EPISTEMIC MISUSE AND ABUSE
OF PICTORIAL CARICATURE

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Caricature is a parasitic art, which flourishes in rich soil.
In a perfect world it would perish.

—Ronald Searle[1]

In 1897, during the "golden age" of the editorial cartoon, New York political boss Thomas Platt spearheaded a campaign in the New York State Legislature to enact legislation banning cartoons from targeting public officials. Though ultimately unsuccessful, this anti-cartoon legislation inspired editorial cartoonist Homer Davenport to draw a cartoon entitled "No Honest Man Need Fear Cartoons" featuring a caricature of "Boss" Platt alongside one of "Boss" Tweed of Tammany Hall infamy. A similar legislative effort by the 1915 Alabama State Legislature was skewered in a Frank Spangler editorial cartoon depicting an Alabama legislator peering into the "Cartoon Mirror" and being startled by the grotesque, sinister-looking caricature reflected back.[2] Presumably, the operative idea behind both pieces is generally that (a) the editorial cartoon, principally via its employ of pictorial caricature, can inform its audience about the world much like its journalistic cousin, editorial writing, and specifically that (b) the corrupt should fear being caricatured in editorial cartoons because pictorial caricature can be revelatory about the nature of its subject, perhaps even on par with, or in a manner unavailable to, the printed word.

To be sure, caricature can be employed as a powerfully persuasive tool. However, this persuasive power flows not from caricature's capacity for providing penetrating insight into the nature of its subject but instead from its unique ability to exploit the powerful and pervasive cognitive biases of its audience. That is, caricature as a means of persuasion—in service to noble, heroic, repugnant, and vile ends alike—can be effectively employed only when its audience is less than ideally rational, specifically one replete with certain cognitive biases (e.g., certain confirmation biases in concert with certain caricature-elicited behavioral response biases).[3] Considering that no actual audience is in fact an ideally rational audience in concert with the standard and substantial role pictorial caricature plays in the editorial cartoon, perhaps, for both honest and dishonest alike, cartoons may well be a fearsome thing indeed.

This paper argues that the extent to which a pictorial depiction purporting to provide non-trivial epistemic access to some proposition about real-world states of affairs constitutively employs pictorial caricature in service to that epistemic uptake is the extent to which that depiction undermines

proper epistemic reception of its own uptake (e.g., beliefs so informed or acquired are to that extent unwarranted). Furthermore, any medium or genre substantially employing caricature (or standardly featuring or prescribing its employment) in service to some epistemic uptake is thereby to that extent an epistemically defective medium (e.g., beliefs informed by works specific to such media to that extent lack warrant). To illustrate this, this paper targets the putatively respected journalistic medium of the editorial cartoon. Given that the principal purpose of the editorial cartoon is to inform/instruct its audience about real-world states-of-affairs (typically of a political, social, or moral sort), insofar as the editorial cartoon standardly employs pictorial caricature in service to that end, the editorial cartoon is to that extent epistemically (if not also morally) defective.

In what follows, § 1 briefly sketches the background issues in depiction crucial both for the way in which § 2 frames the notion of pictorial caricature and the way in which § 3 motivates the worries that follow from employing caricature in service to some non-trivial epistemic end. Section 1 strives to characterize the discussion of these background issues in such a way so as to maximize their philosophical productivity while minimizing their philosophical tendentiousness, such that, though one may find not every assumption incontrovertible, nothing therein should be contentious enough to preclude one from being at least minimally receptive to the substantive claims and principal arguments made by § 2 and § 3. Given that this paper primarily concerns *handmade figurative pictorial depictions of actual human beings*, of which caricature is understood to be a subspecies, the account of pictorial depiction briefly and broadly sketched in § 1 and operatively employed thereafter should be considered relatively uncontroversial.

§ 1. Depiction

For the purposes herein, this paper assumes depiction to be representation in the *standard sense*. That is, it takes depiction *standardly* to involve an object, a subject, and an agent, where the object admits at least some baseline degree of resemblance to that subject in virtue of that object being the product of some set of conventionally established activities successfully performed by that agent with the intention that the product of those actions possess at least some baseline degree of resemblance to that subject. This standard sense should be seen as broadly applicable, having no allegiance to any particular theory of depiction, and able to be formatted to fit specific views (Abell 2005; Dilworth 2002; Hopkins 1995; Hyman 2000; Lopes 2005; Peacocke 1987; Wollheim 1998). So, while some theories claim neither resemblance nor intentions necessary for depiction (Newall 2006; Walton 2002), this paper neither defends nor endorses the necessity of resemblance or intention for depiction *simpliciter* but instead merely takes depiction to *standardly* involve resemblance and intention.[4] Of course, the notion of resemblance being necessary for understanding the form of depiction that is *caricature* is consistent with the position that no resemblance of any kind is necessary for all depiction. As such, the operative account of *caricature* herein being broadly resemblance-based shouldn't itself be a worry.[5]

This paper also assumes such depictions can be either realistic or unrealistic with respect to what they depict. Theories of pictorial realism abound no less than do theories of pictorial depiction itself (Lopes 1995, 2006; Hopkins 1995; Kulvicki 2006; Abell 2006, 2007, 2009; Chasid 2007).[6] For the purposes of this paper, however, the operative notion of pictorial realism herein concerns only the informative properties of pictures.[7]

A pictorial depiction (*qua picture*) is *realistic* to the extent that it accurately informs its au-

dience about the appearance of the subject it depicts, and a pictorial depiction (*qua picture*) is *unrealistic* to the extent that it is not realistic.[8]

Depictions as sources of (depictive) information can be said to be *epistemic transmitters* in that they transmit to their audiences certain relevant information about the appearance of their subjects.[9] More precisely,

> [a] *realistic* pictorial depiction of *F ceteris paribus* transmits (provides epistemic access to) relevant, non-trivial facts about *F*'s appearance.

