

**The Stamp of Rarity:
Ancestrality and Extinction in
*Daniel Deronda***

And the multiplicity of these analogies is itself all the more natural in that the same man, if we examine him for a few minutes, appears in turn a man, a man-bird, a man-insect, and so forth.

—Marcel Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin

I

IN CHAPTER 40 OF GEORGE ELIOT'S *Daniel Deronda* we learn that the title character's "more exquisite" quality lies in his "keenly perceptive sympathetic emotiveness," his "profound sensibility to a cry from the depths of another."¹ Earlier on, Deronda is said to have "the stamp of rarity in a subdued fervor of sympathy, an activity of imagination on behalf of others" (178). This is not a casual trope. Deronda is extolled for being "receptive instead of superciliously prejudging," and "receptiveness" is described as "a rare and massive power" (492). The terms *rare* and *rarity* recur in the novel, denoting what is very uncommon or unusually fine. As a modifier, *rare* is almost invariably paired with the nouns of Jewish singularity—moral "receptiveness" (496), vocal-physiognomic "perfection," verbal "quality" (809), and "visionary excitement" (513). By the time Gwendolen realizes that her feelings have turned Daniel "into a sort of trust less rare than the fidelity that guards it" (430), the suggestion that moral

ABSTRACT There are patterns of *continuité discontinu* (Derrida) in the figural transactions between human groups and between humans and animals in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* that remain underexamined. By emphasizing ironic incommensurability and difference, this essay seeks to reveal the logic of ungivenness organizing human interactions in a novel haunted by images of deep time and species extermination. Eliot's interest in ancestrality and extinction was fueled by her readings in geology and biology (Darwin), but it also evinces a metaphysical concern with uncorrelated time (Kant) that is inseparable from her fascination with the idea of moral *rarity*. REPRESENTATIONS 144. Fall 2018 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 90–123. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at <http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2018.144.4.90>.

redemption presupposes rarity is simply overbearing. The rationale of the polysemy is catachrestic because scarcity connotes value. The rare item is precious because its limited currency eludes the wider circulation of commodified objects and persons in liberal-capitalist society:

To save an unhappy Jewess from drowning herself, would not have seemed a startling variation among police reports; but to discover in her so *rare* a creature as Mirah, was an exceptional event which might well bring exceptional consequences. (378; emphasis mine)

Like the jewels bartered back and forth by the novel's characters (Gwendolen, the pawnbroker, Daniel, Grandcourt, Lydia), something rare is valuable because it is ontologically unlikely: its ancestrality attests to the value of survival, and its exposure to the risk of extinction folds back on the value. However temporarily coopted by wider trade orbits, the jewels remain an intractable, inassimilable surplus. And so do Deronda's Jews, always on the brink of an excessive, sacrificial, and sublime self-waste.² Even the renegade Baruch Spinoza got "his crust by a quiet handicraft" (472) in lens-grinding before completing his *Ethics*. The jewels: the Jews: their stamp of rarity.

The contention that "receptiveness is a rare . . . power" involves a twofold implication: first, that *receptiveness* is a *power*, and second, that *receptiveness* is *rare*. Mesmerized by the range of hermeneutic possibility that the concept of *sympathy* affords, Eliot's critics have addressed the former implication while neglecting the latter. Predictably, then, the response to *Daniel Deronda* has been spellbound by the shine of a familiar faculty (moral sympathy) that, because in principle *unrare* in Eliot's narrative world, seems in little need of special examination. Indeed, the near scientific symmetries of a plot conceivably modeled upon the Goethean allegoresis of *elective affinities* reinforce the impression that everything in the story depends on moral relatedness. On the one hand we have the English characters, with the rich Grandcourt at the extreme of emotional stolidity. Then comes Gwendolen Harleth, an ungenerous dweller in "the border-territory of rank" (*Deronda*, 23) who marries Grandcourt to allay social anxiety. This doesn't prevent her from cultivating an interest in Daniel, the character that occupies the novel's central position. Daniel enjoys the best of both worlds: groomed impeccably as an English gentleman, he can also boast of "the keenly perceptive sympathetic emotiveness" that, in the novel's logic, belongs to the Jews. Because, it turns out, he is also a Jew. On the other hand we have Mirah and Mordecai—Deronda's Jews—which I designate as such to distinguish them from the common, money-minded, shop-keeping Hebrews also present in a novel where, let me recall, "there are Ezras and Ezras" (567). Mordecai is placed at the extreme, in figurative opposition to Grandcourt, whom he never meets. He is a concentrated, unproductive version of Jewish rarity: the passionate

man who sacrifices his life to dig up the historical grounds of his people's moral superiority. Grandcourt and Mordecai are both unrealistic, near Dickensian characters who belong in the world of romance (if not romantic farce): significantly, both die before the tale comes to a close. Between Mordecai and Deronda stands Mirah, Mordecai's sister, a destitute Jewish girl, in a position of structural equivalence to Gwendolen. Like the English girl, she is *saved* by Deronda and falls in love with him. Unlike Gwendolen, she becomes the object of Deronda's favor. The end of the novel describes their wedding and trip to Palestine to start a new life devoted to the construction of the nation of Israel.

The value of the central characters (Gwendolen, Daniel) is a measure of their ability to relate to characters standing—or seeming to stand—across the Gentile-Jew divide. Understandably, critics have been less interested in the dynamics of that ability than in the origin and function of Eliot's sympathy toward the Jews. This sympathy most critics take for granted. I argue, however, that the overdetermined specificity of the cultural-ethnic division dramatized in *Deronda* forces Eliot to depart from the more generic-universal treatment of moral sympathy at work in her other narratives. And she certainly knows it: "Nothing is here narrated of human nature generally" (*Deronda*, 91). It forces her to realize, somewhere in her narrative unconscious, that sympathy is a passion not exclusively based on *receptivity* (the ability to receive the other), since it also depends on the *givenness* of the other. And her novel, I contend, construes the Jew as a poorly given, if not ungiven, alterity. The reason for Jewish ungivenness is rarity, a quality that stands in direct proportion to receptivity within the group: the higher your receptivity to those of your group (race, nation), the less chance you have of being received—even by the people inside the group whom you are most willing to receive. The "unpleasant" grabbing of Deronda's arm, an action performed twice, first by the white-bearded Joseph Kalonymos in the Frankfort synagogue (368) and second by the consumptive Mordecai in the secondhand bookshop (387), testifies to the dilemma of ethnical-cultural asynchronicity and moral interruption that my article sets out to explore. The fact that rarity is bound up thematically and rhetorically with the parallel notions of ancestry and extinction calls for biological considerations that Eliot may have discovered, as I will argue, in Charles Darwin. But insofar as these notions (ancestry and extinction) map out a deep time without human time, Eliot's depiction of Jewish rarity in *Deronda* raises the kind of metaphysical challenge that Immanuel Kant aimed to meet in his first *Critique*. What is the ontological status of nonhuman time? And what kind of epistemic (narrative, rhetorical) processing does it demand?

My attention to the rhetorical effects of this thematic focus on rarity may result in a corrective to standard accounts of George Eliot's philo-Semitism.

Although this is not the primary goal of my article, I do not disown it as a hermeneutic corollary. The fact that readers with a stake in Eliot's philo-Semitism unfailingly overlook the existence of deconstructive approaches to the novel shows that disregard for the novel's complex rhetorical texture can foster belief in versions of Eliot as a utopian *ideologue*, a champion of either proto-Zionism or cosmopolitanism.³ My interpretation, by contrast, draws on extant deconstructive and rhetorically focused readings of *Daniel Deronda* by critics such as Cynthia Chase, Catherine Gallagher, and Ian Duncan and yet seeks to reach beyond them by putting into play the metaphysical question of time that instigates the rhetorical-narrative processing of temporality.

When Deronda's friend Hans Meyrick boasts that "there is really little difference between me and—Maimonides" (642) he is wrong in ways that go beyond—and against—his intended irony. In the novel's moral-lexical economy, difference-making rarity is the exclusive property of the Jewish people. But they pay a great price for this distinction. They reach the present from an immemorial past—David Kaufmann has stressed "the enigma of their marvelous preservation"—and have limited hope of reaching the future.⁴ Compared to some of the substantial English people dwelling in the novel's present, they seem hardly real. The figural etymology of *rare* underpins this unreality. Since the mid-fifteenth century, the adjective *rare* has meant both "unusual" and "thin, airy, porous." The more specific implication of *rare* as "few in number and widely separated, sparsely distributed, seldom found," can be traced back, via Old French *rere* ("sparse"), to the Latin *rarus*, meaning "thinly sown, having a loose texture; not thick; having intervals between."⁵ Thus Jewishness and rarity concur in a shared implication of dissemination or diaspora. Thinly sown, airy, and scattered, Deronda's Jews are inexorably disembedded, whence their paradoxical status as archaic ultramoderns.⁶ They roam the narrative as *dialectical images* of an *Urgeschichte* (prehistory) whose discrepancy in and for the present might harbor a utopian future. Alienated from the English community, they also risk losing touch with their related particulars: Deronda nearly missing Mirah, Deronda on the verge of discounting Mordecai, Mirah close to overlooking her family, Deronda, of course, forgone by his mother. The existence of these singularities is, moreover, steadily encircled by a void. If their future is dizzily open, their past is a riddle and a mire. Daniel, described at one point as a "yearning disembodied spirit" (365), ignores his origins; Mirah flees from them and attempts suicide; Mordecai tumbles into them and dies. Remote and obscure like Mordecai, elusive and unfocused like Daniel, fragile and fugitive like Mirah, these Jews cherish nonetheless a gift—a rare talent—of moral receptiveness that is at odds with the utilitarian lifestyle of most of the English. Hence the paradox: the differential

aspect (*the stamp of rarity*) that deepens their unrelation—with the English, at least—is precisely their ability to relate, their extraordinary receptivity. This doesn't mean that the problem is an English incapacity to receive them. In the novel this is less a problem than a fact. The problem—and Eliot makes it very clear that *there is* a problem—lies with the Jews, who cannot be received because, however fit to receive others, they themselves posit an unacceptable otherness. Though explicitly perspectivized through English prejudice—Deronda's, the Meyrick women's—the first forthright depiction in the novel of a Jewish person (Mirah) answers no other purpose than to uphold the racist preconception, denounced by Kaufmann, of the Jews as “a peculiar people.”⁷ Recall that, in its extended meaning, *rare* also means anomalous. Or that no English character wishes to keep the diamonds: the jewels end up “scattered around [Gwendolen] on the floor” (359). Just like the Jews at the end, shipped toward the uncertain. The jewels: the Jews: their stamp of diaspora.

