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A Negotiation in Middlemarch

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Abstract

We analyse a negotiation drawn from George Eliot's great novel *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*. Eliot is renowned for being one of the most perceptive chroniclers of social interaction, and she understood the process of negotiation and its role in the community perhaps as well as anyone. The negotiation in question is between a wealthy banker and one of his former associates who sets out (or perhaps just ends up) blackmailing him. We discuss a wide range of negotiation principles, and show how it provides insights into the importance of the prenegotiation, the role of preparation, empathy and the fostering of relationships (even when you would prefer not to), and the problems of focusing on one's own BATNA rather than your counterparts'. We consider six key negotiation lessons for the fictional negotiator (and for us). We also consider how negotiation can be difficult when not only material goods are being negotiated, but also one's self-regard. We conclude with a brief account of how both fictional and "non-fictional" negotiations can contribute to our understanding of how to learn about and improve negotiation practice.

A Negotiation in Middlemarch

This paper examines a key negotiation from one of the greatest novels written in English and consider what it can teach us about how to negotiate and, perhaps more importantly, how not to. The novel is *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, by George Eliot (1871/1994)¹; the negotiation is between Bulstrode, a wealthy banker with a shady past whose self-worth depends on maintaining his good reputation, and Raffles, a long-forgotten ally of Bulstrode's possessing information that could destroy that reputation. This is one of many important negotiations in *Middlemarch*, chosen because, in a few pages, Eliot efficiently offers insights into key negotiation principles and tactics while letting us share and understand the inner lives of her two negotiators. Literary explorations often provide a unique glance into the motivations of negotiators and consequently can be effectively used as tools to teach and understand negotiation (e.g., Hackley, 2007; Sunstein, 2007) and strategic thinking in general (Chwe, 2014; Kidd & Castano, 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Read, 2020). In the case of *Middlemarch*, we will see that both Bulstrode and Raffles make mistakes, but these are the common mistakes of even seasoned negotiators who find themselves under pressure. Indeed, they are mistakes we have made ourselves, have seen others make, or have had described to us by our students and colleagues.

Middlemarch

Middlemarch is a medium sized industrial city in the English Midlands, a fictionalised version of the real city of Coventry, where George Eliot grew up. Most of her great works are based in cities and towns based on Coventry and on nearby Nuneaton where she was born (Mead, 2014). *Middlemarch* (the novel) is set during the run up to the reform act of 1832, one of the major steps, but by no means the last step, in the modernization of the English political system. At this time Coventry's important textile industry was largely based around silk ribbon weaving, under threat because local workers resisted modernization, because tariffs designed to protect the ribbon trade were being lifted, and because the world's

¹ George Eliot was the pen name of Mary Ann Evans (1819-1880). Dickens, Eliot and Thackeray are generally counted as the greatest Victorian novelists, and *Middlemarch* counted as Eliot's greatest book (e.g., McCrum, 2015).

tastes were changing (Stephens, 1969). George Eliot's parents were amongst the rising middle class in the Midlands. Her mother was the daughter of a mill owner, and her father managed a local estate. She was therefore exposed to business and negotiation throughout her formative years. Moreover, her career itself involved many multi-issue negotiations, in which she was actively involved, concerning issues such as royalties, book advances, and how her work was to be published (Coleman, 2014).

Not surprisingly, given the nature of Middlemarch (the city) and Eliot's background, much of *Middlemarch* (the novel) is devoted to the interconnected economic and ethical lives of its people. Eliot's thinking was strongly influenced by Adam Smith (Coovadia, 2002), who is name-checked in *Middlemarch*, and who had himself famously emphasised the role of "truck, barter and exchange" in economic life. Naturally, therefore, a key piece of the loom that weaves together Middlemarch life is the negotiation, and Eliot describes several negotiations in detail and gives them remarkable prominence in the text. Indeed, the importance of negotiation is underlined in that the very first dialogue in the novel is an extended negotiation over the distribution of jewellery between two sisters. It should not be surprising, given Eliot's own experience, that she was able to combine a deep understanding of negotiation along with her equally deep understanding of human nature.

A volume could be written on the *Middlemarch* negotiations, but here we restrict ourselves to a single two-party negotiation, chosen because it is compact and largely self-contained. It takes place over less than ten pages of a long book and can be largely understood with little context (which we provide). It reveals many subtle and usually tacit principles of good negotiation, often by showing these principles being violated.

The negotiators

Nicholas Bulstrode is a respected member of the Middlemarch community, one of its chief bankers and financiers, as well as a philanthropist who plays a key role in most major civic activities. While not a native of Middlemarch, he has married into the Vincies, a middle-class family who owe their fortune to the ribbon weaving industry. Bulstrode is a devout member of a Calvinist dissenting branch of the Anglican church and sees himself as chosen by God as a vehicle to do good works. He is also severe and critical of others' shortcomings: "to point out other people's errors was a duty that Mr. Bulstrode rarely shrank

from.” (Page 121)² Those who would benefit from his charity must first conform to his particularly strict religious practice.

Yet Bulstrode has a dark past, concealed even from his family, that belies his public image: his wealth is the product of deceit, double-dealing, and crime. While an ambitious young man advancing in the church and striving to do God’s work, he received a well-paying position as the chief clerk of a pawnbroker. He quickly learned this pawnbroker, who dealt in stolen goods, was no suitable employer for a righteous young man. But rather than resigning, he rationalised away all contradictions by persuading himself that he could do the most good by “cleansing” the tainted money by using it in the service of God. Indeed, he persuaded himself that divine providence must have put the money in his hands rather than in the hands of someone less worthy.

The pawnbroker died, survived by an elderly widow. True to form, Bulstrode aimed to marry the already ailing widow and, given her age and infirmity, eventually inheriting the wealth. But there was a hurdle. The widow had an estranged runaway daughter with whom she wanted to reconcile. Bulstrode offered to search for this daughter, and even found her. But he did not inform the widow. He reported his search had failed and took pains to ensure the truth was never discovered. He exploited the widow’s resulting grief to win her hand in marriage and soon inherited it all. He gave nothing to the daughter, who died leaving a young son. Bulstrode used the same rationalisation as before, this time arguing the daughter would have squandered the money while he would use it for good. For two further decades, Bulstrode ran the criminal business in parallel with his religious activities and then cashed in and moved to Middlemarch for a new life with a legitimate business. Bulstrode has always managed to rationalise himself as a sinner whose worldly success shows he is approved by God as a “vessel to be consecrated by use.” He realises, however, that were others to learn of his past they would not be so forgiving.

John Raffles may be just as disreputable as Bulstrode, but he has no good reputation to maintain. He conspired with Bulstrode to conceal the daughter’s existence, and Bulstrode subsequently bankrolled him when he emigrated to America. Raffles had worn out his

² Page numbers are to Eliot (1871/1994). Line numbers refer to Appendix 2, which consists of a long excerpt from Chapter 53 of *Middlemarch*.

welcome on English soil, and Bulstrode wanted all evidence of his crimes to vanish. But after the American adventure failed Raffles returned to England. He then married, only to squander the wealth of his new family, and alienate his stepson Joshua Rigg. Joshua subsequently inherited a Middlemarch property, which he promptly sold to Bulstrode (unaware, of course, of the connection between his stepfather and Bulstrode). Through this connection Raffles learns that Bulstrode lives in Middlemarch, and after the death of his wife he returns to his stepson's property with the goal of learning Bulstrode's address. By coincidence, however, he stumbles upon Bulstrode himself.

