

**Morality and moral dilemmas in *The Quiet American***

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Tämän tutkielman tarkoituksena on analysoida Graham Greenen *The Quiet American* -romaanissa (1955) esitettyjä moraalisia ongelmia. Yksi peruste romaanin valintaan on sen herättämien moraalisten kysymysten suuri määrä; toinen peruste on Graham Greenen arvostus kirjailijana, jonka tapa kuvata hyvyyden ja pahuuden eri asteita kutsuu – tai jopa pakottaa – moraaliseen arviointiin.

Tutkielman metodologia rakentuu argumentille, että kirjallisuuskritiikissä voidaan romaania analysoitaessa hyödyntää filosofiaa, tässä tapauksessa tarkemmin etiikan teoriaa. Käytän muun muassa kantilaista moraaliteoriaa ja utilitarianismia *The Quiet Americanin* moraalisten kysymysten ja ongelmien analysointiin.

Analyysin pääpainotteena on osoittaa, että etiikan teoria on varteenotettava apuväline romaania analysoitaessa, ja esittää syväluotaava tutkielma moraalisuuden kysymyksistä, jotka käsitykseni mukaan muodostavat Greenen romaanin ytimen.

Tutkielman tavoitteena ei ole esittää yhtä johtopäätöstä siitä, mitkä teot ovat romaanin esittämässä kontekstissa oikein tai väärin. Vastauksia etsiessä tulee kuitenkin selväksi, kuinka etiikan teoria voi olla olennainen ja uusi, näkökulmaa avartava osa kirjallisuusanalyysia.

Avainsanat: Greene, The Quiet American, ethics, morality

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## 1. Introduction

In this thesis, I will explore morality and moral dilemmas in *The Quiet American* (1955) by Graham Greene. The idea of morality will be assessed by means of ethical philosophy, with literary criticism as an aid, as appropriate. Although ethics and morality are often used synonymously, Grassian (1992, 11) explains that “ethics may be defined as the philosophical study of morality”. In practice, morality pertains to the individual ethical choices of a person whereas ethics would be the study of these choices from an external perspective. Thus, this paper will be using ethical philosophy as the theoretical framework when analyzing moral problems. The idea of morality will be limited to the concepts of “right conduct, moral character” and “obligation and responsibility” as the scope of this thesis will not be able to fully reach other moral concerns such as “the nature of the good life” which is often associated with virtue ethics and ancient Greek philosophy, except in passing (Grassian 1992, 11).

The general aim of this thesis is two-fold. Firstly, I would like to provide a coherent idea of the interplay between ethical inquiry and literature. I argue that these disciplines need not be mutually exclusive and that ethics can provide insights into literary criticism. This is not the first work to propose that ethics and literature may provide understanding into one another; however, there is a wide variety in interpretations of this exchange.

For this reason, this thesis will begin with a discussion on how a possible marriage of ethics and literature has been addressed by other scholars and what are key considerations of this inquiry. Accordingly, a chapter will be devoted to these differing views on how ethics and literature relate to one another. Following this, the focus will be upon the book in question

addressing how Graham Greene provides ample ground for a probe into ethics and how *The Quiet American* invites consideration with a variety of moral dilemmas.

The most common and perhaps, relatively unopposed conception of ethics and literature that my research has uncovered is the idea that the literary critic should carry out their critique and analysis in an ethical manner. Siebers (1988, 2) states that this “requires one to study the ethical attitudes behind the critical claims”. Thus, the critic should possess both knowledge and a sense for the ethical undertones or biases which exist both in their own theories and conclusions, and those in a greater cultural context. These undertones are pervasive and should be taken into consideration both on a textual level or a wider scope pertaining to a literary canon. The main point that this thesis takes from the idea of criticizing ethically is the fact that ethics is indeed embedded within critical inquiry. Nonetheless, this consideration of ethics, although important for any reader, connects closer to understanding one’s own biases or how ideology is present in literature as opposed to using ethics or moral philosophy as a mode of interpretation. This will be discussed further in connection to the literary critic Wayne C. Booth.

My second aim is to provide possible understandings or solutions to moral problems within *The Quiet American* by means of ethical philosophy through the examples of moral dilemmas taken from the novel. The multitude of approaches in ethical philosophy provides a rich source for interpretation and brings many questions to the surface that might have otherwise gone unnoticed or have been overwhelmed by other thematic elements or readings. *The Quiet American* was chosen as the focus of this query because its narrative is abundant in moral problems which beg further thought and, equally, because this novel has not arguably received its due attention in comparison to Graham Greene’s other work.

The nature of this effort shows that there are different conclusions depending on the philosophy used, thus the idea of an ultimate moral right is arguably elusive. Nonetheless, some arguments are more swaying than others, and a correct course of action from a moral standpoint, may be revealed in the application of ethical theory. However, for the sake of a limited scope, deep epistemological examinations must be left aside to allow for a sufficient variety of interpretations to be presented. I suggest that the ethical philosophies used here can shed light on the quest to find definitive answers regarding the ideas of right and wrong, good and evil, moral and immoral. Thus, my reasoning for using an array of philosophies is to show where the conclusions coincide and where they differ. I find using only one mode of ethical inquiry would result in incomplete analysis of these moral dilemmas. However, it is impossible to reach one correct answer due to the variety of explanations that ethical inquiry allows.

My methodology shares many similarities with applied ethics. Haldane (2003, 491) explains that in general terms, applied ethics is the “application of moral theory to particular moral problems”. Applied ethics particularly refers to a broad spectrum of ethical applications including business ethics, computer ethics, environmental ethics, gender ethics” and other areas of “human activity” (Haldane 2003, 491). Essentially, it is taking a moral interest in various real-life moral dilemmas, often on a business, medical, or social level. The purpose is often to reach a conclusion to guide a choice in action that would be morally correct or justified. Foundationally, this thesis uses a similar method to applied ethics as it approaches moral problems with a direct application of moral philosophy with the hope of delineating questions of good or bad and the search for a workable conclusion in this regard.

Other scholars have drawn ethics and literature together to varying degrees and for various purposes. Colin McGinn’s *Ethics, Evil, and Fiction* perhaps provides the best example of

a similar method and purpose to my thesis in that he takes moral philosophy and directly applies it as a tool in his literary analyses. Martha C. Nussbaum is another important name in moral philosophy that is paired closely with literature. She holds the stance of being a passionate advocate of moral philosophy and hopes that we will engage with ethics in literary criticism and even argues this is perhaps a necessary dialogue in her famous book on the topic: *Love's Knowledge*. She also agrees with this thesis insofar that "literature presents the reader various attempts to work through prominent alternative views of an ethical problem" and it provides a place for "the imaginative re-creation of moral problems" (Nussbaum 1990, 142).

The scope of literature in this work will not include children's literature, even though Graham Greene has also authored some children's books. The primary concern is that we hold different moral expectations for children's literature and "we do not expect characters to behave in the same way or to be judged by the same standards, as those in a tragedy, a crime novel, a fantasy or a lyric poem" (Clausen 1986, ix-x). Children's literature does address moral dilemmas, but most often the stories are presented in a way that purposefully aims to avoid unnecessary ambiguity. Naturally, this does not always succeed as planned, but works such as fables set out to have a clear dilemma with an unopposed good moral outcome or choice. To debate this would result in another work entirely as it requires a different set of literary norms.

In this work, there will be a further discussion on the interplay of literature and ethics on a broad scale and following that, the topic will narrow to an exploration of where Graham Greene and his book *The Quiet American* are situated for the purposes of this thesis. The moral philosophies utilized will be defined and introduced in their respective chapters thereafter, with the hopes of laying the foundation for a deeper exploration of the moral dilemmas in the book and how they related to these respective philosophies. Due to necessary conciseness, I do not

expect to give all-encompassing definitions of the ethical topics but hope to at least provide the essential details and points of interest for the following analysis. I suggest that each interpretation does evoke further questions which may not be answered exhaustively; hopefully, however, this will convincingly highlight my first aim of showing how rich an interpretation of ethics and literature can be.

Following the theoretical background on the ethical philosophies, I will then debate upon the reliability of the narrator and continue this ethical inquiry to discuss the multitude of moral dilemmas in *The Quiet American* through the use of ethics. The following sections will be the analysis of the moral dilemmas in the novel. I will begin the discussion on the novel by giving an overview of the plot and introducing the characters. Then I will discuss the concept of narrator reliability, and continue to the idea of reporting and how this provides a foundation for the story itself. Finally, the moral analysis of the novel by use of ethical theory will be loosely divided into the following categories: lies, fidelity and love, stupidity, murder, and finally, nation.

## 2. Ethics and literature – a cross-disciplinary inquiry

Many scholars seek to demonstrate that morality can apply to literature in a timeless and relevant manner. Eskin (2004, 575) explains the “literature [is] ethically significant in an exemplary way”. That is to say, that particularly in “the Western cultural context”, literature carries “an ethical force ostensibly exceeding that of [pure] moral philosophy”. Accordingly, literature takes ethical questions making them more palatable and “it can incorporate, encompass, embody, engage...in short, interpret – the propositions, problems addressed and ‘truths’ attained in ethics” (Eskin 2004, 587). Essentially, this allows the reader to digest moral problems in a way that can “heighten our awareness of moral discrimination” and it appeals to our “interest in universal and universalizability of ethical judgments” (Eskin 2004, 581).

It is important to also note that there are theorists who appreciate the interactions of literature and philosophy, but maintain a conservative perspective on the limitations of the interplay between the two fields. For example, Lamarque and Olsen (1994, 396) note that there is a degree of “literary appreciation” from moral philosophy. However, Lamarque and Olsen add (1994, 396):

[It] might be right that moral philosophy would do well to make more extensive use of examples from literature because these are more fully conceived than anything a poor philosopher can invent on the spur of the moment.

They remain skeptical of Nussbaum’s strong stance of the fundamental importance of literature and moral philosophy and how she believes they are nearly reliant on one another (Lamarque and Olsen 1994, 386–388).

From a broad perspective, Sanders (2002, 10) explains that “literary theory has indeed developed in a cross-disciplinary dialogue with philosophy” however “it has done so in a restricted way”. He criticizes how “the discipline of literary studies”, from the perspective of

various scholars, has not been reworked by philosophy (Sanders 2002, 9). Instead, literary theory has not embraced this “ethical turn” fully and it remains that the “objects are untransformed” despite ethical theory’s influence (Sanders 2002, 9). However, even if the transformation is not complete, it is clear that there is an interaction or even on-going tensions between ethics and literature, just under the surface of contemporary literary criticism.

Clausen (1986, ix) believes that what makes a book good or badly written is often hinged on the richness of the moral dilemmas within. Furthermore, he explains (Clausen 1986, xi):

[Ethics] ought to make people more conscious and reflective about moral questions and to make the ethical content of literature (and of criticism) more valued, if less doctrinaire. Whatever kind of ethics and literature we want, only the very thoughtless believe that we can dispense with either one or the other. Literary works usually embody moral problems and reflect moral attitudes, sometimes even moral theories. There is no good reason for criticism to tiptoe around one of the major reasons that some literary works endure.

Thus, it is unproductive not to take notice of ethics which is rooted in most good books and the literary critic should be “more conscious and reflect” on these dynamics that are present in much of what we consider to be great works of writing.

McGinn (1997, 2–3) recognizes that literature and ethics can have a very productive dialogue with one another and explains that “one purpose of fiction is to present and reveal character in such a way as to invite moral appraisal”. Not only does literature awaken ethical thought on an abstract level, it also awakens the active moralizer within us, the readers. McGinn (1997, 3) considers that “one purpose of literary criticism or commentary is (or ought to be) to make clear the ethical import of actions and experiences of fictional characters”. His methodology is truly multidisciplinary in his “eclectic work, mixing metaphysics, epistemology, psychology, literature, film” (McGinn 1997, 5). He finds it necessary, not only to bring literature and ethics together in analysis, but also to revitalize the discipline of moral philosophy as a

whole. McGinn (1997, 5) suggests a holistic approach, which for him also includes aspects of his own personal experiences, which provides a new viewpoint for this undertaking and thus, “we should not let our field of operations be limited by the methods and style recommended by some prevailing paradigm” but instead “adopt new methods and develop new styles in response to the topics that ought to engage our attention” (McGinn 1997, 5). McGinn’s (1997, 51) ethical analysis seeks the foundation of the ideas of good and evil characters and what are the values of moral judgments. Accordingly, he searches to find out about “the nature of evil” while also seeking to understand the “relation between ethics and aesthetics” through literary analysis (McGinn 1997, 3–4). This makes his search touch upon epistemological considerations as well as a variety of ethical theories, particularly with meta-ethics which is concerned with the nature of moral knowledge and ethical terms (McGinn 1997, 1–2).

Like McGinn, Nussbaum also applies ethical theory in her literary analysis and shares an enthusiasm for this often over-looked discourse. Nussbaum (1990, 170) explains that although philosophy is quite often cited in connection to literature, the “writers about ethics are not studied in literary theory programs, as their epistemological and metaphysical companions” are studied. Nussbaum (1990, 170) points out that instead, the “diverse and excellent analyses of human social experience are usually not taken to have any interesting bearing on the theorist”. She goes on to state (Nussbaum 1990, 170):

In the midst of all this busy concern with other types of philosophy, the absence of moral philosophy seems a significant sign. And in fact it signals a further striking absence: the absence, from literary theory, of the organizing questions of moral philosophy.

