

VISION AND SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS IN *THE PICTURE OF DORIAN GRAY*

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In Chapter Seven of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Dorian returns home after severing his relationship with Sybil Vane and aimlessly wandering around the town during the night. He is heartbroken that Sybil, once an artist who self-consciously performed her roles, is now merely acting out her own personality. Entering his house, his eye “fell upon the portrait Basil Hallward had painted of him” (*Picture 89*), and the expression of the portrait is different from what he remembers:

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The quivering, ardent sunlight showed him the lines of cruelty round the mouth as clearly as if he had been looking into a mirror after he had done some dreadful thing.

He winced, and, taking up from the table an oval glass framed in ivory Cupids, one of Lord Henry’s many presents to him, glanced hurriedly into its polished depths. No line like that warped his red lips. What did it mean?

He rubbed his eyes, and came close to the picture, and examined it again. There were no signs of any change when he looked into the actual painting, and yet there was no doubt that the whole expression had altered. It was not a mere fancy of his own. The thing was horribly apparent. (*Picture 90*)

Dorian’s struggle to understand the nature of the change in the portrait, whether illusion or fact, justifies recent critical interest in Wilde’s conception of consciousness in this novel. Critics have read *Dorian Gray* in the context of late nineteenth-century theories of the material nature of the mind, especially the empirical and positivist approaches that dominated late Victorian thought.¹ In this paper, I shall argue for the importance of examining Wilde’s conception of self-consciousness rather than consciousness *per se*. In the above scene, Dorian’s viewing of his portrait differs from him seeing his face in the regular mirror, the oval glass; for Dorian, scrutinizing the portrait is primarily a self-conscious act. There were “no signs of any change,” and yet the changed expression is “apparent” to his mind; it is something invisible but

present. In addition, if the changed expression is not merely apparent, but “horribly” apparent, Dorian’s viewing of these invisible changes points to a form of awareness that is not simply bodily nor simply metaphysical. How these two aspects relate to each other forms the focus of this paper. The ensuing self-consciousness, as I shall argue, depends on both sensory feelings and reflexive evaluation as performative agents of cognition. Another reason for exploring this configured form of subjectivity is to reconsider our selection of contextual references. Apart from Wilde’s interest in nineteenth-century naturalist epistemology, we may also need to take into account his more metaphysical interests; therefore, instead of drawing on only British scientists such as Herbert Spencer, Charles Darwin, T.H. Huxley, and W.K. Clifford, or only European philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Hegel, and Nietzsche, I shall focus on a few meeting points of these two major strands of thought. Wilde’s position should help us map out historically some of the challenges that European philosophy faced in late Victorian England, as metaphysical interests interacted with a distinctly material and positivist ethos, particularly concerning theories of the mind.

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VIEWING THE INTELLECT

Dorian looks into the oval glass to see if there have been any changes to his face. These bodily changes would account for the altered expression in his portrait, and thus provide a persuasive and verifiable cause for that impression. The direction of his observations is from the mirror to the portrait, from factual evidence to something artistic and unexplainable. Here, the portrait serves as a metaphorical and fantastic mirror. In revealing a different expression of Dorian, but initially denying him any traces of epistemological lead, the portrait forces him to give up briefly his reliance on an empirical episteme. It reveals how the visible, as a material presence, may work with the invisible, which the senses alone can access but cannot sufficiently verify. Indeed, Dorian, “[l]ike Gautier,” as the narrator of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* suggests, “was one for whom ‘the visible world existed’” (*Picture* 129). Not only is the visible world there for him to savour, but more importantly, the visible world is the body that bears the invisible or the inaccessible.

Mid-to-late Victorian thinkers were consciously exploring the nature of viewing and observation. The development in astronomy, the increasing use of the microscope, the methodological awareness of taxonomy, and the aesthetic indulgence in the exotic and distant, all intensified already-considerable interests in the subject.² Charles Darwin, for example, uses the eye to describe his evolutionary theory. John Tyndall’s “Belfast Address” questions whether the movements of atoms that generate “sentient, intellectual and emotional” phenomena “can be *seeable* by the mind” (Tyndall 32), thus suggesting a categorical disconnect between the eye of the body and the eye of the mind. Many Victorian men of letters explored the relationship

between viewing and the intellect; for example, W.B. Carpenter, the physiological psychologist, describes the act of observing in terms of the workings of the mind: “If the mind loses itself in the contemplation of the immeasurable depth of space, and of the innumerable multitudes of stars and systems by which they are peopled, it is equally lost in wonder and admiration, when the eye is turned to those countless multitudes of living beings which a single drop of water may contain” (37). For Carpenter, “losing the mind” points ambiguously to the power of material objects over the mind of the observer, and at the same time to the cognitive capacity of the mind developed through losing in or, rather, working on, itself. From a different angle, in his *Foundations of a Creed (Problems of Life and Mind: First Series)*, George Henry Lewes famously defines science as “seeing with other eyes” and suggests a transmutation of sensory and discursive values of observation (Vol. 2, 3).