II

In chapter 15, Sir Hugo teases Deronda with the possibility that Gwendolen might prefer him to Grandcourt. His ward's icy reply—“I suppose pedigree and land belong to a fine match”—elicits an exchange laden with moral implication:

“The best horse will win in spite of pedigree, my boy. You remember Napoleon's *mot*—*Je suis un ancêtre*” said Sir Hugo, who habitually undervalued birth, as men after dining well often agree that the good of life is distributed with wonderful equality.

“I am not sure that I want to be an ancestor,” said Deronda. “It doesn't seem to me the rarest sort of origination.” (163)

Though the attribution to Napoleon is erroneous, the root assumption is that a self-made man risen to celebrity without the help of lineage should be proud of being his own ancestor. Deronda disagrees: he believes that there is a *rarer sort* of origination. He is right but ignores why. The ironic reversals of the novel will deliver the connection between the *ancestral* origination of the Jewish race and their *rarity*—including his. The phrase *rare sort* reappears in another passage fraught with inklings of racial origination. The narrator dilates on the peculiarities of Deronda's moral difference:

The sense of an entailed disadvantage—the deformed foot doubtfully hidden by the shoe, makes a restlessly active spiritual yeast, and easily turns a self-centered, unloving nature into an Ishmaelite. But in the rarer sort, who presently see their own frustrated claim as one among a myriad, the inexorable sorrow takes the form of fellowship and makes the imagination tender. (175)

Ishmael was, according to biblical and Jewish sources, a wicked but repentant outcast who fathered numerous tribes. The Ishmaelite is one of his descendants, a capital figure in legendary accounts of Arab ancestry.⁸ Arguably, the narrator here collates the English and the Arabs as demographically prosperous races that are nonetheless beset by destructive individualism. The *rarer sort*, namely the Jewish diaspora, features by contrast as the victim of English and Arab defective socialization and as the purveyor of a moral revolution based on fellowship, receptivity, and imaginative identification.

The foregoing passages insert *rarity* within a broadly compound—biological, historicist, anthropological, biblical-critical—debate on racial ancestry. Much of the angst in Victorian cultural life was prompted by the rapid fluctuations and shocking revelations punctuating this debate. Nothing short of the historical cause, ideological significance, and political projection of collective fate was at stake. The fact, for instance, that Eliot, in her review of Charles Kingsley's *Westward Ho*, should raise *only* theological objections to a passage in which the narrator recalls Humboldt's description of "some wretched group of Indians" as "the last degraded remnants of some fallen and dying race" shows that she shared with Kingsley not only an imperial pride in the differences between historical time zones but also apprehensions about the survival of their own nation.⁹ If, as Patrick Brantlinger has observed, one endpoint of the "extinction discourse" on primitive races was a "widespread anxiety about the degeneration or even extinction of the white race," then Eliot's overwrought investment in the survival of the Jewish race may betray an unfocused concern with British endurance—the emotion behind, say, *Westward Ho*—and must be read against the contemporary anthropological debate on the meaning to evolutionary theory of primitive tribes unfolding in works like John Lubbock's *Prehistoric Times* (1865) and the Duke of Argyll's *Primeval Man* (1869).¹⁰

But apprehension and pride seldom mix. Take, for instance, the notation that "one man differs from another, as we all differ from the Bosjesman" (*Deronda*, 324) in a novel less concerned with interpersonal than cross-racial difference. To be sure, the determination of *our exact difference* from the San people in South Africa is a task Eliot fails to complete. Why does she bother to register it? We don't know, but the novel abounds in this mode of ironic impertinence—a kind of catachrestic interruption betokening discontinuity across individuals, races, species—which undermines the novel's surface defense of continuity. What shall we make, for instance, of the offhand remark about the "high English breeding that subdues all nations" (405) or "the man of the best Dutch blood" (405) in a section coming closely after the dismal depiction of some very "common" urban

Jews, one of whom is later described as “a preserved specimen” (504)? What of Sir Hugo’s conception of Lush as “a half-caste among gentlemen” (557)? And, still more apropos, what of Mr Gascoigne’s nose, which “began with an intention to be aquiline but suddenly became straight” (30)? Or why would Lydia Glasher—admittedly, both victim and arch-villain—have such “large dark eyes”?¹¹ We are constantly invited to reckon the tangible difference between Maimonides and Hans, or Mordecai and Grandcourt. But this difference between the Jew and the English is a divide that the novel, through its ideological investment in continuity, openly intends to straddle. The crucial question, then, is whether this desired continuity, based on receptivity and relatedness and often modulated through metonymy, can forbear the grotesque celebration of discontinuity that spreads to all levels. The obstinacy with which *Deronda* strives to undo, in the London Jewry, “so strange a blending between the unwonted with the common” (386) exposes the moral mendacity of a selective philo-Semitism that may well have been Eliot’s. It is important to note that the tensions of a *continuité discontinu*, a standard deadlock in sensualist epistemologies based on analogy, is not uncommon in Eliot’s fiction.¹² In the opening of *Felix Holt*, for instance, the narrator wittily negotiates the distance between an outlying nebula and English government, or between the solar system and a shepherd’s parish. These discontinuities are routine instances of controlled ironic metonymy (to stress through conjunction the discontinuity of two widely separated members of a series), very much in the vein of Charles Dickens. But the comment that “till the agitation about the Catholics in ’29, rural Englishmen had hardly known more of Catholics than of the fossil mammals” is uncanny.¹³ What do these fossils have to do with the coarse party politics and inept prenuptial courting in *Felix Holt*? What does the novel gain by deepening Catholic atavism? Once again an instance of parabastic discontinuity undercuts Eliot’s surface concern with gradation and scaled, progressive connectivity—the “mark of kinship in the one brief life to the far-stretching life that went before and to the life that is to come after” (10). In *Deronda*, concern with hyperrelatedness—“I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else”—puts metonymic realism under great pressure.¹⁴ At one point, for instance, the Jews are catachrestically stored up in Mrs Meyrick’s imagination with “Scott’s Covenanters” (566): to what conceivable end if not again to ridicule them as vestigial and irremediably unrelated? All in all, the narrator does little to distance herself successfully from the romantic grasp of Jewishness shared by the women of the Meyrick family.¹⁵ Catherine Gallagher uses the phrase “metonymic realism” to designate “the process of inclusion, equalization, and acceptance” by means of which Eliot’s narratives before *Felix Holt* were able to “get from facts to values.”¹⁶ In *Deronda* the crisis of this method is evident. For how far back

can kinship and equalization between stages go without endangering the likelihood of mutual givenness? What are the limits of “historic sympathy” (*Deronda*, 363)? *Deronda* protests “against the severance of past and present history” (206), Mrs Meyrick considers that “there are some earliest things that last the longest” (210)—and yet how far into English ancestry can we reach without being interrupted by nonacceptance? Under Catholic fossils one expects to find Jewish petrifications. But in England?

III

By Eliot’s own admission, the power of her fiction rests on an ability to hear a human pain that is noiseless to others. Eliot proclaims her moral receptivity to “unapplauded heroism” (*Deronda*, 545)—the givenness (*being-for*) of hidden lives (*being-in-itself*) that rest in *unvisited tombs*. The “full nature” of these hidden lives she memorably compares, in the closing paragraph of *Middlemarch*, to a river that spends “itself in channels which had no great name on the earth.”¹⁷ The figural overlap of riverbeds and tombs compounds a geological site of potential fossil hunting. Eliot’s narratives abound in this seemingly gratuitous givenness of the ontologically *ancestral*, a category that includes both the nebula and the fossil. But, in accordance with an enlightened gradualist logic Eliot endorsed, the category also alludes to human groups that have been passed over by progressive development, either because they remain stranded in an atavistic phase or simply because they fall off the dialectic as “unassimilated material.”¹⁸ It is important to note that, for Eliot, the enlightened ideology of development was partly sustained by a misreading of Darwin’s *Origin of Species*, which she described as “an elaborate exposition of the evidence in favour of the Development Theory.”¹⁹

Made of pride and apprehension, this ideology of development causes *Deronda* to fracture in grotesque figural outbursts and unfocused irony. The Jews are construed as one such residual chunk of unassimilated material—one of the “lifeless barbarisms” that combine to make up “our civilization” and that “have descended to us like many petrifications from distant ages.”²⁰ They stand, in the novel, for something more opaque than the fossil-like Catholics in *Felix Holt*. Not only do they perplex, with their lingering obscurity, the “Development Theory” whereby the world gets on “step by step towards brave clearness and honesty.”²¹ They pose, to the English community in the novel, the threat of incommensurable difference. Thus *Deronda* reads like a failed attempt to process their recalcitrant ungivenness—their rarity. George Levine interprets *Deronda* as a successful experiment in “knowing the other.”²² In my contrary reading, the cognitive grasp of the

other fails because *this* other is not *any* other. Jewishness features as the inherently uncorrelated embodiment of ancestral time, unfit for epistemological assimilation.

My aim in what follows is to examine the nature of this *difference*—a free-standing metaphysical notion the novel also betokens as “separateness”—as it is variously inflected. I want to argue that Jewish rarity is both the cause and the effect of difference. As a cause, rarity underlies the novel in the guise of ancestry. As an effect, rarity haunts the work through forebodings of extinction. The formula, in a nutshell: *The Jews are rare (estimable) because they are ancestral, and they will go extinct because they are rare (scarce)*. The three concepts (rarity, ancestry, extinction) can be traced back to the scientific paradigm of Darwin and Charles Lyell with which Eliot was deeply, if distrustfully, familiar. Ancestry and extinction are bound up both in Darwin’s texts and in *Deronda* with powerful and perplexing metaphysical implications about the ungivenness of difference. The relevance of this claim is twofold. First, critics have overlooked the mutually reinforcing roles that extinction and ancestry play within the Lyell-Darwin scientific episteme. Although concern with human extinction is visible in English fiction at least since Mary Shelley’s *The Last Man*, extinction-anxiety stirred by the Lyell-Darwin take on deep time informs many late Victorian novels.²³ Second, the connected narrative processing in *Deronda* of these two concepts—the parallel attempt to resist a ghastly future and contain a refractory past—has not yet been the subject of critical examination.