> An *unrealistic* pictorial depiction of *F ceteris paribus* does not transmit (provide epistemic access to) relevant, non-trivial facts about *F*'s appearance.

From this, it follows that beliefs informed by *realistic* depictions to that extent have at least prima facie warrant, whereas beliefs informed by *unrealistic* depictions to that extent lack warrant.[10]

Of course, just as realistic depictions can range from the mundane (e.g., a driver's license photo) to high art (e.g., Canaletto's 1752 painting of Northumberland House), so too may the epistemic ends to which realistic depictions aim likewise vary, from the practical (e.g., the illustrations in the parts manual for a Sheldon 11-inch metal lathe) to the scientific (e.g., John White's 1585 watercolor of the male Atlantic Loggerhead tortoise) to the artistic (e.g., *Keith/Mezzotint* 1972, by Chuck Close). What matters is that in each case the realistic depiction transmits certain (relevant, non-trivial) information about its subject, such that, beliefs informed by such depictions (and *ceteris paribus* those subsequently licensed for inference) are at least prima facie warranted (e.g., that the driver has brown hair, that Keith wears glasses, that the front flippers of the male Atlantic loggerhead tortoise are taloned, that Northumberland House had such-and-such architectural features).

Similarly, just as unrealistic depictions can range from the mundane (e.g., photos taken in a novelty photo booth) to high art (e.g.,

Salvador Dali's 1944 *Dream Caused by the Flight of a Bee around a Pomegranate a Second before Awakening*), so too may the epistemic ends to which unrealistic depictions aim likewise vary, from the practical (e.g., an unscrupulous realtor's wide-angle photo of a Chelsea studio apartment) to the scientific (e.g., Ernest Haeckel's famous embryo drawings) to the artistic (e.g., Egon Schiele's *Self-Portrait* 1912). What matters is that in each case, the unrealistic depiction fails to transmit certain information about its subject, such that, beliefs informed by such depictions (and *ceteris paribus* those subsequently licensed for inference) are largely false or, even when true, are nevertheless to that extent unwarranted (e.g., that the studio apartment is spacious, that there is a high degree of relevant similarity between embryos of various species at the phylotypic stage, that elephants have long spindly legs, that Egon Schiele has strikingly angular features).

One needn't think depiction being unrealistic entails depiction being epistemically defective *simpliciter*. For example, some think Haeckel's embryo drawings, despite being unrealistic, nevertheless remain an *all-epistemic-things-considered* useful educational tool. That is, while their being unrealistic constitutes a *pro tanto* epistemic defect, there are epistemic virtues overriding this defect, such that, all epistemic things considered, Haeckel's embryo drawings turn out epistemically virtuous. Similarly, the mere fact that *Self-Portrait* unrealistically depicts Egon Schiele doesn't thereby entail that *Self-Portrait* is somehow defective (artistically or otherwise)—in fact, its unrealism looks to contribute to its artistic success. For *Self-Portrait*, being an artistic success doesn't require being an epistemic success (i.e., that it transmit or license for viewer export into belief true propositions about its real-world subject, at least beyond that trivially required by its being a self-portraiture). If one wants to know (have warranted, justified true beliefs

about) what Egon Schiele looks like, then one shouldn't consult *Self-Portrait* as in virtue of its unrealistically depicting Schiele, beliefs about Egon Schiele's appearance informed by *Self-Portrait* will be *ceteris paribus* to that extent unwarranted, unjustified, or outright false. By contrast, consider Chuck Close's *Keith/Mezzotint*. The fact that *Keith/Mezzotint* realistically depicts its subject (Keith Hollingworth) most certainly contributes to its artistic success as realistically depicting such a subject using only the laborious mezzotint process constitutes a monumental technical achievement. As such, for *Keith/Mezzotint*, being an artistic success looks in part to require being an epistemic success—that is, that it transmit or license for viewer export into belief true propositions about its real-world subject.[11]

That pictorial caricature unrealistically depicts its subject should be obvious. The truly novel aspect of caricature lies in its capacity, via certain behavioral response biases, to outperform even maximally realistic depictions with respect to satisfying certain fundamental cognitive goals (e.g., facilitating identification and response strength). For the ideally rational, caricature can be nothing more than a harmless though perhaps novel sort of unrealistic depiction (what herein is called *fairground caricature*). However, for the less than ideally rational (e.g., actual human beings), caricature can be employed to exploit to great effect certain cognitive biases such as the tendency to confirm, independent of their truth, pre-formed beliefs, attitudes, and judgments, and reinforce pre-held beliefs by selectively interpreting and collecting evidence—confirmation or "myside" bias (Wason 1960; Chapman and Chapman 1967; Nickerson 1998). Though pictorial caricature itself may be quite harmless, when illicitly employed in service to some epistemic uptake (best exemplified by the editorial cartoon), pictorial caricature so employed can easily become nothing short of an epistemic menace.[12]

§ 2. CARICATURE

To prevent confusion, below are two senses of "caricature" related to but distinct from the notion of caricature discussed herein.