Interest in these heterogeneous relationships between vision and the intellect was not exclusive to Victorian scientists. Wilde’s readings in classics at Oxford provide us with another set of contextual sources. His reading of the Greek notion of *theoria* (contemplating, looking at) reveals that *theoria* contains the meaning of thinking and viewing (Smith and Helfand 60). Wilde himself understood *theoria* as “self-conscious mind” (Smith and Helfand 59).³ Thus, a true man of culture can make “instinct self-conscious and intelligent” (Wilde, *Complete Works* 4. 178). Plato, one of Wilde’s influences at Oxford, is also known for making the point that “the soul [...] like the eye [...] perceives and understands, and is radiant with intelligence” (*Dialogues* 2. 344). Spinoza was another important factor in the development of Wilde’s thought, as Wilde studied Spinoza and his *Ethics* as an undergraduate (see *Oxford Notebooks* 142, 147, 165). Spinoza’s *Ethics* also enjoyed much attention among the Victorians through works such as Matthew Arnold’s *Essays in Criticism* and Walter Pater’s *Imaginary Portraits*. In *Ethics*, Spinoza offers a new way to view the world, a vision necessarily advanced by philosophical thinking (143).⁴ The body is not simply a metaphor for the mind, but remains a necessary site that philosophical thinking can work on and, in doing so, coordinate with.

The fact that Dorian’s portrait initially fails to provide factual evidence insidiously suggests the invisible as uncanny and unexplainable, beyond even the imaginable order of fantasy that is central to this novel. When the portrait finally shows details of its altered expression, the physical changes themselves no longer satisfy logical and rational expectations. They force Dorian to register his own sensory responses of disgust, fear, depletion of energy, and instinctive desire to hide the portrait from prying eyes. In this, the immediacy, presence, and texture of sensory observation are transfigured into a more epistemological intimation. But for Dorian, seeing may also create a move from a rational act to bodily responses that display an agency that is not accountable by conventional moral judgement. This cognition through sensory responses often contraindicates his moral deliberation, defines his feelings for the moment, and saves those feelings from becoming mere metaphysical speculations.

In *Dorian Gray*, the eye of the body and the eye of the mind are not necessarily sep-

arated, but they do not always sequentially or consequentially synchronize with each other. The act of observation does not serve to explain, as in Darwin and several other biologists, nor does it simply complement, as in the Greek *theoria*. It is not a first-order experience for the intellect to improve upon, as in Spinoza, or to be mimetically represented for its mechanism, as in Hegel's idea of the soul. Instead, this sensory act prompts, revises, and demands to be reckoned with. In Wilde's ocular-centric conception, the eye of the body has potency of its own, actualizing an unresolved agon; it does not disappoint as it may transgress and contest and rewrite, thus becoming as performative as the eye of the mind.

On the other hand, the way Dorian scrutinizes the portrait resembles Hegel's notion of individualist viewing as an internal response, which is not enslaved by collective perspectives. Darwin and Hegel shared a strong sense of evolution,⁵ through their studies of the individual's relations to the collective. For Darwin, the individual bears the characteristics of the collective, as expressed in the German biologist Ernst Haeckel's famous phrase, "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny." Hegel, as John Russon reminds us, also considers "the very immediacy of our vision [as] constructed through traditional social practices that indoctrinate us into a particular vision, a particular set of images, a particular set of visual expectations" (Russon 221). But for Hegel, this rational vision, much appreciated in the Enlightenment spirit, is unfortunately "totally external to the visible world" and belongs to someone who lives as a "totally self-contained, self-sufficient, monadic substance, independent and impermeable [...] unaffected by anything he sees" (Levin 36). The fact that Dorian needs to scrutinize and question the clues in his portrait every time he revisits it calls forth a personalized lens. Even after the portrait shows visible changes, Dorian has to figure out constantly whether there are additional changes. By then, the conventional moral censure of sinfulness no longer functions as a reliable system of evaluation, but as a raw reality to which he must respond. Therefore, seeing the portrait only prompts him to seek alternative modes of responding, giving form and intensity to the invisible. This personalized act of viewing realizes its potential by engaging viscerally and mystically with what one has to see even when one does not.