Raffles has not yet made definite plans about what he wants from Bulstrode. But upon his arrival it is obvious – at least, it is obvious to Bulstrode – that he will want something, and so they have business to conduct. Neither of them has had any time to plan this negotiation.

The negotiation styles

Bulstrode has beforehand shown himself to be consistently transactional. Every negotiation is patterned as an exchange: I will give you this, if you will give me that. And, not entirely the same thing, if you have nothing to give me, I have nothing to give you. He maintains this approach even at the cost of his counterpart's self-respect. Following the classic negotiation style framework of Lewicki and Hiam (2011), Bulstrode typically displays a *competitive style*. This likely works well in his everyday life as a banker in which he has all the power, but it has left him short of strong personal bonds in the community.

Bulstrode's transactional nature leads him to a related deficit in a key negotiation skill, the capacity for *perspective taking* (Galinsky et al., 2008). He fails to consider how his counterparts may have non-material interests that sometimes outweigh their material interests. When his brother in law, Walter Vincy, petitions Bulstrode to write a letter denying an accusation made against his son Fred, Bulstrode balks, and reminds Walter that it is Bulstrode's financial aid that is keeping his business afloat and, moreover, that Fred may not be innocent. Bulstrode thereby turns an opportunity to strengthen his family ties into a quarrel that ends with Walter threatening to bring his sister (Bulstrode's wife) into the discussion and with Bulstrode writing the letter.

Further, Bulstrode appears incapable of collaboration. As we will see, when threatened he shifts to an *accommodating style* ("what can I do for you?") which simply

makes him vulnerable to further threats, even when a more collaborative approach (“how can we help each other?”) might be more effective. Thus, though Bulstrode is the stronger party financially in his negotiation with Raffles, he lacks the finesse necessary to make this a strength when other things are at stake.

Raffles is financially in a weak position relative to Bulstrode, but he is a fearless negotiator. He is willing to take even physical risks to gain his point. Prior to his meeting with Bulstrode he negotiates with his stepson Joshua. Raffles had been cruel to Joshua when he was young and helpless, and Joshua despises him and threatens him with physical harm: “The next time you show yourself inside the gates here, you shall be driven off with the dogs and the waggoner’s whip.” Yet Raffles stares down the danger and manages to extract £1 and a flask of whiskey from Joshua, before moving on.

Raffles is also a master at the *tactics* of negotiation. Eliot likens them to the moves of a chess player: “... there was an evident selection of statements, as if they had been so many moves at chess.” (Lines 191-192) Yet, as we will see, Raffles underachieves because he neglects the role of the relationship in his dealings. This is evident not just in the negotiations explicitly described in *Middlemarch*, but in various hints we have about Raffles previous business dealings, which have always ended with acrimony and betrayal all around. While he is excellent at extracting value even from unpromising individual transactions, these have never built up to anything. One reason is that Raffles enjoys his ability to torment others, and often indulges himself in this pleasure at the cost of creating lasting bonds. Thus, Raffles’ competitive style costs him in future collaborations.

The prenegotiation

The prenegotiation begins the moment Raffles encounters Bulstrode. Although the meeting is unplanned, its timing could not be better for Raffles. Bulstrode is in a grandiose mood, surveying his newly purchased property and reflecting on how God has rewarded him. But then Raffles appears and immediately Bulstrode’s sins, long viewed as a forgiven part of the divine plan, are made manifest: “this loud red figure [Raffles] had risen before him in unmanageable solidity—an incorporate past which had not entered into his imagination of chastisements.” (Lines 47-53). Unprepared and taken by surprise, Bulstrode should say nothing substantive. He should simply be polite and temporise, while focus on developing a

plan of action. But it is hard to think clearly when surprised, and Bulstrode instead launches into a series of irreversible errors.

Perhaps with ironic intent, Raffles adopts a friendly manner suitable for old friends long separated. Although Bulstrode could mirror this friendliness, at least outwardly, he instead starts by admonishing Raffles for being overly familiar in light of their past relationships:

“If I remember rightly,” Mr. Bulstrode observed, with chill anger, “our acquaintance many years ago had not the sort of intimacy which you are now assuming, Mr. Raffles. Any services you desire of me will be the more readily rendered if you will avoid a tone of familiarity which did not lie in our former intercourse, and can hardly be warranted by more than twenty years of separation.” (Lines 73-77)

Perhaps this condescension is bravado, but it is also an error. It does not build the rapport with Raffles that Bulstrode needs for this important negotiation. This is not the only mistake in this speech. For one thing, Bulstrode presupposes that Raffles must be in Middlemarch to get something from him (“Any services you desire of me ...”), and even hints that, whatever that something is, he is prepared to provide it (“will be more readily rendered”) ... so long as he is treated with due deference.

Perhaps Bulstrode’s greatest error is that he gives Raffles information. Raffles needs to learn Bulstrode’s circumstances if he is to assess how valuable his “silence” is. It has been established already that while Bulstrode and Raffles have been up to no good, neither can be punished legally for their wrongdoing – and in any case Raffles would not want to go to the law for crimes in which he is implicated. It is only when Bulstrode tells Raffles he is willing to pay him off that Raffles learns with certainty of the power he holds. Raffles is a stranger to Middlemarch and could never have known this without Bulstrode “telling” him. Bulstrode has done Raffles’ prenegotiation for him and Raffles begins the negotiation in a much stronger position than before.

Bulstrode’s preparation and BATNA

Bulstrode and Raffles agree to meet the following day. Bulstrode does not spend his preparation time wisely. He consumes it ruminating on what he will lose if the negotiation goes badly (Lines 103-128). He is in terror of exposure. What will his neighbours and family

and business partners and church-members think? He is so eaten up by these fears. He focuses obsessively on his worst-case scenario -- not what he will do or what will plausibly happen to him if no agreement is reached (his BATNA³), but to the consequences for him if the very worst were to happen.

Bulstrode's catastrophizing means he gives no thought to *Raffles'* BATNA, which is very weak. Raffles has little to his name, and few skills with which to maintain himself. Bulstrode is a possible lifeline, but that will be lost if he exposes Bulstrode. Used properly, this alone gives Bulstrode a great deal of leverage, which he neither considers nor uses. Bulstrode does not yet know just how weak Raffles' BATNA is, but if he has come all the way to Middlemarch to find Bulstrode, he must be in a bad way. Bulstrode does not think along these lines.

The negotiation: Bulstrode's mistakes

Formal negotiations begin over breakfast. This is good timing, since negotiations are more productive, in terms of maximizing shared value, when conducted over food (e.g., Woolley & Fischbach, 2017). But Bulstrode's mood is carried over from his difficult night and is hardly propitious for a favourable outcome. Nonetheless, he begins with a valiant attempt to steady the ship. He feigns nonchalance, framing the negotiations as a routine transaction and then, admirably, attempts to learn Raffles' values and positions.

“As I have little time to spare, Mr. Raffles,” said the banker, who could hardly do more than sip his tea and break his toast without eating it, “I shall be obliged if you will mention at once the ground on which you wished to meet with me. I presume that you have a home elsewhere and will be glad to return to it.” (Lines. 140-143).

