THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE AESTHETIC EDUCATION OF CHARACTER

BY 

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A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH IN

PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1993

ISBN 0-315-88383-9

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

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TITLE OF THESIS: The Aesthetic Education of Character

DEGREE: Master of Education

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1993

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Abstract

The increasing focus in school curricula on science and technology has attenuated the importance of the arts in the overall picture of what it means to be an "educated person." The arts have traditionally been valued by society as a means for the aesthetic education of the individual. Over the course of time, various philosophers have regarded the development of the individual's aesthetic capacity, that is, the ability to recognize, perceive, contemplate, and understand the beautiful and sublime, integral to the growth of character. Society has determined those attributes of character that are considered essential to a life of coherent meaning and humanitarian value. With this in mind, the importance of an aesthetic education cannot be understated. As educators, we have a responsibility to ensure the revitalization of our best artistic traditions for the reciprocal benefit of the individual and society.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the following individuals who helped to bring this thesis to its fruition. In particular I would like to especially thank Dr. Eamonn Callan, my supervisor, for his advice, encouragement, and his willingness to take on an added responsibility on such late notice; Dr. Allen Pearson for his understanding and guidance; and Dr. Allen Carlson for his constructive criticism and challenging dialogues.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to Dr. Nick Kach for his sound advice and motivating me to pursue Graduate Studies.

Appreciation is also extended to Anton Bernhardt for his invaluable computer wizardry.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend, Scott Lebsack for his editing skills, and acting as a sounding board for my ideas, providing many hours of frustrating, but rewarding argument,

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

> We live in a precipitous, heady transitional age, the Age of Science (Langer, 1988, p. 399).

Our understanding of science has contributed to technological advances far beyond our wildest dreams. Twenty years ago we only speculated as to the possibilities. Today many of these ideas have become reality. However, along with these scientific and technological advances have come changes in the social, political, economic, and spiritual structures of our world. Affecting our world today are ever-increasing populations, a growing elderly sector, changing gender roles, economic prosperity and recession, racial tension, and increasing numbers of double-income, single-parent, and dysfunctional families. Schools, as a microcosm of society, are the environment in which the behaviors and attitudes of a society are often manifested. As caretakers of our culture and society, educators are obligated to choose and promote society's best traditions for the aesthetic and ethical growth of the individual (Hirsch, 1987, xvi).

There are those, however, who would suggest that these patterns are just a pastiche - that the basic, underlying problems of social, political, economic, and spiritual conflicts have always existed. This may be the case, but one cannot ignore the fact that the size and types of problems have changed over time. I am not suggesting that there is a cause and effect relationship between technological advances and what many people perceive as contemporary cultural decline. What I am suggesting is that a correlation appears to exist between the rise of science and technology and the diminution of the arts.

It has been maintained that the full range of human activities are required for a good life (Graham, 1990, p. 46), and if one robs a human life of those activities which give coherent meaning and a humanistic understanding of one's environment and relationships, one has succeeded in destroying that individual (Alexander, 1991, p. 95). The aesthetic is a human activity in which we search for beauty and goodness, because it brings a sense of order and integrity to our lives. I will argue that an aesthetic education through the arts contributes significantly to the development of those positive character attributes that comprise "who" we are, and the quality of life we live.

Traditionally, the aesthetic has been associated with beauty. However, ordinary language has closely tied our experiences with goodness to the concept of beauty. Consider the following passage from Kolnai in *Ethics, Value, and Reality* (1977, p. 210):

> If churches or certain regions on street corners in certain cities I peculiarly admire and love did not exist, it 'wouldn't make much difference'. Yet it is in their contemplation and tangible nearness, undoubtedly an aesthetic experience, that I seem somehow to be aware of the ineffable goodness of existence more deeply and vividly than in any experience of benefit or thriving, and even of moral virtue.

With the passage of time, the aesthetic has taken on an even broader meaning. Some exponents of modern aesthetic theory regard any object or event as having the capacity for beauty, if the spectator has the appropriate attitude of disinterestedness from which to appreciate the object for its own sake. For the purposes of this discussion, Eaton's definition of the aesthetic will be used. According to Eaton (1989, p. 9), the aesthetic is "that which is characterized by

delight taken in the intrinsic features of objects or events that are traditionally considered worthy of our sustained attention and reflection." Unlike other aesthetic theories, Eaton's theory does not relegate the objective and subjective aspects of aesthetic appreciation to mutually exclusive domains. She improves upon past theories by combining both perspectives into a holistic interpretation of the aesthetic. In addition, Eaton (1989, p. 169) suggests, that the aesthetic can contribute to a general value recognized as an overall meaning-of-life. In this respect, the aesthetic has equal importance to the ethical in the determination of meaning-of-life "oughts." I will take it one step further and suggest that works of art, contemplated from their aesthetic relationships to a meaning-of-life value, can contribute to character development.