(1) The broadly adjectival, if not metaphorical, sense indicating grotesque or radically inferior distortion or imitation (e.g., "*The Godfather III* is but a caricature of its classic predecessors")

(2) The process sense indicating a style of pictorial depiction (e.g., "Considering her background in *trompe l'oeil* painting, her lithographs demonstrated a surprising command of caricature")

In what follows, a pictorial depiction satisfying the conditions for either sense above isn't *ipso facto* a caricature. For example, a drawing by a particularly inept artist may well be in the caricature style (*the process sense*) but nevertheless, contrary to the artist's intentions, fails to be a caricature—perhaps thereby becoming, though unintentionally so, a caricature (*the broadly adjectival sense*) of a caricature. The aim herein isn't to offer an exhaustive or even robust account of caricature, but instead to provide a productive and informative philosophical analysis of a pervasive but heretofore largely philosophically overlooked form of depiction and the primary media employing it.[13]

An Account of Caricature

Caricatures are essentially *distortive* depictions that—given the satisfaction of certain background conditions—elicit behavioral response biases substantially similar to (roughly approximating) *Peak Shift* effects.

> A pictorial depiction *C* of subject *F* is a pictorial caricature of that *F* if and only if *C* unrealistically depicts *F* in such a way (e.g., grossly exaggerating *F*'s salient features) that *C* equally or better facilitates viewer identification of (strength of response to) that *F* than does either a maximally realistic depiction of *F* or *F* itself (*Peak Shift Effect*).[14]

Peak shift is a behavioral response bias in discrimination learning in which subjects display a limited directional preference for or avoidance of unusual stimuli. In cases of subjects conditioned to respond to a certain stimulus (S), when exposed during training to both a reinforced stimulus (S+)—the training stimulus—and a non-reinforced stimulus (S–), the subjects will respond more strongly to stimuli shifted (along a limited range) away from (S–) than to (S+) itself—such stimuli are often referred to as super-stimuli (S++). The peak response then comes from this shifted stimulus (hence the name *Peak Shift*). Given this, for my purposes, if *C* is a caricature of *F*, then, given a background of conditioned or innate viewer responses to *F*-stimuli, *C* at least roughly approximates *a super-stimulus* in the range appropriate to produce a *Peak Shift* effect—to shift peak viewer response from *F* to *C*.

Recall from § 1 that a realistic depiction *ceteris paribus* provides epistemic access to certain (non-trivial) propositions true of its subject, namely those about that subject's appearance. Caricature, however, is clearly unrealistic depiction, and so *ceteris paribus* unable to provide its audience epistemic access to those propositions. More importantly, notice that being an appropriate audience for caricature looks to entail already having knowledge of those very same facts about which caricature itself cannot accurately inform its audience. As such, a caricature can accurately inform its audience only as those facts about its subject that *being a caricature (of that subject) itself entails*. For example, while a caricature of *F* (e.g., the famously large-chinned comedian, Jay Leno) provides epistemic access to (relevantly) true propositions about *F* (e.g., that *Jay Leno has a (saliently) large chin*), this can be revelatory only for an audience sufficiently ignorant of the relevant facts upon which being a caricature of *F* must be predicated (e.g., *that Jay Leno has a (saliently) large chin*). That

is, caricature can be epistemically revelatory only for an audience sufficiently ignorant of the relevant facts upon which *being a caricature (of that subject)* must be predicated, and as such, caricature can be only trivially revelatory about its subject.

Perhaps one might think that nothing so far claimed gives cause for regarding caricature with epistemic concern. After all, standard cases of pictorial caricature—the sort found at state fairs, amusement parks, carnivals—appear to be more or less epistemically innocuous. That is, no one plausibly takes the fairground caricature to realistically depict its subject or the fairground caricaturist to be asserting via the caricature that the subject actually has freakishly disproportionate facial features. In fact, taking fairground caricature to be substantively revelatory about its subject signals a wholesale failure to understand the rules and conventions surrounding caricature and pictorial depiction. The fairground caricature merely provides a source of entertainment by providing viewers a concrete and often comical demonstration of *peak shift*.[15] However, even fairground caricature may not be entirely harmless. While we don't overtly treat caricature as realistic depictions, there nevertheless appear to be instances in which, given certain cognitive biases and background beliefs, we seem to respond to them in *operatively* the same manner in which we respond to realistic depictions.

