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GEORGE ELIOT, SCIENTIFIC MATERIALISM AND LITERARY FORM: SOME REFLECTIONS ON FELICIA BONAPARTE’S WILL AND DESTINY

By K. M. Newton

Felicia Bonaparte’s study of Eliot’s fiction, *Will and Destiny: Morality and Tragedy in George Eliot’s Novels*, was published in 1975. I read it rather quickly towards the end of the 1970s because at the time I was working on a study of Eliot of my own and inevitably my attention was somewhat focused on whether there was going to be any overlap with my book. Since Bonaparte’s book argued strongly that Eliot was intellectually committed to empiricism and scientific rationality and mine attempted to bring out her relation to aspects of Romanticism, I believed at the time there was little common ground between the two books and I therefore did not need to engage seriously with it. Having read *Will and Destiny* more recently with much fuller attention, it now seems to me a major study of Eliot and that this has not been sufficiently acknowledged by later critics. Glancing at recommendations for further reading in the many editions of Eliot’s novels that are currently available, *Will and Destiny* is seldom listed. Bonaparte’s later study, *The Tryptych and the Cross*, which focuses solely on *Romola*, has rightly been widely recognized by critics with a serious interest in that novel as a critical tour de force. *Will and Destiny* should also be an essential critical text for readers of Eliot.

What has perhaps led to the comparative neglect of *Will and Destiny* is that Bonaparte, one of the most unashamedly intellectual of Eliot’s critics, is so unequivocal in identifying her with scientific materialism. In the book’s Introduction Bonaparte writes:

> It was largely the empiricists, who themselves saw the need for some moral authority, who attempted to build a new system out of the new truths, who argued that science was not a threat to morality but a new and stronger foundation for what must become modern ethics. Eliot too was an empiricist. She too believed that science must be the basis of the morality of the future. And, like John Stuart Mill and August Comte, she found in science the answer to both relativism and scepticism. For it was science, Eliot held, not God that provided an inflexible authority for moral law.

Discussing passages from *Daniel Deronda* and *The Mill on the Floss* she writes:

> Two points are of particular importance in these passages. First, the appeal to science – habitual in all of Eliot’s writings – is not merely an explanatory analogy. It is a substantial commitment through which Eliot places man [...] in the natural order of the universe and so asserts the fundamentally material view of man she shared with such ‘scientific’ thinkers as Mill, Comte, Marx, and others. Secondly, both passages accept scientific methodology in that they probe for a principle which will not only explicate the behavior revealed in empirical data but will enable the scientist (cosmic or human) to know and predict, by ‘strict deduction’, that which must of necessity remain beyond observation. It is a view, clearly, which adheres most precisely to the evidence of matter and the concept of law. (p 50)

Though this kind of discourse is likely to have alienated many critics and may have played a part in *Will and Destiny* not finding its way onto many reading lists of Eliot criticism, one recent critic has sided with Bonaparte’s critical perspective. Avrom Fleishman in his book *George Eliot’s Intellectual Life* supports Bonaparte in arguing that Mill is Eliot’s major
intellectual influence and claims that Bonaparte is Eliot’s best critic. What cannot be denied about Bonaparte on Eliot is that she applies a formidable intelligence to her reading of the novels. Much of the book considers in detail particular episodes and characters from the novels in highly persuasive readings. Perhaps Fleishman should look again at Will and Destiny since his generally negative comments on Adam Bede—‘One cannot regard Adam Bede as a major work of fiction, but it establishes a solid foundation for a great career’—receives little support from Bonaparte who devotes a good deal of space to it and clearly sees it as one of Eliot’s major works. When Bonaparte focuses on particular novels in detail, though her intellectual perspective is clear, she does not reduce the novels to romans à these and even characters who critics generally tend to think are not complex enough to deserve detailed critical analysis such as Arthur Donnithorne or Fred Vincy are discussed in illuminating terms, Bonaparte powerfully demonstrating how Eliot combines intellectual critique with sympathetic understanding.