Ancestry and extinction feature today as crucial limit concepts in the work of Quentin Meillassoux and Ray Brassier, two fellow thinkers who are resolved to indict the anthropocentric ontological basis of Kantian critical philosophy. Both condemn the reality-negating effects of Kant’s correlationist thesis, the presumption that whatever escapes the human-world correlation—noumena, metaphysical entities, the ungiven—enjoys at best a questionable existence. This allegation is pertinent to my argument because, as I will argue in the final sections of this essay, Eliot’s fascination with Kant seems motivated by her abiding cognitive-moral interest in the ungiven—the hidden, the unvisited. Thus *Deronda*’s metaphysical agenda aims to restore, contra Kant and yet with a determination only Kant’s critical distinctions made possible, cognitive-moral access to the noncorrelated because inherently nonidentical. More precisely, I want to examine the way in which the narrative representation of ancestry and extinction forces the narrator into a confrontation with the metaphysical puissance, if contested reality, of what is different because unknown (the rare Jew), and of what is unknown because either poorly given (ancestral) or merely ungiven (extinct). Eliot is not responsible for the troping of the Jew as unreceivable

remnant of embodied ancestry, but she unwittingly did much to propagate it. Her intervention stands somewhere between David Strauss's banishment of the Jews from the region of the *historical* into that of the *mythical* and Arnold Toynbee's description of them as the "fossil remnants" of an "extinct society."²⁴

IV

Nothing describes prehuman earth better than the notion of an object that is not a subject.²⁵ Slavoj Žižek has insisted on the traumatic "relationship of the subject to an Otherness which is prior to intersubjectivity," thus outlining a failure in receptivity that involves more than the simple collapse of human scales.²⁶ Such consensus around the singular status of the pre-intersubjective object—say, the fossil—is not casual. The diagnosis of subject-object unrelation can be traced back to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, and it is precisely against Kant's epistemology that Meillassoux and Brassier have recently insisted on the right to know what Samuel Butler called "some other world with which [a human being] had no concern."²⁷ Meillassoux seeks to resist *correlationism*, the Kantian assumption that to be is to be *for* a human, that only what is phenomenally *given* to human cognition enjoys ontological stature. Kant argued that "if we remove our subject . . . then the entire constitution and all relations of objects in space and time, nay space and time themselves, would vanish."²⁸ So what happens in a setting like the primordial earth where the subject is removed because not yet there? What kind of representation is *now* possible of the ancestral realm, if the subject-object correlation did not *then* obtain? For Meillassoux, "The ancestral . . . designates an event anterior to terrestrial life and hence anterior to givenness itself. . . . The arche-fossil does not merely refer to an un-witnessed occurrence but to a non-given occurrence."²⁹ Therefore, the ancestral names occurrences that are not "contemporaneous with any givenness" (20). The metaphysical purchase of this notion is incalculable. Meillassoux invites us to consider

the great outdoors, the absolute outside (*le Dehors absolu*) of pre-critical thinkers: that outside which was not relative to us, and which was given as indifferent to its own givenness to be what it is, existing in itself regardless of whether we are thinking of it or not; that outside which thought could explore with the legitimate feeling of being on foreign territory—of being entirely elsewhere. (7)

This consideration is paralleled by Brassier's appeal to take notice of the de-anthropocentric implications lodged in the hypothesis of solar death:

Extinction is not to be understood here as the termination of a biological species, but rather as that which levels the transcendence ascribed to the human, whether it

be that of consciousness or *Dasein*, stripping the latter of its privilege as the locus of correlation. Thus, if the extinction of the sun is catastrophic, this is because it disarticulates the correlation.³⁰

Thus ancestry and extinction strip the human being of *its privilege as the locus of correlation*, and since both designate real experiences—there is evidence of both residual ancestry and partial extinction—we must assume that the correlation is de facto disarticulated. But this is not exactly so. The unveiling of noncorrelated reality doesn't revoke the correlation: it merely narrows its sphere of action to human chronology. This proves convenient in two ways. First, it makes the correlation more effective by tightening its conditions of applicability. Second, it liberates the prehuman past and the posthuman future from anthropocentric subjection. What is original in this approach is the attempt to restore, contra Kant, these discarded realms to epistemological dignity. This approach closely echoes that of Darwin, whom Brassier consciously reads as a precursor.³¹ For not only did the English naturalist establish the reality of ancestry and extinction, thus shaking the centrality of man in the universe. By postulating a community of descent that leveled humans with ancestral fish, Darwin also attempted to bring the nonhuman back into epistemological reckoning, if not correlation. This attempt is anti-Kantian because the German philosopher stipulated a radical epistemic discontinuity between the ungiven (nonhuman, noncorrelated) and the two central spheres—cognitive and moral—of human action. But Meillassoux and Brassier overlook the essential fact that, for Kant, this discontinuity did not lessen the ontological and metaphysical credentials of the discarded realities; it simply quarantined them as unknowable. Dieter Henrich reminds us that “Kant *does* talk about the possible being-there of things-in-themselves.”³² In actuality, their forced exile into unknowability vastly enhances their metaphysical potency.³³

At a conscious level, Eliot seeks to adjust metonymic realism to the demand of placing Jewish difference—the Jews' rarity—within the continuous natural-cultural whole the Lyell-Darwin hypothesis had forced her to reconsider. Thus, on a surface level, the novel treats them as effectively given and correlated to epistemic, narrative, and figurative strands of English rationality. Behind this strategy lies a Darwin-inspired ecocultural allegoresis of multiple human-nonhuman transferences and cross-human interrelatedness. But the strategy fails. Figurative aberrance and discontinuity disrupt the narrative, alerting the reader to the discrepancy between Eliot's familiar world and the Jews' resilient objectivity. Unable to contain them, the novel turns down the Jews as an ungiven difference and lets them bounce back into a cosmic night euphemized as “the East” (*Deronda*, 783). Such failure in English receptivity testifies to their unique metaphysical standing, to their rarity.

Let me start with the second half of the formula: *the Jews will go extinct because they are rare (scarce)*. Gillian Beer has argued that “Darwin’s theory required extinction,” and he saw it “as ordinary and as necessary to evolutionary change.”³⁴ Thomas Malthus provided him with a working hypothesis: the two powers of population and production in the earth are unequal. Since “the race of plants and the race of animals shrink under [the] restrictive law” of limited room and nourishment, the human race, accordingly, “cannot, by any efforts of reason, escape from it.”³⁵ Darwin then elaborated on the dynamic of a necessary competition, between species and members of the same species, arising when “the number of places in the polity of nature is not indefinitely great.”³⁶ But this competition is also ordinary in that it obtains everywhere in the “economy of nature,” including the human race. Surely, speculation on places of survival “in the polity of nature” underpins Mordecai’s appeal to “the dispersed people” to “[look] toward a land and a polity” where they “may share the dignity of a national life” (532). Yet no such restorative heroism obtains in real nature. In his *Journal of Researches* Darwin notes the circumstances of race survival around the earth—General Rosa’s “purposes of exterminating” the Indians in Rio Negro, the tendency in the Fuegians’ population rate to remain stable, or the “striking instance of the comparative rate of increase of a civilized over a savage people” in Van Diemen’s Land.³⁷ These annotations are presided over by the dictum, written on the back of Darwin’s notebook, “Nothing For any Purpose.”³⁸ Humans are neither privileged by meaningful extinction nor exempt from its meaninglessness. Ian Duncan notes that Darwin envisaged extinction as “an event that happens fully inside human history.”³⁹ However, as Levine observes, “Survival in Darwin’s nature is not morally significant.”⁴⁰ And neither is extinction. Both are just accidents in a global, unwritten plot of life-forms’ interactions.⁴¹ Because such meaninglessness is hideous to Eliot’s moral vision, she must have relished the exiguous strands of teleological significance the web of Darwin’s argument could afford. Although “slow extermination” is described in the *Origin* as nonteleological, it helps further progressive evolution because it widens “intervals between the several groups in each class.”⁴² *Interval* is a key concept in *Origin*, denoting difference (discontinuity) across time and space, and *rarity*, etymology tells us, is contingent upon the diasporic widening of intervals. Devoid of teleological significance, the oscillation between extinction and survival furthers no discernible development, but it can be taken as a mark of progressive, if arbitrary, discrimination, that is, the contingent separation of the rare. Eliot seeks in *Deronda* to endow Jewish survival with extra significance. The survival, for instance, of Spanish-Hebrew liturgy is

compared to the diasporic dissemination of “a plant with wandering seed” (*Deronda*, 684), thus reinforcing the connection between meaningful permanence and interval-opening rarity. Still, Eliot’s resolve to prove that Jewish rarity may harbor, in Levine’s words, a mission of “spiritual revitalization” of “a disenchanting contemporary England” is bedeviled by a rhetorical inertia that forces her to showcase Mordecai as a dodo. To elude the emblematic force of Dickens’s rendition of Fagin as a “loathsome reptile, engendered in the slime and darkness through which he moved,” was no easy task for anyone.⁴³

By postulating a “community of descent” binding together all living beings, Darwin encouraged ecological awareness.⁴⁴ Notions like kinship and interdependence took precedence over traditional concepts like hierarchy and deference.⁴⁵ Critics have examined the role that Darwinian egalitarian interconnectedness has played in Victorian culture at large; what has not been sufficiently explored is the parallel impact of the pervasiveness of risk unleashed by natural interconnection. Darwin implicitly relied on a dynamic of gradual accident underwriting adaptability, evolution, and ultimately extinction. Indeed accident logic worked both ways. It could further the rise of a new biological variety as well as the extinction of an old one. Darwin knows that

it is most difficult always to remember that the increase of every living being is constantly being checked by unperceived injurious agencies; and that these same unperceived agencies are amply sufficient to cause *rarity*, and finally *extinction*.⁴⁶

And so he encourages us “not [to] marvel at extinction; if we must marvel, let it be our presumption in imagining for a moment that we understand the many complex contingencies on which the existence of each species depends” (325). Though the understanding of webs of complex contingencies is Eliot’s trademark presumption, she couldn’t help marveling at the extinction of human races.

VI

I move on now to the examination of the Victorian construal of *ancestrality*, a notion present in the first half of our formula: *the Jews are rare (estimable) because they are ancestral*. To many nineteenth-century novelists, Darwin counted above all as the discoverer of real—nonhuman, deep—time. Because it involved primarily, albeit not intentionally, an imaginative conjecture about nonnarrative time, Darwin’s theory posed a particular challenge for fictional narratives. Darwin suggested that human life is poised between receding cosmic ancestrality and impending biological

extinction. When *Origin* was reviewed in the weekly *Athenaeum*, the findings were sharply summed up as “Man was born yesterday—he will perish tomorrow.”⁴⁷ The plain refractoriness of this conjecture to conclusive empirical evidence forced it to fall back on nonscientific grounds, thus confirming John Dupré’s conception of the importance of Darwin’s theory as *metaphysical*.⁴⁸ Darwin did not say as much, but he went to great lengths to suggest that if the universe is indeed as old as the geological evidence suggests, then human beings are dispensable—a corollary that is nothing if not metaphysical. By regressing the problem of time to a precritical ground laden with speculative implications, Darwin reinvented—both dehumanized and expanded—the past. Simultaneously, moreover, he reconfigured the future in a nonhuman direction. The joint effect of these actions was a coming into focus of the related notions of ancestry and extinction.