It is still a matter of dispute as to whether or not an aesthetic form of knowing can influence the development of character. Aristotle portrayed the elements of character as virtues of courage, self-control, generosity, a spirit of good will, morals, cooperativeness, truthfulness, justice as fairness, and a capacity for love and friendship. These are all generally agreed upon by society as constitutive elements of a good and purposeful life (Crittenden, 1990, p. 106). The determinants of what is good in life are based upon our cultural experiences. More specifically, MacIntyre in *After Virtue* (1981, p. 26), describes character as that which furnishes society with a cultural and moral ideal. Character in this sense, is a fusion of role and personality (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 26). That is, there are individuals who are either villains or heroes, and they exhibit those traits we associate with being evil or good. Let us take it as given that character is influenced by those traditions valued within one's culture. Art and science are two such valued traditions, both requiring a breadth of knowledge in all aspects of human activity. The arts, although not the only

aesthetic vehicles, do portray our world in an abstract sense from which life and experience can be evaluated vicariously (Murdoch, 1977, p. 85). For this reason, an aesthetic education with art as the primary vehicle recommends itself strongly for the development of character.

The aesthetic education of character is not just a random series of actions and experiences. It is an interpretive process, with stages of refinement. We can think of this process in terms of understanding how to read a blueprint. Once we learn the interpretive skills of how to decipher the blueprint, we can use these to read other blueprints, and even transfer facets of this knowledge to other skill areas. I suggest that the aesthetic interpretive process consists of stages of awareness, disposition, experience, reflection, and understanding. This process does not immediately dictate right or wrong, but allows us to ask "what is good", not just "what is right." In doing so, we can evaluate our own perceptions against society's concept of what constitutes "the" good, resulting in an increased capacity to make rational life choices.

An aesthetic education in artistic traditions is important, because humankind has a huge, indiscriminate appetite for aesthetic activity. An aesthetic education will cultivate our ability to appreciate and understand the value of art. Through this enhanced capacity, we gain a humanistic understanding of ourselves and others. As we mature, frequent exposure to works of art which arouse wonder, admiration, and depth of thought and feeling beyond ourselves, will unquestionably contribute to our sense of identity, and significantly affect our concept of a good and meaningful life.

CHAPTER TWO

The Evolution of Aesthetic Theory

> The desire to find relationships, order, form in what is puzzling and challenging is certainly one of the deepest drives of human beings (Reid, 1986, p. 116).

In order to understand where we are going, we must first understand where we have come from. In this respect, the aesthetic domain is no different than any other area of knowledge and experience. The natural, inborn attraction of human beings to beauty has been observed since pre-historic times (Golaszewska, 1990, p. 72). As a species we have a need to respond to our world through expressive means of voice, hand, intellect, and body. Even a child's reactions to the world are constant and natural to the human race. The expressive gestures of the infant follow the same graphic evolution in every culture (Read, 1973, p. 18). First, basic forms, such as the circle, the upright cross, the diagonal cross, the square occur singularly. Then, two or more of these forms are combined into a comprehensive symbol called the mandala, a circle divided into quarters by a cross (Read, 1973, p. 9). By modifying the basic symbol of the mandala, a basis is provided for creating further symbols equivalent to the child's experience. As the child is initiated into the cultural norms of society, this symbolization process matures. From the simple concept of line springs shape, texture, symmetry, and colour. The striving for a cohesiveness of these parts, reflects the desire for wholeness and integrity, which ultimately constitutes our concept of beauty.

I

This philosophical concern with the nature of beauty and our ability to judge beauty existed long before the term "aesthetic" ever originated. Throughout history, humankind has tried to identify a set of rules or conditions for determining what is beautiful. Greek philosophers, such as Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus related beauty to those intrinsic features of objects which are beautiful in their very nature (Stolnitz, 1967, p. 264). St. Thomas Aquinas suggested there was not only an objective aspect to beauty, but a subjective one, as well (Dickie, 1971, p. 8). The subjective condition describes beauty as dependent both on the psychological state of the perceiver and the features of the object that are independent of the perceiver.