Claiming that Eliot writes from the point of view of scientific materialism is of course open to the objection that currents of thought that on the surface do not seem easily reconcilable with it can also be found in her writings, such as her admiration for Wordsworth and for aspects at least of the thought of such figures as Carlyle and Ruskin, as well as her interest in Judaism, Jewish mysticism and in religion generally. Bonaparte does not ignore this, Wordsworth is mentioned as well as the emphasis Eliot places on ‘mystery’ in some of her references to science, though Bonaparte claims that this does not mean that her commitment to empiricism and the scientific project is seriously undermined. However, this raises the question as to whether Eliot’s intellectual perspective is coherent or whether she has an innovative intellectual position that is able to integrate apparently opposed elements, and here Bonaparte’s discussion may fail to convince.

One might consider Eliot’s relation to determinism in this context. Bonaparte argues that Eliot is fully committed to determinism and entitles one of the sections of her chapter on ‘Destiny’, ‘Undeviating Law in the Material and Moral World’, claiming that it is assumed in Eliot’s fiction that the ‘cosmic scheme [is] governed only by causal laws’ (p. 21). She quotes a letter from Eliot to Charles Bray regarding his book, The Philosophy of Necessity, in which she agrees with Bray on determinism—‘mind presents itself under the same condition of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena’—but one should note that she adds a qualification: ‘the only difference being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex’ (p. 48). What Eliot’s fiction surely shows is that in the human realm at least all phenomena are complex so that there is almost never any simple relation between cause and effect, and even in science where the testing of hypotheses is done under carefully controlled experimental conditions there is always scope for misinterpretation. Bonaparte is not unaware of this complexity and quotes the following passage from Chapter 6 of Middlemarch:

> Even with a microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. (pp. 7-8)

By implication an even more powerful microscope may make the second interpretation of the
water-drop equally coarse, requiring a different metaphor to help comprehend the new interpretation. Bonaparte also admits the epistemological limitation of empiricism – ‘all empirical observation, including science, can never be known to be knowledge of what is but only of what is perceived’, so that ‘Eliot’s realism becomes, of necessity, an attempt at objectivity that remains within the limits of subjectivity’ (p. 11).

Bonaparte admits, then, that ‘Eliot’s determinism […] carries considerably more complex implications than are suggested by a position such as Bray’s [in his Philosophy of Necessity]’ (p. 50), and she goes on to make an important distinction between actions ‘which arise in [a character’s] very essence’ and those which arise ‘only in [a character’s] attributive nature’ (p. 53), the first being qualitatively different from the second. She also claims that for Eliot all events considered in empirical terms are equal: ‘Not only does every apparent minute detail of action acquire special meaning in Eliot, but, more significantly, it is impossible to tell, a priori, which event will be more important than another’ (pp. 53-4). It follows that though a character’s ‘very essence’ may shape action, when a character encounters the randomness of events one cannot predict with any certainty how that character will act when ‘attributive nature’ comes into play, since in the situation the character is presented with there will always be scope for variability of response in terms of action. Bonaparte does not make this point explicitly but it is illustrated powerfully in her discussion of Tito Melema’s response in Romola to Baldassarre’s suddenly confronting him in Florence: ‘The surprise of seeing Baldassarre for the first time and the fact that the meeting takes place in public allow Tito no opportunity to calculate consequences. When Lorenzo asks who the strange man might be, Tito replies instantly, “Some madman, surely”’ (p.153). As Bonaparte points out, Tito later believes it would have been less of a risk to have recognized Baldassarre: ‘Events prove his second thoughts right’ (p.154). Yet is she right in implying that if Tito had had more time to reflect he could have calculated the consequences correctly and so would have behaved differently? I think this is where her determinism oversimplifies the situation. Determinism can be no reliable guide to future circumstances since there are too many variables. At the point Baldassarre confronts him, Tito cannot know what action would serve his interests best. To use Bonaparte’s terminology, Tito’s ‘very essence’ is his devotion to self-interest and his own pleasure but that cannot determine how, in terms of his ‘attributive nature’, he should act in specific situations as events arise unpredictably and he has to decide how to act without knowing whether the consequences of a particular action will serve his interests better than an alternative action. Before he acts he has the power to shape reality in different ways but once he has acted, a reality is created that is now unalterable. This is a point that Bonaparte rightly stresses: ‘in a character’s intentions […] we see perhaps subtler, truer motives. Yet the events of the novels arise in actions, not in intentions, a fact which many readers find disagreeable in Eliot […]. It is […] the very core of her convictions that intentions and motives, like hopes and wishes, have no consequences, do not, cannot, have consequences’ (p. 34).