Wilde's conception of an individualized vision can be further differentiated from that of Nietzsche, whose work was a significant intellectual presence in Wilde's time. In *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche explains that "learning to see" means "getting your eyes used to calm, to patience, to letting things come to you [...] and] postponing judgement" (190). This position is close to Pater's in *The Renaissance*, an ekphrastic study of how Renaissance (and other) artists cultivate an almost phenomenological temperament, an intuitive and patient perceiving by letting the impact of life come to them with little intervention of their own predilection. Wilde gives more agency to the act of seeing than Pater: for Wilde, in spite of the material presence of objects, what one sees is often what one prefers to see and determined by how one chooses to see. In a way, seeing in Wilde involves the corporeal tremors of feeling the novelty and strangeness of learning to will one's body.

Wilde thus refuses to look for a crudely material form for the intellect. The primacy of the invisible is what informs Lord Henry's pithy snub of positivism: "The things one feels absolutely certain about are never true" (*Picture* 215). The ocular potential of the counterfactual depends on Dorian's senses for both form and impact, and the invisible is there to shadow the sensory. This is also why the sensory often acts as an ontological prompt for Dorian: seeing the invisible would touch a deeper chord in Dorian's sense of being, seizing his soul and forcing him to speculate over his own self, just as New Hedonism helps to free him from the burden of shared rationality or episteme.

When Dorian stabs the portrait in the final scene of the novel, his servants' observation of the scene does not corroborate a retribution, nor does it end the story rationally. Their observation, in effect, transcends a paradigm of Gothic mysticism, as the fantastic is rendered real through the spirit of decadence:⁶ no one can trust his or her eyes, but no one can afford not to trust his or her eyes. The portrait returns to its original material form but becomes remote, untouchable, and unexplainable. Dorian's stabbing becomes a chiasmic act that is doubly reinforced. It gives him back a life by allowing his body to die, ending his unchangeable and stagnant youth. This act also confirms the need for his soul to migrate from the portrait back to his body. In acquiring a materiality by adopting the earthly form of the dead body, his soul does not lose its own vitality, as it could live on in the afterlife, as fantastic as his spirit. Body and soul are physically connected but metaphysically pulled apart, though: the existential rationale of the soul depends on the death of his body, so to speak. One move by Dorian thus enacts two important meanings in the semantic history of "soul," as animate life and as the intellect of a person (see *OED*, "soul").

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The strong presence of Gothicism in general and fantasy in particular is instrumental in generating a model of seeing that steers away from empirical episteme. But this act of seeing also creates its own genre through its transgression of the boundaries between rational and irrational thinking. Not everything is explainable; the fantastic and menacing could set up an otherworldly presence that is actual but not trustworthy. One does not have to give up rational categories of thinking to accept improbable forms of art. In this, Wilde never lets the phantasmgoric be reduced to the merely intellectual. The dialectical interplay of the two offers him much freedom from positivist certainty, mechanical materiality, and limited perspectivism. Even when what used to be invisible in the picture seems to take on some visible signs, Dorian can never be sure how much the visible has to do with the invisible. Yet, while seeing can mean responding to something tactile and materially unusual, exquisite, or grotesque, the endpoint of this sensory emphasis as Wilde presents it is not biological explanation or empirical witnessing, which was the case for many leading Victorian scientists who might nevertheless entertain the imaginative and the uncanny.

THE TOUCH OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS

This approach to seeing in *Dorian Gray* offers useful terms for us to consider the conception of subjectivity in general and self-consciousness in particular in this novel. What Dorian looks for in both the mirror and the portrait is his own self. While the portrait acts as a prosthesis, an artificial eye to extend Dorian's ability to reach himself, this perceiving of the self moves further away from the Cartesian dichotomy. Dorian himself is aware of the "blended" nature of his temperament, but through another mirror in the novel, the yellow book that Lord Henry gives him, which Wilde identified during cross-examination at his trial as J.K. Huysmans's novel *À Rebours* (Calloway 48): "The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him [Dorian] a kind of prefiguring type of himself" (*Picture* 127). This third "mirror" transforms Dorian's self-recognition into a reworking, an empathetic seeing of oneself as someone else.