His tone is business-like and he makes no new concessions. He also attempts to elicit information, to get a better sense of Raffles' BATNA and the threat to himself. But he makes four crucial errors.

First, Bulstrode continues to display *condescension*, putting Raffles in his place, and treating their meeting as if it were just another low priority business transaction. Second, he betrays his personal emotional state by being unable to eat -- his words say one thing, his

³ BATNA: Best Alternative To A Negotiated Agreement. What Bulstrode will do, and what will happen, if no agreement is reached.

behaviour another. Third, his eager emphasis on reaching a resolution betrays his *impatience*, giving yet more power to Raffles.

Finally, although Bulstrode does enquire about Raffles' circumstances it is not in a way designed to build empathy. He does not even pretend to care, but rather states that he assumes Raffles will want to return to his home – even though Raffles is currently in mourning for his wife. Bulstrode's assumption is transparent wishful thinking rather than a genuine request for information, and it gives Raffles an effective line of attack:

“My own establishment is broken up now my wife's dead. I've no particular attachment to any spot; *I would as soon settle hereabout as anywhere.*” (italics added, Lines 148-149)

Raffles has not previously said anything about the consequences of not reaching a satisfactory agreement, yet now he makes a threat: perhaps he will move to Middlemarch. Raffles masterfully deploys *the power of a weak BATNA*. He has no steady income, he has nowhere to go, so he is free to go anywhere, including to the one place where Bulstrode least wants him. Even during the previous night's darkest moments this possibility had not occurred to Bulstrode, and yet by starting the negotiation with Raffles he has increased the likelihood that this worst possible outcome will occur.

Bulstrode quickly tries to learn Raffles' goals through *asking questions*. Well formulated questions can help others open up and tell us about themselves. Bulstrode, however, who may in his business dealings have acquired the habit of being an interrogator rather than an interlocutor, makes the same kinds of errors we have seen earlier. He starts with a friendly enough question:

“May I ask why you returned from America?” (Line 150)

This is a good open question. Raffles is a loquacious man and this question is an obvious occasion for him to provide a satirical account of his adventures and misadventures, and a corresponding opportunity for Bulstrode to sit back and use the information he gleans to formulate the best way to deal with this troubling man. In short, this is a good occasion for *silence* on Bulstrode's part.

But there is no silence. Bulstrode squanders the opportunity by turning his question into an accusation:

“I considered that the strong wish you expressed to go there, when an adequate sum was furnished, was tantamount to an engagement that you would remain there for life.” (Lines 150-152)

An accusation is a “move” that must be countered, and Raffles does so:

“Never knew that a wish to go to a place was the same thing as a wish to stay. But I did stay a matter of ten years; it didn’t suit me to stay any longer. And I’m not going again, Nick.” (Lines 153-157)⁴

So Bulstrode learns nothing about the trip to America, but only induces Raffles to entrench his position.

Bulstrode makes a further bumbling attempt to gather information. He asks Raffles a double-barrelled question ““Do you wish to be settled in any business? What is your calling now?”” (Line 156). The second question is innocuous, but the first is very close to an offer to put Raffles up in a new business. Providing such a *choice of questions* allows your counterpart to choose to answer the question they prefer, and naturally Raffles chooses the one most favourable – just as politicians do when asked multi-part questions (Clementson & Eveland, 2016).

Raffles responds by putting the *first offer* on the table. As any first offer should be, it is ambitious, reflecting aspirations rather than expectations. He wants an “independence.” That is, he wants an income that will allow him to live without working -- although he would work if something agreeable is available (Lines 157-161) Raffles is used to bargaining conventions and perhaps expects some hard bargaining – in his earlier negotiation with Joshua he started by asking for enough money to set him up in business, and had to negotiate hard to achieve his flask of whisky and £1.

Yet Bulstrode does not make a significant counteroffer. He simply agrees to Raffles huge demand, but attempts to impose a condition.

“That could be supplied to you, if you would engage to keep at a distance,” said Mr. Bulstrode, perhaps with a little too much eagerness in his undertone. (Lines 162-163)

⁴ Raffles continues to stress Bulstrode’s first name “Nick.” This familiarity rankles Bulstrode and keeps him on the back foot. It has further significance: “Old Nick” is a name for the devil, and Raffles does not fail to make this connection.

Bulstrode's normally competitive and inflexible negotiating style here becomes almost entirely accommodating. Indeed, not only does he give in without significant bargaining, he aggravates matters because his proviso, that Raffles keeps away from Middlemarch, becomes a bargaining chip for Raffles. Since Raffles has no real desire to visit Middlemarch, they have *compatible* preferences, but when one party reveals the importance to them of a compatible dimension it provides power to the other party (e.g., Loschelder et al., 2014).

A powerful negotiation move is to focus your counterpart's attention on their BATNA, especially when you believe it is weak, and even more when you can weaken it even further. Raffles does exactly that and takes a gamble. He is not yet sure whether Bulstrode has remained the devout Calvinist he had been in the early days, so he ventures a guess:

“Still in the Dissenting line, eh? Still godly? Or taken to the Church as more genteel?”
(Lines 181-182)

This turns the knife, and it undermines whatever equanimity Bulstrode has:

This time Mr. Raffles' slow wink and slight protrusion of his tongue was worse than a nightmare, because it held the certitude that it was not a nightmare, but a waking misery. (Lines 183-184)

This exchange illustrates two critical aspects of negotiation. First, it highlights one of Raffles' chief *non-financial interests*. He enjoys tormenting his counterpart. We have seen how his replies to Bulstrode are always slightly acidic, and every reply contains a small dig. In fact, making his companions uncomfortable is one of Raffles' skills, and he enjoys it. When travelling for business, one of his chief joys is mocking one travelling acquaintance as a way of amusing the rest. This desire for the short-term gratification of a mildly sadistic impulse can take precedence over his desire for a more lasting outcome. “even the desire for cognac was not stronger in Raffles than the desire to torment, and [...] a hint of annoyance always served him as a fresh cue.” (Lines 74-75).

A second point is that when Raffles states he believes Bulstrode is “still godly” he makes this *common* knowledge (Chwe, 2013). Something is common knowledge if not only do all parties know it (that is *mutual* knowledge), but the parties also know that everyone else knows it (and that everyone else knows that everyone else knows it). The success of negotiations, and the outcome for each party, can depend crucially on whether knowledge is

common or merely mutual (Ayres & Nalebuff, 1996). Bulstrode has up to this point been aware that Raffles could damage his reputation. He believes that Raffles knows this too but cannot be sure. But once Raffles mentions Bulstrode's religiosity, this becomes common knowledge and Bulstrode knows that Raffles knows the weakness of his position. This is reinforced when Bulstrode does not deny the assertion that he is "godly", a non-denial practically equivalent to a confession (see Sah & Read, 2019).

Bulstrode, forced into a corner, hardens his offer of a "living" for Raffles, presenting it as an ultimatum:

"You will do well to reflect, Mr. Raffles, that it is possible for a man to overreach himself in the effort to secure undue advantage. Although I am in no way bound to you, I am willing to supply you with a regular annuity—in quarterly payments—so long as you fulfil a promise to remain at a distance from this neighborhood. It is in your power to choose. If you insist on remaining here, even for a short time, you will get nothing from me. I shall decline to know you." (Lines 210-215)

Bulstrode again reinforces the weakness of his position by beginning with a (non-credible) threat and adds two (non-credible) claims that he does not have to do what he is currently doing.