The belated donation of “arche-fossils” to the Victorian lens, for some an occasion for taxonomical rejoicing, was turned by Lyell and Darwin into evidence of humans’ very late arrival onto the ontological earth-stage—evidence, in short, of the belated formation of the critical arena of givenness. That givenness could run both ways became a metaleptic surmise indulged in by novelists. Thomas Hardy, for instance, describes, in the cliff-hanging episode in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), a situation in which an embedded fossil looks at a human being. Through a synoptic imaginative regression, we are invited to consider a time when “no man was there,” traversed only by “dragon forms and clouds of flying reptiles.” And further back, there “were fishy beings of lower development; and so on, till the lifetime scenes of the fossil confronting him were a present and modern condition of things.”⁴⁹ Of course, to fully grasp how a fossil can become a “present and modern condition of things” Victorian readers had to wait three years for the publication of *Deronda*. Critics have tracked the evolutionary tropes sustaining this Hardy passage, but they have missed the particular source in Darwin that lies directly behind it. The fragment in question covers the section “On the Lapse of Time” in chapter 9 of *Origin*. Darwin is anxious to meet an important objection resulting from the uniformitarian texture of his theory: the necessary “slowness” attending organic changes in natural selection. He turns to Lyell on geological time and evokes personal experiences of time-reading in a coastal cliff. Goaded by a drive to comprehend the incomprehensible, his reading results in what Žižek has called a “sublime protuberance”.⁵⁰

A man must for years examine for himself great piles of superimposed strata, and watch the sea at work grinding down old rocks and making fresh sediment, before he can hope to comprehend anything of the lapse of time, the monuments of which we see around us.

Darwin invites the reader to “wander along lines of sea-coast” and to stop at “the base of the cliff” in order to “mark the process of degradation.”⁵¹ The interjection, “What time this must have consumed!” prepares us for the vain metaphysical “endeavor to grapple with the idea of eternity” (294). Hardy must have been dazzled by Darwin’s power to invest nonhuman nature with something that is aesthetically and morally enchanting. But he wasn’t the only writer to fall under the spell partly cast by Lyell, Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, and other uniformitarians before *Origin* was published. In “The World of Water” (1851), for instance, possibly a collaborative piece by Dickens and Henry Morley, we encounter a similar representation. The standard evocation of sea fossils strewn over the bottom of the ocean turns into a daring speculation on the (present) givenness of the past as confirmation of its (ancestral) nongivenness. This speculation gives way, in turn, to an intrepid conjecture about the future fossil availability of man: “Man came, as you know, late into the world. . . . It is not easy to imagine one’s self as a fossil; but the Megalotherium, no doubt, never expected it.”⁵² The writers urge a pre-critical infraction—a panoramic tableau of *time without man*—that exacerbates the likelihood of human extinction. The *Notebooks*, the *Journal of Researches*, and *Origin* testify to Darwin’s growing willingness to dwell in the petrified temporality—both *elsewhere* and *elsewhen*—he first encountered in South America. It was there too that he first met a “savage,” a putative instance of *ancestral man*, and his narrative response to this event produces another sublime protuberance. According to Duncan,

Darwin’s rhetoric suggests the recognition of something unrecuperable, essential rather than transient, in the “primitive” shock of revulsion that defines his encounter with the savage man. The difference glimpsed is more drastic than that between developed and primitive stages: it is the difference between culture and its lack.⁵³

The subcontinent stood then as a *lieu de mémoire* consecrated to perpetuating the ancestral, an era of *nongivenness* where cultural memory fails to obtain.⁵⁴

It was, then, through exposure to this arrested temporality that Darwin first entertained the likelihood of human extinction. As I have noted, the connection between ancestry and extinction has been seldom considered. Gillian Beer suggests that Lyell’s “exploration of an infinitely extended time-scale for the earth” was a “necessary precondition” of Darwin’s theory and placed species extinction at its core.⁵⁵ But she lays no special emphasis on the connection between late arrival and early exit—perhaps because the connection is less a scientific datum than a metaphysical surmise. Nor has the literary response to the emerging reconceptualization of earth time received the treatment it deserves. Virginia Zimmerman observes that “geology burdened the nineteenth century with

a sense of time that exceeded the limits of plot,” but she grants that the privileging of the present position of the excavator allows narratives “to imagine at once time’s expanse and the persistent value of individual life.”⁵⁶ This opinion rests on an overestimation of the effective powers of narrative point of view, always in fact exposed to delusions of resignation and ideology. I assume, rather, that if for the standard Victorian novel “beginning is the first step in the intentional production of meaning,” no meaningful narrative risked being produced without a fixed beginning, whence the need, if novel there must be, to stabilize the stretch of time extending before the recorded incipit.⁵⁷ For someone like William Makepeace Thackeray, performing this task was still an enjoyable rhetorical exercise (see the beginning of *Barry Lyndon*). For Victorians steeped in Darwin, including late Dickens, the task could prove inexecutable.

VII

The first epigraph in *Deronda* opens with the sentence “Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning.” The poetological concern with the need to set off stories *in medias res* hides a deeper metaphysical interest in the impossibility of a time when “time is at Nought.” Science and poetry are equally unfit to rebut the fact that “no retrospect will take us to the true beginning” (*Deronda*, 7), but the latter, evoked in the para-text through the allusion to J. W. von Goethe’s *Faust*, grapples more effectively with the speculative dimension of the dilemma. It is far from casual that the novel opens with this important preliminary note, which Terence Cave forthrightly characterizes as “metaphysical.”⁵⁸

The remark that men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning obtains a reverse confirmation in another precept: “Everything in the world must come to an end some time. We must bear to think of that” (*Deronda*, 376). Extinction, the most radical expression of discontinuity, is the master trope weaving the context of reference in *Deronda*. Thus the logic of intervals that informs its technical meaning in Darwin openly works to unstitch the novel’s predetermined ideological cogency based, let me insist, on metonymic continuity—the rhetorical mode that best apprehends the novel’s ideological investment in “separateness with communication” (725). The narrator’s resolve to prevail as a detached comparative ethnographer puts this metonymic coherence under a great deal of pressure. Irony, for one thing, is pervasive, but seldom under control. Consider the novel’s opening, where the extrapolation of Darwin’s conjectures to the arena of an international ecology is indirectly effected. Gwendolen is surrounded by a mixed assortment of “very distant varieties of European type: Livonian and

Spanish, Graeco-Latin and miscellaneous German, English aristocratic and English plebeian" (8). No learned Victorian acquainted with Scottish Enlightenment stadial theories of human advance would miss the implicit tabulation that organizes these civilizational, national, and class categories, a taxonomy where "English aristocratic" reigns highest—*high* meaning, of course, better equipped for meaningful survival. The "exasperating irony" (*Deronda*, 23), here under control, is that the English lady is the first to turn, empty-handed, from the roulette table. The next social gathering turns into a new pretext for racial observation, with the narrator again rehearsing as mundane anthropologist. With the exception of "the formidable Herr Klesmer," the men at the Archery Meeting "had all the ordinary stamp of the well-bred Englishman" (102). At stake is, once again, a biological crux, what the narrator will later call the right "ground of selection" (719). Difference in "stamp" sparks a crudely reductive zoological diversion, opening with "We English are a miscellaneous people, and any chance fifty of us will present many varieties of animal architecture or facial ornament" (102). In view of what the novel has in store for the Jews in the way of animalistic reduction, this attempt at self-depreciation delivers an extravagant situational irony.⁵⁹ The novel assumes "the partition of mankind into races and nations" and attempts to map "an unexplored continent where all species are peculiar."⁶⁰ But some are decidedly more peculiar than others: the "little comparison" recommended by the ethnographic narrator does little to "diminish" her "surprise and disgust at the aberrations of the Jews" (366).⁶¹ The novel invests in cultural-ethnographic difference and zoographic variety, stressing instances of incongruous temporality and mismatched survival. Differential development between species—or races—accounts for their diverging modes of survival and the dissimilar chronologies of their disappearance. In trying to metonymically account for the overlap of these unequal temporalities Eliot puts at risk the cogency of her focus on the master-difference between the Jews and the English. Two axes of compulsive figuration are suggested, one sampling cultural-racial-ethnographic difference and the other zoological diversity.

Let's start with the first axis. The novel maps cultural tensions between a centripetal, arguably nonliberal "variety of type"—social class, race, or nation—and the centrifugal energies of egalitarian cosmopolitanism described, in plain Darwinesque, as "universal kinship" (*Deronda*, 124).⁶² It dramatizes racial-cultural survival within a transnational but asymmetrical ecology. As already noted, variety of type is evinced through a strategy of diffuse ethnographic allusiveness that instances, say, proud Turks, Spanish shepherd boys, praying Tartars, the Bosjesman, and other exotica.⁶³ Although Mordecai's doctrinal bigotry pares this variety down to the archetypal antagonism of Jewishness versus Englishness, the stamp of retained

time is implicitly epitomized in the various peoples invoked—Turks, Spaniards, Tartars, Bosjesmen—*ad maiorem anglorum gloriam*. Indeed, while Englishness is always marked with near-obscene overspecification—take, for instance, “the solidity and suffusive pinkness of a healthy Briton” (241)—the rest of the peoples referenced face the indifference of paratactic discontinuity. Mr Klesmer, for instance, is “a Pole, or a Czech, or something of that fermenting sort” (241). The fact that this slippery taxonomy is conveyed through free indirect discourse aggravates rather than mitigates the tropic irony running through the whole text. In fact, only the narrator is to blame for the original—hardly unironic—presentation of Herr Klesmer as a “felicitous combination of the German, the Slave, and the Semite” (47). This panoramic tableau of human diversity should work as a background to the drama played out in the foreground, but this is not always the case. In a letter to Daniel, Mrs Meyrick reports on Mirah’s adaptation to her new family: “We are getting fonder of her every day,” she writes. “At breakfast-time we all look toward the door with expectation to see her come in; and we watch her and listen to her as if she were a native from a new country” (361). The difference between the English and the Jew is here superseded by that between the English and the native. New country means here, of course, old (undeveloped) country *newly given* to European consciousness. Exiled Mirah has no native land, but she compensates for this lack with the “strong native bias which would still reign in her conscience.” This bias is the “native brightness” extolled by William Wordsworth in the epigraph to chapter 40, which the novel assimilates to “the native spirit of our [the Jewish] tradition” (532). At stake in this supernal smuggling of original territory—the introjection of homeland as moral *conatus*—is the contingency of communal survival.⁶⁴ And yet, despite this local sublation, Mirah remains tropologically stranded in the ancestral type of the “native from a new country.” Admittedly, the subtraction of the interval (between Jewess and new-country native) brings off situational irony, but to what effect? The interval is so tenuously asserted that the ironic contrast, otherwise explosive, is here merely defused.