It was not until the Eighteenth Century however, that the study of beauty was transformed into modern aesthetic theory. In 1750, A. G. Baumgarten invented the term "aesthetic" to denote the study of a science of sensuous knowledge based on the subjective experience of beauty (Eaton, 1989, p. 129). It was also during this time that aesthetic theory divided into two schools of thought; the objectivist and the subjectivist. Objectivist theory defines the aesthetic in terms of specific features or properties, which existing to varying degrees contribute to an object's or event's aesthetic value. The aesthetic value is based upon established norms or rules against which the object or event is measured (Mukarovský, 1979, p. 59). The object or event can be simple, like the shimmer of the Northern Lights, or much more complex, like a modern abstract painting.

The subjectivist theorists define the aesthetic in terms of the spectator. In this approach, the aesthetic potential is as much in the spectator as it is in the

object being perceived (Mukarovský, 1979, p. 28). Through the subjectivist approach, attitude theories gained prominence. These theories claimed that in order to appreciate an object aesthetically or have an aesthetic experience, a special attitude was required so that one could perceive the object "for its own sake." The concepts of "taste" (i.e., Alison) and "disinterestedness" (i.e., Shaftesbury) as special mental faculties or attitudes, became popular (Dickie, 1971, p. 9, 21).

Disinterestedness is described as the action of "shutting oneself off from human interests, arresting memories and anticipations, subsequently lifting oneself above the stream of life" (Berleant, 1986, p. 102). The faculty of taste on the other hand, was considered by some to be a special mental faculty. Some maintained it was a special composite of several faculties, while others considered it as ordinary cognitive and affective functioning employed in an unusual way (Dickie, 1971, p. 11). In the following excerpt, Bullough (1977, p. 759) describes this special attitude as one of "psychical distance", comparing it to a fog at sea:

> Thus, in the fog, the transformation by Distance is produced in the first instance by putting the phenomenon, so to speak, out of gear with our practical, actual self; by allowing it to stand outside the context of our personal needs and ends-in short, by looking at it 'objectively,' as it has often been called, by permitting only such reactions on our part as emphasize the 'objective' features of the experience, and by interpreting even our 'subjective' affections not as modes of *our* being but rather as characteristics of the phenomenon.

Bullough (1977, pp. 763-764) recognizes however, that distancing can have

limitations. These limitations are described as under- or over-distancing. We are under-distanced when we become too closely tied to the object. As a result, objectivity is sacrificed to religious, emotional, or political factors. When the spectator is too far removed from the object, absurdity or artificiality occurs and one is over-distanced. For example, a limited understanding of the ballet or symphony may create a sense of separation from what is happening on stage, thus motivating an attitude of indifference.

In contrast, Sibley suggests that a special attitude is not sufficient for understanding the aesthetic. Rather, he draws upon the Eighteenth Century concept of a special mental faculty called "taste." Taste, according to Sibley (1977, p. 818), is the ability to notice, see, or tell that things have particular qualities. Sibley argues that not everyone is capable of perceiving these qualities. However, taste is a faculty which can be developed by exposure to features which require the knowledgeable use of aesthetic terms, metaphors, similes, comparisons, contrasts, imitations, or reiterations.

Eaton, although she would not consider herself an attitude theorist, does describe a special psychological condition necessary to the aesthetic. Rather than an attitude, she refers to this condition as "control." Control is the ability to maintain a sufficient level of attention and reflection upon an object (Eaton, 1989, pp. 18-19). It is a necessary feature of the aesthetic, although weaker than disinterestedness. Rather than an all-or-none proposition, there can be degrees or levels of control in experiencing the aesthetic.

II

Aesthetic attitude theories have had their critics. Dickie, suggests that it is the broad social institutions of established practices, such as museums and Institutes of Art which correctly identify and set the standards of excellence for what we appreciate aesthetically. (Berleant, 1986, p. 108). That is, an aesthetic attitude is unnecessary for the perception of beauty, because we learn what is aesthetic and non-aesthetic from the traditions which authoritative institutions in society promote. The concept of disinterestedness could be rejected on other grounds as well. Disinterestedness for Dewey did not reflect an attitude appropriate to the aesthetic because it would be static and discontinuous with life (Smith, 1971, p. 71). Dewey believed a disinterested attitude which promoted a private, subjective, and unsharable experience would be uneducative (Smith, 1971, p. 76). Hampshire criticized aesthetic attitude theories by suggesting that it is unnatural to hold an individual's attention still upon a particular thing. "The common vocabulary, being created for practical purposes, obstructs any disinterested perception of things" (Hampshire, 1959, p. 166). Hampshire is suggesting attitude theories are limiting, because such theories deny the influence prior experiences and social context have upon aesthetic reaction and understanding. The content of an aesthetically perceived object or event and the context in which one perceives it are neglected. Hampshire (1959, p. 166) argues that "There is no practical reason why attention should be arrested upon a single object, framed and set apart." This suggests that to think one can perceive, assess and understand something outside of its practical context, serves no great purpose to humanity.