For example, suppose that when presented with a fairground caricature of himself, Howard becomes embarrassed, self-conscious, and begins to think of himself as ugly to the degree of the distortion present in the caricature. Further suppose that one of Howard's salient facial features is a distinctive and prominent bump in the middle of his nose. The caricature of Howard grossly exaggerates this feature among others. Even though Howard takes the caricature to be an unrealistic depiction of his face, Howard and others identify him as the depictive subject just as

easily as they would for a maximally realistic depiction of Howard. So, when presented with the caricature, Howard quite forcefully identifies the subject but also sees the grotesquely exaggerated facial feature. Given the presence of (i) certain background beliefs (e.g., Howard believes that disproportionally large noses are to that degree unattractive, that his own nose is disproportionately large and to that degree unattractive), (ii) the behavior response bias elicited by the caricature, and (iii) certain confirmation biases (e.g., illusory correlation), Howard may well come, however briefly, to revise his belief about the prominence of his nose with respect to the rest of his face, including revisions to beliefs about his own attractiveness that may follow. That is, Howard may take the caricature as evidence for such revision (e.g., the novelty of the peak-shift effect in concert with his background beliefs fosters an illusory correlation, thereby confirming those beliefs), and therefore, to that degree his revision is unwarranted. Moreover, even though Howard may upon reflection abandon the caricature as evidence for such revision, his beliefs may nevertheless fail to return to their pre-revision levels (the confirmation bias of *belief perseverance*) (Ross et al. 1975).

This demonstrates that caricature can be effectively employed to exploit the presence of certain background conditions and cognitive biases so as to bring about a false epistemic effect (i.e., an epistemic effect absent for ideally rational agents but non-negligibly present for less than ideally rational agents with certain epistemic backgrounds and cognitive biases)—if C is a caricature of F, then C quite easily can be mistakenly taken by its audience to warrant, entitle, or justify non-trivial beliefs about F. Again, if for ideally rational agents all caricature is harmless *fairground* caricature and at best only trivially revelatory, then the focus on caricature as a potential epistemic harm must largely rest on how caricature can be effectively employed in a non-trivially revelatory manner.

§ 3. The Editorial Cartoon

That the prescribed uptake of the editorial cartoon is typically at least in part mediated by caricature is by no means mere coincidence. That is, by employing caricature, the editorial cartoon is able to exploit a low-level adaptive feature of stimulus discrimination so as to better facilitate its prescribed uptake by illicitly fostering (*falsely warranting*) otherwise warrantless associative relations between two or more things germane to that uptake. So, insofar as caricature plays a substantive role, the editorial cartoon, this paper claims, is *pro tanto* epistemically defective (i.e., prescribing an epistemic uptake, the receipt of which both requires a less than ideally rational audience and constitutes a false epistemic effect in that audience). Of course, a *pro tanto* epistemic defect may well be overridden by some epistemic virtue. As such, a *pro tanto* epistemically defective medium may be such that beliefs informed by works in that medium turn out to be all epistemic things considered warranted. However, a *pro tanto* epistemic defect, even when overridden, nevertheless remains in a very real and substantive sense an *epistemic defect*; likewise, a *pro tanto* epistemically defective medium, even when all epistemic things are considered virtuous, nevertheless remains in a very real and substantive sense *epistemically defective*.

What follows does not assume the editorial cartoon exhaustive with respect to the employment of pictorial caricature but merely takes the editorial cartoon to be a subclass of *didactic depiction* (or *political art*) for which the employment of caricature (itself a subclass of *entertainment depiction*) is instructively standard (relevant, salient, pronounced). As such, the analysis of the editorial cartoon in what follows should hold *mutatis mutandis* for any didactic depiction

constitutively employing pictorial caricature in service to some epistemic uptake.[16]

On any minimally adequate account, the editorial cartoon

(a) has pictorial content (i.e., a content that is substantively dependent on pictorial depictions and their relations to one another);[17]

(b) prescribes for its audience some uptake (e.g., supporting or strengthening, cultivating or imparting, challenging or undermining certain morally or politically oriented beliefs or attitudes);

(c) employs its pictorial content to substantively mediate or facilitate its uptake so prescribed (e.g., employing certain pictorial content to mediate inference to or export of propositions relevant to or facilitative of the uptake); and

(d) purports to provide non-trivially revelatory epistemic access to some proposition p where p is about real-world states of affairs, such that, p being so accessed is constitutive of its uptake so prescribed.

Accordingly, the editorial cartoon purports to inform its audience about the world (i.e., persuade its audience to the truth of certain propositions about real-world states of affairs) and essentially employs pictures in substantive service to this end. As such, insofar as one regards the editorial cartoon as serious epistemic business (e.g., as a putatively respected journalistic medium), one must also regard its employ of caricature as a suspect if not outright deceitful business practice.

Caricature and the Editorial Cartoon

Consider Thomas Nast's editorial cartoon *The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things*.[18] Suppose for argument's sake that part of the prescribed uptake for *The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things* is that the Irish are innately uncivilized, of below average intelligence, and exceedingly prone to mindless violence (i.e., the usual Irish way of doing things is *stupidly, drunkenly, violently*). In service to this uptake *The Usual Irish Way* employs a caricature

of what were considered stereotypical Irish facial features grossly exaggerated so as to bear an obviously simian likeness.