570 The word "prefiguring" in the above description highlights a perspective external to Dorian and a temporal (as well as spatial) unfolding that bears out this externality. "Prefiguring" here is tantalizingly deterministic and yet withholds its own telos: the future is not fully determined for you by an external force if this force turns out to be yourself, and so the external may also elide into the internal. A "prefiguring type," however, is another matter. As a more objectified case, it disallows self-awareness as merely first-hand sensations. The teleological significance of reading someone else would make Dorian relate to the hero of the "Yellow Book" as a "third-first person." As a result, this "third-first person" is never intimate or somatic enough to be primarily the first person; thus, a single act of "viewing" himself in this third "mirror" illustrates the intricacies of the formation of self-consciousness in Dorian.

This perspective, conflated but also transposed at times, would alert us to the difference between self-consciousness and consciousness in *Dorian Gray*. Self-consciousness could mean being conscious of certain aspects of oneself; yet, in this novel, it refers to the awareness of oneself being aware, whether it is imagining how other people view you, facing up to someone who actually looks at you, or responding to your own prior self-perception. As consciousness is largely a first-order response, self-consciousness is often a second-order perspective, or a perspective of a perspective. Self-consciousness in *Dorian Gray* thus serves a meta-function. William James's definition of a psychologist's point of view may help us clarify this claim. James argues in *The Principles of Psychology* that "[t]he mental state is aware of itself only from within; it grasps what we call its own content [...]. The psychologist, on the contrary, is aware of it from without, and knows its relations with all sorts of other things" (197-98). Self-consciousness in *Dorian Gray* sees from both within and without, but with a view to the formation of the subjective. Wilde works through various manifestations of this distancing through the third person. According to Lord Henry:

To project one's soul into some gracious form, and let it tarry there for a moment; to hear one's own intellectual views echoed back to one with all the added music of passion and youth; to convey one's temperament into another as though it were a subtle fluid or a strange perfume: there was a real joy in that—perhaps the most satisfying joy left to us in an age so limited and vulgar as our own. (*Picture 35*)

Wilde's conception of self-consciousness also recalls an "Unhappy Consciousness" mapped out by Hegel, though Hegel is as speculative as Wilde is poetic. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel discusses the conception of self-consciousness in Skepticism in terms of the internal duplication of one's perspective. For him, "the duplication which formerly was divided between [...] the lord and the bondsmen, is now lodged in one" (126). This "Unhappy Consciousness itself is the gazing of one self-consciousness into another, and itself is both, and the unity of both is also its essential nature" (126; emphasis in original).

The "meta" in the meta-function of self-consciousness here does not mean metaphysical, as in transcending material existence. Instead, it offers a reconfigured vision of the subjective that is "aestheticized" by the senses. Self-consciousness in *Dorian Gray* may mean that bodily responses force the subject to recall its past sensations, and the intellect takes shape through a perpetual but intuitive gauging of, and acting on, the body without displacing the body's sensory impact. Dorian could smile with "secret pleasure" (140) over the changes in his portrait, or be "absolutely" (144) conscious of them. The added epithets show how his mind is trying to make sense of his bodily feelings. More importantly, sensory feelings may dominate his mind or overtake it in making him aware. In this way, self-reflection may not always register the movements of the body that are nevertheless there, thus denying any facile merge of body and mind. This is why Lord Henry would remind Dorian that sometimes "[y]ou know more than you think you know" (*Picture 20*). That is, Dorian's body may register more than his mind does, but he will realize that condition only later, if at all. What is imperative for Lord Henry includes cultivating a temperament to respond to what Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth call "visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing, vital forces insisting beyond emotion—that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability" (1; emphasis in original). In this sense, Wilde's conception comes closer to this more recent definition of *affect* than does Spinoza's. Dorian's bodily activities may cause a raw and visceral epiphany, sensual but transformative, a type of tactile self-consciousness, so to speak. What is unique about this sensory subjectivity is that it may enable one to detect a false materialism that is overdetermined by the subjective.