Every person performs actions that could have been different, given that there is always the potential for some degree of variability of response in regard to action in any situation. The action that is performed will have consequences, and these consequences will create other situations in which variability of response comes into play before another action takes place, and so on ad infinitum. Such complexity makes determinism of limited value for Eliot in understanding the effect of actions at the human level whatever its value in the realm of science where great effort is made to control variability. This does not mean that determinism has no
significant role in Eliot’s fiction but her novels habitually show that in the human context the consequences of an action generally cannot be determined by a single cause, the corollary of which is that one cannot predict with any certainty that any action or decision will necessarily result in a particular set of consequences. In *Romola* Tito’s action in refusing to recognize Baldassarre does not inevitably lead to his ruin – numerous other factors play a part – but if he had chosen to seek reconciliation with Baldassarre this would have contributed to creating an alternative reality to the one in which he ends up being murdered by Baldassarre. An example of there being a determining cause of a character’s ruin which is not sufficient in itself to account for that ruin is Lydgate’s vote for Tyke in *Middlemarch*. This links him to Bulstrode in people’s minds, a link that is crucial in his being implicated in the death of Raffles. Yet a whole network of causes and consequences have to be taken into account in addition to Lydgate’s vote for Tyke in order to lead eventually to the accusations that end his career in Middlemarch and the hospital project. Among the most obvious are the blackmailing of Bulstrode by Raffles, Lydgate’s arrogance which alienates influential people, the prejudices and fears of other doctors who have a motive for believing anything that would result in his leaving Middlemarch, his marriage to Rosamond Vincy which places him seriously in debt so that he is eventually forced to seek financial support from Bulstrode, and one could list many seemingly less obvious factors that play a part in his ruin. The novel may give special emphasis to the vote for Tyke as the apparent origin of his ultimate failure but that emphasis does not imply that this event had more intrinsic importance than other events or actions that also contribute to his failure – so Bonaparte is right that ‘it is impossible to tell, a priori, which event will be more important than another’ – but it is inevitable that human beings will see certain events as more important and significant than others in relation to their interests, beliefs, or prejudices. The narrative the narrator creates is influenced by interests and a philosophical perspective that shape its construction. A complex structure of events is created in relation to Lydgate’s failure, one which gives special emphasis to his vote for Tyke, and though there is no direct and simple link between that action and Lydgate’s failure, one can infer from the narrator’s highlighting of the vote for Tyke that a different reality would have emerged if he had not voted for Tyke, one in which he may not have been implicated in Raffles’s death and in which he may not have had to leave Middlemarch.

The interpretation of reality that is embodied in the narrative is of course interesting in itself and particularly relevant to the ethical and political themes of *Middlemarch* but there is an implied subtext that suggests there is an infinity of potential realities, a subtext that undermines conventional positivist empiricism with its emphasis on causality and consequence. If there is a weakness in Bonaparte’s treatment of determinism it is that cause and consequence are not sufficiently subject to scrutiny – she argues that ‘characters who commit their fortunes to chance […] ignore […] the factual world in which events occur only within the scope of cause and consequence’ (p. 16) – but not sufficient account is taken of variability of response always being theoretically present before any action takes place, with consequences not being able to be reliably calculated. There is thus always some degree of gambling intrinsic in any action in relation to its intended effect. In discussing the role of chance in Eliot, Bonaparte writes that there is an ‘assumption […] that Eliot could trace, had she fictional world enough and time, a long chain of causes and effects which would make these events in question [chance events] as naturally inevitable as others in the novels’ (p. 41). I think, however, Eliot would consider that a futile exercise since multiple causes and effects
will produce a web (to use Eliot’s most famous metaphor) of such infinite complexity that understanding the totality of relations between causes and effects is beyond human comprehension. Chance is thus an ineradicable human concept and gambling an inevitability, and though her narrator may express moral disapproval of gambling as a life strategy, it is also clear that gamblers sometimes improbably win.