Nussbaum aims to pair moral philosophy with literature, like Sanders and McGinn. She believes that these two disciplines need not be taken as mutually exclusive, but are fruitful when assessed

together because “literary form is not separable from philosophic content” (Nussbaum 1990, 3). However, the degree of this interplay is paramount and the foundation of her ethical inquiry is hinged primarily on Aristotle and other virtue ethics traditions, and mentions of other traditions serve the purpose of contrast rather than playing a key role in her analyses. She explains that she selects this ancient “moderate position” over more recent, systematically-oriented ethical thought systems like Kantianism or utilitarianism and proposes that even those who adhere to these traditions will be able to sympathize with her work if “they accept the Aristotelian dialectical procedure as [a] good overall” ethical guideline and are open to the “study of alternative conceptions” (Nussbaum 1990, 27). Her work is multidisciplinary like McGinn, and very much concerned with the nature of good, however, it shies away from purely systematic or normative ethical inquiries which will be discussed later.

Eaglestone (1997, 48), like Lamarque and Olsen, criticizes Nussbaum for her “emotional response” which potentially undermines her analyses. She has been accused of “over-determination” which although does not completely discredit “her philosophical analyses” it does however, highlight Nussbaum’s “deep and unquestionable assumptions about the nature of reading itself” (Eaglestone 1997, 46). In short, Eaglestone (1997, 48) states that Nussbaum’s explanation of “the ‘ethical’ in her ethical criticism is fully laid out” but the “criticism” aspect is “problematic and flawed” and would require a more thought-out literary theory or methodology.

Wayne C. Booth is another interesting scholar for this study. Booth is well-known for his work in literary analysis, including the concept of an “unreliable narrator” which was coined by him in his work *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, first published in 1961, which will be discussed later in this work. Regarding philosophy, he also provided an extensive undertaking in ethics and literature as seen in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. This book demonstrates an

undertaking with a thorough analysis of both ethical theory and literary criticism. Booth (1988, 38) states that “the ethics of criticism should be a universal concern”. Moreover, he suggests, as Nussbaum has been accused, that a lot of ethical critics are susceptible “to over-generalize” in their analyses (Booth 1988, 51). Booth’s main concern, however, is not an exploration of ethics as a tool in criticism like in the cases of McGinn and Nussbaum. Instead, he aims to demonstrate that ethical inquiry is to be taken along with every critical assumption, as morality is innate with the reader or critic – as it is within an ethical reading.

Goodheart (1997, 115) explains that Booth’s position is “formed by an Aristotelian poetics” and involves a “preoccupation with rhetoric as the medium of ethical expression and action”. Goodheart (1997, 118) sees it interesting that many “feel compelled” to “formulate an *ethics* of criticism”. He asserts (Goodheart 1997, 118):

Ethical criticism is in a sense, a redundancy, since all criticism, whether it knows it or not, is value-laden, even criticism that thinks itself as value neutral. Booth chooses to call ethical what others might call ideological.

Booth’s ethical criticism, as argued, is important for anyone undertaking the task of literary criticism. Yet, Goodheart (1997, 118) emphasizes that “Booth’s particular stance...is a scrupulously generous effort to respond to the ideological challenges in an ethical style”. In other words, it seems as if his main task is to tease out ideological assumptions in ethical terms, while not pursuing a pure ethical or moral inquiry in philosophical terms.

For the purposes of this work, this work will agree with Goodheart in that Booth has a more ideological undertaking and it is not the perspective on ethics that is primarily explored in this thesis. Moreover, where Booth does find a more steadfast ethical argument, it is within an Aristotelian or virtue ethics tradition, which is not within the scope of this work.

## 2.1. *The Quiet American* and Graham Greene

The ideas of good and bad are not necessarily clearly distinguishable from one another in many of Graham Greene's novels, and *The Quiet American* is no exception. Nonetheless, this particular novel has not received a great deal of attention by academic scholars in comparison to other works such as *The Power and the Glory* which is seen as Greene's greatest novel in the minds of some scholars (Donaghy 1986, 14). The reigning preoccupation with Greene's Catholic tropes has isolated *The Quiet American* as, more often than not, an honorable mention. Even with many allusions to Catholic imagery such as references to Bishops and cathedrals and many passing, but unelaborated, allusions to Catholic faith, Catholicism remains ever-present, but in the background (Greene 2004, 39). The only place where Catholicism arguably plays an intricate role is in the fact that Thomas Fowler's wife will not grant him divorce due to her commitment to the "High Church" (Greene 2004, 50). *The Quiet American* therefore seems more of a political book than one of religious inquiry, which is not of great interest to critics whose purpose is of an exploration of Greene's Catholicism.

The reception of *The Quiet American* was sometimes lukewarm at best within the first decades after its publication. For example, Hynes (1973, 46) relinquishes this book to a footnote, albeit a long one, in his collection of critical essays on Graham Greene. Hynes (1973, 46) explains:

I have not included here a discussion of Greene's latest novel, *The Quiet American* of 1956. This is one of his most brilliant feats of dramatic narration, but its drama, which concerns the conflict of American and European foreign policy...amounts mainly to a transferring of his argument from a religion to a political basis...Graham Greene is a novelist who must be judged on the most important level, [that of religion].

Adkins (1957, 235) notes the anti-American sentiment (which could be viewed favorably or unfavorably) but apart from that he felt that “*The Quiet American* leaves one quite unmoved” due in part to the lack of overt Catholicism. Greene himself classified his books as either novels of serious regard or thrillers, which were dubbed entertainments, a distinction which later became problematic.

Lodge (1966, 9) maintains this division and writes of “Greene’s novels and entertainments”, highlighting the separateness of the two. This very distinction perhaps was unwise by Greene as it invited the reader to not take certain works seriously, or conversely, sets a tone for other works like for *The Quiet American*, which was considered one of the novels. The quality could be conceived by either the search for Greene’s famous Catholicism, or for his politics, which arguably could impact the reception of the novel as a separate work, and not only part of some interrelated set. For this reason, *The Quiet American* could have been (and still be) received with more balanced critique and considerations if it was assessed primarily for its own merit, rather than with pre-conceived notions and expected themes. Moreover, Bergonzi (2006, 3–4) explains that “Greene could be an acute critic of his own work” but stresses that “Greene as an auto-critic needs to be read cautiously” as his personal feelings of his works change over time and may invite certain conclusions.

Regarding the themes, getting engrossed in assessing the degree of Catholicism in Greene’s works, or negotiating with “venomous Anti-Americanism” which has given *The Quiet American* a certain amount of “notoriety” in some circles, makes it easy to see how the connection seems too often to lead back to the author himself (Lodge 1966, 37). For example, in feeling compelled to make a direct association with Graham Greene the author and the first-person narrator, Englishman Thomas Fowler, many scholars have fallen into a trap of

oversimplification. In other words, answers for the dilemmas in *The Quiet American* have mistakenly been sought within the author's biography instead of from the rich text and plot at hand in the novel itself. According to Lodge (1966, 5):

One can't help thinking...that Greene has represented for many critics a temptation of a kind to which criticism of the novel is always susceptible: the temptation to abstract from fiction the author's version of reality, measuring this against a supposedly normative version, rather than assessing the persuasiveness with which the novelist realized his version.

Donaghy also notes tendencies for a brand of biographical reading that often emerges from scholars dealing with Greene's works. Particularly, "American critics talk of Greene's anti-Americanism in the novel because his first-person narrator, Fowler, displays such feeling" however upon closer inspection, there is more to the characters, according to Donaghy (1986, 65). He stresses that "the confusion of author and his character is worth dwelling on a moment... [as] it has been a recurring problem in discussions on Greene" due to Graham Greene's "own feelings of American involvement in Indochina" being well-known amongst his readership and being clearly mirrored in many ways in *The Quiet American's* central character of Thomas Fowler (Donaghy 1986, 65).

*The Quiet American* should be approached as a work of fiction, with Fowler being an imaginary character instead of delimited by a biographical reading of the author. Donaghy (1986, 70) rightfully returns to the novel itself away from Graham Greene, and considers the first-person narrator from a perspective of literary function and points out that these "first-person narrators often prove hardest on themselves, and perhaps he chose such a narrator here for its greater possibilities of irony and subtlety". In addition to greater insight into the narrator-character, this also contributes to providing ample room for actions and motivations to conflict

and create thought-provoking tensions. More discussion on the first-person narrator can be found in the section on the reliability of the narrator, later in this text.

## **2.2. A novel on morality**

Bergonzi (2006, 141) devotes an entire chapter in his book on Graham Greene to the question of whether he is indeed a Catholic novelist or not. Although Bergonzi (2006, 148) concludes that *The Quiet American*, at least, does not thematically fit as a Catholic novel he does as a matter for course, look elsewhere for themes to find that the story “raises the questions about human motives and responsibilities which are the common material of serious post-Christian novels”. Brennan (2010, 104) also notes how *The Quiet American* evokes consideration of “issues relating to human motivation and responsibility within a moral framework”. Thus, even with the apparent lack of profound religious content, there are some very interesting questions that the novel evokes in terms of morality and what motivations people have within a spectrum of right and wrong.

Some scholars in Graham Greene’s time did accept that there is value in a true-to-modern-life work on morality that does not have to rely on a purely religious moral framework.

Alberes (1951, 10) observes:

In order that literature may be an expression and the amplification, the elucidation and the testing-block of real existence, it would seem that new tools, new imaginary forms, and new moral notions must be used. That is why our contemporary authors are perhaps not amoral. They simply refuse to recognize an outdated moral world; living in one which is quite different, they are occupied with discovering its principle characteristics.

Although Alberes’ comments pre-date the publication of *The Quiet American*, he is nonetheless including Graham Greene and his contemporaries in this modern, more secularized ethical turn that he saw emerging in literature.

Zadie Smith more than fifty years later states in the introduction to *The Quiet American* that “no twentieth-century writer had a subtler mind for human comparison and where lesser novelists deploy broad strokes to separate good guy from bad”, in Greene’s work the characters “fail by degrees. And so there is no real way to be good in Greene, there are simply a million ways to be more or less bad” (In G. Greene 2004, vii). It is this skillful interplay of right and wrong, good and bad, which evokes thought and begins the journey of ethical analysis of the novel. Thus, *The Quiet American* will be taken here as Bergonzi, Brennan and Smith describe: a novel on morality.

Philosophical theories as a tool in literary criticism is not a completely new concept, but the varieties of applications do vary significantly from one undertaking to the next. This section introduced ways in which many scholars have noted how ethics can provide fruitful insight into literature – whether from the standpoint of ethical criticism or criticizing ethically. With morality or ethics, the research shows that most contemporary literary critics grant that there is an interplay with literature, but diverge on the ways in which the dialogue is possible or the degree in which it is useful to bring in ethical questions into literary analysis.

*The Quiet American* was introduced as a novel which is outwardly imprinted with the author’s own biography or personal ideals. However, critics are seeing more and more that the novel has much to offer in its own right, even if you would look past typical features of Greene’s work, such as Catholicism. *The Quiet American* also should not be simply written off as a political novel, but instead could be seen as a novel on morality and moral questions. These moral questions need not be linked intricately with Catholicism, but instead can be read as representing human values and provide an interesting source of thought in this manner.

### 3. Ethics

Section three will discuss ethics as a branch of philosophy. Because ethics is a wide-reaching field, it is useful to understand how it is divided into distinct schools of thought and what the different lines of ethical inquiry typically entail. After a brief introduction to some classically held divisions in ethics, different ethical theories will be presented that will be used later in the analysis of morality in *The Quiet American*. Examples from Kant, utilitarianism, ethical egoism and ethical relativism will be presented, respectively.

Normative ethics “deals with the formulation of ethical codes of behavior and moral models of evaluative decision making” (Roth 2005, 1048). McGinn (1997, 1) defines normative ethics as a philosophy which “is taken to include practical questions in which ethical notions are essentially employed”. Theories, principles, or maxims are given by philosophers to provide a basis for what is morally right and what is morally wrong. Ethical relativism is often considered in terms of normativity, because although it disagrees with a universal code of conduct as such, the universal rule is that there is no universal rule, and this in itself can be taken as a normative stance in stating that we ought to accept moral plurality in the fact that people should “be sensitive to differences among communities” (Velleman, 2013, 50). However, ethical relativism can also be taken in other senses, such as meta-ethical, which is considered later in this section.

Furthermore, another important distinction in normative ethics is whether it is a deontological or teleological ethical philosophy. Shafer-Landau (2007, 521) states of deontology:

Deontologists believe that certain actions are intrinsically morally right or wrong. That is, many actions have moral character they do by virtue of their own nature, considered entirely apart from any good or bad consequences they generate. [For example] there is something about murder, or intentional deception, or humiliation that makes such actions wrong in and of themselves.

So, it is deontological if it is unconcerned with consequences and the focus is backwards upon “the nature of the act itself, seeing it within the context of duties and obligations” (Grassian 1992, 52). Shafer-Landau clearly cites Kantian ethical philosophy, which will be discussed later, as deontological. Conversely, it is a teleological (or consequentialist) ethical philosophy if the idea is with the outcome of the action or, in other words: “right conduct is determined by what is achieved” (Grassian 1992, 51). Ethical egoism and utilitarianism are two examples of teleological theories that will also be examined.

Applied ethics, as defined earlier, is the application of ethical principles on a question or problem to try to uncover what is the best (or right) solution in that case or related cases. Another ethical philosophy category is descriptive ethics which contrasts with normative ethics. Normative ethics provides the “moral philosophies that tell people what they should do”, while descriptive ethics are “moral philosophies that merely tell people what they already believe they should do” (Roth 2005, 1048). Therefore, descriptive ethics includes a comparison of people’s moral positions and it is in stark contrast to prescriptive ethics, like Kant’s normative ethics which tells people what is their duty in the sphere moral action or belief. In general, meta-ethics is concerned with “abstract metaphysical questions about the nature of ethical value” (McGinn 1997, 1). Shafer-Landau (2007, 3) explains in the introduction to *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* that this can also include the truth-values of morality where it is “not about the content of morality but the status” and whether it is even possible “to have moral knowledge” and if so, whether these claims “can be objectively true”. In his view, it is particularly interested in the exploration of the meanings of ethical terms or appeals to knowledge and rationality with regard to concepts such as good and bad, right and wrong. Arguably, in any dialogue or debate about ethics, meta-ethics comes into play as it explores many foundational concepts and terms in

ethical thought and is a useful aid in exploring how that affects the discussion, or how it supports or undermines the theory at hand.