Raffles, remarkably, refuses the annuity: "Your quarterly payment won't quite suit me. I like my freedom." Instead, he announces he will settle for £200, without any promise to stay away from Middlemarch. This is a substantial amount⁵ -- earlier, Raffles had treated a payment of £1 from his nephew Joshua as a decent sum – yet it is surely much less than the annuity would have amounted to. Indeed, Bulstrode is carrying £100 in cash, suggesting £200 is little more than pocket change to him. Raffles could likely have asked for £1,000 and received it. And yet Raffles is satisfied with the deal: "Raffles watched the banker riding away—virtually at his command. His lips first curled with a smile and then opened with a

⁵ Nominally, £200 in 1830 it is about £13,600 in today's money

(<https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency>), but the standard of living then was very different than it is today. £200 would have been 1,000 days wages for a skilled tradesman.

short triumphant laugh.” (Lines 248 - 249) He feels he has won⁶. Is this therefore a win/win outcome?

It is not. Both Bulstrode and Raffles have lost. They have most certainly not found a point at the Pareto frontier. The financial blow suffered by Bulstrode is only trivial but he knows the reprieve it has bought him is only temporary. Raffles feels he has won the day, and is more satisfied than Bulstrode, but clearly he has not achieved a lasting resolution. How might matters have been improved?

Six lessons in negotiation for Mr Bulstrode and us

We have already pointed out several of Bulstrode’s negotiating errors, and suggested ways he could have done better. Here we summarise some general lessons: (a) Focus on the relationship; (b) Disclose less about a weak position; (c) Assess the credibility of threats (and manage them); (d) Don’t give away your willingness to concede; (e) Help your counterparts to envision a better outcome; and, (e) Consider non-monetary or unconventional interests.

Focus on the relationship. Bulstrode begins by putting Raffles in “his place,” and then consistently keeps him at arm’s length while using condescending language. Raffles is a difficult man, but he is not without a sense of dignity and self-respect. By belittling his counterpart, Bulstrode removes value from the table. There are few negotiations, and this is not one of them, in which the relationship is irrelevant. Bulstrode should realise that the better the relationship is for Raffles, the greater is the possibility of building a kind of loyalty – not love or friendship, but a recognition that there is more to gain from sticking by Bulstrode than betraying him. Of course, it is hard to focus on the relationship with someone you dislike, and this is one of the greatest challenges of many negotiations.

Disclose less about a weak position: Bulstrode is remarkably forthcoming about his (perceived) BATNA and his fears. He repeatedly reveals, implicitly and explicitly, that Raffles has the power to harm him. Once Raffles realises that Bulstrode wants nothing more than to keep him away from Middlemarch, he has almost unlimited power. Nothing required Bulstrode to reveal so much. Again, if we put ourselves in Bulstrode’s shoes, we can

⁶ In Appendix 1 we consider why Raffles settled for so little, after apparently achieving so great an ascendancy over Bulstrode.

empathise. It is difficult to say the right thing when under stress, but Bulstrode might have better spent his evening of preparation reminding himself to say as little as possible, and even planning what to say.

With respect to both these points, imagine how things might have improved if instead of his aloof and condescending greeting (Lines 73-77), Bulstrode had welcomed Raffles with open arms, offered him a good meal with plenty of fine wine, and showed him around his new estate. He could have introduced him to Caleb Garth.⁷ Not only would this have put more on the table for Raffles to lose, and potentially improved the relationship, it would also have demonstrated that Bulstrode *did not feel threatened* by Raffles. It might be a bluff, indeed, but one that Raffles would not easily be able to detect.

Assess the credibility of threats (and manage them): Bulstrode is terrified by Raffles' threat to move to Middlemarch. The threat immediately increases his eagerness to pay Raffles off (Lines 149), which in turn makes Raffles more aware of the effectiveness of his threat. Bulstrode *never* considers whether Raffles' threat is credible. Indeed, he takes it for granted that Raffles genuinely intends to move to Middlemarch or otherwise "turn him in" if they fail to agree. But would Raffles really want to do this?

Let us do Bulstrode's thinking for him. If Raffles moves to Middlemarch it would be a very unwelcoming community. No doubt some of Middlemarch would be interested in his story, and no doubt he would harm Bulstrode's reputation in some quarters by telling that story, but once it was told he would be a pariah. No community would take to their bosom a disreputable stranger who claims to have conspired to defraud a woman of her rightful inheritance. Perhaps even more importantly, if Raffles did spill the beans, Bulstrode would cease to have any reason to support him. This is the classic blackmailer's trap -- their power vanishes when they expose their victim, so if the victim refuses to pay, the blackmailer is no better off following through on their threat and quite possibly worse off (Posner, 1993; Read, 2020). It is hard to imagine circumstances under which Raffles would benefit from informing on Bulstrode.

⁷ Caleb Garth plays an important later role in the Bulstrode/Raffles relationship, and readers of *Middlemarch* might consider that if Bulstrode had introduced Garth to Raffles at this point, the plot might have taken a different turn.

Bulstrode could manage the threat by *interrogating* it. Why not ask Raffles where in Middlemarch he would like to live? Who does he know there? Indeed, if we were in his place, we would offer to put Raffles up at a Middlemarch hotel so he could see what it is like to live there. Bulstrode knows the owner of the local newspaper, and he could even offer to arrange an interview. Threats are rarely credible and interrogating them is very likely to lead to them being withdrawn. And, if they are not withdrawn, then important information about their credibility has been obtained.

Don't give away your willingness to concede: The first true offer comes from Raffles, but before that offer Bulstrode makes unreciprocated, and even unasked for, concessions. The very fact that he devotes so much time to Raffles case when he is a “busy man” is a clear indication that he considers the business important. Moreover, as discussed earlier, he immediately suggests that his services can be “readily rendered” to Raffles. Therefore, when Raffles makes his first offer he has been able to learn a great deal from Bulstrode about his reservation point. This may be why Raffles initially demands so much.

Help your counterpart(s) to imagine a better outcome: One should not always rely on the other side to understand their own best interests. Raffles is a great tactical negotiator, but as we have already discussed, lacks vision. Negotiators can often make irrational decisions simply because they fail to consider better alternatives. A good negotiator can help their counterpart explore and understand their own interests and the potential means to achieve them. Bulstrode has some understanding of this. He does make a half-hearted attempt to learn Raffles interests. He also makes the offer of an annuity, which must seem to him to be a good way to satisfy Raffles' long-term concerns (as well as make Raffles less likely to return). But Raffles announces he is not interested. How much persuasion was needed to change his mind, or how much discussion was needed to find out what he would find better than a relatively small gift and an uncertain future? Bulstrode should not have let Raffles decide what he wanted but worked harder to find other Pareto efficient options that were clearly better for them both.