Does Eliot or more exactly her narrator, however, generally rig things so that a narrative structure is created in which, for example, characters such as Tito or Grandcourt are punished by how events turn out? This leads to the question of whether artistic organisation in Eliot’s fiction is at odds with empiricism. One of the most interesting aspects of Bonaparte’s argument in *Will and Destiny* is that, though she recognises that for the artist subjectivity cannot be overcome, she detects discordance between Eliot’s scientific materialism and the methods and techniques she applies to realise her artistic and moral aims as a novelist. Bonaparte believes Eliot as artist was committed to representing the world in empiricist terms, banishing distorting subjectivity as far as possible: ‘Precisely because subjectivity threatens always to question the truth of the artist’s vision, experience must be refined and adjusted by knowledge, itself founded on experience but now reflected on formally and analytically[...]’. For there can be no doubt that Eliot was a thorough empiricist [...] like Mill [...] arguing against any criterion of truth whose basis is not in solid fact’ (p. 5). Yet Bonaparte in a section of her chapter on ‘Destiny’, entitled ‘Loose Threads in the Causal Web’, believes Eliot’s empiricism is compromised in her fiction and she attributes that to Eliot’s need to employ artistic methods to incorporate her moral perspective within the narrative.

It seems odd that, though Bonaparte refers to Hume in relation to Eliot – ‘Gordon Haight dismisses far too lightly [...] the insight that George Eliot’s novels “seem to have been dictated to a plain woman of genius by the ghost of David Hume”’ (p. 5) – that she appears not to take account of one of Hume’s most cited ideas: the unbridgeable dichotomy between fact and value when she claims ‘that science was not a threat to morality but a new and stronger foundation for what must become modern ethics’ (p. xxii). She sees Eliot in her fiction confronting ‘the existential, absurd universe [...] a tragic universe in which man is born and dies for no purpose and with little hope for joy’ (p. viii), and claims that Eliot is right to believe that empiricism and science can somehow on their own provide the foundation for a morality that will be independent of religion or metaphysics and can overcome relativism and scepticism. Despite Eliot’s support for science and a methodology based on empiricism, Bonaparte’s claim that for Eliot they were sufficient in themselves to supply the basis of moral law is open to doubt. For example, though Eliot accepted the scientific validity of Darwinian theory, she rejected the claim that its governing principle, ‘survival of the fittest’, in Spencer’s formulation, could provide the basis for ethical action at the individual or social level.

Bonaparte is critical of aspects of Eliot’s fiction that cannot be reconciled with empiricism: ‘There are elements of melodrama which cannot be satisfactorily explained [...] especially in the matter of causality. Why Eliot devised these and thought them – as she must have – appropriate, or at least not inappropriate, must make a list of futile guesses’ (p. 42). In ‘Loose Threads in the Causal Web’, Bonaparte argues that it is artistic pressures that lead to the setting aside of empiricism since the artistic organization of her narratives implies there is a moral order in the world that tends to benefit the morally deserving and generally, if not always, punishes or frustrates the undeserving. For Bonaparte this is not reconcilable with scientific materialism, since a ‘deus ex machina’ appears to intrude into ‘the plots of events’
and so that there is 'a striking contradiction to Eliot’s fundamental principle of action' (p. 36). *Daniel Deronda* is particularly problematic in this respect:

In *Deronda* especially, Eliot seems to go beyond the possible and the probable. Here, the reader is troubled by many questions. Why, for instance, is it Daniel who happens to find Mirah as she is about to commit suicide, an incident which leads him to the preparation of his own long-delayed destiny? Why does it happen that Mordecai is Mirah’s brother? Why is it that Ezra Cohen, whom Daniel believes to be Mirah’s brother, is not but happens to employ the man who is? (pp. 36-7)

Bonaparte is inclined to be forgiving of Eliot for this use of ‘coincidences’ but sees the problem as lying with literary form which Eliot as an artist inevitably employs, so that Grandcourt’s drowning ‘at so appropriate a moment’ is a ‘coincidence’, but one foreshadowed in the text. Though Bonaparte understands why Eliot as a novelist might not want to abandon such a crucial literary device even if it is in contradiction with an empirical view of reality, the discordance between her philosophical commitment and her artistic practice needs to be acknowledged: ‘foreshadowing is an aesthetic device which can hardly expect to find realization in the real world which Eliot’s fiction promises to mirror. The reader’s doubt persists’ (pp. 37-8).