### 3.1. Kant

A good starting point to the discussion of ethical philosophy is with the thoughts of Immanuel Kant. If one does not take into consideration Plato and Aristotle's virtue ethics, then Kant's normative ethics would arguably be the next stop in Western philosophy's lauded tradition of thought. Kant (1966, 195) states:

Moderation in emotion and passion, self-control and sober consideration are not only in many respects good but...one can hardly call them unreservedly good (however the ancients may have praised them). For without the principles of a good will they may become very evil indeed.

Kant dismisses the ideas of a good person through various virtuous traits, like hailed by Plato and Aristotle, as being merely pleasant traits but not intrinsically good or "good in itself" (Kant 2002, 10).

However, this leads to the issue of what in effect, then, is good? Kant's quest was "the search for and establishment of the *supreme principle of morality*" (Kant 2002, 8). In the most simplified form, one could argue that this principle is revealed in his rationalized sense of moral duty. Kant sees that duty trumps all other interests, including those of good character as defined by the ancient Greek philosophers, which is central to the ideas of virtue ethics. Following this, generalized good habits do not necessarily entail one's moral duty but "the concept of duty" means that all acts should be carried out "from duty" and not following duty in a superficial manner, like for a "self-serving aim" (Kant 2002, 13).

Moreover, "the good will is good not through what it effects or accomplishes, not through its efficacy for attaining any intended end, but through its willing" (Kant 2002, 10). Therefore

the moral act is considered in terms of the will it entails and not its intended end. More than that, “utility or fruitlessness can neither add to nor subtract anything from this worth” (Kant 2002, 10). So, the ends or consequence, whether positive or negative, has little bearing on whether an act is morally good. Even a sense of community cannot overpower the adherence to duty and “we must never place our self-interest or communal or social interest above our basic sense of duty”, according to Kant (1966, 264). Yet, if our duty happens to be in accordance with a communal interest, then it would be suitable for Kant, but it is the principle or duty and not the ends that is the defining feature of moral good or conversely, a moral transgression.

In basic terms, Kant is able to conceive a person as a rational being logically choosing good or bad based on principles. Kant’s philosophy also painstakingly discusses epistemological concerns which he applies to his ethical belief system. He sees that “moral principles had a special status among the dictates of reason” (Shafer-Landau 2007, 521). In this way, Kant helped move morals from the hand of a deity, specifically the Christian god, into the hands of people through his exploration of reasoning which people possess. He believes our good moral behavior is developed from our own ethical reasoning. Shafer-Landau (2007, 521) succinctly summarizes that “Kant thought that reason alone was capable of discovering correct moral principles”. This is not to say that Kant was an atheist, but entrusting morality to the reasoning of mere mortals and engaging in a critique of faith was quite an interesting (and controversial) prospect in his time.

Kant provides a framework for moral principles with his Categorical Imperative which is based upon the ideas of duty and moral reasoning, which were introduced earlier. He has two supplementations of his Categorical Imperative including the “Principle of Universality” and the “Principle of Humanity” (Shafer-Landau 2007, 521). Kant states that “I am never to act

otherwise than so that I could at the same time will that my maxim should become a universal law” and continued by saying that “ordinary human reason in its practical judgment fully agrees with this and always has suggested principle in view” (Kant 1966, 201). Or, in other words “there is only one categorical imperative and it is this: Act only on that maxim which will enable you at the same time to will that it be a universal law” (Kant 1966, 207). This Categorical Imperative encompasses his ideas of universality and provides “a principle of action that one give oneself, stating what one is going to do, and why one is going to do it” (Shafer-Landau 2007, 521–522). The use of the word “action” shows that being morally right is an activity and choice a person makes and it is not merely thoughtless repetition. Furthermore, Kant’s “rule permits no exceptions because it must remain and is by definition “absolutely impartial” (Hospers 1990, 256). Kant found absolute principles which were “never permissibly broken” and that were enacted by a “good will [which] is the steady motivation to do one’s duty” (Shafer-Landau 2007, 521). Hence the rational moral actor must recognize that they cannot make themselves an exception, and if it applies to one, it applies to all. However, Sullivan states (1996, ix):

We need [not] to appeal to the categorical imperative every time we act or are faced with a difficult decision. The function is to generate maxims – general rules or policies – not actions.

In other words, it would be silly to have to reformulate the maxim in every new circumstance. It should be apparent that some of the principles have already been argued, such as Kant’s strong position against killing and the Categorical Imperative can be conceived as the rational underpinnings of these moral conclusions (Shafer-Landau 2007, 522).

The Principle of Humanity is perhaps Kant’s preferred supplement to his Categorical Imperative in terms of the “best expression of the ultimate moral standard” while the Principle of

Universality could be taken as the “formula for interpreting and applying” moral judgments (Shafer-Landau 2007, 522). He insists that one should: “Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means” (Kant 1992, 302). Therefore, Kant adds a tier of respect for people as a building block of his otherwise relatively calculating and impersonal philosophy. Respect is present elsewhere in Kantian philosophy, and he stresses that this general respect should be a guiding feature in your actions, although it is not fully accounting for your duty.

Grassian (1992, 89) suggests that Kant’s principle as a whole may actually be a renewal of the Christian ‘Golden Rule’ which states: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you”. Yet, this would be an oversimplification because the prescriptive nature of Kant’s morality is not concerned with “variable subjective tastes of human beings” (Grassian 1992, 90). Shafer-Landau (2007, 523) gives the extreme example of a masochist causing “us to commit actions that we all believe are immoral” because of his own delight in pain which clearly runs counter to what we would constitute “unusual inclinations” which hardly apply widely. However, Alan Gewirth cited in Shafer-Landau (2007, 523) provides an “amended rule” which states “do unto others as you would *rationaly* want them to do unto you” which would be more in line with Kantian principles.

In summary, Guyer (2006, 17) connects these interrelated thoughts concisely when he states:

Kant argued that not only the concepts of good will and duty, which could be derived from ordinary consciousness, and the concept of a categorical imperative, which could be derived from more technical moral philosophy, but also his own conception of humanity as an end in itself whose free agency must always be preserved... [Which leads] to the fundamental moral principle that one should act only on [these] maxims.

The above constitutes, for Kant, the “law of pure practical reason” in that the “requirements that are imposed on actions not form any external source, but from the nature of reason itself” (Guyer 2006, 17). For the sake of argumentation, it is worthwhile to appeal to the maxims when analyzing behavior, as a good moral act cannot exist without fulfilling the criteria of the rules. This is also where Kant has been criticized, because some of the maxims are more or less self-evident. Is the rule just explaining the moral code or is the code actually developed from adhering to the rule?

### **3.2. Utilitarianism**

On the one hand, as seen with Kant, the consequences or outcomes of an action can be taken as irrelevant to their nature as morally good or morally wrong of his line of thought (Shafer-Landau 2007, 521). Utilitarianism, on the other hand, takes into consideration the outcome or consequences of an action and what results is the deciding factor in whether a moral action was right. A notable philosopher in the utilitarian spirit is John Stuart Mill. Mill (1998, 50) asserts:

All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and color from the end to which they are subservient...A test of right and wrong must be the means, one would think, of ascertaining what is right or wrong, and not a consequence of having already ascertained it.

Hence, Mill saw Kant as improperly positioned in the spectrum of moral action. That is to say, it is not the rule on which the action is based but instead the resulting consequence that should be considered. Moreover, Mill criticizes Kant by saying that the Kantian principles fail to show the sheer impossibility of “all rational beings” taking as maxims, some very “outrageously immoral rules of conduct” and that the application of rational beings of an immoral rule of conduct would have consequences that “no one would choose to incur” (Mill 1992, 282). Therefore, it is no wonder that instead of the act only, the consequences must be taken into consideration, because

people would naturally avoid a preposterous maxim (in terms of consequence), even if it would hold up to Kant's scrutiny.

Mill explains that according to "the foundation of Utility, or the Greatest-happiness Principle...actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness" and conversely, these actions are "wrong as they produce the reverse of happiness" (Mill 1992, 283). Furthermore, happiness is not just contentment, but also embodies the "prevention of pain" which is considered an aspect of the happiness principle (Mill 1992, 283). Mill goes to great lengths to try to define the intricacies of the meaning of happiness or its reverse. Yet, consistently the goal is avoidance of unhappiness, for as many people as possible, with happiness taking on a more neutral sense rather than some extreme form of pleasure or hedonism.

Mill's predecessor in utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham, however, had a more hedonistic perspective on morality. He also considers morality in terms of human welfare, and believes that "human actions and institutions should be directed at promoting the greatest overall 'utility', by which he meant happiness or pleasure" (Crisp 1997, 2). He takes an "*experience account*" of welfare meaning that "anything that happens beyond your conscious awareness and does not affect that awareness cannot affect your welfare" (Crisp 1997, 21). So, in the words of an old adage: "What you don't know...can't hurt you", according to Bentham's tradition (Crisp 1997, 21). This means in practice that if something beyond your knowledge happens, then it cannot be considered as a factor affecting your happiness or well-being. For example, it would follow that if you never catch someone lying to you, then this lie could not hurt you.

Additionally, unlike Mill, Bentham believes pleasures or happiness are measurable or quantifiable, while Mill sees "pains and pleasures are incommensurable" as "one cannot compare

pain and pleasure because they are essentially different in kind” (Falikowski 1990, 60–61). Yet, aside from a generalized preference to pleasure rather than pain, Mill asserts there can be no “impartial tribunal where some kind of objective calculation can be performed” (Falikowski 1990, 61). Therefore, pain and pleasure cannot be quantifiable because they are subjective. Yet, Bentham’s calculations were based on an idea of individual happiness or pleasure which is more in line with *my* greatest happiness first and foremost, and happiness to others as a secondary consideration. Bentham will be returned to later in the section on ethical egoism.

Importantly, for Mill, the greatest happiness was not only referring to an individual but spans “the greatest happiness of the greatest number” of people (Hospers 1990, 354). A consequence is measured upon the idea that it is a morally right action if the result causes the most people to be happy or that the reverse of happiness is avoided. Aside from this, Mill (1992, 289) does not glorify the idea of martyrdom: “The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others” but it does not believe that “the sacrifice in itself is good”. The utilitarian view is, in its basic form, a balancing act, in which the greatest possible amount of happiness is divided among individuals and unhappiness is avoided in so far as possible.

Mill also deviates from Kant in recognizing that different situations may require a different course of action. He criticizes the “rigidity” of set doctrines and believes that “accommodation” is necessary “to peculiarities of circumstances” (Mill 1992, 293). Thus, it is impossible to have a universal principle that is appropriate in all matters, for all people, and so the prescriptive method that Kant adheres to does not necessarily apply in every circumstance. Mill (1992, 293) asserts:

It is not the fault of any creed, but of the complicated nature of human affairs, that rules of conduct cannot be framed as to require no exception, and that hardly any kind of action can be safely laid down as either always obligatory or always condemnable.

However, as Moore (1965, 106) points out “much of the Utilitarian argument involves the logical absurdity that what is here and now, never has any value in itself, but is only to be judged by its consequences”. This continues almost indefinitely as when the consequences themselves are “realized” they also “have no value in themselves, but would be a mere means to a still further future, and so on ‘ad infinitum’” (Moore 1965, 106). Accordingly, it is rather unusual that you are constantly assessing an “expected happiness” or “expected utility”, to borrow phrases from Brandt (1992, 198), over and over again. This, according to Moore, loses sight of the current situation and involves a constant projection into the future. Moore’s criticism could arguably be expanded to all teleological or consequentialist lines of thought, in that the focus is only on the result (or perceived result) and it makes the present action seem somehow to lack importance.

### **3.3. Ethical egoism**

Some claim that people by nature are selfish, and act purely out of their own interests in for biological reasons. This descriptive claim “about the nature of humanity, namely, that all human beings, are inevitably committed to furthering their own aims, interests and ambitions” can be characterized as “psychological egoism”, according to Flescher and Worthen (2007, 58). This forms the premise of, but is not to be confused by, “ethical egoism” which is a normative claim that “because it is ultimately in our nature to be selfish, we *should*, in fact, aspire to be this way” (Flescher and Worthen 2007, 58). Accordingly, the belief of ethical egoism is not just descriptive of our nature, but, because of our nature we ought to act in a way that is apparently natural to human beings. This, of course, would depend on if you would take the position of psychological egoism to be true.

Therefore, ethical egoism as defined by Hospers (1990, 350), concedes that “the goal of each person’s life should be his or her own self-interest”. So, this represents a shift from thinking of the well-being and happiness of others, as with utilitarianism, and directing one’s moral energy towards fulfilling own personal goals and happiness needs. Furthermore, “one’s conception of human nature affects how optimistic or cynical one is concerning the prospect of altruism” (Flescher and Worthen 2007, 60). Accordingly, if it is natural to be selfish, then it follows that altruism is unnatural and thus wrong by nature, and also along this line, morally wrong.