In line with this tropic reversion, the difference between the English and the Jews often harbors crude biological implications. While the best of the English are socially *distinguished* (*Deronda*, 139, 141), the best of the Jews are, well, *rare*—foreign, cunning, beautiful, strange, artistic, and morally fine. English distinction tends to be genealogically productive: the disadvantaged of the extended family are provided for, and illegitimate children become affluent heirs. This may be only an appearance, as Gwendolen, for instance, does not reproduce. Still, in keeping with the overall pattern of ironic inversion, sterility is an exceptional trait that can be imputed to overexposure to the moral strictures of Jewish *rarity*. Those

strictures, in turn, come through as genealogically unproductive: parents either give up their children or predetermine their social isolation. Mirah's evocations of Jewish fathers slaying their children (222) in wartime further aggravates this stigma. Both forces are genealogical, and both involve issues of ancestry, origin, descent, and inheritance. Determination to grapple with ancestral inheritance is also a signal factor in survival. Characters who strive to reinforce awareness of their genealogical ancestry seem ironically doomed to extinction. And yet, this may be an illusion, as Mordecai's sacrifice may pave the way to Daniel and Mirah's prospective fecundity. Their endurance is all the more meritorious, as their inmost cultural-racial identity, made of juxtaposed survivals, provides a glimpse toward an ancestral past.

Cued by this return, we move on to the second axis, sampling zoological diversity. Talk of *stamps* and its attending dialectic—"stamp of rarity" versus "ordinary stamp"—resonates with Darwin's argument about the retention of selected traits in the morphology of surviving species. In *Origin* Darwin speaks not only of "the stamp of far higher workmanship" in nature's productions, better adapted than the human's to "the most complex conditions of life" (133), but also of complex organs that bear, inexplicably, "the stamp of inutility" (428, 452). The "stamp of rarity" trope (294), which Darwin first deciphered in the pebbles of the Latin American Cordillera, inheres in both uses. The trope reappears in *The Descent of Man* when he discusses "the difference in mind"—a difference of degree, not kind—"between man and the higher animals." Darwin contends that lower animals also express, albeit in incipient form, "the various emotions and faculties, such as love, memory, attention, curiosity, imitation, reason, &c.," and thus "the half-art and half-instinct of language still bears the stamp of its gradual evolution" (151). Eliot puts this excogitation to markedly ironic use, drawing cultural inferences that are wildly uncomplimentary to the English characters in the novel: Grandcourt, the quintessence of English dispassion, notoriously features as a lower brute, and Gwendolen's failure as a singer confirms the ironic reversal. She is repeatedly described as a colorful "serpent" (*Deronda*, 12, 19), and he is compared to "an unknown lizard of a hitherto unknown species" (137) and an "alligator" (157). But this tropic reduction is under the allegorical control both of a master plot of temptation and fall (for example in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, John Milton's *Paradise Lost*) and of a primal ritual of sexual selection (in Darwin's *The Descent of Man*). The reduction is confined to scenes of predatory courting and has a limited, conventional force. The irony, in this case, is focused, and it remains so in all figural elaborations of Gwendolen: nymph, serpent, demon, witch—her avatars betoken the green world of romance (as in Edmund Spenser, Torquato Tasso).

Conversely, love, memory, attention, curiosity, and artistic inclination are all on the side of the rare Jews. And yet, in a society of philistines, the higher-order *stamp of inutility* these moral-aesthetic possessions evince condemns their owners to extinction. Consider the author as anthropologist reporting on Daniel's first experience of a Jewish meal:

It was noticeable that the thin tails of the fried fish were given to Mordecai; and in general the sort of share assigned to a poor relation—no doubt a “survival” of prehistoric practice, not yet generally admitted to be superstitious. (397)

The correlation between Jewishness, prehistory, and survival is explicit, waiting only to be completed by the fish. The image of Mordecai eating the thin tails of the fish is eerie, and it goes to show how crassly the novel is willing to naturalize “the question between the Bible and Geology.”⁶⁵ No cultural absolutism ideologically preprogrammed in the narration manages to efface its uncanniness. However consciously they strive to imagine their future, the Jews are marooned in an ancestral *Lebenswelt*, unconsciously enmeshed in prehistoric practices. A far cry from English “*savoir vivre*” (*Deronda*, 597).

Mordecai, Deronda, and Mirah are three actors striving to assert their imaginative *biases*—admittedly a Spinozan *conatus* aimed at body-and-mind survival—inside the moral arena resulting from racial interaction in English society. While the English have a *nation*, the Jews have *imagination*, a faculty Darwin described as “one of the highest prerogatives of man.”⁶⁶ While the former indolently dwell in their *native* land, the latter passionately inhabit an *imaginative* togetherness predicated upon genealogy and family inheritance. The resulting dialectical tension between commonplace English nation and rare Jewish imagination is only imperfectly mastered by the novel's imaginative narrator. Her unfocused irony subjects the opposition to a figural traction that threatens to undo it. Partly to blame for this is the lure of infinite metonymic connection fostered by the new scientific paradigm. The pangenesis hypothesis, considered by Darwin and boosted by George Henry Lewes, radically upset the genealogic-dynastic logic of limited inheritance—central to realist fiction—by including, as heritable material for Mordecai, Mirah, and Deronda, the entire biological history of the species. Notwithstanding Eliot's *de iure* commitment to the rightfulness of the Zionist cause, the descent claimed by the novel's Jews via imaginative deeds of ancestral appropriation stretches beyond Semitic origins toward an immemorial animal past. This extension brings about a *de facto* contamination of grotesque images drawn from the figural bestiary. If Daniel doesn't want to be his own ancestor, who or what is his *ancêtre*? Can he choose among different pasts the better to secure survival? Does life amount to a matter of choosing the origin that best advances—in Spinozan

parlance—one’s “affections”? And how far into the past is he willing—or able—to go in order to achieve an end that is also a beginning? Will he stop at the fish strata, at the prehistoric level, or at the degree of civilization attained by fish-tail-eating Mordecai?

VIII

Stimulated by Mordecai’s doctrinal instruction, Daniel becomes gradually mindful of the advantages for survival of nation-centered systems: “A human life . . . should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth” (*Deronda*, 22). After centuries of diaspora, the Jewish community is at risk. Haunted by “suffering” (206), “absence of ease” (386), and destitution, this “long-oppressed race” (610) is doomed to an “obscure lingering decay” (366) in a “long song of mourning that has been going on for ages and ages” (215), recalling the erosion of the rocky coast in Darwin’s consideration. To be a Jew is to be rare, “a mere bubble of the earth” (246), chronically threatened with extinction.⁶⁷ Mirah thinks of her “people, how they had been driven from land to land and been afflicted, and multitudes had died of misery in their wandering—was I the first?” (222).

Wandering promotes intervals, and intervals deepen a rarity that is intractable to English girls with “minds to which the idea of live Jews, out of a book, suggested a difference deep enough to be almost zoological” (708). Although Mordecai places his people’s “ardent zeal” above the “narrow tenacity of insects” (685), Hans sees *Deronda*’s interest in Judaism as an expression of an “antediluvian point of view” responsive to the “megatherium” (642). *Deronda* admits to having dismissed Judaism, and by extension Mordecai, “as a sort of eccentric fossilized form” (363). Darwin observed that “species and groups of species, which are called aberrant” can be called “living fossils.”⁶⁸ This thought returns us to the qualitative difference between the English and the Jewish extinction. Whereas the former is a contingency conditional on moral unregeneration, the latter is the outcome of a moral excess—a rarity—that is not yet totally human.⁶⁹ Whereas English extinction is contingent upon reversion, Jewish extinction is the scar of a withheld development. It is the difference between progressing far enough to risk regression and not progressing enough; between being, like Grandcourt, “a remnant of a human being” (404) and, like Mordecai, not yet a human being—“a sort of eccentric fossilized form.” In Dickens’s *Our Mutual Friend* the coexistence of Judaism and animal extinction occurs as a negligible accident of *récit*. In *Deronda* the Jew and the megatherium are inextricably implicated. The problem,

again, is how to determine the nature of Eliot's commitment to that tenacious co-implication.

Eliot's views on the survival of the Jewish race were ambivalent and changing. In her youth, she despised the isolationist "fellowship of race" as an "inferior impulse" and considered that "everything specifically Jewish is of a low grade."⁷⁰ References in the novel to "universal kinship" and a "feeling for wider relations" (*Deronda*, 149) would seem to support this view, a cosmopolitan stand best showcased by Klesmer's and Hans's defenses of the "fusion of races" (242) and the "amalgamation of races" (462), respectively. The debate on the necessary death or possible revival of nations (525) was an issue embedded in the larger Darwinian concern with the presence or absence of progress in biohistorical change (526). While Mordecai resists the belief that the Jews, a people that "has maintained its vigour in all climates" (534), "will ever cease to be a nation" (527), cosmopolitan members of "The Philosophers" club are bothered by Jewish "superstitions and exclusiveness" (527). But Eliot's sympathies in the novel would appear to fall on the side of the "separateness" (630) of ethnic identity, insofar as it protects peoples from an assimilation envired by risks: "If Jews and Jewesses went on changing their religion, and making no difference between themselves and Christians, there would come a time when there would be no Jews to be seen" (375). Darwin had made the related point, in passing, that "the uniformity" of the Jewish people "in various parts of the world . . . has been somewhat exaggerated."⁷¹

In "Shadows of the Coming Race," Eliot foresaw the eradication of a "feebler race" under the weight of a "human race evolving machinery. . . as all less adapted existences do before the fittest."⁷² In other words, the enhanced sensibility of *Deronda*'s Jews is assaulted by English patrimonial philistinism. Darwinian interconnection—troped in *Deronda* as "entanglement" (188) and "relationship" (654)—can thus prove disastrous to the former community.⁷³ But radical separateness is also a hazardous enterprise. Terence Cave evokes the "crude evolutionist notion that sharply individualized races are destined either to die or to fuse with others 'for physical and moral ends.'"⁷⁴ Indeed, separation breeds *rarity*, a key evolutionary lexeme described in *Origin* as "the attribute of a vast number of species of all classes, in all countries. If we ask ourselves why this or that species is rare, we answer that something is unfavourable in its conditions of life."⁷⁵ Rarity is, in short, "the precursor to extinction" (153), and their causal link is to be regarded as a natural process:

To feel no surprise at the rarity of a species, and yet to marvel greatly when it ceases to exist, is much the same as . . . to feel no surprise at sickness, but when the sick man dies to wonder and to suspect that he died by some unknown deed of violence (106).