Another reason Bonaparte cites to account for events like the drowning of Grandcourt that she finds inappropriate in terms of empiricism is that they are ‘thematically motivated’ (p. 38) and she points out that sometimes symbolism also appears to be necessary: ‘Yet even such deflections from literal fact do not offer Eliot all the scope she sometimes requires. Very often we find Eliot compelled – or thinking she is compelled, which yields an identical consequence – to communicate not only on the literal level but on one or more symbolic levels’ (pp. 38-9). In *Silas Marner*, she argues, there are two levels which must be kept apart, ‘the factually realistic and the mythically true level; and each demands a different set of rules. It is essential not to take the myth for the fact’ (p. 39). But this creates incoherence: ‘one of the novel’s major theses concerns the causal relationship itself, demonstrated on the literal level by the events which occur mainly in Godfrey Cass’s life, but demonstrated on the mythical level in symbols which, if taken literally, deny the very hypotheses they are designed to enforce’ (p. 39). Bonaparte goes on to argue that it is understandable that ‘more and more, Eliot turned to the refuge of symbolic endings’ (p. 41), since endings can have no empirical justification in reality: ‘the world continues […] in pretty much the way it had before’ (p. 41).

Other critics have raised the same problem in relation to Eliot and her plots but none has articulated it as powerfully as Bonaparte, together with an attempt to understand why it exists rather than simply to accuse Eliot of failing to resolve a contradiction: ‘In plot, she never found a structure that suitably expressed her very unique vision at all points. Thus the content of Eliot’s novels is often revolutionary, modern, the form, not always’ (pp. 42-3). It is hard to believe, however, that Eliot would not have been aware of this apparent mismatch between literary form and empirical content and not have attempted to overcome it. Otherwise one might have to resist Bonaparte’s claim that Eliot writes from the point of view of a scientific materialist, or alternatively that Bonaparte’s understanding of the form of her novels and its relation to the empirical is based on questionable assumptions. Some Eliot critics may prefer to take the former view since it allows them to set aside Bonaparte’s claim that Eliot was a ‘thorough empiricist’ and thus open up her fiction to alternative readings. But though as I
suggested previously a great range of ideas circulate in Eliot’s texts I think Bonaparte is right to see empiricism as central to Eliot’s realism and I will therefore argue that she misreads the form of Eliot’s fiction.

Bonaparte makes what may seem an unexceptionable point: ‘Eliot makes a clear distinction between what is true and what is literal. In cases such as the drowning of Grandcourt, it seems fairly obvious that the literal recorder of facts must be in conflict with the analytic commentator on them’ (p. 38). I quoted previously Bonaparte’s comment: ‘Eliot’s realism becomes, of necessity, an attempt at objectivity that remains within the limits of subjectivity’ (p. 11), drawing obviously on Kant, but the conflict Bonaparte sees between the ‘literal facts’ the narrator records and the subjectivity of the narrator is problematic. This is to treat Eliot’s form of narration as essentially similar to third person narration in conventional fiction where the ‘literal facts’ are assumed to exist separately from the narrator who merely describes them or comments on them. But if ‘objectivity […] remains within the limits of subjectivity’ such a separation is called into question, and I shall argue that the form of Eliot’s narration undermines such a separation. Her narrator is characterized as a historical novelist writing about events that have already happened and that are real for the narrator. A narrative structure is formed out of such events with the narrator using the techniques available to a novelist in shaping and commenting on them. Reality is still made up of ‘literal facts’ but by being mediated through the mind of the narrator as novelist who has certain interests, particularly ethical and political in nature, reality is a fusion of the objective and the subjective. Though ‘literal facts’ have an independent existence, they are accessed via the subjectivity of the narrator. Nor do Eliot’s narrators pretend they are neutral observers or describers of an independent reality made up of ‘literal facts’; their subjectivity is on display through numerous interventions and expressions of opinion. The narrators interpret the events, situations and people they are concerned with not only as conventional historians but also as novelists, their interpretations exploiting the devices of fiction, such as foreshadowing, a ‘thematically motivated’ connecting of events, use of symbolism in order to go beyond ‘literal facts’ and communicate at a different level which generates a range of possible meanings. Though the narrative may consist of ‘literal facts’ and descriptive detail, these are integrated into a literary form which incorporates a commentary that may be ironical, sceptical, pessimistic, idealistic, so that the reality that is represented is complex and multi-faceted. Thus description, interpretation, critical comment, along with the appeal to the senses that is associated with artistic form and expression, constantly interact. To refer as Bonaparte does to the ‘unlikelihood of some events’ is to read a novel like *Deronda* as if ‘literal facts’ and empirical events exist independently and not within a narrative shaped by the narrator. There is no ‘deus ex machina’ who ‘intrudes into “the plots of events”’ but only a narrator as novelist who shapes events to serve both a thematic and an aesthetic purpose; it is no ‘coincidence’ that drowning recurs in the text of *Deronda*, with Grandcourt’s drowning being ‘foreshadowed’; this linking is created by the narrator as novelist and artist. ‘Factual’ events such as the drowning nevertheless retain their empirical independence and are thus open to being interpreted differently.