Although utilitarianism includes the self as a factor in moral decision making, especially in the moral philosophy of Bentham as mentioned, ethical egoism exalts the individual person as the greatest deciding factor in concluding a course of action and whether this action is morally desirable. In the extreme, one’s personal interest is not only the most important matter to be considered, but the primary matter to be taken into account. However, especially when considering conflicts and violence, it is often in your best interest not to harm others. Flescher and Worthen (2007, 62) interpret what follows these premises as “something akin to the Golden Rule, albeit a negative version” which would result in “do not do unto others what you would wish them not to do unto you”. Instead of thinking of how you would like to be treated by others, you reverse this line of thought and consider others in terms of trying not to cause an excess amount of harm. This is not because of your altruistic care for people, but it is instead related to you logically realizing that there are many instances where if you do harm others, they will return the favor, which is detrimental to your own well-being in the long-term.

Rational egoism represents the normative perspective on ethical egoism, not just the descriptive sense. Rachels (2007, 213) looks deeper by “leaving aside *why* we behave as we do,

what is our *duty*?” and considers “what *should* we do?” A commonsensical view in “morality requires that we balance our own interests against the interests of others...especially at little cost to ourselves” (Rachels 2007, 213). So, in practice, although the motives are mostly for the self, the idea includes the admission of acting in a way that takes some consideration of others into use and can involve promoting various norms as being a rational choice of behavior which suits the needs of the egoist. A rational egoist may accordingly uphold moral norms, even some of those comparable to Kantian ethics, because they may be towards one’s own “advantage” (Skorupski 2003, 220). Skorupski (2003, 220) explains that one adheres to a “moral principle...if it is to one’s advantage to do so”. However, acting in accordance to principles, unlike with Kant, does not occur from a sense of duty, instead it is a sensible decision based on personal interests as “sometimes the best means to this end will be to give pleasure to others” (Moore 1965, 96). This mode of action would be parallel with the idea that it is not often reasonable not to harm others unnecessarily.

The position of egoism shows artificial similarities to utilitarianism in the sense that it is sometimes desirable to act in other people’s interest for the sake of one’s own. However, Moore (1965, 109) reminds us that “egoism and utilitarianism are not only different from, but strictly contradictory of, one another” as “my own greatest pleasure is the ‘sole good’” of egoism while “the greatest pleasure of all is the ‘sole’ good” of utilitarianism. Thinking of others is not for their sake, and it is purely as a necessary consideration for one’s own well-being or benefit.

Jeremy Bentham, as mentioned earlier, is a utilitarian but has an egoist spin on his moral belief system. Falikowski (1990, 60) characterizes this as adopting “an egoist philosophy which supports this ethical position” and that people are built with a predisposition to act in a self-seeking manner regardless, so if everyone tries to secure their own happiness and helps others do

the same, then the moral good will prevail. In a sense, there is a common good achieved in a self-interested but communally sensitive way of conducting oneself. This is just one example how even normative belief systems do sometimes intersect, or often, contradict.

### **3.4. Ethical relativism**

Ethical relativism explains that there is variation and hence an unavoidable relativity from culture to culture and person to person regarding morality or ethical perspectives (Hospers 1990, 364). Dower (1998, 33) describes the theory of ethical relativism as of sound logic because it is “a matter of fact [that] values do vary significantly”. Accordingly, it is suggested that “there is no common...or universal reference point from which to assert claims about universal morality” (Dower 1998, 34). Values vary along with cultures and different nationalities and religions, and so do specific situations of moral questioning. Thus, whichever moral perspective one assumes, they are right for their time and place.

McGinn (1997, 21) explains that “if one group judges something to be good, another bad” then actually “both are right, since the thing has both dispositions”. Yet we run into a problem here, because there is “a logical gap between *being* good and being *taken* to be good” (McGinn 1997, 21). In other words, can some people be wrong, but there still be room for plurality? Dower (1998, 23) asserts that there is a “natural tendency” of theories like Kant’s categorical imperative, utilitarianism and other moral philosophies to “advocate some kind of world ethic for individuals”, which relativism seeks to avoid.

It is important to note that the stance of moral relativism is not asserting there are no moral standards or codes, but instead, it denies “the existence of universal morality” but “must also assert the existence of local moralities”, and that by denying any morality at all it would be

instead nihilism (Velleman 2013, 46). Furthermore, Velleman (2013, 61) asserts that morality serves the purpose of “sociality” whereby people uphold an “interpretability to co-members of a community” through social norms or mores. “The variance among social *mores* will therefore resemble the variance among variations on a theme, where the theme is recognizably moral” (Velleman 2013, 66). Velleman (2013, 64) elaborates:

I assume that the mores of actual communities always have enough in common with our morality to be recognizable to us as versions – often misguided versions, even horrifically or appallingly misguided versions, but still recognizably versions – of what we call morality.

So, though there are moral pluralities, these disparities are still recognizably moral codes even if they do potentially diverge from society to society. However, this implies that there are better or worse moral codes, which is a common problem in ethical relativism that often has trouble reconciling different moralities even if it does easily assert that they exist.

What then, is the constant thread that is present everywhere to provide recognizable moral codes? According to Velleman (2013, 64), because we are “constrained by human nature” in that “there are some attitudes on which we humans cannot help but converge”, certain norms do emerge. This is not to say that there are universal codes, but instead, there are human tendencies which create consistencies in the world’s moralities such as “aversion to pain” and “an inclination toward pleasure...plus an array of psychological appetites” (Velleman 2013, 64). He resolves the issue of universality by referring to common “ubiquitous” morals without going as far to allow “the existence of universal norms” (Velleman 2013, 63). Thus, although we do have to recognize that the world is not homogenous in belief systems, there is something of humanity which many people believe, which requires some sort of framework to draw upon, and

that framework does indeed exist. Like ethical egoism, there seems to be a strong tendency to soften the position and allow for some exceptions.

Because few moralists are able to purely accept a true and all-encompassing plurality of belief systems as presented above, there is tendency to try to pinpoint some universal truths, such as can be seen in famous international documents like the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” from 1948. An example of an attempt to account for a true universal code, which does not impede on cultural belief systems, renders a rather elaborate explanation to try to show where the lines are drawn. For example, it is written in Article 29, part 2 of the UN Assembly Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

In other words, delineating good moral behavior is a very hard task for the ethical relativist. The desire for drawing the line somewhere is very strong typically, so for practical purposes it is wise to consider relativism from a descriptive rather than a normative stance. Yet, as we have seen, each ethical theory has its inconsistencies when attempting to consider real life situations.

We have seen that most ethical theories rest on some preconceived notion of what it is to be a human and some typical features of human behavior or tendencies in the realm of morals or ethics. In the case of Kant, he appeals to our ability to reason as a case for a moral code in the form of the Categorical Imperative. The maxims that can be willed to be universal laws are decisively complete and true and allow for no exceptions, and importantly, this is in line with a very reasonable line of inquiry. Moreover, treating people with a degree of respect by not using them as a means is a rational and moral requirement.

Utilitarianism appeals to a desire to ensure the most happiness to the greatest number, as a result of our actions. This too arguably has a foundation in human nature, with Peter Singer arguing that “there is something in our nature that is capable of responding simply to the thought that there is a human being, just like us, who is suffering preventably” (Voorhoeve 2009, 60). For this reason, it is only logical that we would try to maximize happiness while minimizing other people’s suffering.

Ethical egoism also believes there is something in our nature, but this is in the form of psychological egoism where we have the tendency (and very reasonably so) to act in accordance with our interests as the primary concern. In the extreme forms, ethical egoism would say that to act otherwise (such as altruistically) is counterproductive to our needs, which makes it counterintuitive and even morally wrong, when taken to the letter. Conversely, ethical relativism agrees with all of the other theories in the sense that moral codes exist, however it insists that there are moral realities instead of one primary moral truth or correct code of action. These moral mores or norms may converge but they are not universal and local truths have to be understood in context. However, it is important to note that all of the philosophies introduced require further elaboration or discussion to be exhaustive, and I have set out to give some important aspects for the sake of the analysis in the next sections.

#### 4. *The Quiet American story*

To begin the ethical analysis, it is important to begin with brief character introduction to provide the foundation for moral discussion. The first-person narrator, Thomas Fowler, as mentioned earlier, is presented as a “war-weary reporter” who “takes existential pleasure in his disassociation from the society around him” (Brennan 2010, 103). In his time in Southeast Asia, he had established Vietnam as his home and had been romantically involved with a young Vietnamese lady, Phuong, despite having a wife at home in England. Fowler continually maintained throughout the novel, despite his strong ties to the region, that he chose to be “not involved” in all affairs and considered it a kind of motto – from love, to war, to politics, to personal interests (Greene 2004, 20). Fowler explained his objective stance to police officer, Vigot, during investigations into American national Alden Pyle’s murder. He stated (Greene 2004, 20):

The human condition being what it was, let them fight, let them love, let them murder, I would not be involved. My fellow journalists called themselves correspondents; I prefer the title of reporter. I wrote what I saw. I took no action – even an opinion is a kind of action.

However, that proves not to be true as we continue through the story, when Fowler becomes very involved in matters that he views as ethically wrong and does indeed take action. He unwittingly becomes involved in the beginnings of malignant meddling of Americans in Vietnam and especially, he becomes involved with the ambitious American, Pyle, interfering with his lifestyle and his pretty lover, Phuong. The theme of reporting will be returned to later in the analysis.

Phuong herself is a mysterious character and presented more as an object within the story instead of an active agent. Bergonzi (2006, 147) describes Phuong’s characterization as “shadowy” where her “exoticism both defines and conceals her”. Her name also gives an other-

worldly impression and it is said to mean “Phoenix” in English, although according to Fowler, “nothing nowadays is fabulous and nothing rises from the ashes” (Greene 2004, 3). Fowler recalled getting to know her soon after they had met and how desperate he was to understand her because “she didn’t have the gift of expression” due to the inadequacy of their shared languages and cultural differences (Greene 2004, 124). Although we know Phuong is young and lovely, we are forced into “inventing a character” like Fowler admitted to doing, because we are only presented with an exotic showpiece rather than a fully-rounded woman (Greene 2004, 124). Fowler described the language barrier between them and how in one situation he “thought of several ironic and unpleasant jests” that he might make but, how, “neither her English nor her French would have been good enough for her to understand the irony” (Greene 2004, 3–4). This alludes to how much of the story is beyond her grasp and she may not have fully comprehended the complexities around her.

Returning to the Americans, there are a few minor characters featuring as support actors in representing the growing presence of the United States in Indochina. However, one person in particular, Alden Pyle, is central to the plot and becomes the name and face or even, the scapegoat for America the nation. Pyle is described as a polite man who was “very meticulous about small courtesies” (Greene 2004, 3). Pyle is by title an American attaché that came to Vietnam to conduct seemingly unimportant business of a political nature. He is depicted as a moderately flat character and “a product of his culture, rather than as a character of any complexity or depth” (Bergonzi 2006, 146). This image is only heightened by the small courtesies that Pyle focuses on enacting, with much more serious issues of regional conflict closely in the background.

Moreover, the title *attaché* is French for attached, which is a notable and very contrasting term when held up to Fowler's staunch and incessant denial of being attached to anything at all. Bergonzi (2006, 147) suggests that Fowler's opium use helps him (at least seemingly) "sustain his detachment from the world around him". Fowler's resolve on not being attached or acutely involved will be discussed further within the analysis section.

The story itself begins with the investigations into the death of Pyle, and over the course of the novel, we get to know the characters more and are gradually given more information on the backstory surrounding the events leading to Pyle's murder. It becomes clear that Pyle's involvement is much more sinister than he had initially presented when we find out from Fowler's investigations, he is suspected of supplying bomb materials. The suspicions are confirmed later when a bombing connected to General Thé, a Vietnamese military leader and nationalist, was shown to have originated from Pyle's supplies. Thus, he is shown to be directly linked to plastic explosives which resulted in the deaths of dozens civilians (Greene 2004, 165).

Pyle's political motivations are based, at least partially upon, his studies. Kerr explains (2006, 97):

Pyle is intensely bookish. He has enormous respect for what he calls serious writers...Above all he venerates York Harding...an American diplomatic correspondent and cold warrior whose ideas about Southeast Asia will inspire Pyle's own intervention, in the name of the Third Force in Vietnam, with its tragic results.

Accordingly, Pyle is driven by a clear cause, which provides an explanation of his motivations in Vietnam. However, as shown later, this cause may not be morally just or desirable. Moreover, it is debatable if Pyle fully understands the consequences of this involvement and what potential atrocities might result in the future.

Pyle not only becomes entangled in shady politics in the region and contributes to violence and unrest, he also falls in love with Fowler's mistress, Phuong. Unlike Fowler, his interest in Phuong is seemingly more respectable as he seeks to take her hand in marriage (which is something that is important at least to her sister) and make an honest woman of her because as Fowler described: "the keyword was marriage. Pyle believed in being involved" (Greene 2004, 21). However, Fowler's jealousy successfully thwarts his efforts, leading (at least in part) to Pyle's untimely death.

#### **4.1 Reliability of the narrator**

"For practical criticism probably the most important... [kind of] distance is that between the fallible or unreliable narrator and the implied author who carries the reader with him in judging the narrator" (Booth 1983, 158). Booth (1983, 158) explains that he considers a "narrator reliable when he speaks for or acts in accordance with the norms of the work" or the "implied author's norms". Whereas, "unreliable narrators thus differ markedly depending on how far and in what direction they depart from their author's norms" (Booth 1983, 159). Olson (2003, 94) expands on Booth's concept and clarifies unreliable narrators as those "who articulate values and perceptions that differ from those of the implied author" which involves a "distance [that] is created between the views, actions and voice of the unreliable narrator". This definition is not without problem, and many scholars question the terms and their scope including Olson, as mentioned above. For example, Olson (2003, 98) refers to Ansgar Nünning and suggests that even if the reader detects inconsistencies on the part of the narrator, they can then "make sense of the initial conundrum by relating it to other world/literary experience or to what the implied author meant to say" and from there, "another reading is decided upon". The alternative that Olson suggests from Nünning, however, rests on the reader taking ideas from potentially extra-literary sources.

