Recent developments in ethical thought have expanded possibilities for critical inquiry in the field. The fruits resulting from this revival make ethics an exciting and rewarding avenue of philosophical investigation. At the same time, major advancements in the field of neuroscience have led to new understandings of human consciousness and perception, clearing the path for innovations in the philosophy of science, and altering the way we view ourselves as conscious agents. From philosophy of religion to literary criticism, a growing focus on the "thicker" aspects of human life, art, and mind exposes dissatisfaction with the austerity of purer but perhaps ultimately impoverished study in psychology, philosophy, and critical theory. The ways in which literature has been analyzed in the past decade, and the types of literature to be analyzed, prove to be examples of this shift.

Current scholarship has made a strong case for the significant and perhaps singular position literature, particularly fiction, holds in the field of ethics. Ethicists have turned to literary criticism in order to examine a more troubling and complex question than "What is good conduct?" A more subtle variant is also more basic: "How should one live?" This question is also "thicker" than the former, because it assumes an urgency, somehow strangely lacking in the "good conduct" question. That is, to ask how one should live is to ask how I should live, in this moment and under these circumstances, with all of the messy implications that follow. In literature, this level of questioning can be pursued in a way that seems simply unavailable to other modes of reasoning. Rather than acting as convenient "case studies" of ethical problems, works of literature create entire worlds, which the reader must willingly enter into and explore, engage with and juggle, derive meanings from and allow with them future meanings to cohabitate.

This precisely was the project of the Victorian novelist George Eliot. Writing during the heyday of high realistic fiction, Eliot challenged and expanded the function of the novel. As Henry James declared, Eliot brought the novel "inside," and that act changed the face of literature, paving the way for Modernism and its myriad descendents.

Adam Bede was George Eliot's first extended work of fiction. It may be a convenient construction to compare explicitly this novel and Daniel Deronda, her last. Bookending a span of almost twenty years with two significantly different projects is clearly problematic. In so doing, however, we identify the crucial aspects of Eliot's lifelong project, in distilled form, and recognize the significance of her achievement. While it seemed clear from her first publication that a significant voice had presented itself through the stories, over the course of her career Eliot deepened immensely her own philosophical and artistic vision. Her preoccupations and experiments are especially exciting in linking today's great ferments in ethical thought and the science of consciousness. For it becomes clear, with Adam Bede and Daniel Deronda placed side-by-side, that Eliot's overriding concerns lay with the issues of moral luck and self-identity. That is, she is engrossed in exploring the possibilities available to contingent and particular human lives, and the forms of consciousness that make fathoming them fundamentally compelling.
Moral luck is a term that describes the convergence of a variety of ethical questions and quandaries. Simply put, it is the admission that we judge ourselves morally largely in terms of situations that exist outside of our control. To what culture and period of history we are born, our socio-economic position and educational backgrounds, and the significant relationships and events that arise out of seemingly random factors, all contribute to our status as moral beings. Significant work has been done in the last thirty years on this phenomenon. The philosopher Thomas Nagel reevaluates Kant's postulation of the unchanging, incorruptible good will, which refrains from judging the outcome of an agent's actions. Kant's definition of the good will, and the absolute value of achieving this sort of will, has been enormously influential in Western thought. The definition is set forth in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*:

> Even if it should happen that, by a particularly unfortunate fate or by the niggardly provision of a stepmotherly nature, this will should be wholly lacking in power to accomplish its purpose, and if even the greatest effort should not avail it to achieve anything of its end, and if there remained only the good will (not as a mere wish but as the summoning of all the means in our power), it would sparkle like a jewel in its own right, as something that had its full worth in itself. Usefulness or fruitlessness can neither diminish nor augment this worth.

Only the evil or good *intention*, it seems, is blamable or worthy of praise. "But this is not true: when someone acts in such ways he takes his life, or his moral position, into his hands, because the way things turn out determines what he has done. It is possible also to access the decision from the point of view of what could be known at the time, but this is not the end of the story" (*Moral Luck*, 62). In spite of the "irrationality" of moral judgments that take outcomes into account, they "inevitably" return: "We judge people for what they actually do or fail to do..." (*ML*, 65-66). When we combine this quandary with the premise of moral luck, the idea that much of what affects an agent is uncaused by his actions or intents, we are faced with an additional, greater problem: for how much is any given agent responsible? If "responsibility" becomes an infinite regress of uncaused and unseen events, how can a person be morally blamed or praised? "The area of genuine agency, and therefore of legitimate moral judgment, seems to shrink under this scrutiny to an extensionless point," Nagel worries (*ML*, 66).

What does contemporary neuroscience say about the self as agent, about consciousness as an active force in the development of a coherent self? The neuroscientist and philosopher of mind Owen Flanagan calls the self the "center of narrative gravity," meaning that a sense of agency depends on the ability to narrate one's own life story, referencing past experiences and organizing disparate events into a coherent whole. (Many fascinating examples of brain damage resulting in memory loss seem to illustrate this point. One victim of brain damage, for example, having no memory lasting longer than thirty seconds, labored obsessively and with tragic futility, to construct an autobiography. Hundreds of pages were produced, but a coherent narrative and therefore sense of self remained elusive.) Our very experience of reality, certain neuroscientists seem to suggest, is bound to our ability to make stories. In this light, the great fictions of our culture take on new weight, as we struggle to understand ourselves as agents and the world that interacts with us as such. For example, in *The Literary Mind*, the neuroscientist and critic Mark Turner...
uses *The Thousand and One Nights* to discuss the imaginative capacities that spring from the mind's ability to envision competing and even conflicting viewpoints. These imaginative capacities are particularly noteworthy in Eliot's novels.

In *Adam Bede*, Eliot builds a framework that will serve as a template for the rest of her fiction: the complexity of community, the hold that personal and social obligations exert upon us, the difficult and sometimes irresolvable morals dilemmas that confront fragile human beings. While contingency and formation of self are certainly evident, intractable "fate" (a tempest of social forces, chance and human reaction) combines with the inadequacy of intention to overwhelm these more subtle issues. In other words, the character Hetty Sorrel is merely a machine, lowered to stage-level in order to deliver Eliot's disturbing implications for morality and justice. Only later will opportunity, disposition and luck meet more delicately and believably in such characters as Maggie Tulliver, Silas Marner and Tertius Lydgate. My thesis projects that another later character, Gwendolyn Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*, is the culmination of Eliot's project to present breathing, thinking, changing beings, who are wracked with moral dilemmas and must accept the difficult consequences both of their actions and the actions of others. By the time *Daniel Deronda* was written, Eliot was able to weave her tapestry with such variety and richness, that she could chart the development of single psyches caught within society's greater loom, in all their complexity and fragility. Furthermore, her presentation of luck and circumstance in the development of character goes far beyond her previous work, ushering in the uncertainties and experimentation in form that would define Modernism.

I find George Eliot's work deeply illuminating and exciting, challenging my own concept of myself as a self-reflective agent in this "thick" world. What happens when the concept of a unifying and enduring "will" or agency is questioned or demolished? What sanctuary does moral philosophy seek, if any? But that is exactly what has occurred in the last few decades, with advances in neuroscience, changing currents in philosophy of mind, the influence of post-modern inquiry. Is it still possible to turn to literature to puzzle through these disturbing issues? Does classic literature offer us help in evaluating narrative through these new lenses? I hope to tie together some quite different modes of inquiry into the problems of moral luck and self-identity, using George Eliot's novels *Adam Bede* and *Daniel Deronda* as both foci of thought and texts worthy of analysis themselves, expecting this intersection to bear surprising and beneficial fruit.