This editorial cartoon and others similar to it typically found in mid to late nineteenth-century magazines such as *Punch*, *Judy*, and *Harper's Weekly* were wildly successful, reinforcing in or imparting to the audience the belief that the Irish (at least Irish men) were not just simian but *violently simian*. Presumably, the audience already had to a sufficient degree the background beliefs, attitudes, and judgments appropriate to the prescribed uptake. As such, this audience took the response bias toward the caricature of the then thought stereotypical Irish facial features (e.g., midfacial prognathism) together with the (incidental) simian likeness as evidence for an in fact core association between the Irish race and non-human primates, specifically that non-human apes are by their nature uncivilized, violent, and stupid, and by natural association, so too then must be the Irish.

However, as L. Perry Curtis (1997) notes:

> The very concept of prognathism was a Victorian invention, with roots in the ancient lore of physiognomy, which fulfilled certain needs in the minds of the beholder or believer (p. 93). . . . But prognathism is not the same thing as simianism, Victorian caricature notwithstanding, and prominent chins do not a monkey make. (p. 89)

This association between the Irish and non-human primates was, of course, nothing more than an *illusory correlation*: a form of confirmation bias triggered by audience apprehension of two novel variables, namely the response bias from the caricature of stereotypical Irish features and the high degree of simian resemblance. Taking there to be such a core association, regardless of its truth, allowed audiences to receive that uptake and thereby confirm their pre-existing attitudes and expectations (Golding and Rorer 1972; Hamilton 1979, 1981; Hamilton and Gifford 2005). So, even though Nast's cartoon

licenses for export into belief a false proposition, it does so in such a way that, even were the proposition true, the belief so exported would nevertheless lack warrant.

Now consider some of the less repugnant of Thomas Nast's editorial cartoons, most famously those that helped in no small measure to put an end to the corrupt Tammany Hall era of New York City politics.[19] Rather fittingly in reaction to Nast's editorial cartoons, then "Grand Sachem" of Tammany, William "Boss" Tweed reportedly exclaimed:

> I don't care a straw for your newspaper articles; my constituents don't know how to read, but they can't help seeing them damned pictures!

Presumably, Tweed had cause for concern not because Nast was able pictorially to perform the task of a newspaper article (i.e., accurately report structurally complex events and actions that any competent reader would take to be substantial evidence for corruption). Rather, what worried Tweed was that Nast's cartoons via the caricatures employed therein were able to avoid the otherwise required epistemic complexities yet remain equally if not more capable of fostering and reinforcing audience beliefs, attitudes, and judgments that Tweed and company were nothing but vile crooks— *all without having to address the literacy rate*.

There should be little doubt, of course, as to both the truth of such propositions about Boss Tweed and his Tammany ilk, and it was a decidedly good thing that the population came to believe those true propositions. However, should their export from editorial cartoons have been constitutively facilitated by caricature, then belief in those propositions so acquired were nevertheless to that extent unwarranted. Even though editorial cartoons may, perhaps even in decidedly unique ways, assert and invite for export true moral propositions, by employing pictorial caricatures in service to this end, any belief so exported is to that extent unwarranted. Just as Tweed relied on illiteracy to keep his constituency

sufficiently in the epistemic dark, Nast relied on caricature exploiting certain cognitive biases to bring his audience sufficiently into the epistemic light.

To be sure, Nast's editorial cartoons may have imparted true beliefs about Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall to an otherwise ignorant or misinformed audience, and perhaps to that extent be seen as in a noble or heroic light. However, for that audience, those true beliefs so informed or acquired to that extent lacked warrant, and no amount of nobility or heroism can warrant an otherwise warrantless belief. The fact that a *pro tanto* epistemically defective work or work in a *pro tanto* epistemically defective medium can satisfy some all things considered epistemically or morally virtuous end doesn't thereby render that work or that medium any less *pro tanto* epistemically defective. Obviously, such works and media can just as effectively satisfy some epistemically ignoble or morally despicable end. The principal objection to the editorial cartoon then has nothing to do with the virtues or vices of its prescribed uptake and everything to do with caricature being employed in service to, and thereby undermining proper epistemic reception of, that prescribed uptake. Consequently, audience beliefs so acquired lack warrant regardless of the truth or falsity of those propositions, the virtuousness or viciousness of those propositional contents, or even the epistemic reliability/moral constitution of editorial cartoonists themselves.

Just as the Irish needn't have been actually violent, simian sub-humans to be justifiably afraid of the reflection cast in Nast's "cartoon mirror," Boss Tweed needn't have been actually greedy and vilely corrupt to be justifiably afraid when Nast directed this "mirror" at him. The reason to be afraid was the same for both. Even though the caricature-powered "cartoon mirror" can at best only incidentally reflect the world, it nevertheless possesses the truly fearsome ability to seem to a less than ideally rational audience as if it were a true mirror

(i.e., to unrealistically and unreliably depict the world in a way at least equally effective and persuasive as its realistically and reliably reflected counterpart). The true locus of fear then rests not in the editorial cartoon's merely putative power of insight but instead in caricature's very real capacity for exploitation.

The Editorial Cartoon as Epistemically Defective

One should take the following claims and the space between them to represent the plausible range of claims about caricature's role in the editorial cartoon.

> *Strong Claim*: The editorial cartoon essentially substantively employs caricatures in service to its uptake (i.e., pictorial caricatures are essentially and substantively constitutive of the pictorial content an editorial cartoon employs in service to its prescribed uptake).