Still, Levine has noted that Darwin also suggests that “species tend to become relatively fixed in nature when they are geographically isolated and comfortably situated in an environment that exerts few pressures.”⁷⁶ The dialectical co-implication of national individualization and national extinction, a speculative motif at work in narratives of *lastness* (James Fenimore Cooper, Edward Bulwer-Lytton), informs Eliot’s spectatorial commitment to Zionist efforts to reach the “promised Land.”⁷⁷ The fact that she should also avow, in her essay on *Antigone*, that if you “cultivate a new region of the earth, . . . you exterminate a race of men,” serves to naturalize Israel as a territorial *ironie de sort*.⁷⁸ A postcolonial nerve has been unwittingly touched.

In *Descent*, the adjective *rare* is invariably bound up with the *anomalous* and *exceptional*:

Great lawgivers, the founders of beneficent religions, great philosophers and discoverers in science, aid the progress of mankind in a far higher degree by their works than by leaving a numerous progeny. In the case of corporeal structures, it is the selection of the slightly better-endowed and the elimination of the slightly less well-endowed individuals, and not the preservation of strongly-marked and rare anomalies, that leads to the advancement of a species.⁷⁹

Darwin is unambiguous: on biological grounds, anomalies do not “aid the progress” of the human species. It is the selection of “slightly better-endowed” individuals that leads to its advancement, including, as he makes clear later, “intellectual” progression. On this logic, Jewish moral rarity educes limited survival. As Michael McKeon argues, “ethical capacity is not genealogically embodied.”⁸⁰ And yet moral superiority may foster cultural survival. That much is also clear. The narrator of *Daniel Deronda* argues categorically that “selectness of fellowship” is a condition of “moral force” (364). In cultural-evolutionary jargon, the superiority of the memes framed by the Jewish population would compensate for the declining survival rate of their genes.⁸¹ Still, the fact that Darwin’s oppositional distinction between “rare anomalies” and the progress begot by the “intellectual faculties” chimes with Kant’s celebration of conscious understanding—not sympathy (*Teilnehmung*), not receptivity (*Empfänglichkeit*)—as the genuine incentive for moral action places Eliot’s championing of imaginative-moral survival under great pressure.⁸² Who or what exactly develops when human-racial rarity is protected?

To be sure, Eliot’s genuine stake in the problem of *rarity*—*Deronda*’s “stamp of rarity” is a sign of “moral eccentricity” (*Deronda*, 178)—evinces a concern with the demise of spiritual excellence. And yet, the suggestion of atavistic retention is oppressive, as if the spiritual-moral excellence of “idiosyncrasy” were irreparably beholden to biological-evolutionary deficiency.⁸³ Darwin’s interest in the aberrant-eccentric was more than a simple

methodological tool. It reflects an engrossment with the permanence of uncommon accident. Permanence, in turn, exacted inheritance. But although Darwin found it more correct “to look at the inheritance of every character whatever as the rule, and non-inheritance as the anomaly,” he never discounts, as we saw in the long passage quoted earlier, the cultural preservation of “strongly-marked and rare anomalies.”⁸⁴ So the interrupted Jewish genealogies in *Deronda* emerge as anomalous instances of noninheritance or uncertain “heirship” (127) that Mordecai aims to correct by securing a memetic transmission of memory “from generation to generation” (531). This way, the invisible patrimony of the Jewish community is pitted against the too visible patrimony of the English (169, 523). What is truly anomalous, Eliot realizes, is the moral determination to retain the ancestral. This is the theme of Mordecai’s analogy: “Suppose the stolen offspring of some mountain tribe brought up in a city of the plain, or one with an inherited genius for painting, and born blind—the ancestral life would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations” (750).

Eliot relishes this moral anomaly and makes ample narrative room for Mordecai’s vision. But the avatars of memetic (cultural) retention are not enough. A contrary force compels her to register the instances of genetic (biological) retention that make the survival of moral excellence possible. Tensions in the resulting dialectic foment the sublime-grotesque figuration that accompanies the Jews, whose supplementary role in the novel is that of a *pharmakos*. The celebration of their moral-imaginative rarity is an elegy for the self-sacrifice they are willing to perform: going to—extinct into—the East. Meanwhile, the more intellectually developed, though less imaginative, English people can safely, if laboriously, proceed to survive. At the novel’s close, Gwendolen comforts her mother: “Don’t be unhappy. I shall live. I mean to live” (807).

IX

Gallagher’s strong reading of *Felix Holt* suggests that Eliot’s productions of the 1860s bear the marks of a decisive crisis. The serene accord between epistemological methods and narrative procedures reached in “metonymic realism” is suddenly upset by metaphysical demands unforeseen by and incompatible with Eliot’s particular brand of inductive cognition. The crisis is exemplified in the figure of Felix, whose response to “the need for a transcendent realm of values and ultimate meanings” (378) erodes the cohesive ties of the rural community.⁸⁵ With deconstructive gusto, Gallagher attributes the resulting “contradictions,” “imbalances,” “abrupt changes,” even “self-parodies” (379) observable in the narrative

plane to the “insufficiency and ambiguity of signs” (376) characteristic of the new cultural program championed by Felix. The interpenetration of the metaphysical (ultimate meanings), the epistemological (ambiguous signs), and the narrative (imbalances) is persuasively asserted. The conclusion is that “realistic fiction invariably undermines, in practice, the ideology it purports to exemplify” (376). Cynthia Chase’s earlier essay on *Deronda* argues along similar lines. The novel’s “anomalous plotting” and odd “figural logic” are imputed to the ironic undoing of the metaphysical claims to origin and identity that the novel anxiously lines up with the Jewish cause.⁸⁶ A deconstructive reversal is again identified: the novel’s ostensible promotion of (Jewish) moralistic idealism over (English) cynicism is relentlessly undermined by metaleptic irony. Chase exemplifies this parabastic interruption in the reversal of temporal status of effect and cause implied in Hans’s letter in chapter 52. Here the “scandal of rhetoricity” is made co-extensive with a metaphysical scandal—that an “origin can be the effect of its effects.” The hermeneutic nub shared by these readings is expertly rehashed by Duncan in a recent article that examines, among other things, the way “grotesque figurality” in *Middlemarch* and *Deronda* challenges Eliot’s putative conception of realism based on “organic interconnection.”⁸⁷ The latter novel is haunted by rhetorical “strangeness” (26), overburdened with tropes of natural history (reptiles, fish, birds, lions, alligators, crabs). Although Duncan also reads this figural strain as self-defeating—“Far from modeling a synthesis, the different registers disarray the analogical pattern they ostensibly serve” (30)—he departs from the former readings in furnishing a rationale for the anomaly. A deeper narrative schedule—less predictable than the analogical pattern—is bent on redirecting the horde of naturalized tropes toward a utopian future: “Eliot asks us to imagine a biologically actual return of ancestral forms as figures of future possibility, monstrous or messianic” (35).

These three interpretations accord a metaphysical correlate to the novel’s anomalous rhetoricity. Gallagher’s identification of a search for unity beyond “multiplying appearances” is echoed in Duncan’s inference that Eliot’s vision in *Middlemarch* of “involuntary, palpitating life” is the purveyor of “unity” in a “horizon of totality” (25–26). The trope of unity is anticipated in Chase’s ingenious attention to “the myth of origin” (217). The three critics are careful not to suggest necessary causality in the relation between the craving for origin/unity and the tropic undoing of the novel at hand. What my reading adds to these interpretations is both the conjecture of a causal relation and the identification of this cause as metaphysical. In my account, the metaphysical cause of narrative trouble is the Jew as an embodiment of rare noumenal ancestry. Whereas in *Felix Holt* the violence of unity is effected by “the peculiar stamp of culture” (*Felix*, 291)

of its titular hero, in *Deronda* the unifying origin fails to be sanctioned by Deronda's "stamp of rarity." What the novel processes in terms of moral failure is actually the outcome of an epistemological breakdown, whence my resolve to read the conflict between a metaphysical *donnée* and a narrative program based on an epistemology of metonymic connectivity within a strictly Kantian framework.

Eliot described Kant as "the most eminent of German metaphysicians" and thought the first *Critique* not "in the least cloudy."⁸⁸ Influenced, however, by Lewes's distrust of Kantian epistemology, she opposed the promotion of a priori, deductive modes of knowledge.⁸⁹ With a Victorian distrust of objective detachment, she believed that "pure rationality cannot give us access" to the other, let alone "the life of a past culture."⁹⁰ She held, in short, that access to the origin and unity of "palpitating life" exacted an epistemology of raised barriers, capable of obtaining the ungiven. And she argued that "Kant's classification of Infinity and Universality as ideas a priori, and of Space and Time as purely subjective forms of intelligence" is the elaboration of "a fundamental error."⁹¹ The reference to time is important. Her preference for the "uphill a posteriori path" could betray a willingness to take account of empirical evidence of a kind of reality (nonformalized time) existing prior to its givenness to a human mind that would subject it to the grid of a priori formalization.⁹² Her readings of Lyell and Darwin prepared her for such recognition. Darwin, we know, had turned to Kant when discussing "moral sense" in *Descent*.⁹³ But at bottom he rejected critical correlationism, the mutual dependence of thinking and being animating Kant's philosophical project. In this sense, Eliot's determination to correct Kant is inseparable from her resolve to accept Darwin: the latter had raised a metaphysical problem (beginning in time, the unconditioned unity of the plurality of time) that the former refused to solve, considering it either a paralogistic illusion—a *sophisma figurae dictionis*—or the irreducible side of an antinomy.⁹⁴ But Eliot was keenly aware that any solution to the problem had to be formulated inside the critical domain originally established by Kant.

