadvantage any particular group of people in society before anything else. On the other hand, though, political correctness would be relevant to “moral identity hermeneutics” in two different ways: it can concern the standpoint and the rhetoric of the analysis itself, but it can also concern the rhetoric of the text(s) submitted for analysis, the rhetoric of the work of fiction itself. In this latter sense (just as with technical and aesthetical considerations, too), evaluative judgements issued by the interpreter are evidently acceptable.

Finally, some basic possible structural patterns proper to the metaliterary discussion of moral identity could rely on typological recurrences, oppositions or similarities, on such notions as those of “moral hero/anti-hero”, “social or cultural conformity / non-conformity of the depicted moral identity models”, “moral individual model or anti-model” (usually a protagonist

or a certain type of recurring character), “moral collective model or anti-model” (a present or an absent/«spectral»<sup>32</sup> collective character present through features of the setting), “minoritary or dominant fictional discourse on moral identity”, as well as on notions relating to the construction of identity narratives and “narrative identity”, on the complex dynamics (of acceptance or rejection, of engagement or disengagement etc.) between different exponential or significant individuals, between various groups or between individuals and the groups or macro-groups they relate to, and so on.

For instance, the recurrence in a text or with an author of morally corrupted protagonists or characters could hint to the critical fictional depiction of a morally problematic cultural, non-fictional context such as that of a certain totalitarian society. Or: the significant presence of protagonists having unusual, non-conformist moral identities could suggest a cultural shift in the macro-identity moral profile of a community. Or again, morally “different” reoccurring characters could signify the presence of a new, different micro-group or subculture within a certain society. The actions of certain protagonists could be explained by their moral appurtenance or disengagement in relation to a particular cultural group with different sets of values, to a group of more strongly (or strictly, or loosely) defined in terms of moral identity... And the examples can continue, for a wide range of options lies before the hermeneutist willing to attempt such an investigation.

To sum up, the scholarly literary interpretation of fictional texts might have much to gain by including interdisciplinary concepts such as that of “moral identity” into their theoretical arsenal: a rich new territory ready for exploration, new interests and an increased cultural and social magnitude of its inquiries. Dis-locating the concept of “moral identity” from the fields of ethics and moral psychology and relocating it the context of metaliterary discourse could reinvest hermeneutics and comparative literary analysis in general with a fresh and engaging perspective, involving novel viewpoints on such narrative elements as story, character or setting. Addressing *via* literature a large variety of acute issues of globalization like cultural identity (but also corruption, moral tyranny, moral conflict or culture clash etc.) from an angle that includes the diversity of moral choices and moral axiological systems is not nearly impossible or deprived of pertinence, since fiction may be considered to rely heavily (and by definition), on representation

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<sup>32</sup> In the sense given to the term by Jacques Derrida in *Specters of Marx. The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*. Routledge, New York and London, 1994.

and on the social significance of its imagery (i.e. on its exemplarity, its representative nature). Moreover, this approach could rejuvenate the ancient (and rather natural) relationship between ethics, psychology and literature, proposing a new, different and compelling connection between them.

While the “usage” of the base-notion is of course not uncomplicated due to its interdisciplinary character and intricate intellectual history, conformity to some “ground rules and basic protocols” – such as the principles of “relation”, “relevance”, “adequacy” and “political correctness”, together with a sustained stance of moral neutrality, moral relativism and the concern for the phenomenon itself – could render it more “user-friendly” and possibly more pertinent than could be expected.

**Acknowledgement:** This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research and Innovation, CNCS- UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-0240.

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