Consider non-monetary or non-conventional interests. To achieve better outcomes, you must understand your interests and those of the other party. Bulstrode, by focusing on the amount Raffles' hopes to extract, effectively demonstrates what Sebenius (2001) considers a standard negotiation error: letting the ‘price’ obscure other issues. This removes value from the table and impairs the outcome of the negotiation at the outset. Appendix 1 analyses some

of Raffles' other possible motives, and Bulstrode could have gained a lot by doing such an analysis himself. For instance, on two occasions Raffles hints that he feels guilty because he did not reunite the daughter with the elderly widow (Lines 177-178, 238-239). How much has this act weighed on his conscience and influenced his subsequent life? Perhaps he is genuinely resentful toward Bulstrode for leading him astray. An apology from Bulstrode or some demonstration that he understands how Raffles feels might be enough to change the nature of the negotiation. As we have stressed already, empathy and compassion may be more important when the relationship is difficult than when it is good – both because it is harder to achieve, and because it has a potentially higher payoff.

Why does Bulstrode fail to negotiate? An alternative view.

One question that might be asked by this scenario is what we mean by “negotiation”. There are many ways this negotiation differs from textbook descriptions of how negotiation takes place. First, neither party, perhaps most especially Bulstrode, approaches the interaction in the manner we expect. Bulstrode does not strive to get a better deal, and Raffles ends up displaying considerable ambivalence about what he wants. One possibility is that Bulstrode is suffering from anxiety, which shrinks his field of view and prevents him from seeing his options. But we might want to step back and consider whether Bulstrode is in fact capable of acting other than he does. And, if not, why not?

Eliot includes with each chapter an epigraph, a commentary, often elliptical, on what we are about to read. This is the epigraph for chapter 53:

It is but a shallow haste which concludeth insincerity from what outsiders call inconsistency—putting a dead mechanism of "ifs" and "therefores" for the living myriad of hidden suckers whereby the belief and the conduct are wrought into mutual sustainment.

This passage is strikingly modern. Even today, 150 years after it was written, the standard view of behaviour is one of beliefs and desires and the causal links that bridge beliefs and desired ends. We say, for instance, “if you want X, and believe you can achieve it by doing Y, then you should do Y”, or “he did Y, and therefore must have wanted X” (see, Read, 2004).

Eliot suggests a more complex and possibly less tractable variety of causality, a “living myriad of suckers” or – to use another favoured metaphor – a web of influences that

pull our beliefs and desires into alignment. Both metaphors suggest the overwhelming power of multiple interlocking forces on behaviour, and challenge a purely instrumental approach to interactions, including negotiations. Moreover, that there are a “myriad of suckers” indicates that a few local changes can have little effect on behaviour – if one sucker is released, there will be more there to ensure behaviour remains unchanged. “Belief” and “conduct” are part of a system.

What has this to do with Bulstrode and his failure to negotiate effectively? Bulstrode is a *sincere* man. He holds his religious beliefs with conviction, and is convinced that his actions are in line with those beliefs. The network of impulses that has produced that behaviour is therefore not hypocritical, in the sense of Bulstrode consciously expressing one view while acting on another. Bulstrode has with effort brought all aspects of his life into alignment, and believes himself to be entirely dedicated to God. The effort has all been self-interested, indeed, but it has not been any less genuine for all that. As Eliot notes, “... the egoism which enters into our theories does not affect their sincerity; rather, the more our egoism is satisfied, the more robust is our belief. For the egoism which enters into our theories does not affect their sincerity; rather, the more our egoism is satisfied, the more robust is our belief.” (Page 490-491).

What would it mean to Bulstrode if he were to negotiate with Raffles? It is well known that people strive to avoid uncovering negative information about themselves (Golman et al., 2017). Moreover, there is a difference between knowing something is true in the abstract, and facing the concrete reality of that truth (Frank, 1988). We suggest explicit discussion of the concrete reality of the situation – actually talking about the daughter betrayed – will challenge Bulstrode’s self-image beyond its breaking point. That is, facing reality will tear at the myriad of hidden suckers in a way that the abstract knowledge will not.⁸ Throughout the negotiation with Raffles, Bulstrode consistently fails to address his past actions, and does not even reply to Raffles comments about that past (see Lines 144-152; 193). It is plain he is striving to maintain his self-image, as if the past can be altered or is simply less real if he does not acknowledge it. To engage in an explicit and forceful

⁸ Bulstrode knows more than Raffles does. The daughter has since died, leaving a grandson. Bulstrode has remarkable scruples about lying, and continued negotiation might force him into the unbearable situation of lying directly, or revealing a truth that would put him in an even worse light.

negotiation risks this explicit engagement with the past, tearing at those suckers that currently maintain Bulstrode's equanimity.

Afterword

We have conducted a close investigation of a negotiation that did not actually take place. But does that make it irrelevant to our understanding of those that have taken place or will? We hope the analysis we offered dispels that idea, but we will conclude by offering a few lines in support of this approach. Firstly, it is worth considering that most negotiation "cases" are to a large degree fictional. They are anecdotes, sometimes unverified but even when verified cleaned up to make a pedagogical point and in any case based on incomplete information. Sometimes the point is derived from the anecdote, but more often the anecdote is customised in the service of that point. What makes the anecdote effective is not its "truth," in the sense of a conformity to what really happened, but a truth in the sense of matching how the world works. One of our favourite anecdotes is that of George Wallbridge Perkins and the Teddy Roosevelt photograph, first introduced to the negotiation literature by Sebenius (2001) and given a prominent place in Bazerman and Murnighan's *Negotiation Genius* (2007). Is this a "true story"? It does originate from an early account by someone "who was there" (Davis, 1925), but there is no documentary evidence other than the anecdote (Garritty, 1960) and the story certainly appears embellished, coming as it does from a colourful memoir focusing on the racier side of political life. The story is therefore a form of negotiation fable. Does this matter? To us it does not. We have no problem believing that in the situation as described, Perkin's clever move would have worked, and we believe it offers a valuable negotiation lesson. We believe it because if we put ourselves in the shoes of each party (especially the photographer) we expect we would behave in precisely the same way. In any negotiation in which we are engaged we immediately think "what is my counterpart's BATNA?" and this question always brings to mind Teddy Roosevelt's photo.

Similarly, the negotiation from Middlemarch does not derive its value from being a real negotiation carried out by real people, but by being a reflection and synthesis of how real people are likely to think and behave if placed in a situation similar to many we encounter in our everyday life. We are unlikely to be blackmailed because of some bad actions from our past, but we *are* likely to be "ambushed" by demands affecting our reputation when we (feel) we have little time to respond. We are also likely to be forced to deal with people we dislike, and while it is in our best interest to maintain reasonable relationships with them, we are

strongly motivated to give them what they want and leave the room (or just to leave the room). We are also likely, when under pressure, to concede more than we should (not even realising that we are conceding) and fail to take the perspective of our counterpart. We may also find that our discussions force us to confront facts about ourselves we would rather leave hidden? How can we anticipate and prepare for these eventualities?

First, by experiencing the situation itself and knowing how it will feel. Eliot draws us into the mental life of these two men (especially Bulstrode) and even if we do not like them, we can empathise while we watch them (which means, vicariously experience them) making blunder after blunder. Second, by working out better strategies for Bulstrode and Raffles, we are also working out how to create better strategies for ourselves. Finally, fictional negotiations, like many real negotiations (and unlike many negotiation cases) do not come with pat solutions but with possibilities. Every negotiation is an experiment in which there is a space of possible resolutions, and an effective negotiator will strive to choose actions that are likely to lead to good outcomes, and unlikely to lead to poor ones.