X

Deronda is an intriguing contribution to the debate, consequent on the disavowal of correlationism, about "what did or did not exist prior to the emergence of humankind, as well as about what might eventually succeed humanity."⁹⁵ The novel, arguably a tragedy of knowledge, doesn't decide the question, but it testifies to the magnitude of the challenge and bears the marks of the effort. Metonymic accordance and controlled irony

collapse, ceding to a realization of deeper unrelation. Gwendolen's alleged cognitive triumph—"I have known you" (*Deronda*, 818) she writes to Daniel—is plainly contradicted by his earlier misgivings: "If we had been much together before, we should have felt our differences more, and seemed to get farther apart" (806). Her reaction to the climactic disclosure—"A Jew!" Gwendolen exclaimed, in a low tone of amazement, with an utterly frustrated look, as if some confusing potion were creeping through her system" (801)—confirms something far more unmentionable than the obvious fact that "the distance between her ideas and his acted like a difference of native language" (802).

Whereas Kant sought to sanitize the premises of rational knowledge by ousting metaphysical enigmas, Eliot strove to adapt her realist art to the demands of ultimate meanings and limit concepts. Her epigraphic speculation on the possibility of time being "at Nought" recalls Kant's antinomic juggling between thesis ("Die Welt hat einen Anfang in der Zeit") and antithesis ("Die Welt hat keinen Anfang"). The unity supposedly lying beyond "multiplying appearances" evokes his instancing of a metaphysical category that spells *the synthesis of the manifold*, admittedly the trademark crux of Eliot's epistemology.⁹⁶ Interestingly, Kant makes this synthesis contingent both on time (an a priori form of sensibility) and on the faculty of the imagination. Thus the mere notion of unsynthesizable but imagined time (ancestrality) poses a metaphysical riddle: the ancestral is the unformalized that makes formalization possible. In Lacanian terms, the Jew is the threatening intrusion of the Real that allows symbolic reality to occur. The Jew is that figural antinomy: the "world-supporting elephant" in a tale beguiled by "the decomposition of the elephants" (*Deronda*, 642).

Kant holds that what constitutes "the transcendental ideality of time" is that "if we abstract from the subjective conditions of our sensible intuition, time is nothing" (71). On this logic, the *ancestral* designates the segment of time in which time is nothing. Eliot must have been intrigued by the paradox. For the conjecture of a past when "time is at Nought" does not imply that ancestral substance has faded away. Kant presupposes "the existence of substance at all times," which involves not only the necessary permanence in "the future time" but also "the necessity to have always been" (209). Meillassoux and Brassier overlook Kant's emphasis on the noncorrelated preexistence and postexistence of substantial noumena. Kant presumes the existence of "a time that has completely elapsed up to the given moment as also given (even though not as determinable by us)" (381). The phrasing is exacting: though not determinable by us, ancestral time is also *given*. But since givenness occurs "only in time and through the synthesis of time, but not time before this synthesis" (226), the nature of a time that is not a "pure form of the sensible intuition" (67) is uncertain. As uncertain, no doubt, as

the “inhabitants on the moon” (438). Although no one has seen them, Kant considers them as ontologically likely and potentially perceivable as uncorrelated experience. These gossamer Selenites, and the peace of nations, make up Kant’s pocket science fiction.

When Kant advanced the “required possibility” of “an a priori knowledge of objects, one that would settle something about them before they are given to us (*ehe sie uns gegeben werden*)” (18), he was imaginatively setting up a stage of givenness anterior to all forms of knowledge. Though he tirelessly cautions that “with respect to time . . . no knowledge within us is antecedent to experience” (37), the truth is that only the implicit positing of such anteriority allows us “to *think* the same objects as things in themselves (*als Dinge an sich selbst*), though we cannot *know* them” (23). Conversely, moreover, thought-power alone permits the schema of “substance” to conceptualize “the permanence of the real in time” (180) and, *a fortiori*, to envision the ancestral. This is no *Schwärmerei*, but rather a repressed dialectical supplement of Kant’s core thesis. And Eliot didn’t miss the conjectural entailments: “Whether there be therefore other perceptions than those that belong to our whole possible experience, whether there be in fact a completely new field of matter, can never be decided by the understanding” (244).

XI

Near the close of chapter 43, the reader comes across an important passage that simultaneously comprises the novel’s meaning and prefigures its end. Deronda is concerned with the indifference Mordecai’s “fervid life” must have encountered:

His own experience of the small room that ardor can make for itself in ordinary minds had had the effect of increasing his reserve. . . . He, for the first time, saw in a complete picture and felt as a reality the lives that burn themselves out in solitary enthusiasm: martyrs of obscure circumstance, exiled in *the rarity* of their own minds, whose deliverances in other ears are no more than a long passionate soliloquy—unless perhaps at last, when they are nearing the invisible shores, signs of recognition and fulfilment may penetrate the cloud of loneliness. (545, my emphasis)

Mordecai’s is not the only extraordinary mind condemned to exile. Daniel and Mirah are likewise hostage to a mental “rarity” that proves inefficient for survival and are therefore compelled to find “recognition” in “the invisible shores” of a nonexistent nation. Through the evocation of these shores, the novel embodies a thought of closure—both a limit concept and a concept of limits. This symbolic move becomes fully intelligible after Darwin’s metaphorical invitation to reconsider spatio-temporal liminality. But behind

Darwin there is Kant. According to Dieter Henrich, the latter's entire project was sustained by similar thoughts of closure (*Abschlussgedanken*), postulates of final ends providing the guidance of reason toward unity.⁹⁷ Eliot's narrative project seems to be driven by a similar persuasion that rational-moral unity can only be achieved after a radical coping with the two limit concepts—ancestrality and extinction—that threaten the metonymic-realistic project from the outside. The related statements “Men can do nothing without the make-believe of a beginning” and “Everything in the world must come to an end some time. We must bear think of that,” turn the confrontation with the metaphysical realities that lie beyond temporal limits into a matter of resignation (*can do nothing*) and ideology (*we must bear think*).⁹⁸ *Daniel Deronda* tells us that before the beginning of present English ordinariness there was an ancestral Jewish rarity, and that this fossil singularity will disappear before the English go extinct. It also tells us that without such rarity made up of imagination and time the realm of English reality would not be accessible to metonymic representation: Deronda acts both as condition of possibility (a limit) and agent of exposure (a dissolvent) of Gwendolen's unrare *Alltagsleben*. “I shall live. I mean to live.”

As already noted, Eliot believed that “our civilization, and, yet more, our religion, are an anomalous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us like so many petrifications from distant ages with living ideas, the offspring of a true process of development.”⁹⁹ By framing a mythos of the discovery and extrication of Jewish rarity on English soil, she displays a transitory resolve to confront the Jew, to touch it, as one such petrification from a distant age, and to examine the measure of its imaginative-moral contribution to English intellectual development at large—as if human development were conditional on “a prehistory that lingers.”¹⁰⁰ The desire that the Jewish fossil may revitalize the English, with their sympathy and receptiveness, is strong throughout the novel, but so is the suggestion that, to put it in the terms of a Thomas Carlyle fantasy quoted by Eliot, the “Men of the Dead Sea” have inexorably reverted “into Apes.”¹⁰¹ *Deronda*'s insidious tropic investment in grotesque discontinuity hinders the narrator's determined sail to utopia. The novel opens with Deronda redeeming a necklace and shows him later attempting to redeem a ring while Mordecai struggles with “the urgency of irredeemable time” (*Deronda*, 474).¹⁰² The redemption of time mirrors the redemption of the ring. Chivalric romance and kairotic apocalypse dovetail in this unrealized dialectical figure, suggesting that, for Eliot, the probationary redemption of a rare past (the redemption of the Jew) worked as the one nonliberal measure inside a very liberal—self-indulgent, auto-immunitary, more latitudinarian than cosmopolitan—program.¹⁰³

Deronda closes in a coup of sham deliverance for everyone involved, including Deronda's Jews. The trip to the East will not be enough. The

redemption of “ancestral life” (*Deronda*, 750) is never completed.¹⁰⁴ Symptomatically, the two material emblems of invaluable ancestral rarity that endow the hero—the “diamond ring” (391) and the chest full of “manuscripts, family records stretching far back” into Sephardic Spain (748)—end up unredeemed, confounded and obscured by a swindler. Not only does Mirah’s father steal his ring. More important, he “[helps] to decipher some difficult German manuscript” (780) that lies hidden in a treasured chest the novel makes a great deal of fuss about, but never reopens. Lapidoth flees and Mordecai dies: who will redeem that German difficulty? Something older and darker than a *German ideology* inexorably remains, unassimilated and undeciphered.

Eliot’s failure to realize her meaning—“I meant everything in the book to be related to everything else”—allows us to characterize *Deronda* as a tragedy of unrelation. But because the Jew holds no standard share in “everything else,” the novel fails into a very successful homage to the Jew.

Notes

I want to thank Ian Duncan, Jean Day, and the other members of the *Representations* editorial board who read my article for their immensely helpful comments and suggestions.

1. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*, ed. Terence Cave (London, 2003), 496. Future references to this edition will be given in the text.
2. For the valorization “of genealogy over exchange,” see Catherine Gallagher, “George Eliot and *Daniel Deronda*: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question,” in *Sex, Politics and Science in the Nineteenth Century Novel*, ed. R. B. Yeazell (Baltimore, 1986), 50.
3. Gertrude Himmelfarb, who gives credit to what Henry James merely described as an impression—“that nothing in the world was alien to [Eliot]”—closes her tendentious book with the startling assertion that “*Daniel Deronda* has been spared some of the literary fashions of recent times—Marxism and deconstructionism, most notably”; Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Jewish Odyssey of George Eliot* (London, 2009), 145, 143. Cynthia Chase’s brilliant deconstructive essay was published in 1978; “The Decomposition of the Elephants: Double-Reading *Daniel Deronda*,” *PMLA* 93, no. 2 (1978).
4. David Kaufmann, *George Eliot and Judaism: An Attempt to Appreciate “Daniel Deronda”*, trans. J. W. Ferrier (1888; reprint, New York, 1970), 7.
5. *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. “rare,” <https://www.etymonline.com/>.
6. For disembedding in modernity, see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC, 2004).
7. Kaufmann, *George Eliot and Judaism*, 12.
8. Adam Silverstein, *Islamic History* (Oxford, 2010), 9.
9. George Eliot, “Charles Kingsley’s *Westward Ho!*” (1855), in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (London, 2000), 117–18.