This bodily anchored subjectivity in *Dorian Gray* advances a larger conceptual shift in the field of psychology, from the ontological model of consciousness that was influential in the mid-century to naturalism. According to Rick Rylance, "Under the

influence of Kant, Coleridge, and the philosophy derived from the ‘Scotch School’, metaphysical psychologists brought the faculties together under a conception of a unitary, transcendent consciousness identified with the soul. This created a powerful argumentative ensemble that, in the mid-century, was a ready and persuasive opponent for the new psycho-physiology” (54). The efforts of physiological and general scientists such as W.B. Carpenter, Alexander Bain, George Henry Lewes, and T.H. Huxley were part of a larger European movement. Scientists such as Ernst Haeckel were widely known for believing that “what is commonly termed the ‘soul’ or ‘mind’ of man (consciousness included) is merely the sum-total of the activities of a large number of nerve-cells, the ganglia-cells.” Thus the brain is “the human ‘soul-organ’” (*History of Creation* 2. 494).⁷ The challenge of this shift toward naturalism was not as great for those who preferred either model, physiological or ontological, as it was for those who anticipated some form of integration of the two (Rylance 77). In his “Belfast Address,” John Tyndall pinpointed this question when explaining Spencer’s theory of evolutionary psychology: “We see with undoubting certainty that they [sensation and thought] go hand in hand. But we try to soar in a vacuum the moment we seek to comprehend the connexion between them” (59). In *Dorian Gray*, Lord Henry can afford to be self-indulgent: “To note the curious hard logic of passion, and the emotional coloured life of the intellect—to observe where they met, and where they separated, at what point they were in unison, and at what point they were at discord—there was a delight in that!” (*Picture* 57).

When life is defined by Lord Henry as “a question of nerves, and fibres, and slowly built-up cells” (*Picture* 217), these physiological details become the organs of passion and thought, but are also where “thought hides itself and passion has its dreams” (*Picture* 217). Such thought and passion may be secretive, not seen, or not to be seen, yet are able to keep themselves alive with their intensity, coming back to haunt the subject. Recognizing value in this visceral sensation separates Wilde from his contemporary thinkers and scientists. In merging sensory experience with the intellect in the formation of consciousness, few of them would show the same intense responsiveness to humility and vulnerability, or to a self that looks inward. Alexander Bain found that the three terms “Feeling, Emotion, and Consciousness” were hardly distinguishable and might “express one and the same fact or attribute of mind” (1). For George Henry Lewes, “Feeling” was “understood as involving consciousness,” and “very generally the term [Consciousness] is synonymous with Feeling, i.e., Sentience” (143). In the later writings of Spencer, the conscious operations of thought were set “within a naturalistic framework of explanation which presents thinking as being only different in degree from feeling” (Peel 120; emphasis in original).

Wilde was different. In his *Oxford Commonplace Book*, Wilde wrote under the heading “Kantian Knowledge” (underlined in original): “Knowledge to Kant was the thinking of our sensations” (*Oxford Notebooks* 128). His interest in the relational nature of knowledge goes beyond these general terms: when Lord Henry claims that “Nothing can cure the soul but the senses, just as nothing can cure the senses but the

soul” (*Picture* 20), the potential offered by these permeable movements complicates the counteracting efficacy of an antidote. Dorian must see this point to recognize the chiasmic change that is happening to him. The point is to keep one aspect fresh through the other by mutually refracting and infinitely generating, yet without fostering any mechanically causal automation for each other. Wilde’s refusal to collapse the two could explain why he finds materialist approaches alone lacking. According to Philip E. Smith II and Michael S. Helfand, one of Wilde’s *Commonplace Book* entries indicates his interest in Plato’s idea, through Benjamin Jowett’s translation of *The Dialogues of Plato* that “We talk about facts when we are really resting on ideas” (Smith and Helfand 22). Another point in the same entry offers a key to Wilde’s thinking: “*We do not consider how much metaphysics* [underlined in original] are required to place us *above* [double-underlined in original] metaphysics” (*Oxford Notebooks* 133). Wilde’s observation points to a more holistic perspective that is necessary to make materialism work beyond dichotomous terms.

Two other sources are also helpful in defining Wilde’s conception of self-consciousness. The first is Socrates, whom Wilde studied at both Oxford and Trinity College Dublin (*Complete Works* 2. 267, note 118. 24-25). Where Socrates has an instrumentalist approach to the senses, Wilde makes the senses the essential component of self-consciousness, making them the end rather than the means. For Wilde, the sensual and the spiritual are both important. In this, he is akin to Hegel. For Hegel, “The sensuous and the spiritual are both essential to art. [...] When the cultural experience of an entire age sinks into this contradiction [of the two], it becomes philosophy’s task to show that neither side possesses truth in itself, that each is one-sided and self-dissolving” (*On the Arts* 5). This way, metaphysical thinking does not have to be deductive or merely ontological.