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Appendix 1: Raffles' motives

In any interaction, whether we class it as a negotiation or not, our counterparts will have diverse motives that may not be discernable to us, and possibly not even discernable to them (Chater, 2018; Trivers, 2011). An effective negotiator will strive to understand all motives, hidden or otherwise, and use what they learn to create a more favourable and durable agreement. Here we consider what we might learn about Raffles' motives. Why does he suddenly end negotiations and turn down the offer of an annuity? We suggest many plausible reasons, and if he was a "real" person we would want to investigate them all, and might expect all to be operating simultaneously.

The most obvious motive is that Raffles does not want to give up his power over Bulstrode. He resents Bulstrode and hints that it was Bulstrode's malign influence which led him to keep quiet about the daughter. In Raffles' mind, he might have been a more honorable man were it not for Bulstrode. Raffles therefore feels there is no better punishment for Bulstrode than the constant threat of exposure that comes from a free-floating Raffles. The negotiation is not about money at all, but about honour.

Indeed, while Raffles is clearly something of a scoundrel, he is not entirely without dignity or principle. He is proud of his appearance and believes (counterfactually) that he would fit well in polite society. Moreover, he likes his freedom. As he says, "I will not give up my liberty for a dirty annuity. I shall come and go where I like." (Lines 204-205). There are several occasions where he alludes to his honesty (e.g., "It's been all on the square with me; I'm as open as the day." Line 182), and he may believe that taking a "dirty annuity" is a different degree of collusion than merely taking a one-time bribe.

Combining these motives, Raffles may want to be able to return to Middlemarch and torment Bulstrode, but be honour bound to stay away from Middlemarch if he agrees to Bulstrode's offer. Raffles' certainly has a peculiar sense of honour. When Bulstrode challenges him by suggesting that coming back from America violated an agreement between them, Raffles retorts that agreeing to go to America is not the same as agreeing not to return – he does not want to be seen as renegeing on the deal. If Raffles were to agree to stay away from Middlemarch, he may feel obliged to do so or, at least, that Bulstrode would have some reason to complain if he does.

It also cannot be ignored that while Raffles is an effective negotiator in many ways, he is also extremely focused on immediate gratification, and he may have calculated that he can quickly get a lump sum larger than the first annuity payment, and even sooner. Raffles' life history, as much as we know of it, is characteristic of the modern stereotype of the adult who failed the marshmallow test as a child: unable to wait for larger returns later as a child -- two marshmallows in 15 minutes versus one now -- they go on to an adult life of impulsivity and low achievement (Mischel, 2014).

There may be a further reason for Raffles' refusal to accept an annuity. While Raffles resents and perhaps even hates Bulstrode, he also has *no one else* in his life. His wife has recently died, and Raffles has otherwise burned his bridges. He may be able to spend an evening amusing a group of strangers by making fun of one of their members, but he has no friends and what is left of his family (his stepson) has made his hatred for Raffles very clear.

All these motives are hinted at by Eliot in the brief time we spend with Raffles. To a large extent, Bulstrode's negotiation failure is related to his failure to consider the rich motives even of someone he dislikes and fears, and his consequent assumption that his counterpart seeks nothing more than to extract money from him.

Appendix 2: The negotiation

Middlemarch by George Eliot excerpted from Chapter 50. Line numbers cited in the text are from this version, which is drawn from the public domain text of *Middlemarch* available on Gutenberg.org. This is the first negotiation between Bulstrode and Raffles. The passage begins when Bulstrode is surveying his newly purchased estate and feeling particularly happy.

1 Mr. Bulstrode was conscious of being in a good spiritual frame and more than usually serene,
2 under the influence of his innocent recreation. He was doctrinally convinced that there was a
3 total absence of merit in himself; but that doctrinal conviction may be held without pain when
4 the sense of demerit does not take a distinct shape in memory and revive the tingling of
5 shame or the pang of remorse. Nay, it may be held with intense satisfaction when the depth of
6 our sinning is but a measure for the depth of forgiveness, and a clenching proof that we are
7 peculiar instruments of the divine intention. The memory has as many moods as the temper,
8 and shifts its scenery like a diorama. At this moment Mr. Bulstrode felt as if the sunshine
9 were all one with that of far-off evenings when he was a very young man and used to go out
10 preaching beyond Highbury. And he would willingly have had that service of exhortation in
11 prospect now. The texts were there still, and so was his own facility in expounding them.
12 His brief reverie was interrupted by the return of Caleb Garth, who also was on horseback,
13 and was just shaking his bridle before starting, when he exclaimed—
14 “Bless my heart! what’s this fellow in black coming along the lane? He’s like one of those
15 men one sees about after the races.” Mr. Bulstrode turned his horse and looked along the
16 lane, but made no reply. The comer was our slight acquaintance Mr. Raffles, whose
17 appearance presented no other change than such as was due to a suit of black and a crape hat-
18 band. He was within three yards of the horseman now, and they could see the flash of
19 recognition in his face as he whirled his stick upward, looking all the while at Mr. Bulstrode,
20 and at last exclaiming:—
21 “By Jove, Nick, it’s you! I couldn’t be mistaken, though the five-and-twenty years have
22 played old Boguy with us both! How are you, eh? you didn’t expect to see *me* here. Come,
23 shake us by the hand.” To say that Mr. Raffles’ manner was rather excited would be only one
24 mode of saying that it was evening. Caleb Garth could see that there was a moment of

25 struggle and hesitation in Mr. Bulstrode, but it ended in his putting out his hand coldly to
26 Raffles and saying—

27 “I did not indeed expect to see you in this remote country place.”

28 “Well, it belongs to a stepson of mine,” said Raffles, adjusting himself in a swaggering
29 attitude. “I came to see him here before. I’m not so surprised at seeing you, old fellow,
30 because I picked up a letter—what you may call a providential thing. It’s uncommonly
31 fortunate I met you, though; for I don’t care about seeing my stepson: he’s not affectionate,
32 and his poor mother’s gone now. To tell the truth, I came out of love to you, Nick: I came to
33 get your address, for—look here!” Raffles drew a crumpled paper from his pocket.

34 Almost any other man than Caleb Garth might have been tempted to linger on the spot for the
35 sake of hearing all he could about a man whose acquaintance with Bulstrode seemed to imply
36 passages in the banker’s life so unlike anything that was known of him in Middlemarch that
37 they must have the nature of a secret to pique curiosity. But Caleb was peculiar: certain
38 human tendencies which are commonly strong were almost absent from his mind; and one of
39 these was curiosity about personal affairs. Especially if there was anything discreditable to be
40 found out concerning another man, Caleb preferred not to know it; and if he had to tell
41 anybody under him that his evil doings were discovered, he was more embarrassed than the
42 culprit. He now spurred his horse, and saying, “I wish you good evening, Mr. Bulstrode; I
43 must be getting home,” set off at a trot.

44 “You didn’t put your full address to this letter,” Raffles continued. “That was not like the
45 first-rate man of business you used to be. ‘The Shrubs,’—they may be anywhere: you live
46 near at hand, eh?—have cut the London concern altogether—perhaps turned country squire—
47 have a rural mansion to invite me to. Lord, how many years it is ago! The old lady must have
48 been dead a pretty long while—gone to glory without the pain of knowing how poor her
49 daughter was, eh? But, by Jove! you’re very pale and pasty, Nick. Come, if you’re going
50 home, I’ll walk by your side.”