> *Weak Claim*: Current and past editorial cartoon practices implicitly if not explicitly prescribe the *substantial* employment of pictorial caricatures, such that, at present, in service to its uptake (i.e., in standard cases of the editorial cartoon, pictorial caricatures are substantively constitutive of the pictorial content employed in service to the prescribed uptake).

Given the eminent plausibility of the *Weak Claim*, one should at least take the force of the arguments following from the *Weak Claim* to represent the lower bound.

> Let w be some work, EC the editorial cartoon medium, w_{EC} a work in that medium, and p some proposition about real-world states of affairs.

> (1) [For all w, if w is in EC (w_{EC}), then . . .] There is some p such that w_{EC} purports to provide (non-trivially revelatory) epistemic access to that p.
> (2) Pictorial caricature is substantively constitutive of the manner in which w_{EC} provides access to that p.
> (3) So, the manner in which w_{EC} provides access to that p is *pro tanto* epistemically defective.
> (4) So, the belief that p informed by (or acquired through) audience uptake as prescribed by w_{EC} is *pro tanto* unwarranted.

> (5) So, w_{EC} is *pro tanto* epistemically defective.
> (6) So, EC is *pro tanto* epistemically defective.

Notice that the mere fact that the editorial cartoon, via the substantial employ of caricature, can be revelatory (perhaps even uniquely so) with respect to certain truths about the world doesn't *itself* secure for the editorial cartoon any solid epistemic ground whatsoever. In fact, the revelatory capacity of the editorial cartoon cannot itself even prima facie justify, let alone fully account for, the epistemic respect putatively afforded the editorial cartoon (e.g., that Editorial Cartooning has been a Pulitzer Prize category for journalistic achievement since 1922).

One might object to the above by claiming that editorial cartoons employ caricature only in service to some purely suppositional uptake (e.g., enjoining the viewer to entertain or suppose certain propositions are true rather than inviting the viewer to export those propositions into belief). The reply here is that an editorial cartoon with an exclusively suppositional uptake looks to be merely a form of message-free entertainment or amusement, and so, not an *editorial cartoon*—it certainly would seem to lack the putatively journalistic or didactic character of the traditional editorial cartoon.[20] Moreover, the difference between comic strips (e.g., *Garfield*, *Family Circus*, *Prince Valiant*) and editorial cartoons is not simply their respective locations within newspapers (funnies page vs. editorial page). That is, although editorial cartoons can entertain their audiences just as well as their comic-strip cousins,[21] cartoons with purely suppositional uptake look radically ill-suited to satisfy the standard sorts of epistemic aims taken to be the editorial *sine qua non*. So, while an editorial cartoon may no doubt fail to inform or persuade its audience, a cartoon that aims neither to inform nor to persuade, regardless of its location within the newspaper, is not an *editorial* cartoon.[22]

Given the above, suppose one were to fix certain facts about the editorial cartoon: its

comparative accessibility, the production goals of its artists, the preferences and expectations of its readership, and the industry's objectives regarding that readership and production. Presumably, one would then expect that editorial cartoon practices and conventions are likely to continue to prescribe, endorse, or foster the substantial employment of pictorial caricature and by so doing likely ensure that the editorial cartoon remains *pro tanto* epistemically defective.

§ 4. Final Thoughts

Before concluding, consider a potential *moral* concern for the editorial cartoon. Works specific to the editorial cartoon medium routinely, if not essentially, prescribe for uptake/license for export propositions with moral content (broadly construed so as to include the social and political). However, works specific to the editorial cartoon medium also routinely, if not essentially, constitutively employ caricature in service to their prescribed uptakes. As a result, the editorial cartoon appears to be *self-undermining*—it purports to be non-trivially revelatory with respect to certain moral propositions but then provides an epistemically defective mode of access to those moral propositions, such that, the manner in which the editorial cartoon attempts to persuade *tanto* unwarranted belief. So, for an ideally rational audience, the caricature-employing editorial cartoon, at least as described herein, would be strictly (if not necessarily) *self-undermining*, as no ideally rational audience as such could ever receive its prescribed epistemic uptake. Furthermore, while an audience less than ideally rational may have no such difficulty in receiving that very uptake, the manner in which that uptake is so received by such an audience *itself* looks to be *pro tanto* epistemically defective—the caricature-employing editorial cartoon can achieve its epistemic aims only by violating some epistemic norm or other.[23]

From the above, one might argue then that epistemically virtuous methods of acquiring true moral beliefs (e.g., studied reflection, logical inference) are to that extent *self-supporting* in that moral agents adopting such methods will *ceteris paribus* as a result tend to acquire not only moral beliefs that are largely true but also the ability to critically appraise, defend, and revise those beliefs as constituents of their morally evaluable actions and characters. However, epistemically defective methods of acquiring true moral beliefs (e.g., blind deference, illicitly biased inference) appear to be to that extent *self-frustrating* in that moral agents adopting such methods will *ceteris paribus* as a result tend to acquire moral beliefs that are largely false and thereby, to that extent, also a tendency to perform immoral acts or cultivate immoral character. Even when largely true, such moral beliefs so acquired are nevertheless unwarranted or unjustified and thereby, to that extent, impart to moral agents a marked inability to critically appraise, defend, or revise those beliefs as constituents of their morally evaluable actions and characters. To be sure, methods of belief acquisition (and the media and genre types prescribing their employ) may not be the sorts of things coherently morally evaluable in the standard sense. However, they do appear to be the sorts of things coherently morally evaluable in a comparative or an instrumental sense (i.e., at least with respect to the tendency to foster/support or frustrate/undermine the acquisition of warranted and justified true moral belief). Perhaps then one might claim that methods of moral knowledge acquisition that are *pro tanto* epistemically virtuous are to that extent *pro tanto* morally virtuous and likewise that methods of moral knowledge acquisition that are *pro tanto* epistemically defective are to that extent *pro tanto* morally defective.