It is this conception of self-consciousness that has enabled Wilde to contribute significantly to the discussion in his time of the dynamics of the senses and the intellect. In *Dorian Gray*, the discursive splendour of chiasmi and paradoxes is a dominant mode of enacting self-consciousness and making it corporeal. Lord Henry never shies away from relishing them: “There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality. The senses could refine, and the intellect could degrade. Who could say where the fleshly impulse ceased, or the psychical impulse began? How shallow were the arbitrary definitions of ordinary psychologists!” (*Picture* 58). Chiasmi and paradoxes depend on the intellect to detect relations, but once established, these relations enact every nuance and sinew of form and movement, which could be beyond the expectations of the intellect. Wilde’s move to foreground sensations in self-consciousness still differs from the thinking of evolutionary physiological psychology, because for him, the intellect is not exclusively determined by its material presence. In addition, it is useful to remember that, outside the register of positivist language, as Gillian Beer has pointed out, “*fact* in much Victorian writing partakes still of the heroic connotations of its cognate form, *feat*” (75; emphasis in original). *Feat* acknowledges that a fact is to be experienced through the senses, but

feat is also a process and performative act in itself, obligating the intellect to engage with the act.

Thus, in *Dorian Gray*, self-consciousness, rather than consciousness *per se*, offers a unique category. The senses are no longer seen as an issue of methodology, but become a central form of existential awareness. We can see this through Wilde's general idea of the historical method. In his Oxford days, Wilde argues that the nature of the historical method is "not merely confined to the empirical method of ascertaining whether an event happened or not, but is concerned also with the investigation into [...] the general relations which phenomena of Life hold to one another, and in its ultimate development passes into the wider question of the Philosophy of History (*Complete Works* 4. 4-5). If, for Wilde, being self-conscious is an intuitive way of life, he also moves significantly beyond mid-century theories of ontological thinking, such as that of William Whewell. As an intuitionist philosopher and scientist at Cambridge, Whewell maintains in *Philosophy of the Inductive Sciences* that

574 "Ideas, as well as Sensations, necessarily enter into all our knowledge of objects: and these words express [...] that Fundamental Antithesis, in the union of which [...] all knowledge consists" (1. 27). Whewell evokes the British tradition of associationism, especially John Locke's view of "Sensation and Reflexion," and deliberately differentiates himself from Locke. His own position is based on the nature and composition of knowledge, while Locke's focuses on its origins. The tradition established by Locke, Hume, and David Hartley was still strong in the middle of the century and into Wilde's time. But for Wilde, sensations do not merely nor necessarily serve the birth of knowledge, either as composition or origin. Within self-consciousness, sensations are intuitive, sometimes self-serving, but never stagnant; they have their own *raison d'être*.

In this, Wilde also differs from Spinoza. Spinoza defines affect as the "affections of the body by which the body's power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections" (*Ethics* 70). Some examples of affects include desire, joy, pleasure, sadness, and pain. Spinoza establishes the connections between affects and the mind as a parallel of modification. "Spinoza's parallelism," as Amy Schmitter has summarized, "holds that the mind is constituted by its idea of the body; we become aware of the body, however, largely through its changes. So it is really the affects—whether active or passive—that constitute the mind" (Schmitter). Thus, shamelessness is an example of a breakdown of connection due to an absence of affect; or, more precisely, when "the mind is not the adequate cause of the affect; rather, it responds to some external thing, which can thus be considered the active cause" (Schmitter). For Wilde, the way the senses and the intellect inhabit each other so as to form a sense of self is less logical and mechanical than for Spinoza; it is fundamentally mystical and intuitive. This may be why Wilde reads Spinoza's *Ethics* for its ideas of evolution, which came to him as "the continuous adjustment of internal to [e]xternal relations" (*Oxford Notebooks* 142; editing in original). Lord Henry teaches Dorian that, when life appeals to us as art does, "we

find that we are no longer the actors, but the spectators of the play. Or rather we are both. We watch ourselves, and the mere wonder of the spectacle enralls us" (*Picture* 101). This self-watching gives form to a complex web of subjectivity that depends on the sense of wonder and awe.