51 Mr. Bulstrode’s usual paleness had in fact taken an almost deathly hue. Five minutes before,
52 the expanse of his life had been submerged in its evening sunshine which shone backward to
53 its remembered morning: sin seemed to be a question of doctrine and inward penitence,
54 humiliation an exercise of the closet, the bearing of his deeds a matter of private vision
55 adjusted solely by spiritual relations and conceptions of the divine purposes. And now, as if

56 by some hideous magic, this loud figure had risen before him in unmanageable solidity—an
57 incorporate past which had not entered into his imagination of chastisements. But Mr.
58 Bulstrode's thought was busy, and he was not a man to act or speak rashly.

59 "I was going home," he said, "but I can defer my ride a little. And you can, if you please, rest
60 here."

61 "Thank you," said Raffles, making a grimace. "I don't care now about seeing my stepson. I'd
62 rather go home with you."

63 "Your stepson, if Mr. Rigg Featherstone was he, is here no longer. I am master here now."

64 Raffles opened wide eyes, and gave a long whistle of surprise, before he said, "Well then,
65 I've no objection. I've had enough walking from the coach-road. I never was much of a
66 walker, or rider either. What I like is a smart vehicle and a spirited cob. I was always a little
67 heavy in the saddle. What a pleasant surprise it must be to you to see me, old fellow!" he
68 continued, as they turned towards the house. "You don't say so; but you never took your luck
69 heartily—you were always thinking of improving the occasion—you'd such a gift for
70 improving your luck."

71 Mr. Raffles seemed greatly to enjoy his own wit, and swung his leg in a swaggering manner
72 which was rather too much for his companion's judicious patience.

73 "If I remember rightly," Mr. Bulstrode observed, with chill anger, "our acquaintance many
74 years ago had not the sort of intimacy which you are now assuming, Mr. Raffles. Any
75 services you desire of me will be the more readily rendered if you will avoid a tone of
76 familiarity which did not lie in our former intercourse, and can hardly be warranted by more
77 than twenty years of separation."

78 "You don't like being called Nick? Why, I always called you Nick in my heart, and though
79 lost to sight, to memory dear. By Jove! my feelings have ripened for you like fine old cognac.
80 I hope you've got some in the house now. Josh filled my flask well the last time."

81 Mr. Bulstrode had not yet fully learned that even the desire for cognac was not stronger in
82 Raffles than the desire to torment, and that a hint of annoyance always served him as a fresh
83 cue. But it was at least clear that further objection was useless, and Mr. Bulstrode, in giving
84 orders to the housekeeper for the accommodation of the guest, had a resolute air of quietude.

85 But it was at least clear that further objection was useless, and Mr. Bulstrode, in giving orders
86 to the housekeeper for the accommodation of the guest, had a resolute air of quietude.

87 There was the comfort of thinking that this housekeeper had been in the service of Rigg also,
88 and might accept the idea that Mr. Bulstrode entertained Raffles merely as a friend of her
89 former master.

90 When there was food and drink spread before his visitor in the wainscoted parlour, and no
91 witness in the room, Mr. Bulstrode said—

92 “Your habits and mine are so different, Mr. Raffles, that we can hardly enjoy each other’s
93 society. The wisest plan for both of us will therefore be to part as soon as possible. Since you
94 say that you wished to meet me, you probably considered that you had some business to
95 transact with me. But under the circumstances I will invite you to remain here for the night,
96 and I will myself ride over here early to-morrow morning—before breakfast, in fact—when I
97 can receive any communication you have to make to me.”

98 “With all my heart,” said Raffles; “this is a comfortable place—a little dull for a continuance;
99 but I can put up with it for a night, with this good liquor and the prospect of seeing you again
100 in the morning. You’re a much better host than my stepson was; but Josh owed me a bit of a
101 grudge for marrying his mother; and between you and me there was never anything but
102 kindness.”

103 Mr. Bulstrode, hoping that the peculiar mixture of joviality and sneering in Raffles’ manner
104 was a good deal the effect of drink, had determined to wait till he was quite sober before he
105 spent more words upon him. But he rode home with a terribly lucid vision of the difficulty
106 there would be in arranging any result that could be permanently counted on with this man. It
107 was inevitable that he should wish to get rid of John Raffles, though his reappearance could
108 not be regarded as lying outside the divine plan. The spirit of evil might have sent him to
109 threaten Mr. Bulstrode’s subversion as an instrument of good; but the threat must have been
110 permitted, and was a chastisement of a new kind. It was an hour of anguish for him very
111 different from the hours in which his struggle had been securely private, and which had ended
112 with a sense that his secret misdeeds were pardoned and his services accepted. Those
113 misdeeds even when committed—had they not been half sanctified by the singleness of his
114 desire to devote himself and all he possessed to the furtherance of the divine scheme? And
115 was he after all to become a mere stone of stumbling and a rock of offence? For who would

116 understand the work within him? Who would not, when there was the pretext of casting
117 disgrace upon him, confound his whole life and the truths he had espoused, in one heap of
118 obloquy?

119 In his closest meditations the life-long habit of Mr. Bulstrode's mind clad his most egoistic
120 terrors in doctrinal references to superhuman ends. But even while we are talking and
121 meditating about the earth's orbit and the solar system, what we feel and adjust our
122 movements to is the stable earth and the changing day. And now within all the automatic
123 succession of theoretic phrases—distinct and inmost as the shiver and the ache of oncoming
124 fever when we are discussing abstract pain, was the forecast of disgrace in the presence of his
125 neighbours and of his own wife. For the pain, as well as the public estimate of disgrace,
126 depends on the amount of previous profession. To men who only aim at escaping felony,
127 nothing short of the prisoner's dock is disgrace. But Mr. Bulstrode had aimed at being an
128 eminent Christian.

129 It was not more than half-past seven in the morning when he again reached Stone Court. The
130 fine old place never looked more like a delightful home than at that moment; the great white
131 lilies were in flower, the nasturtiums, their pretty leaves all silvered with dew, were running
132 away over the low stone wall; the very noises all around had a heart of peace within them.
133 But everything was spoiled for the owner as he walked on the gravel in front and awaited the
134 descent of Mr. Raffles, with whom he was condemned to breakfast.

135 It was not long before they were seated together in the wainscoted parlour over their tea and
136 toast, which was as much as Raffles cared to take at that early hour. The difference between
137 his morning and evening self was not so great as his companion had imagined that it might
138 be; the delight in tormenting was perhaps even the stronger because his spirits were rather
139 less highly pitched. Certainly his manners seemed more disagreeable by the morning light.

140 "As I have little time to spare, Mr. Raffles," said the banker, who could hardly do more than
141 sip his tea and break his toast without eating it, "I shall be obliged if you will mention at once
142 the ground on which you wished to meet with me. I presume that you have a home elsewhere
143 and will be glad to return to it."

144 "Why, if a man has got any heart, doesn't he want to see an old friend, Nick?—I must call
145 you Nick—we always did call you young Nick when we knew you meant to marry the old
146 widow. Some said you had a handsome family likeness to old Nick, but that was your

147 mother's fault, calling you Nicholas. Aren't you glad to see me again? I expected an invite to
148 stay with you at some pretty place. My own establishment is broken up now my wife's dead.
149 I've no particular attachment to any spot; I would as soon settle hereabout as anywhere."