According to the above analysis and given that the editorial cartoon purports to be non-

trivially revelatory with respect to certain moral propositions (i.e., purports to be a morally didactic medium), if the editorial cartoon is a *pro tanto* epistemically defective medium, then the editorial cartoon is *ipso facto* also a *pro tanto* morally defective medium. However, though one ideally ought to employ exclusively those epistemically virtuous methods of acquiring, informing, reinforcing one's moral beliefs, there could nevertheless be situations in which the all-moral-things-considered virtuous or optimal outcome requires employing an all-epistemic-things-considered less than virtuous, if not outright defective, method. In such cases might a *pro tanto* epistemically defective and *ipso facto pro tanto* morally defective method nevertheless turn out to be morally *virtuous*, all moral things considered (e.g., perhaps as in the case of Thomas Nast's Boss Tweed cartoons). That is, there could be certain overriding factors present, such that, the editorial cartoon turns out, in some or even most cases, an all-moral-things-considered virtuous medium, despite the fact that even in such all-moral-things-considered virtuous cases, the editorial cartoon nevertheless remains *pro tanto* morally defective. Of course, whether such overriding factors (e.g., the relevant conventions, backgrounds, audiences, and perhaps most importantly, the presence or absence of epistemically or morally responsible artists and editors) are in fact present looks to be a straightforwardly empirical matter and so, well beyond the purview here, which is simply to provide a better understanding of a neglected form of pictorial depiction and in so doing reveal its rather frightening capacity for epistemic exploitation.

CONCLUSION

Caricature, while profoundly interesting, is itself neither dangerous nor worrisome. Caricature illicitly employed, however, can most certainly be both. Recall that for ideally rational agents, all caricature can be nothing more than harmless fairground caricature, at best only trivially epistemically revelatory. Even though the editorial cartoon purports to inform its audience about the world, given its employ of caricature, the editorial cartoon requires for its uptake an audience *less than ideally rational*. Upon reflection, perhaps this conclusion shouldn't be too terribly surprising. After all, editorial cartoons traffic substantially, if not exclusively, in radical over-simplifications of often extremely complex and nuanced positions, persons, events, and gross exaggerations of the relevance, importance, and scope of certain features or aspects salient to those positions, persons, events, yet via the illicit work of caricature, the editorial cartoon can nonetheless provide a comparatively far more expedient, simple, and widely accessible manner of delivering for uptake true and false propositions alike. This, taken together with the chief putative subject matter being the eminently profound subject matter of the moral, provides ample reason to consider the misuse and abuse of pictorial caricature something that even the honest have reason to fear.

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NOTES

1. As quoted in and translated by Curtis (1997), p. x.

2. For a detailed history of the editorial cartoon, see Lamb (2004). For reprints of the Davenport and Spangler cartoons, also see Lamb (2004), pp. 73–74.

3. I take the *ideally rational epistemic agent* to be not some actual or possible human being but rather a *theoretical* construct principally employed by epistemology, especially its more formal incarnations. For an excellent discussion about the relation between the notion of rationality in epistemology and the psychology of human reasoning, see Rysiew (2008).

4. Catharine Abell (2009) makes a compelling defense of the necessity of both resemblance and intention.

5. This holds, even though caricature is likely to fail any strict (sufficient) resemblance conditions. For example, Robert Hopkins (1995) argues that in order to explain caricature, one need not appeal to resemblance in real outline shape but instead merely to *experienced resemblance*—that is, that a caricature of *F* may or may not bear any resemblance in real outline shape to that *F* is irrelevant; what matters is only that it be *experienced* as resembling that *F*.

6. Lopes (2006) breaks down the distinct varieties of pictorial realism into the following categories: *One*, *Slow-Dawning*, *One Gradual*, *Lifelike*, *Uncanny*, *Illusionistic*, *Idolic*, *True*, *Informative*, *Revelatory*. The notion of pictorial realism herein should be seen as broadly consistent with those of the latter three categories.

7. More precisely, those informative properties had in virtue of a picture's *depictive content* (depictive information) that presumably, at least in standard cases of the sort under discussion here, entails non-incidentally featuring a visual array with a sufficiently (saliently) high degree of non-incidental subject-resemblance.

8. This sense of pictorial realism should neither be seen as exhausting the notion of pictorial realism itself nor as being inconsistent with further specifications thereof such as sensitivity to culture-specific depictive styles (Abell 2006) or projective interpretive schemes (Kulvicki 2006) or placing relevance constraints on depictive information (Abell 2007). In fact, it should not even be taken to exhaust the notion of pictorial realism for resemblance based depiction—for objections to exhaustively resemblance-based accounts of pictorial realism, see McIntosh (2003).