10. Patrick Brantlinger, *Dark Vanishings: Discourse on the Extinction of Primitive Races, 1800–1930* (Ithaca, 2003), 15. Edward Beasley, *The Victorian Reinvention of Race* (London, 2010), 112–28.
11. Despite her presumed Englishness, the history of Lydia Glasher contains all the melodramatic elements of moral transgression and physical exoticism commonly attached to aliens and bohemians, from William Makepeace Thackeray to James. The evocation of her youth in chapter 30 as a vivacious, impassioned, Spanish-looking girl who was fond of adoration, has—intriguingly—much in common with the descriptions of Mirah.
12. Jacques Derrida, *L'archéologie du frivole* (Paris, 1990), 66.
13. George Eliot, *Felix Holt: The Radical*, ed. Lynda Mugglestone (London, 1995), 7.
14. *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven, 1954–78), 6:290.
15. Mrs Meyrick and her daughters see Mirah as an avatar of Scott's Rebecca. See Eliot, *Deronda*, 194, 362. The reference to the Covenanters is an explicit evocation of Scott's *Old Mortality*.
16. Catherine Gallagher, "The Failure of Realism: *Felix Holt*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35, no. 3 (1980): 375.
17. George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Rosemary Ashton (London, 1994), 838.
18. Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E. Jephcott (London, 2005), 151.
19. Quoted by Rosemary Ashton in her introduction to Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, xxvi.
20. George Eliot, review of R. W. Mackay's *The Progress of the Intellect*, in *Selected Critical Writings*, 18–19.
21. Quoted by Ashton, introduction to *Selected Critical Writings*, xxvi.
22. George Levine, *Dying to Know: Scientific Epistemology and Narrative in Victorian England* (Chicago, 2010), 176.
23. For an excellent overview of the idea of extinction in Anglo-American literature, including narratives by Mary Shelley, J. F. Cooper, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton, see Fiona J. Stafford, *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford, 1994).
24. David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, trans. George Eliot, 2nd ed. (New York, 1892), 7; A. Toynbee, *A Study of History* (Oxford, 1934), 1:135–39.
25. Theodor Adorno argued that "not even as an idea can we conceive a subject that is not an object, but we can conceive an object that is not a subject," Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (London, 1973), 183.
26. Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham, NC, 1993), 107.
27. Samuel Butler, *Erewhon*, ed. Peter Mudford (London, 1985), 198.
28. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. M. Weigelt (London, 2007), 75.
29. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: An Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. Ray Brassier (London, 2008), 20.
30. Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound: Enlightenment and Extinction* (New York, 2007), 224. See also Joshua Schuster, "Life After Extinction," *Parrhesia: A Journal of Critical Philosophy* 27 (2017): 88–115.
31. Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, 40, 48, and esp. 245n7. For a Darwin-inspired analysis of "time as survival" see Martin Hägglund, "A Radical Atheist Materialism: A Critique of Meillassoux," in Levi R. Bryant, Nick Srnicek, and Graham Harman, eds., *The Speculative Turn: Continental Materialism and Realism* (Melbourne, 2011), 114–29.
32. Dieter Henrich, *Between Hegel and Kant: Lectures on German Idealism*, ed. D. Pacini (Cambridge, MA, 2008), 116.

33. In Adorno's opinion, "the more the world is stripped of an objective meaning and the more it becomes coextensive with our own categories and thereby becomes *our* world then the more we find meaning eliminated from the world; and the more we find ourselves immersed in something like a cosmic night. . . . The familiarity with our own world is purchased at the price of metaphysical despair"; Theodor W. Adorno, *Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason"*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, 2001), 110–11.
34. Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, 2009), 111; Gillian Beer, "Darwin and the Uses of Extinction," *Victorian Studies* 51, no. 2 (2009): 321.
35. Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principle of Population*, ed. P. Appleman (New York, 2004), 20.
36. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species*, ed. John Burrow (London, 1985), 154.
37. Charles Darwin, *Voyage of the Beagle*, ed. Janet Browne and Michael Neve (London, 1989), 83, 179, 329.
38. "A Voyage Round the World," Charles Darwin and the Beagle Collections in the University of Cambridge, Cambridge University Library <http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/exhibitions/Darwin/captions.html>.
39. Ian Duncan, "On Charles Darwin and the Voyage of the *Beagle*," *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*, ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*, http://www.branchcollective.org/?ps_articles=ian-duncan-on-charles-darwin-and-the-voyage-of-the-beagle-1831-36.
40. George Levine, *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*, (Chicago, 1988), 141.
41. For the extinction of human races, see Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man*, ed. Adrian Desmond and James Moore (London, 2004), 211–22.
42. Darwin, *Origin*, 324, 413.
43. Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, ed. Philip Horne (London, 2003), 153.
44. Darwin, *Origin*, 101. Levine, *Patterns*, 47.
45. Beer, *Plots*, 18, 62–67; Levine, *Patterns*, 47–48.
46. Darwin, *Origin*, 323 (my emphases).
47. Quoted by Moore and Desmond in their introduction to *Descent*, 34.
48. For Darwin's equivocal use of the term "metaphysical" in his *Notebooks* (1836–44), see Robert J. Richards, "Darwin's Metaphysics of Mind," in *Darwinism and Philosophy*, ed. Vittorio Hösle and Christian Illies (Notre Dame, 2005), 166–80.
49. Thomas Hardy, *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, ed. A. Manford (Oxford, 1998), 210.
50. Žižek, *Tarrying*, 107.
51. Darwin, *Origin*, 294.
52. Charles Dickens, "The World of Water," in *Household Words* 61 (1851), in Charles Dickens, *Home and Social Philosophy* (New York, 1852), 243.
53. Ian Duncan, "Darwin and the Savages," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 4, no. 2 (1991): 22.
54. Cannon Schmitt, *Darwin and the Memory of the Human: Evolution, Savages and South America* (Cambridge, 2009), 3–4.
55. Beer, *Plots*, 7.
56. Virginia Zimmerman, *Excavating Victorians* (Albany, 2007), 1, 3.
57. Edward Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (London, 1975), 5.
58. Terence Cave, notes to *Daniel Deronda*, 813n1.
59. Pierre Schoentjes, *Poétique de l'ironie* (Paris, 2001), 48–53.

60. Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, 334; Eliot, *Deronda*, 413.
61. While Cave excuses Eliot's "sense of distaste for certain aspects of Jewish life" by invoking the forces of stereotype and growing antiproletarian revulsion, the recent editors of the novel for Oxford Classics do not even bother to register the novel's occasional, but powerful, anti-Semitic vein.
62. For an excellent analysis of the tension between "modern ethnic nationalism" and cosmopolitanism in *Deronda*, see Aleksandar Stević, "Convenient Cosmopolitanism: *Daniel Deronda*, Nationalism, and the Critics," *Victorian Literature and Culture* 45, no. 3 (2017): 593–614.
63. Eliot, *Deronda*, 9, 161, 324, 535.
64. For the rationale behind the decision to shift "motivation" from art to *homeland politics*, see Catherine Gallagher, *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel* (Princeton, 2005), 150–55.
65. Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, 155.
66. Darwin, *Descent*, 95.
67. Cf. *Macbeth* 1.3.81. References to the works of Shakespeare are from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York, 2008).
68. Darwin, *Origin*, 457.
69. For degeneration, see Marc E. Wohlfarth, "Daniel Deronda and the Politics of Nationalism," *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 53, no. 2 (1998): 188–210.
70. Quoted in Terence Cave, introduction to *Daniel Deronda*, 21.
71. Darwin, *Descent*, 223.
72. Quoted in Beer, *Plots*, 158.
73. Levine, *Patterns*, 47.
74. Cave, introduction to *Daniel Deronda*, 21.
75. Darwin, *Origin*, 322.
76. Levine, *Patterns*, 112.
77. Eliot, *Deronda*, 250. Stafford comments briefly on the dependence between rarity and extinction: *The Last of the Race*, 291–92.
78. Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, 246.
79. Darwin, *Descent*, 162.
80. Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity* (Baltimore, 2005), 11.
81. Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (Oxford, 1989), 189–201.
82. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. Mary G. Gregor (Cambridge, 1996), 156, 208.
83. In her essay "The Modern Hep, Hep, Hep" Eliot gives the term "idiosyncrasy" the same meaning she gave "rarity" in *Deronda*. National idiosyncrasies enrich the world because they constitute beneficent individualities among the nations. The price to be paid for such distinction is of course the risk of extinction. George Eliot, *Impressions of Theophrastus Such* (1879), ed. Nancy Henry (Iowa City, 1994), 162–65.
84. Darwin, *Origin*, 76. Darwin, *Descent*, 162. Bernard Semmel, *George Eliot and the Problem of National Inheritance* (Oxford, 1994).
85. Gallagher, "The Failure of Realism: *Felix Holt*," 378.
86. Chase, "The Decomposition of the Elephants," 215.
87. Ian Duncan, "George Eliot's Science Fiction," *Representations* 125 (2014): 17, 23.
88. George Eliot, "A Word for the Germans," in *Selected Critical Writings*, 333–34.
89. See Eliot's review of William Lecky's *The Influence of Rationalism*, in *Selected Essays, Poems and Other Writings*, ed. A. S. Byatt and Nicholas Warren (London, 1990), 395.
90. George Levine, "Daniel Deronda: A New Epistemology," in *Dying to Know*, 175.

91. George Eliot, "The Future of German Philosophy," in *Selected Critical Writings*, 135.
92. Andrew Lallier, "'Where Can Duty Lie?': George Eliot, Kant and Morality," *George Eliot-George Henry Lewes Studies* 62/63 (2012): 69.
93. Darwin, *Descent*, 120–33.
94. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 374–419.
95. Meillassoux, *After Finitude*, 114.
96. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 124–29.
97. Richard L. Velkley, introduction to D. Henrich, *The Unity of Reason: Essays on Kant's Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA, 1994), 6–15.
98. "Sheer receptivity is equivocal. It is both a memorial to the barrier which spirit rebounds from whenever something is not its equal, and a bit of resignation and ideology"; Theodor W. Adorno, *Against Epistemology: A Metacritique*, trans. Willis Domingo (Cambridge, 2013), 136–37.
99. Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, 18–19.
100. Duncan, "George Eliot's Science Fiction," 30.
101. Eliot, *Selected Critical Writings*, 192.
102. For the biblical notion of redeemed time, see Shakespeare, *1 Henry IV*, 1.3.195.
103. Derrida describes as "auto-immunitary" the destruction caused by the religious (read "nationalist") community's attempt to give itself indemnity and immunity. Interestingly, in this auto-immunitary logic, the reappropriation of the sacred life and its associated tropes (soil, root, origin, blood) is predicated upon the sacrificial eradication of uprootedness. Indemnification presupposes sacrifice. See Jacques Derrida, *Foi et savoir* (Paris, 1996), 46.
104. For Eliot's "conservational and conservative theory of time," see Sue Zemka, *Time and the Moment in Victorian Literature and Society* (Cambridge, 2012), 161–64.