150 "May I ask why you returned from America? I considered that the strong wish you expressed
151 to go there, when an adequate sum was furnished, was tantamount to an engagement that you
152 would remain there for life."

153 "Never knew that a wish to go to a place was the same thing as a wish to stay. But I did stay a
154 matter of ten years; it didn't suit me to stay any longer. And I'm not going again, Nick." Here
155 Mr. Raffles winked slowly as he looked at Mr. Bulstrode.

156 "Do you wish to be settled in any business? What is your calling now?"

157 "Thank you, my calling is to enjoy myself as much as I can. I don't care about working any
158 more. If I did anything it would be a little travelling in the tobacco line—or something of that
159 sort, which takes a man into agreeable company. But not without an independence to fall
160 back upon. That's what I want: I'm not so strong as I was, Nick, though I've got more colour
161 than you. I want an independence."

162 "That could be supplied to you, if you would engage to keep at a distance," said Mr.
163 Bulstrode, perhaps with a little too much eagerness in his undertone.

164 "That must be as it suits my convenience," said Raffles coolly. "I see no reason why I
165 shouldn't make a few acquaintances hereabout. I'm not ashamed of myself as company for
166 anybody. I dropped my portmanteau at the turnpike when I got down—change of linen—
167 genuine—honour bright—more than fronts and wristbands; and with this suit of mourning,
168 straps and everything, I should do you credit among the nobs here." Mr. Raffles had pushed
169 away his chair and looked down at himself, particularly at his straps. His chief intention was
170 to annoy Bulstrode, but he really thought that his appearance now would produce a good
171 effect, and that he was not only handsome and witty, but clad in a mourning style which
172 implied solid connections.

173 "If you intend to rely on me in any way, Mr. Raffles," said Bulstrode, after a moment's
174 pause, "you will expect to meet my wishes."

175 "Ah, to be sure," said Raffles, with a mocking cordiality. "Didn't I always do it? Lord, you
176 made a pretty thing out of me, and I got but little. I've often thought since, I might have done
177 better by telling the old woman that I'd found her daughter and her grandchild: it would have

178 suited my feelings better; I've got a soft place in my heart. But you've buried the old lady by
179 this time, I suppose—it's all one to her now. And you've got your fortune out of that
180 profitable business which had such a blessing on it. You've taken to being a nob, buying
181 land, being a country bashaw. Still in the Dissenting line, eh? Still godly? Or taken to the
182 Church as more genteel?"

183 This time Mr. Raffles' slow wink and slight protrusion of his tongue was worse than a
184 nightmare, because it held the certitude that it was not a nightmare, but a waking misery. Mr.
185 Bulstrode felt a shuddering nausea, and did not speak, but was considering diligently whether
186 he should not leave Raffles to do as he would, and simply defy him as a slanderer. The man
187 would soon show himself disreputable enough to make people disbelieve him. "But not when
188 he tells any ugly-looking truth about you," said discerning consciousness. And again: it
189 seemed no wrong to keep Raffles at a distance, but Mr. Bulstrode shrank from the direct
190 falsehood of denying true statements. It was one thing to look back on forgiven sins, nay, to
191 explain questionable conformity to lax customs, and another to enter deliberately on the
192 necessity of falsehood.

193 But since Bulstrode did not speak, Raffles ran on, by way of using time to the utmost.
194 "I've not had such fine luck as you, by Jove! Things went confoundedly with me in New
195 York; those Yankees are cool hands, and a man of gentlemanly feelings has no chance with
196 them. I married when I came back—a nice woman in the tobacco trade—very fond of me—
197 but the trade was restricted, as we say. She had been settled there a good many years by a
198 friend; but there was a son too much in the case. Josh and I never hit it off. However, I made
199 the most of the position, and I've always taken my glass in good company. It's been all on the
200 square with me; I'm as open as the day. You won't take it ill of me that I didn't look you up
201 before. I've got a complaint that makes me a little dilatory. I thought you were trading and
202 praying away in London still, and didn't find you there. But you see I was sent to you,
203 Nick—perhaps for a blessing to both of us."

204 Mr. Raffles ended with a jocosse snuffle: no man felt his intellect more superior to religious
205 cant. And if the cunning which calculates on the meanest feelings in men could be called
206 intellect, he had his share, for under the blurting rallying tone with which he spoke to
207 Bulstrode, there was an evident selection of statements, as if they had been so many moves at
208 chess. Meanwhile Bulstrode had determined on his move, and he said, with gathered
209 resolution—

210 “You will do well to reflect, Mr. Raffles, that it is possible for a man to overreach himself in
211 the effort to secure undue advantage. Although I am not in any way bound to you, I am
212 willing to supply you with a regular annuity—in quarterly payments—so long as you fulfil a
213 promise to remain at a distance from this neighbourhood. It is in your power to choose. If you
214 insist on remaining here, even for a short time, you will get nothing from me. I shall decline
215 to know you.”

216 “Ha, ha!” said Raffles, with an affected explosion, “that reminds me of a droll dog of a thief
217 who declined to know the constable.”

218 “Your allusions are lost on me sir,” said Bulstrode, with white heat; “the law has no hold on
219 me either through your agency or any other.”

220 “You can’t understand a joke, my good fellow. I only meant that I should never decline to
221 know you. But let us be serious. Your quarterly payment won’t quite suit me. I like my
222 freedom.”

223 Here Raffles rose and stalked once or twice up and down the room, swinging his leg, and
224 assuming an air of masterly meditation. At last he stopped opposite Bulstrode, and said, “I’ll
225 tell you what! Give us a couple of hundreds—come, that’s modest—and I’ll go away—honor
226 bright!—pick up my portmanteau and go away. But I shall not give up my liberty for a dirty
227 annuity. I shall come and go where I like. Perhaps it may suit me to stay away, and
228 correspond with a friend; perhaps not. Have you the money with you?”

229 “No, I have one hundred,” said Bulstrode, feeling the immediate riddance too great a relief to
230 be rejected on the ground of future uncertainties. “I will forward you the other if you will
231 mention an address.”

232 “No, I’ll wait here till you bring it,” said Raffles. “I’ll take a stroll and have a snack, and
233 you’ll be back by that time.”

234 Mr. Bulstrode’s sickly body, shattered by the agitations he had gone through since the last
235 evening, made him feel abjectly in the power of this loud invulnerable man. At that moment
236 he snatched at a temporary repose to be won on any terms. He was rising to do what Raffles
237 suggested, when the latter said, lifting up his finger as if with a sudden recollection—

238 “I did have another look after Sarah again, though I didn’t tell you; I’d a tender conscience
239 about that pretty young woman. I didn’t find her, but I found out her husband’s name, and I
240 made a note of it. But hang it, I lost my pocketbook. However, if I heard it, I should know it

241 again. I've got my faculties as if I was in my prime, but names wear out, by Jove! Sometimes
242 I'm no better than a confounded tax-paper before the names are filled in. However, if I hear
243 of her and her family, you shall know, Nick. You'd like to do something for her, now she's
244 your step-daughter."

245 "Doubtless," said Mr. Bulstrode, with the usual steady look of his light-gray eyes; "though
246 that might reduce my power of assisting you."

247 As he walked out of the room, Raffles winked slowly at his back, and then turned towards the
248 window to watch the banker riding away—virtually at his command. His lips first curled with
249 a smile and then opened with a short triumphant laugh.