9. Catharine Abell (2007) takes the relevance constraint on depictive information to be as follows: "[T]he information a picture provides must connect with viewers' existent assumptions to yield positive cognitive effects that warrant the processing effort required to obtain them. . . . [O]nly accurate pictures can have such effects" (pp. 11–12).

10. For a detailed account of what it is for a *fiction* to be unrealistic, see Hazlett and Mag Uidhir (2011).

11. For a related argument about the epistemic defects of the cinematic practice of actor-character race-mismatching, see Mag Uidhir (2012).

12. This is consistent with there being a comparative revelatory distinction between a photograph of *F* and a hand-drawn maximally realistic depiction of *F* (Cohen and Meskin 2004). However, the difference is analogous to the difference between a realistic photo of *F* and a photo-realistic caricature of *F* (e.g., a photograph of *F* digitally distorted into a caricature of *F*), and as such, photo-realistic caricatures are no more counter-examples to the view that caricatures unrealistically depict their subjects than are photo-realistic depictions of unicorns counter-examples to the view that there are no unicorns.

13. The general operative account herein is most closely aligned with that suggested by Catharine Abell and Gregory Currie (1999).

14. Note that I also take Ramachandran and Hirstein (1999) as providing supporting evidence; however, I want to avoid having my rather modest claim about pictorial caricature tied to their (if not metaphorical) ambitious but baldly implausible claim that all art is caricature.

15. This is consistent with the claim that caricature is a subclass of *entertainment depiction*, that is, depiction that has as its principal aim or purpose the amusement or entertainment of its audience (Blumson 2009).

16. Nothing in what follows hinges on whether one thinks the editorial cartoon is perhaps best described as a *genre* rather than a *medium* (e.g., that *editorial cartoon* is not itself a medium but is instead a specific *genre* of the medium *comic*). For more on comics, see McCloud (1994); Hayman and Pratt (2005); Meskin (2007).

17. Lewis and Johnston 1998, 1999a; Spetch et al. 2004. Of course, editorial cartoons may well have other sorts of content (e.g., propositional, narrative, suppositional, semantic, aesthetic, etc.), so should editorial cartoons be, for instance, essentially pictorial narratives, claims about its content can be modified accordingly (Nanay 2009; Pratt 2009).

18. First appearing in *Harper's Weekly*, September 2, 1871. Nast's cartoon is similar to Sir John Tenniel's *The Fenian Guy Fawkes*, which first appeared in *Punch*, December 28, 1867.

19. Tammany Hall (or the Society of St. Tammany) was a political organization that played an enormously influential role in New York City and New York State politics, especially during the mid to late nineteenth century. During this period, Tammany had become largely a machine for graft, corruption, and fraud, most notably under the leadership of William "Boss" Tweed.

20. Consider *The Far Side* cartoon by Gary Larson that depicts a cow sitting on a living room couch bemoaning her inability to answer the ringing phone due her lack of opposable thumbs. *The Far Side* cartoon has purely suppositional uptake. That is, it invites its audience to suppose cows sentient and living as humans do with all of the modern conveniences of late twentieth-century life yet nevertheless still remaining hooved—a fact of which the cartoon cow is all too aware. Larson's cartoon does not aim to inform or persuade its audience as to actual-world facts about cows and opposable digits. In fact, in order to receive its uptake (i.e., to get the joke), the audience must already know what opposable thumbs are and that cows do not have them. By contrast, consider the editorial cartoon "The Goose-Step" (1936) by E. H. Shepard that depicts a heavily armed goose, with a swastika on its chest and an olive branch in its mouth, marching down the middle of the road. "The Goose-Step" does not simply invite its audience to suppose geese to be ridiculously well-armed and members of the Nazi party. Rather, Shepard's cartoon obviously employs this depiction and its associated imagery in service to some specific epistemic end: specifically that of persuading (imparting, enjoining, fostering, cultivating, strengthening) its audience of the actual world of 1936 being a certain way, namely one in which a remilitarized Germany under Nazi control has expansionist ambitions and no real desire for peace.

21. Likewise, some comic strips may also contain editorial content or have editorial aims (e.g., *Mallard Fillmore*, *Doonesbury*, *This Modern World*, *Pogo*).

22. Presumably, this shows that belief acquisition from editorial cartoons cannot be plausibly construed as simply an innocuous case of learning from fiction—for example, learning that Chicago has an elevated train from watching *The Fugitive* (1993). Of course, the problem has nothing to do with the notion of fictional export itself—for a detailed account of which, see Gendler (2000). Instead, the problem lies with the audience mistakenly taking the caricature—via its peak-shift effects in concert with certain background assumptions and cognitive biases—to license the export of propositions true in the cartoon world into belief about the actual world. As such, even when construed in terms of fictional export, it would nevertheless remain the case that the editorial cartoon, insofar as it employs pictorial caricature in service to some epistemic end, is *pro tanto* epistemically defective.

23. For an argument according to which, at least in certain cases of narrative fiction, such epistemic defects also constitute *pro tanto* moral defects, see Mag Uidhir (forthcoming).

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