So in effect, if the narrator “is discovered to be untrustworthy, then the total effect of the work he relays to us is transformed” (Booth 1983, 158). But, it is not just a matter of lying.

Booth (1983, 159) elaborates:

It is true that most of the great reliable narrators indulge in large amounts of incidental irony, and that they are thus ‘unreliable’ in the sense of being potentially deceptive. But difficult irony is not sufficient to make a narrator unreliable. Nor is unreliability ordinarily a matter of lying.

Olson (2003, 94) explains that Booth’s version of irony involves “narrator unreliability to be a function of irony” and that this is the “formal means” to create the distance.

Booth (1983, 156) mentions *The Quiet American* directly in his *Rhetoric of Fiction* in terms of distance between the narrator and the characters of the story he tells. That is to say, in *The Quiet American*, he sees a chasm between “Fowler the narrator and Pyle the American” where there is a large gap in terms of morality and intellectuality, respectively (Booth 1983, 156). Therefore, there is a distinct distance between Fowler and Pyle almost as if they represent polar opposite sides of a spectrum. This can also be seen in other elements such as Fowler being an older man, while Pyle has youth and vibrancy. Fowler briefly considered whether life was worth living at one stage in the novel, citing the impending doom of “old age” and “loneliness” while Pyle reminded him that he himself “can stick it [out]” because he is “young” (Greene 2004, 102–103). This distance is perhaps most clear to the reader in moral terms, as suggested above, which will be covered in the moral analysis.

Returning to the idea of reliability, Lodge (1966, 379) explains that “we never doubt that Fowler is a reliable reporter of the Southeast Asian scene” which includes “the war” and the “interests behind it”. As mentioned previously, many discussions on Graham Greene’s works involved discussing the author himself when one should be discussing the fictional characters.

Accordingly, Lodge (1966, 37) asserts that this reliability is linked to the fact that Graham Greene himself was well-researched on the politics and nature of conflicts taking place at the time and he “made four trips to Indochina, staying there twelve months in all”. Even though Greene’s thorough research may have impacted the atmosphere of the novel and the places, it is a stretch to say that Fowler would be reliable as a matter of fact. Yet, when taking into account context and environment, it is fair to conclude that Greene’s knowledge at least affects the feeling of reliability that we have when we get the story from Fowler, our only lens into the situation. However, one can see the problem with this interpretation easily without going into an all-encompassing discussion on the nature of narrators and authors in fiction.

The author himself aside, reliability of the narrator in this case must be judged from the information we know instead of the information we think we are lacking. For example, Fowler allowed us to get a glimpse in his own head and showed us some of his unpleasant motives, which does bode well to us being able to believe his versions of events. Yet, even his reporting of war events, as Lodge believes to be convincing, could be called into question as is seen in the next section. Within the narrative, it feels as if the author is teasing us with the validity of information. This can perhaps be best seen in Pyle saying “a man becomes trustworthy when you trust him” (Greene 2004, 78). For the purposes of this analysis, it seems only fitting that we will take Pyle’s advice and cautiously trust Fowler’s version of events since further investigation of the concept of a reliable narrator is not within the scope of this work.

#### **4.2 Reporting in *The Quiet American***

Reporting plays a key role in *The Quiet American*. According to Kerr (2006, 95), “this is a novel much concerned with reading and writing and the relation of both activities to reality” which rests greatly upon reporting. Kerr’s perspective follows that all of the characters can be seen

through different reading and writing discourses within the story. He argues that the novel “is about a man who writes reluctantly, another man who reads too eagerly, and a woman who apparently does not read or write at all, but who is also unreadable” (Kerr 2006, 95). Or, said in other words, it is “the story of a jaded English reporter [Fowler], an idealistic American diplomat [Pyle], and an inscrutable Vietnamese dancer who likes to go to the cinema [Phuong]”, respectively (Kerr 2006, 95). However, as mentioned, the information is filtered through Fowler’s narration and for this reason his reporting will be the primary consideration here.

Bergonzi (2006, 147) explains that Fowler’s role “as a reporter...is to investigate and describe what is happening, not to make judgments about the events and still less to change anything”. Fowler prides himself on this position, and he even asserted “I had prided myself on detachment, on not belonging to this war” (Greene 2004, 105). Kerr (2006, 96) points out that although there is “a writer for a central character, *The Quiet American* is far from a romantic celebration of the writer as hero”. He continues that “the English journalist Thomas Fowler appears to take no pride, and not much interest, in his own writing” instead, the value of writing seems to rest only upon a practical consideration “in providing him a professional reason for staying in Vietnam” (Kerr 2006, 96). Nonetheless, as shown above, Fowler does take pride in an idea of objectivity even if he is jaded as a reporter.

“The closest Fowler seems to come to sincerity in his own writing is in [a personal] letter he sends his wife in London, begging for a divorce and frankly acknowledging his entirely selfish motives, since he has nothing to lose” (Kerr 2006, 80–81). In Fowler’s letter to his wife asking for this divorce, he admitted his affair. He confessed (Greene 2004, 72):

I could wrap this up...and make it sound more honorable and more dignified by pretending it was for someone else's sake. But it isn't, and we always used to tell each other the truth. It's for my sake and only mine.

Fowler could be conceived as a truthful man considering the confessions within the letter, particularly because he also admitted marital indiscretions. Yet, his motivations for truth here might still be for selfish concerns. Kerr (2006, 99) characterizes this as a "little oasis of sincere writing" which is purely limited to a "domestic, marital register and does not even mention Vietnam" which is an interesting omission considering the setting is Vietnam and his desire to continue his stay there is paramount.

Despite Fowler's apparently honest correspondence, his wife Helen declined his request by letter and she questioned his integrity and informed Fowler that she would not grant him a divorce due to her Catholic convictions. She told him that "you say that we've always tried to tell the truth to each other, but, Thomas, your truth is always so temporary" (Greene 2004, 110). Thus, even the truth-value of Fowler's personal letter to his wife is called into question.

Likewise, Fowler made it very clear that even in his profession as a journalist he subjectively selected what matters to report and what not to report regarding the war events he encountered. This is in contrast to the biographical reading of events, where Greene was noted as being well-researched and thus Fowler should uphold some degree of truthfulness in a profession that is often lauded as objective. Within the story itself, during the night where he was trapped in war-torn areas, he mused that "I thought how strange it was that men of my profession would make only two news-lines out of all these night", despite the horrors that he had witnessed with his own eyes (Greene 2004, 104). Nonetheless, Kerr (2006, 97) defends selective reporting and notes that Fowler's (and other reporters') "reporting of the colonial war in French Indochina is subject to censorship and he has been careful not to risk expulsion by filing news that would

displease the French authorities”. However, “in any case, war reporting, it seems, is a speech genre not always dependable for truthfulness”, Kerr (2006, 96–97) concludes. Although this seems like a plausible excuse for not being able to report the full truth, this nonetheless conflicts with taking pride in a position of objectivity when the reporting of events is done in a subjective manner, as suggested above.

This section has considered whether Fowler is a reliable narrator as well as what can be said of reporting. As suggested, reporting is a central aspect of the novel and Fowler is the mediator for all of the information that we are given on the events in the novel. Even though there is dialogue with other characters, the narration is recounted through Fowler’s perspective. For this reason, we must be aware that the information is potentially skewed. Nonetheless, this is arguably a good technique to invite us to look deeper into the dialogue and the cited motivations, to try to uncover the ethics surrounding the events and actions. As Booth (1983, 151–152) explains, an experienced reader is not unaware of this fact and “in fiction, as soon as we encounter an ‘I’, we are conscious of an experiencing mind whose views of experience will come between us and the event”. In effect, the moral analysis is through the lens of Fowler but a greater meaning can be cautiously teased out in careful analysis.

## 5. Analysis: Moral dilemmas of *The Quiet American*

In this section, I will use ethical theory and consider various moral dilemmas within the novel. The choices of which matters to discuss are not purely an objective task, and there are moral problems which some ethical theories would not consider problems at all. However, by using the ethical theories it is possible to move closer to a more objective discussion of behaviors and actions within *The Quiet American* which may be considered either good or bad in an ethical sense.

As mentioned, the entire story is from the perspective of the first-person narrator, Fowler. When possible other character's voices are given a forum in the discussion. However, even when a character does state something this is also told through a lens. For this reason, the lack of agency should be noted and this should also be taken into consideration in the analysis. Nonetheless, no story is very engaging if we can be sure of everything and all the information is handed to us on a platter. Therefore, the task of analyzing the moral dilemmas is still very much relevant to uncovering a deeper meaning, even if it requires reading between the lines.

### 5.1 Lying

"I felt an unreasoning dislike of telling more lies than were needed", considered Fowler (Greene 2004, 173).

It has already been established that Fowler does not always tell the truth, as he himself admits in the quote above. Moreover, the quote could also be conceived as humorous and it downplays the seriousness of the act of lying – perhaps ironically as a mode of distance in accordance with Booth. This provides emphatic effect due to the seriousness that ought to be associated with a lie, especially when it pertains to the actions leading up to Pyle's murder. Either way, we can assume

that Fowler would not be a good Kantian since he does not appear unsettled by the fact he tells lies and he clearly seems to believe that it is permissible to tell lies in some circumstances. Then again, Kant's Categorical Imperative unequivocally forbids lying because "promises would cease to have any force" and "the institution of promise-keeping would be destroyed" if people lied (Grassian 1992, 91). Thus, lying cannot be converted into a universal principle and on that basis, it is morally wrong.

MacIntyre (1994 216) explains that lying often has different degrees of severity associated with it depending on the philosophy used, especially when considering if one had the intention to deceive in the first place. In cases where a lie can be permissible in some situations (such as for a greater good in utilitarianism) "an intention to deceive is an essential defining property of a lie, and the wrongness of lies is the same as that of other acts of deception" while those that are against lying in all circumstances define a lie as "an intention to assert what is false", which is wrong by most normative accounts (MacIntyre 1994, 316). However, some philosophers do not even require explicit intention to deceive. MacIntyre (1994, 316) identifies primary considerations in connection to lying: the definition of a lie, the nature of lying, and the justification of a lie. He clarifies that these discussions vary in accordance with the position of the moral philosophy on lying. As mentioned, in Kantian ethics the definition of a lie and nature of a lie can be discussed, however, there is no justification. Yet, with utilitarianism, ethical egoism, and ethical relativism there is more room for maneuvering.

Returning to lies within *The Quiet American*, at the very beginning of the book the reader is made aware of deception. As Fowler and Phuong are waiting for the arrival of Pyle, Fowler wonders why Pyle has not been in contact but soon realizes that he has been murdered. "I told myself, he might be detained for some reason...but surely in that case he would have

telephoned” (Greene 2004, 3). So, Fowler was well-aware that Pyle would not be returning and he quickly presumed that he was most likely dead, yet he still comforted Phuong assuring her that nothing was wrong. “It’s clear as daylight. Pyle knows I smoke a few pipes before bed, and he doesn’t want to disturb me”, Fowler said, adding that “he’ll be around in the morning” (Greene 2004, 5). In the meantime, Fowler was privately thinking that “Pyle had diminished”, even though he assured Phuong that everything is as normal. Clearly, this is a lie because even though it might have taken a moment of deliberation, Fowler was certain that Pyle was dead and attempted to deceive Phuong.

Additionally, Fowler’s tone is different here than elsewhere in the story and this seems revealing in its awkwardness particularly in the use of “clear as daylight” and the upbeat nature of the remark. Typically, as shown through much of the dialogue from this jaded reporter, a more natural way of speaking would be more sarcastic or matter-of-fact and thus it begs the question whether he wanted Phuong to detect the lie through picking up on something off in his tone, as preparation for the news that would inevitably arrive – Pyle has been murdered.

Another example of lying in *The Quiet American* can be seen in Fowler’s lying by omission or failure to tell relevant facts to Phuong. Fowler decides not to tell Phuong that he has been relocated back to England and he will be leaving his life and her behind in Asia. He expressed regarding his imminent departure, that “there was no point in telling Phuong” because it “would be to poison the few months we had left with quarrels and tears” (Greene 2004, 63). He further explained that he would not even make the necessary travel arrangements until last moment, and thus further conceal the truth for she might have “a relation in the immigration-office” which would potentially reveal that he is leaving the country (Greene 2004, 63).

He not only consciously withholds information in this situation, but he also justifies this action (because it would likely result in unpleasant feelings) and he maintains his secrecy by attempting to safeguard this undisclosed information. As explained previously, according to Kant, lying provides a very impractical basis for a universal principle and Fowler is acting in a manner which cannot be universalized and this is morally wrong. Although Fowler justifies this behavior by wanting to avoid quarrels and tears, this normative perspective is not concerned with the motivation to avoid certain consequences but instead, the act itself.

Another moral philosophy can approach Fowler's dilemma of lying with a dissimilar result. For instance, we can approach Fowler's lie through utilitarianism. As "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness" and "wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness" (Mill 1992, 283), in avoidance of quarrels and tears there is a promotion of happiness or at least, the avoidance of unhappiness. Thus, the dodging of these confrontations is arguably desirable because it has a positive consequence in that Fowler and Phuong are happier in the short-term than if he did not lie. So by means of lying, Fowler cultivates a situation in which there is an avoidance of negativity. Based upon these facts, Fowler is morally correct in his choice to lie, or at least justified. After his lie, both he and Phuong are happy, or at the very least, more happy than unhappy. As a result, there is the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" (Hospers 1990, 354).