A contrast with Hegel may also be helpful. For Hegel, "[i]ntellectual intuition is alone realized by and in ethical life." This means that "the eyes of the spirit and the eyes of the body [need to] completely coincide" (*System of Ethical Life* 143). If this life is seen in ethical and interpersonal terms in Hegel, conflating the living individual and the absolute concept, in Wilde it is personalized, visceral, and yet dignified in its own way. The turn to the personal and sensory brings out more sharply what Wilde's contemporaries in England needed but were denied due to a lack of "self-watching." More precisely, to be a spectator of oneself is to allow one's senses not only to respond to objects, artefacts, and bodies that may make one cringe or exult, but also to feel what others normally do not and cannot feel. It is a double response, individualized and individuating, that is "at once new and delightful, and possess[es] that element of strangeness" (*Picture* 132). Reality becomes tactile only to those who can feel it, as not everyone can feel "the scarlet threads of life," "the sanguine labyrinth of passion" (*Picture* 95), and "the quivering, ardent sunlight" (*Picture* 90). One's vigilance to such forms of "plastic character," outside conventional episteme, has engaged Wilde's thinking. In his Oxford *Commonplace Book*, Wilde describes this character with reference to Aristotle as the "Tendency To [sic] conceive ideas always under the form of images, and to give a sensible rendering to objects most removed from sense" (*Oxford Notebooks* 137). Moreover, for someone like Shelley, "the sight of a Greek piece of sculpture touched 'the most removed and divine of the chords which make music in our chords'" (*Oxford Notebooks* 137). In the end, Dorian's portrait shows in every detail his awareness of himself, and yet his response to the portrait can only be defined in Hedonistic terms: it demonstrates the difference between feeling when that is inevitable for everyone and feeling when that becomes inevitable for oneself. This distinction should help us understand why, after Lord Henry's speech about the Hellenic ideal, "[f]or nearly ten minutes [Dorian] stood there, motionless, with parted lips, and eyes strangely bright. He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him. Yet they seemed to him to have come really from himself [...] vibrating and throbbing to curious pulses" (*Picture* 18).

This internalizing of sensory feelings also resembles what T.H. Huxley evokes when he isolates humans from animals in his discussion of the impact of evolutionary theories. For Huxley, atoms or physics could be outside the purview of human intellect; it is thus the acute self-awareness of humans of the forms of their life that separates them from animals. This self-awareness may deny any exhaustive reach of science and reason ("Evolution and Ethics"). By addressing the formation of self-consciousness in *Dorian Gray*, Wilde defines this difference of humans as an exquisite type of creative sensitivity, an intimate but contrarian and sometimes counterfactual reflexivity, and a vigilance of the body that compels the intellect to scrutinize its

own formation without holding the intellect hostage. It is a unique predilection, both sensory and visual, that integrates the Greek idea of perception. Thus, being a self-spectator may disturb one more than being an active participant in one's life. Only a self so enthralled could transform vision to envisioning through reconceptualizing and reconfiguring one's own conditions. The challenge to articulate such an intricate process of becoming aware is palpable in a comment Wilde made towards the end of his life. Writing to a friend on March 17, 1898, Wilde said: "[m]y writing has gone to bits—like my character. I am simply a self-conscious nerve in pain" (*Complete Letters* 1039). Here again, words are limiting, for the body and the mind both feel or see through a mode of articulation other than words, as neither the body nor the mind stands on its own. Yet the conflation of the senses and the intellect is far from reductive or conclusive, as one cannot perform the role of the other. Here also, Wilde's comments retain the theatricality of the pessimism in *Dorian Gray*, but are no longer as histrionically overstated, still raw, still alert, not just feeling, but knowing as well.

576 In the end, it is in terms of how one's own sensory awareness poses an obligation to respond and forces one to own up one's humility and humanity that Wilde carries on a dialogue with the metaphysical philosophers and the scientists.

NOTES

1. See, for example, Cohn; Davis and Seagroatt, on the other hand, regard Wilde's conception of consciousness as more creative.
2. See Willis and Flint.
3. For Wilde and the influence of ancient Greek thought, including the notion of *theoria*, see Ross and Evangelista.
4. For a brief discussion of this point, see Levin (13).
5. For this awareness among students at Oxford then and for the adaptation of Hegelian influences to Platonic and Darwinian discourses for survival in England, see Chamberlin (58, 151).
6. For a different view, see Cohen (15).
7. Haeckel's wording was less unequivocal and less conclusive in the earlier editions (1876 and 1883, for example) of his *History of Creation*.

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