Of course this implies that the narrator should not be identified with Eliot as author, a standard assumption by many previous critics. Her novels rather have ‘implied authors’ with the narrator being within the narrative and a major structural element of it. The implied author functions as a frame which surrounds the narrative though not of course intended to be
specifically present in the text, in effect functioning as what Jacques Derrida calls a ‘parergon’, incidentally a word Eliot uses in the plural in Chapter 29 of *Middlemarch*. I would argue that this gives the reader some scope to interpret things differently from the narrator while still respecting the narrator’s point of view. Narrators can also enter the minds of characters seemingly independently of the narrator through the literary technique of free indirect speech, though there is no metaphysical but only imaginative penetration. I believe this analysis overcomes the contradiction Bonaparte sees as an inevitable consequence of the disjunction between Eliot’s empiricism and the morally motivated structuring of reality implied by the novelistic methods and techniques she employs, nor is there any indication that empirical events have an intrinsic meaning or a moral structure in themselves. Though Bonaparte recognizes that realism can never be purely and objectively empiricist since subjectivity cannot be completely eliminated, she does not draw the same conclusion that Eliot, I believe, draws from it, that art can combine realism grounded in empiricism with an ethical dimension mediated through art even if empiricism is ethically neutral or indifferent. By being committed both to empiricism and to art, I would suggest that Eliot believes the realist novel in her conception of it has the potential to exploit its literary and artistic power to overcome Hume’s dichotomy between fact and value, or empiricism and the ethical.

In the last chapter of *Will and Destiny*, ‘Morality and Tragedy’, Bonaparte ties to find a way of overcoming the problem that Eliot’s ethical aims in her fiction seem to require that empiricism be set aside and improbabilities and ‘coincidences’ be resorted to. She claims that integration can be seen to work in practice if one regards the narration as consisting in effect of two narrators or ‘[t]wo narrative voices’ who exist ‘in an irresolvable tension’ (p. 182) with each other: ‘There is, first, an analytic narrator who explicates, with neutral accuracy, the facts of existence [...] He is nonpartisan [...] objective [...] outside the experience of the characters [...] uninvolved’, thus viewing reality purely empirically. ‘The second narrator, quite different in tone, is subjective [...] because he enters fully into the existence of every character’ (p. 163), thus creating the sympathetic consciousness that is intrinsic to the moral dimension of Eliot’s fiction. The second narrator ‘knows with that knowledge that comes from total identification, the final and unquestionable validity of the egocentric view [...] he justifies the self against all encroachments [...]’. But against the objective and analytic narrator, whose exclusive right it is to record the movement of destiny, the subjective narrator is as powerless as the characters themselves against the pressure of compelling facts’ (pp. 163-4). While the analytic narrator is ruthlessly objective about human beings blind to the reality of the human situation, the subjective narrator urges sympathy even if they may have few redeeming features, as is evident in the following passage Bonaparte quotes from Chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*:

> everyone, must be accepted as they are; you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people – amongst whom your life is passed – that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love; it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, whose movements of goodness you should admire – for whom you should cherish all possible hopes, all possible patience. (171)

But Bonaparte’s creation of two narrative voices is only an expedient to try to overcome the fact that in reality there is only one narrator who is equally committed both to empiricism with its basis in rationality and objectivity, and to a form of ethics with its basis in sympathy. Such sympathy has no credibility and becomes sentimentality if it ignores the perspective of the
analytic narrator, but the division of the narrator into two voices is a consequence of Bonaparte's misreading of the form of Eliot's novels, as I have tried to argue. However, this misreading does not prevent many insightful readings by Bonaparte of particular characters and situations, which are as evident in the final chapter of the study as in earlier ones. These readings together with the fact that Bonaparte raises theoretical questions in relation to Eliot that still need to be engaged with makes Will and Destiny necessary reading for any serious student of her fiction.

Notes