Yet, we can continue on this line by wondering how long-lasting is this happiness? And who actually truly benefits from avoiding these tears and quarrels since Phuong inevitably will have to face his departure, and likely shed even more tears from being deceived and lied to? In the end, finding out later would bring her more distress and the only one really benefiting is Fowler himself. So, it appears as if his main concern was to retain the opportune situation for his

own benefit, that of having Phuong for his needs. After all, if she were sad or angry upon finding out about his departure, she might not be in a mindset that would be beneficial for Fowler. He himself stated that her needs are not as important to him as his own, and it is of primary importance to keep her around (Greene 2004, 123). Moreover, Fowler supposed that in keeping her content “she won’t run away from home” which is convenient and “very secure” for an “aging man” like himself (Greene 2004, 95). Therefore, the utilitarian greatest happiness does not apply very well since it appears that the purpose of the lie was not on the basis of happiness for the greatest number of people and it is likely that the hurt from being deceived will cause Phuong more pain in the long term.

In light of Fowler’s motivations, ethical egoism fits well. His motivations appear to hinge on his own comfort and so there is a shift from thinking of the well-being of others to directing that energy into fulfilling his own personal contentment. However, it is important to note that there are other factors that should be taken into consideration for the ethical egoist. As Hospers (1990, 351) points out that it is “selfishness” to just act however you wish “at the expense of the interest of other people” and that is not completely accurate in a “self-interest” perspective, which is much more benign. Moreover, the egoist must weigh not only the short-term benefits of an action, but also the long-term benefits of an action (Hospers 1990, 351). From Hospers’s perspective, Fowler is not within the bounds of ethical egoism. Not only is he making choices “at the expense” of others, he is also short-sighted in his aims which do not justify acting in that manner when considering benefits in the long-term.

Returning to Fowler’s quip about not believing in telling more lies than were necessary, the irony could hold other meanings as well (Greene 2004, 173). Fowler also stated that “perhaps truth and humility go together; so many lies come from our own pride” (Greene 2004, 113). He

explained how he admired his assistant Dominguez and the air of integrity that he displayed. “All that you encountered in daily contact with him was gentleness and humility and an absolute love of truth” (Greene 2004 113). Moreover, Fowler even credited him for helping him be more honest and in returning to the idea of him as a reporter, “withstand” covering reports “of someone else which I knew to be untrue” despite strong pressure from his home office in England (Greene 2004, 113). It is plausible that Fowler jokes about the lies he tells, also in part, because he knows he is not as good of a person as others, such as Dominguez, in this example.

If Fowler himself is ashamed of lack of integrity on some level, then he is not furthering his benefit by lying in line with ethical egoism. Moreover, as discussed, many of his lies have negative consequences to others in the story, but they also seem to be difficult for Fowler himself on a psychological level. In effect, Fowler’s lies hurt everyone involved and result in more harm than expected and from this perspective, do not fit with a good utilitarian way of acting.

## **5.2 Fidelity and love**

Adultery is a key concern in *The Quiet American* as Fowler was involved with a woman that was not his wife, while his wife was back in England obstinate about granting him a divorce. Most normative traditions would deem adultery as immoral, including Christian ethics which has the “most famous example of normative ethics” in the Ten Commandments (Roth 2005, 1048). The Christian Bible’s Ten Commandments states explicitly: “You shall not commit adultery” (*NIV Women’s Devotional Bible*, Exodus 20:14). The Kantian tradition would also straightforwardly categorize adultery as wrong because it undermines the sanctity of marriage (such as in Catholicism as mentioned early), which is based on a principle of one man and one woman in a unique sexual partnership with only one another (in the most old-fashioned sense) and for this

reason, if everyone would engage in affairs, marriage would effectually lose its meaning and purpose.

Adultery is not so clear in utilitarianism. As mentioned earlier, this is a matter of the degree of happiness or unhappiness that results for the people affected. In the case of Fowler, he appears to benefit well from his affair with Phuong and enjoys the pleasures and comforts that he receives, especially when considering that his advancing age makes it difficult to chase other women and Fowler was terribly afraid of “old age, an editor’s chair, loneliness” (Greene 2004, 102). From an ethical relativist perspective, many conclusions could be drawn about adultery. For example, in some cultures marriage has different meaning or is a different institution all together. Also, marriage has diverse connotations for different individuals, and thus, it is not fair to say that having relations outside of a marriage is a moral wrong if the people involved do not see it in that sense.

There is no reason from an ethical egoist perspective that seems to indicate he should not enjoy this productive position – especially because he is candid about the affair and not hiding it from any party that might be concerned, so not further complicating this matter, in that sense, with lies or deception that often surround adultery. However, as mentioned earlier, it does seem that he appears to use his position of knowledge to the full extent, and selectively decide which information to relay to his wife and what to tell Phuong, so he is not necessarily fully honest to any party.

Returning to utilitarianism, it is unclear how Phuong fares as a result of the affair. Fowler makes it clear that he “can’t marry her” because his wife will not divorce him as “she’s High Church” (Greene 2004, 51). Then again, it is apparent that Phuong’s sister is very concerned

about Phuong's future prospects – and without a legitimate relationship, she is wasting her youth and forgoing a better or happier situation by being Fowler's mistress (Greene 2004, 51).

Moreover, the on-going affair may not only have a negative result in the present (delaying her chances of finding a better partnership) but it is clear that Fowler will do whatever he can to ensure she stays with him, as suggested previously. So, the potential for unhappiness is further reaching than even the near future, and arguably, the relationship could potentially impede her entire life's goals.

In terms of how he treats his lover, Fowler seems to be continuing on a selfish path. Not only did he want to keep his lover to himself, he explained that he would do so “at any cost to her” (Greene 2004, 123). As previously discussed, this is hard to classify in an ethical egoist perspective since most practitioners of this tradition draw the line somewhere – at some degree of harm. This stance is probably best explained by the following quote from an interview with Peter Singer, who states (Voorhoeve 2009, 61):

We will often be happier and lead more fulfilled lives if we do not only care about our own happiness or personal fulfillment. This is the ancient ‘paradox of hedonism’: in order to lead a happy life, you often need to develop attachments to things other than your own happiness [and] the promotion of others' well-being.

In other words, it is usually not productive for one's own happiness to consistently remain disconnected to those around and act in a manner that disregards other people. Here, in the case of Fowler, he should take Phuong into greater consideration. As, for example, if Phuong would become chronically unhappy, then it would be difficult for him to maintain his own happiness. Interestingly, Singer uses the word attachments which are something that Fowler prides himself on supposedly not having, as discussed earlier that he insists he is “not involved” (Greene 2004, 20).

Pyle questioned the very meaning of the relationship and told Fowler that the fact he is conducting himself so uncaringly indicates that what he feels for Phuong “is not love”. (Greene 2004, 123) In a sense, Pyle is making a moral judgment on Fowler by equating care for others with love. If Fowler does not have love for Phuong, and he is merely using her for his physical pleasures, then his motivations are morally wrong. Fowler however, retorted and explained that “perhaps it’s not your way of love” (Greene 2004, 123). Upon first glance, it seems that Fowler could be indicating a more profound or less understood version of love. In terms of ethical relativism, love is not necessarily a monolithic entity, but instead, can embody a multitude of perspectives. In this sense, no one should be in a position to tell another that their version of love is not legitimate. When Fowler considered the issue in dialogue with himself earlier, (which was also during a discussion with Pyle about love) and he concluded (Greene 2004, 103):

To be in love is to see yourself as someone else sees you, it is to be in love with the falsified and exalted image of yourself. In love we are incapable of honor – the courageous act is no more than playing a part to an audience of two.

Thus, Pyle’s suggestion that Fowler is acting selfishly, instead of out of a profound love for another person, seems to be viable since Fowler’s very definition of love begins and ends with the self. Nonetheless, as mentioned with relativism, different definitions of love should be accepted and it is wrong to try to force an ultimate rule of love.

Yet, Fowler’s primary motivations fall well in line with ethical egoism. Fowler said (Greene 2004, 105):

I know myself, and I know the depth of my selfishness. I cannot be at ease (and to be at ease is my chief wish) if someone else is in pain, visibly or audibly or tactually. Sometimes this is mistaken by the innocent for unselfishness, when all I am doing is sacrificing a small good – in this case postponement in attending to my hurt – for the sake of a far greater good, a peace of mind when I need think only of myself.

However, arguably, altruistic acts can be primarily selfishly motivated, but the resulting good still counts as a good for other people. When thinking of it from that perspective, it is would be unclear whether a utilitarian would accept the greater good over the selfish motivation. Most likely, because the consequences are what matter in the end, an act that begins selfishly but results in a greater good would be conceived as good at its conclusion.

### **5.3 Stupidity**

In what way could stupidity be morally wrong? Fowler characterizes Pyle as both ignorant and also dangerous because “innocence is like the dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm” (Greene 2004, 29). More than that, Pyle lacks basic realizations of the consequences, or potential consequences, that his actions may cause. For example, Fowler worried that Pyle “was incapable of imagining the pain or danger to himself” in the same way “he was incapable of conceiving pain he might cause to others” (Greene 2004, 53). Therefore, Pyle was regarded as incapable of utilitarianism according to Fowler’s assessment of his cognitive abilities, because a prerequisite of utilitarianism is the ability or good sense to be able to consider the consequences of an action. Arguably, if he was incompetent in knowing what harm his actions could cause to himself or others, it would be a very difficult stretch for him to be capable of being good consequentialist since he could not grasp these consequences for himself or the consequences for others.

However, Pyle was arguably a good Kantian because he clung tightly to his principles or duties as he understood them. He believed deeply in York Harding, and acted accordingly with even Fowler stating that “I liked his loyalty to York Harding” (Greene 2004, 16). His transparent and steadfast commitment, for example, would be a good trait to form a maxim of universalizable behavior. Furthermore, the idea of ignorance does vary from society to society in

light of ethical relativism. Fowler's old-world view of what constitutes as stupidity would not necessarily be seen as such by another American in the region who shared Pyle's values.

Furthermore, in the story, it does not seem the Phuong has a negative opinion of Pyle. This is an interesting point, because it is her country that he is in. Yet, it could also be argued that she simply does not understand the depth of his involvements due language constraints, as suggested earlier. Moreover, Fowler characterized Phuong as "childish" because according to his view, the Vietnamese "hate you for a blow or an injustice" yet are content with small acts of "kindness" and "security" (Greene 2004, 95). If one would believe Fowler, then Phuong could not dislike Pyle because he has only showed her kindness (as far as we know) and she is not capable of seeing a larger picture. Superficially, this seems like an understanding perspective of different cultures. However, an ethical relativist might have problems with the fact that Fowler dictates what Phuong supposedly believes. For this reason, it seems he is only giving a stereotypical account which may only be superficially culturally sensitive, while not giving Phuong agency or credit for being a complex human being with complex emotions that may not be simply written off as her appreciating comfort.

In returning to Pyle, as presented earlier, Fowler explained that Pyle was a polite man and "was very meticulous about small courtesies" (Greene 2004, 3). This trait could be seen positive social behavior if we consider how the converse, being rude, could be insulting or disrespectful to people around and thus, if we think of utilitarianism, for the most part being polite would cause the greatest amount of happiness. Furthermore, Pyle "was quiet, he seemed modest" and "he was very, very serious...but he criticized nobody" (Greene 2004, 15). Various connotations comes with the adjectives used to describe Fowler – for example, being quiet may indicate a lack of disruption to others, and being modest also does not generally cause annoyance or harm to

others. Though, when paired with “he criticized nobody”, a problem is revealed. Pyle seems to have the shallow traits of a good man but he lacks a deeper critical thought-process which could bring about a greater moral understanding. Pyle’s values seem to be in line with respectable duties or traits but these are only artificial principles and he arguable lacked a greater understanding of the world or people around. Namely, Pyle was unable to think critically about people and thus potentially unaware of key moral concerns.

Returning to the idea of being able to consider consequences of behavior, Pyle is clearly not very intelligent in this department. Toulmin (1986, 164) explains how people [should] have the available information for making a “moral decision” yet people are not consistently “reasonable”. Thus, although all the principles are available for properly making a moral decision, people are not always able to utilize them fully. In this case, it seems that Pyle is blinded by his duty-oriented principles (such as his adherence to York Harding and democracy) and for that reason, lacking a sense for the real world at large. That is to say, the world is a mosaic of different ways of life and being too caught up with one’s own personal codes can result in impeding on other cultural realities, which would not be supported by the ethical relativist.

Furthermore, if Pyle puts such a great weight upon shallow displays of goodness, but also lacks critical thought, he may not be equipped to make educated moral decisions. Fowler repeatedly describes Pyle with the use of the word innocent and that his first instinct was to protect Pyle from his own innocence. Fowler stated (Greene 2004, 29):

It never occurred to me that there was a greater need to protect myself. Innocence always calls mutely for protection when we would be so much wiser to guard ourselves against it: innocence is like the dumb leper who has lost his bell, wandering the world, meaning no harm.

The image of his innocence is only highlighted by repeat mentions of his sexual inexperience. For example, there is a glaring contrast between Pyle's innocence when he confesses to experienced Fowler that he's "never had a girl" and has not ever told anyone else this fact in a discussion on women and Fowler's long sexual history which involves dozens of lovers (Greene 2004, 93). Here, we can return to the clear distance that is presented in the story between Fowler, the old experienced journalist and Pyle, the naïve democrat.

Fowler was very concerned that Pyle was essentially going forward with a covert political agenda with his head full of ideas (which he had adopted in his politics) from a "library" which included: "*The Advance of Red China, The Challenge of Democracy, The Rôle of the West*" and "Congressional Reports" and a "history on the War in the Philippines" (Greene 2004, 20). This collection comprised York Harding's teachings, which greatly unnerved Fowler later as he grew distrusting of the "Third Force" concept that shaped Pyle's beliefs (Greene 2004, 17). However, as previously mentioned, initially Fowler "liked [Pyle's] loyalty to Harding" perhaps bearing the respect for a strong commitment that Pyle maintained to an ideology and was refreshed to find he did not possess the "immature cynicism" of the press (Greene 2004, 16). Nonetheless, in retrospect, he noted that "I might have saved us all a lot of trouble, even Pyle, if I had realized the direction of that indefatigable young brain" with his "fanatic gleam" and overzealous beliefs in dangerous thinkers like York Harding (Greene 2004, 17).

Yet, Pyle was willing to learn or at least listen to other perspectives. Fowler introduced Pyle to his version of the historical background of the conflicts in the region. He recited his typical spiel "explaining the situation in the north, in Tonkin, where the French in those days were hanging on to the delta of the Red River" and he continued to the present day by explaining that "'and now', I said, 'there's General Thé. He was the Caodist Chief of Staff, but he'd taken to

the hills to fight both sides, the French [and] the Communists” (Greene 2004, 16–17).

Remarkably, Fowler seemed to pick up on the fact that Pyle’s his political leanings would potentially result in problems, but he did not pick up on his own cynicism in describing the local conflicts. He said (Greene 2004, 17):

I was a record always turned on for the benefit of newcomers – the visiting Member of Parliament, the new British Minister. Sometimes I would wake up in the night saying, ‘take the case of the Caodaists’. Or the Hoa-Haos or the Binh Xuyen, all the private armies who sold their services for money or revenge.

Fowler failed to include himself in the group that adopts an immature cynicism to the local conflicts. He even described the situation in the north by saying “but you can rot comfortably in the damp in Hanoi. They don’t throw bombs there. God knows why. You could call it a regular war” (Greene 2004, 16). By depersonalizing the war but being unaware of doing so, he makes himself also seem rather naïve. He inadvertently revealed a morally problematic aspect with his ethical thinking, namely that he was not always self-aware. The danger here seems to be not his involvement like in the case of Pyle, but his unintentionally looking the other way to the atrocities at he reports on daily, except when they affect him directly.

Returning to the degree of stupidity that Pyle disputably embodies, it was not that Pyle was not educated. Instead, he was educated with the wrong theories like ideas of overzealous paternalistic democracy portrayed in “what the East needed”- mentality, including the idea of a mediator like a “Third Force” according to York Harding’s writings. After Pyle’s death, Fowler recalled (Greene 2004, 160):

Pyle came out here full of York Harding’s idea. Harding had been here once for a week on his way from Bangkok to Tokyo. Pyle made the mistake of putting his idea into practice. Harding wrote about a Third Force. Pyle formed one...he got mixed up.

Notably in this way, *The Quiet American* shows an almost prophetic vision on the future of the United States' involvement in Southeast Asia as depicted in the form of Alden Pyle. He serves as a stereotype of the “brash, ill-informed, self-confident, and courageous to the point of foolhardiness” American national (Bergonzi 2006, 146). But, he was additionally armed with plastic explosives and misguided political agendas.

Ronell (2002, 28) points out it is possible that “stupidity issues from an experiment in excess rather than from an experience of lack”. This may seem counterintuitive because often stupidity is associated with a lack rather than an excess of experience or knowledge. Ronell (2002, 28) cites Kant's example of an idea of stupidity where “one overstudies”, which seems to imply that they over-study to the extent that they go forward without true understanding and shoot past their mark. As mentioned, Pyle is not unschooled, quite the contrary, he was a graduate of Harvard (Greene 2004, 166). But, his problem arguably was that he read too much but lacked critical thought to question what he was reading.

Accordingly, is Pyle even stupid? He may be naïve to the point of being a danger to himself and perhaps others, but is this stupidity? In Ronell (2002, 29), ignorance is “not in itself contemptible” and it is a lesser stupidity that can perhaps be remedied with further knowledge and “holds out some hope”. In this sense, one could see Pyle as the innocent fool or the ignorant fool. He has tried too hard to be knowledgeable and is still very inexperienced in the world. Pyle could have perhaps grown out of it his youthful ignorance in time and become a smarter man and hence would potentially not hold such a risk to society. But, Pyle would never grow older or wiser since he got mixed up in the wrong situations, and he had already met an untimely death as a result. The question remains: Could Pyle's misguided ideas have been remedied? Could there

have been another way to save him or others from his stupidity? Pyle's death will be discussed further in the next section.

Returning to the idea of reasoning, in order to make good moral decisions, as Toulmin pointed out, one needs a good base for moral reasoning. Pyle is depicted as shallow and innocent. Fowler seems to be concluding that not only is Pyle unable to be morally reasonable but he is also morally dangerous. Fowler asserts a position of knowledge by his constant musings and his analysis of various situations. Thus is placing himself as a morally "reasonable" character. Hence, if Pyle is a simpleton and cannot reason properly and Fowler himself is a self-proclaimed intellectual then the resulting situation places Fowler in a superior position to make moral conclusions and judgments according to his own deductions.

Pyle, as described previously, is an immature and "innocent" character. But, if that is indeed the case, should Pyle be held responsible for his moral actions? Moreover, if Fowler is supposedly such an evenhanded and introspective character, should he be somehow held more accountable? Here the idea of justice comes into play. According to Hospers, justice is within the realm of ethics. Hospers (1990, 358) expresses how "justice means treating people as they deserve". He notes that it is "more important for people to be justly treated than for happiness to be maximized" (1990, 358).

Smart (1990, 412), a utilitarian scholar, expresses that the idea of "justice as a fundamental ethical concept" is not applicable to utilitarianism but nonetheless, how justice can be "a means to the utilitarian end". Yet, Hospers (1990, 358) asserts that it is a tricky situation because according to him, it is "more important for people to be justly treated than for happiness to be maximized". The reasoning is that a punishment should be given based on what a person

“deserves” and “not because others would be happier...seeing him [or her] punished.” (Hospers 1990, 358) Hospers (1990, 366) stresses the importance of the ethical inquiries into justice because it can serve as a base inquiry for the “intermixture of empirical facts...and moral principles”. In this way, whether justice was served can, in a sense, be a viable moral question.

Fowler asserted regarding Pyle that “he’ll always be innocent, you can’t blame the innocent, they are always guiltless” (Greene 2004, 15). As previously discussed, not only does Fowler consider Pyle innocent he also considers him ignorant of rational thought. Hospers (1990, 369) explains how “ignorance is one condition that often excuses a person from responsibility”. So if Pyle is indeed like the “leper” described earlier and he simply does not realize what kind of harm he is doing, should he be held responsible for his destructive actions? More specifically, should he have been killed for what he was involved with and was justice served?

#### **5.4 Murder**

Murder, or killing another person, is often considered to be a serious moral indiscretion.

According to McMahan (2002, 189):

There is no moral belief that is more universal, stable, and unquestioned, both across different societies and throughout history, than the belief that killing people is normally wrong.

The distinction is whether it is *always* wrong or *normally* wrong. In the case of Kant, killing a person or murder is wrong without exception, while utilitarianism and ethical egoism may grant some exceptions. Ethical relativism also typically classifies murder as morally wrong, however this tradition also grants that sometimes there are extraordinary circumstances where it is justified, depending on the context or society.

In *The Quiet American*, Fowler is, at the very least, an accomplice in Pyle's murder, and arguably, he single-handedly orchestrated the idea of killing Pyle and facilitated this act. After finding out how deep Pyle was involved in the senseless deaths, he decided to go see the man that tipped him off in the first place that Pyle might have some shady dealings with explosives. He visited Monsieur Heng to plot a course of action to stop Pyle. "You really want Mr Pyle stopped, Mr Fowler?", Heng questioned in a leading manner (Greene 2004, 165). Fowler did not believe the police would "dare to touch an American", so he became open to other suggestions from Heng (Greene 2004, 166). Heng told him to invite Pyle to meet him at a prearranged location at a certain time, to "talk undisturbed" (Greene 2004, 166). It was implied that Pyle would likely not make it alive from that situation, but Fowler chose "to take sides" and with only some hesitation, he decidedly lured Pyle to his almost-certain death (Greene 2004, 166).

Fowler had many chances to change his mind on the course of events that would occur, should he stick with the plan. As he went to dinner the night of Pyle's set-up, the waiter asked, "A table for one?", and he considered for a moment what he would have to "answer" in the future about Pyle's murder, and responded "for one" (Greene 2004, 174). He revealed his understanding that Pyle would be killed before he finished his dinner when he thought that "it was almost as though I had said aloud that Pyle was dead" (Greene 2004, 174).

The idea of justice is prevalent in the events leading up to Pyle's murder. According to Fowler, "all you can do is control them or eliminate them. Innocence is a kind of insanity" and very dangerous as a result (Greene 2004, 155). Because Pyle was involved in needless violence and we can presume further expected deaths of civilians if his activities continue, then we can posit that by removing Pyle from the equation, atrocities are also thus avoided or prevented. In

this sense, a greater good has occurred by stopping Pyle and his deeds, which suits the utilitarian spirit of considering the good for the greatest number of people.

Nonetheless, it is not clear if Pyle is actually a key player in the events, especially given the rather flat and stereotypical descriptions of the man himself. It is repeatedly stressed that he is indeed a good representative of a typical American and for that reason we can safely assume that there are probably many more just like him, if we hold that a stereotype at least has some basis in a cultural reality. Yet, Fowler insists that “didn’t Pyle always go his own way?” after his death, in contemplating his own guilt for Pyle’s murder (Greene 2004, 10). Yet, this is a weak argument which seems that Fowler is trying to convince himself that Pyle alone is responsible for his actions. Part of the reason for this may be his meeting with Heng before plotting to have Pyle stopped. Heng asserted that he “has the impression Pyle is very much his own master”, yet we have little reason to believe that he is acting purely on his own accord, and this may have been a technique to give Fowler an extra nudge in finding murdering Pyle a just and necessary act (Greene 2004, 165). For that reason, Pyle alone is responsible for his own death since he was not only involved, but profoundly involved, according to Fowler’s mentality. However, this is problematic as it is quite convenient to place all of the violence on Pyle’s shoulders, especially when we consider how he was not characterized as a leader, but more as a follower that does what he is told, in the same manner as his blind appreciation for York Harding discussed previously.

Consequently, killing Pyle does not necessarily actual stop any bad events or further violence from occurring, at the most, it could be simply delaying the inevitable conflicts or problems with the growing involvement of the United States in the region. Fowler notes that “this was a land of rebellious barons. It was like Europe in the Middle Ages. But what were the

Americans doing here? Columbus had not yet discovered their country” (Greene 2004, 29). Thus, the United States’ presence was clearly increasing in the region in the backdrop of an unstable political atmosphere, and so it simply could not have been, in a logical sense, a one-man show with Pyle and his murderous meddling. Furthermore, returning to the idea of reporting, in considering what type of death notification to write of Pyle’s death, Fowler stated (Greene 2004, 13):

Not that Pyle was very important. It wouldn’t have done to cable the details of his true career, that before he died he had been responsible for at least fifty deaths, for it would have damaged Anglo-American relations.

This supports the idea that Pyle is insignificant, and not worthy of potentially souring international relations in the growing conflict. This is curious because it seems that Fowler is now taking a step back in his engagement, since Pyle is dead he is more disinterested in politics than before. The idea of politics will be returned to in the section on nation.

It is clear, however, that Pyle had a role in the civilian deaths in the square, yet as discussed, he was most likely following orders from some superiors in the United States. The implication that he was not answering to a boss as such does not hold that he was not representing some greater national or military agenda. There are no indications that he was a rogue militant, especially since he was strongly attached to reputable American organizations. Moreover, even though he did supply the bombs to General Thé, his shock at the aftermath speaks well for his innocence even as a central player in the chain of events. He did not anticipate the civilian deaths and “looked white and beaten and ready to faint” after the civilian deaths were apparent in the bombing (Greene 2004, 155). Even Fowler noted, “he’ll always be innocent” and you cannot blame them (Green 2004, 155). From this perspective, it is hard to see

him as fully responsible for this, at least to the degree that he should be murdered for his involvement.

If this holds true that he is only one piece of the puzzle and quite replaceable, then utilitarianism would not hold. His death would cause grief and would not stop any future deaths from military meddling of the United States. There is only one person that is happier as a fact that Pyle is gone, and that would be Fowler. Again, this brings to mind that Pyle's murder mostly suits the purpose of solving many problems for Fowler (for example, removing the competitor in gaining Phuong's romantic favor) and thus is ethically egoist in nature, if justified at all. Fowler clearly seemed to benefit from Pyle's death and he expressed that "my tension was over. Pyle had diminished" (Greene 2004, 5). Yet, if we return to Fowler's motivations we recall that he explained "to be at ease is my chief wish" and his actions are for that purpose. If he admits his tension was over as Pyle was dead, then he is inadvertently admitting that he had him killed primarily for his own benefit.

Moreover, initially Fowler tolerated the fact that he knew Pyle was involved in explosives. He explained that "let him play harmlessly with plastic molds: it might keep his mind off Phuong" (Greene 2004, 135). The above conclusion was based on the first explosion (that we know of) in which Fowler knows that Pyle was responsible. This event occurred in Saigon, and it involved rigged bicycle pumps that resulted in "ten explosions, six people slightly injured" but it was according to Fowler, "quite trivial" (Greene 2004, 134). Here we can see a clear moral dilemma, firstly, who is Fowler to say it was trivial? If there was injury and loss of property and more than that, a terrorist act – why is it not important? The reason seems to be as quoted above, as he believes that importing explosives and igniting terror functions as a hobby of sorts for Pyle to remain too occupied to be a sexual rival in connection to Phuong. We plainly see the

selfishness of this perspective, especially as we know that Fowler is not naïve – he must understand that nothing good will result out of this activity. More than that, is threat to other people’s lives (through bombings) a worthy risk in securing a mistress to be your own? Only when people perish and he sees this firsthand, mostly pondering that it could have been Phuong, does he see a problem and deem murder as the only solution (Greene 2004, 153).

If we move away from the idea of murder, and just assess Pyle’s death, we can still undertake some moral considerations. For example, McMahan (2002, 129) states that in assessing the goodness or badness for death, we can only do this “by comparison with what it excludes”. Therefore, if “the life that the person would in fact have in the absence of death would be bad” then “it seems that the death must be good”, with the converse also holding to be true (McMahan 2002, 129). Consequently, the fact the Pyle dies is bad in the sense that he misses out on a long life, since he was a young man, and he is unable to marry Phuong, which would be for her benefit in terms of marriage and future family prospects.

## **5.5 Nation**

The idea of nation will be discussed as it proves an important aspect of characterization as well as justification for behavior within a moral framework. Despite the setting in Vietnam, the Vietnamese influence is the weakest facet of the story. Donaghy (1986, 69) wonders if “so shadowy is Phuong that one suspects Greene of intending this vagueness for allegorical purposes”. Her nebulous existence only highlights the fact that “we hear the voices and feel the presence of England, France and the United States, but the Vietnamese voice and presence fades far into the background” (Donaghy 1986, 69). The voices of the other nations are not all represented equally, however. The French presence could be compared to Catholicism, which is an ever-present feature but somehow lacking a deeper resolve in the narrative. The French

language is of course present in communications between Fowler and Phuong and other interactions, but perhaps because the chief language of *The Quiet American* is English, the novel does not really encompass a strong feeling of a Francophone nation.

Furthermore, most of the communication that takes place in French is surprisingly in some direct connection to Pyle. For example, Fowler told Phuong in French that he noticed her waiting by the window for Pyle when Pyle had not returned (Greene 2004, 3). Of course, Pyle was already dead which he soon revealed to Phuong in French: “Pyle est mort. Assassiné”, explained Fowler (Greene 2004, 13). Otherwise, there are few examples of full sentences in French, save for the only direct communication that we experience between Phuong and Pyle resulting in a confused Phuong telling Pyle that “Je ne comprends pas” or “I do not understand” (Greene 2004, 125). And also, Pyle grossly mispronounced French in saying “I shall call out ‘Je suis Frongçais’” to indicate that he is not an enemy (Greene 2004, 104). Because it should be said *Français*, it seems abundantly clear that Pyle is indeed a newcomer to the region and not one of the old colonial peoples, who would know how to pronounce such a simple French word.

Perhaps both the lack of the French communication and the growing presence of the Americans who (as demonstrated by Pyle above) do not speak the language, show the lessening presence of the French as a whole. A similar feeling can be found in French characters, such as the police officer Vigot half-heartedly investigating Pyle’s murder but just going through the motions. Vigot admitted that he was not really searching for the killer but “just making a report, that’s all” since Pyle’s death could just be written off as one of the many deaths in “an act of war” and there are simply too many possibilities of what the full story entailed (Greene 2004, 20). This also connects with the idea of reporting mentioned earlier, where it seems that reporting is a task rather than a duty. In other words, officials seem to report as they see fit

without reaching for a greater depth of coverage. In the case of Pyle's murder, because it could have been any number of people, it was simply too much trouble for Vigot to get too deep into.

In terms of Pyle being American, Fowler saw Pyle's nationality a disadvantage and was not particularly fond of the "damned Yankee" nationality (Greene 2004, 12). He stated to Pyle that: "I wish sometimes you had a few bad motives, you might understand a little more about human beings. And that applies to your country too (Greene 2004, 124). Fowler's impression of Pyle indicates "some of the old colonial power's bilious resentment of the arriviste hegemon, and something else of the scorn of the old hand for the metropolitan theorist" (Kerr 2006, 97). Fowler described himself as possessing a greater understanding due in part to his old colonial sensibilities, as he is an Englishman. He liked to think that he had a greater perspective based on his nation's experience regarding colonial conflict and expansionistic political action. He lectured Pyle that "we are the old colonial peoples" and thus "we've learnt a bit of reality, we've learned not to play with matches" (Greene 2004, 149). However, he was concerned that Pyle as an American has not learned this lesson, and will become involved and as a result get hurt, and hurt others. Fowler explicitly warned Pyle against his brand of "democracy and the responsibilities of the West" (Greene 2004, 10). Fowler, in this case, is upholding a perspective of non-intervention. He takes an ethical relativist stance in believing that Pyle (or his nation) has no right to tell Vietnam how to conduct their affairs. Particularly when thinking of how many nations were already involved in the region, Fowler takes a stand of hands-off policies being in the best interest for the nation.

Fowler was not the only person that thought positively of his English nationality in political terms. Returning to Heng, the Chinese business owner that was involved in Pyle's disappearance, categorized Fowler by his nationality and stated that "you are English. You are

neutral” (Greene 2004, 120). However, it is unclear why he would believe Fowler was neutral, because Fowler was taking a side by his very presence in rather shady meetings with Heng. Additionally, because they were also co-conspirators in ridding the country of Pyle, they both were in a place that was clearly antagonistic to the American dealings. Perhaps it is feasible that Heng saw Fowler as a lesser evil when compared to the other nationals in the region and was indeed comforted by both his Englishness and was interested in his position which was in close proximity to Pyle.

Even so, it does not appear that Heng is so concerned with innocent loss of life; rather he was very concerned that his people would be blamed for the explosions (Greene 2004, 165). In other words, Heng had a position in the country which he rightfully sought to maintain and safeguard his own interests, well in line with ethical egoism, and he wanted to make sure that the heat from the loss of life would not negatively affect him or his people.

Nonetheless, Fowler continually insisted that he was not involved in any of the region’s war, which becomes even more apparent when Pyle and Fowler are stuck in a conflict-torn region and their lives were at great risk. Fowler said to Pyle as they were hiding out in a tower, hoping that an enemy does not storm their position, that “I don’t know what I’m talking politics for. They don’t interest me and I’m a reporter. I’m not engagé” (Greene 2004, 88). Pyle, however, was skeptical of Fowler’s supposed insights into himself and asked: “Aren’t you?” (Greene 2004, 88). Fowler dismissed Pyle’s accusation and justified his long discussion on politics by chalking it up to something “for the sake of argument...to pass this bloody night” while still maintaining that “I don’t take sides. I’ll still be reporting, whoever wins” (Greene 2004, 88). Yet, Fowler also realized that the people involved in the warfare that night would not be overly concerned with his opinion on whether or not he is involved in the conflict, they will

likely kill him for being in the wrong place either way (Greene 2004, 98). Moreover, returning to the idea of reporting, Fowler conveniently admits to being a jaded reporter yet at the same time tries to hide behind the objectivity of the profession by claiming he is “not engagé”, as quoted above. Also by using French here, an additional distance is shown between the Americans and Fowler, who much more comfortably sits with the old colonials and the French nationals in the region.

The national argument seems to have some bearing, as Fowler genuinely appears to have a strong distaste in what he considers representative of America. Yet, he himself also seems to realize this this might be a personal vendetta as well (Greene 2004, 132):

I began – almost unconsciously – to run down everything that was American. My conversation was full of the poverty of American literature, the scandals of American politics, the beastliness of American children. It was though she was being taken away from me by a nation rather than by a man. Nothing that America could do was right. I became a bore on the subject of America, even with my French friends who were ready enough to share my antipathies.

Here again we see how Pyle the man is synonymous with the nation of the United States. This is a good place to question Fowler’s reasonability again, although he seems to be aware that he is merging the concept of Pyle and his nation, he still does not seem to be able to stop. Ethically speaking, it appears that Fowler’s motivations are very affectively oriented. In other words, it is difficult to decide to what degree his emotions are clouding his moral judgement. Vigot even pondered whether Pyle’s death was “a simple case of jealousy”, which made apparent reference to Fowler’s desire to guard Phuong as his own (Greene 2004, 19). Nonetheless, Vigot does support Fowler’s perspective that Pyle’s politics were “doing a lot of harm” (Greene 2004, 11). From this quote we can see that Fowler’s view is not unique in that Pyle’s actions, in the name of the United States, are morally problematic. Yet, as in the tirade above, Fowler does seem to lose

sight of reason and goes forward based on pure emotion. Even at the inquiry into Pyle's death, Fowler has to repeat to yet again that "I'm not involved" to Vigot (Greene 2004, 20). Despite his insistence, it is clear that he is indeed emotionally involved.

In continuing with the Anti-American sentiment, Fowler was very cynical of Pyle's beliefs in "democracy and the responsibilities of the West" which were commonly accepted as typical American ideas (Greene 2004, 10). Pyle had great ambition for his role in the east with which he sought "to do good", but as Fowler pessimistically added, Pyle's good was "not to any individual person but to a country, a continent, a world." (Greene 2004, 10) This idealism of democracy and Western responsibility can triumph or fall short in utilitarianism, mostly from the perspective one takes. In Pyle's view, the war-torn region required the aid of an outside force, the Third Force, and this would help reduce the problems in the region and eventually lead to a peaceful resolution. On the one hand, if one considers the risks if that goes wrong, meddling in an already volatile situation can cause the polar opposite to occur and just lead to more disarray and even deaths. On the other hand, democracy in its purest form, does stand up well to Kant's Categorical Imperative, because when democracy works, most people can attest that it serves to provide a good universal maxim and is an improvement over colonialism or budding communism. Yet, for that matter, communism also stands up well to the Categorical Imperative when it works, as in theory.

I have discussed various moral dilemmas in *The Quiet American* through the lens of ethical philosophy. One of the key considerations has been Fowler's consistent lying to other characters in the novel. It is unclear to what degree that he deceives us (as a narrator), however all of his comments are suspect since he freely admits deception at many turns. From the perspective of ethics, lying can be considered either a moral wrong or sometimes morally

justifiable depending on which philosophy is used. The themes of fidelity and love, and stupidity were also considered in terms of the story, and how these matters provided places for moral tension.

Because the story hinged on the untimely death of Pyle, which we learn is due to murder, murder or killing is another moral problem. However, in order to discuss murder it was important to also discuss the circumstances surrounding his death and the idea of death itself. As is consistent with many other moral dilemmas in this work, Kant forbids murder absolutely, yet other ethical theories at least allow some room for discussion. Finally, the idea of nation was presented. The nationalities of each character and characteristics or stereotypes that can be associated with each nation played a large role in the narrative. These national identities also connected to ideas of how to live and how to act, which was considered in a moral framework.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is a truly difficult task to apply moral theory in its entirety, while doing justice to the idiosyncrasies of each philosophy. It is no wonder that a scholar could devote a lifetime to debating just one facet of ethics. This is not, of course, because of the lack of discussion or the lack of theories. Instead, the difficulty arises from the plethora of ethical theories and the complicated or conflicting natures of the philosophies themselves.

The second difficulty arises in the nature of the narrative itself. Because the story is told by a first-person narrator, who is also a central character, this does affect the perspective greatly. It would be interesting to have the story related through another character and see if that affects the moral analysis. As shown in the various debates on chosen moral problems in the book, it is apparent that conflicting interpretations on the plot, characters, motives and so forth are possible in many places, even with a one-person account. It is presented that it is possible to provide a moral judgment or sketch of the novel through ethics, and arguably, the debate that could erupt simply goes to show how interesting this journey can be.

As discussed, *The Quiet American* has been relinquished to a position of a side note, or even in some cases, literally a footnote. Nonetheless, this story was rich enough to be featured as two major motion pictures – 1958 and 2002, and one can argue that it is not for the hot love affair (which is rather cold) or the fast-paced war drama (which is under-reported). Indeed it was for the same reason that this work was undertaken – it is filled with the uneasiness of problematic moral dilemmas.

None of the characters themselves fit comfortably into categories of good or bad, right or wrong and these characters do offer themselves beautifully to moral appraisal. Even through a

pain-staking analysis of plot turns and character actions, it is hard to be satisfied with the conclusions. This is true partially because we have to rely on Fowler for the account of every action and each person's motivation. However, his perspective should not be pushed aside since it still gives a lot of information in consideration of the ethical content.

Interestingly, although the idea of evil is perhaps buried within this discourse, it was not overtly discussed. Part of this is somewhat accidental, since many scholars on morality and literature do make reference to good versus evil. However, more than that, it did not seem appropriate to discuss such an extreme as evil because the exploration of moral dilemmas did reveal shades of grey where it would be a stretch to refer to any of the characters as distinctly good or evil. This is in accordance with Zadie Smith's introduction to Greene, as mentioned earlier. The characters really appear to fail by degrees, while some actions are worse than others perhaps, but somehow there is a dimension of sympathy for nearly all of the characters that is difficult to escape – even Pyle with his innocent malevolence or Fowler with his reasonable murder or Phuong who seems content ending up with whomever wins at the end, no matter how.

This work has endeavored to prove that applying ethical philosophy and considering ethical propositions as tools in analyzing *The Quiet American* is feasible. It should be actively considered in today's literary criticism that ethics is ever-present and embedded within literature and the reader. The main question is: What does one do with this ethical knowledge? I suggest that when a novel invites moral appraisal, it is only fitting to see where ethical inquiry leads. I hesitate to elevate ethics as the ultimate literary question, as some scholars like Nussbaum suggest, however, I would insist that ignoring ethics leaves some of the most interesting material in a good work of literature untouched.

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