The chief criticism I would level against attitude theories is that they do

not allow for the development of character. According to Dewey, if an experience is to have value, it must leave a deposit which can provide a point of initiation for new experiences, or empower one to move forward (Smith, 1971, p. 71). Thus Dewey implicitly acknowledged a close connection between aesthetic experience and the subsequent formation of the self. In defending a view of art education that emphasizes character development, I will argue that the objectivist and subjectivist accounts are not and need not be mutually exclusive. In fact, both are necessary to the understanding of the aesthetic. Beardsley, most closely identifies this relationship by describing the aesthetic as "compound and disjunctive." As compound, it cannot be reduced to a single feature, such as a pure aesthetic emotion or attitude. Rather he suggests, it consists of a number of characteristics that tend to cluster. Disjunctive means that experiences with aesthetic characteristics separate themselves easily from ordinary experiences, even though ordinary experiences may partake of some aesthetic features (Smith, 1992, p. 58).

Coinciding with this view of equal and complementary relationships between the subjective and objective approaches, contemporary theorists, such as Berleant and Eaton, suggest the following alternatives. Berleant identifies the aesthetic experience as having connections with other modes of experience, such as practical, social, religious, or political. Berleant (1991, p. 45) describes the aesthetic as an essential reciprocity that binds the object and spectator as they act on and respond to each other through an interplay of forces. It is a mutual engagement of person and object that is both active and receptive on every side. Berleant (1991, p. 44) explains "engagement" as follows:

> Engagement is the signal feature of the world of actions, of social

> exchange, of personal and emotional encounters, or play, of cultural movements like romanticism and, as is our claim here, of the direct and powerful experiences that enclose us in situations involving art, nature, or the human world in intimate and compelling ways.

Eaton identifies the aesthetic as a compilation of objectivist and subjectivist components. Intrinsic features of objects that have been deemed of value within one's cultural traditions are still necessary for attention, reflection, and conception (Eaton, 1989, p. 147) However, past experiences can influence perceptions and associations, thereby promoting new ideas. We cannot isolate ourselves from the context and content of the object or event, nor would it be feasible to do so in our attempt to understand our world. Eaton's aesthetic theory, which I shall draw heavily on in this thesis, addresses the issue of aesthetic value in the context of the "good life." That is, a rational life in which there are meaning-of-life "oughts" which determine how we should live. The aesthetic process provides us with a method of interpretation which is not strictly limited to pleasure, but to the interpenetration of the experience of beauty and goodness (Kolnai, 1977, p. 189). The aesthetic interpretive process of awareness, disposition, experience, reflection, and understanding can contribute to the realization of a meaning-of-life value.

CHAPTER THREE

The Value of Aesthetic Cognition, Art, and Aesthetic Education

> What is he (the educand) to make of objects in the natural world and of phenomena such as the dark, thunder, the tides, time and the changes of the seasons? What is he to make of other people and of their reactions to him and to each other? What is he to think about himself and about questions of ownership? What attitude is he to take towards the cycle of birth, marriage and death? In what way is he to react to authority and violence? (Peters, R., quoted in Elliott, 1986, p. 60)

For an individual coherently to understand his or her relationship to the world and life within it, an education in all the ways that humankind has of perceiving, interpreting, and understanding is desirable. These forms of knowing would not only include the humanities, sciences, mathematics, and religion, but the aesthetic as well. As Hirst (1965, p. 87) suggests, the pursuit of knowledge in all its forms is the pursuit of the good of the mind, because the achievement of knowledge is fundamental to the developed mind in all its aspects, and this in itself is an essential element in living a good life. The "good life" is one in which we use our minds to make, act and think in the best ways possible for human beings (Graham, 1990, p. 46). The aesthetic interpretive process is an all-encompassing activity comprising awareness, disposition, experience, reflection, and understanding. Like other forms of interpretation, it contributes to positive ways of acting and thinking. Even though we have no one object that exemplifies the ultimate in beauty or goodness, and no one way of life that reflects the perfect composite of goods for human beings (Callan, 1992, p.

15), the aesthetic interpretive process is one continuous strand which pervades all other forms of interpretation. This aesthetic interpretive process is a way of apprehending and assessing the meanings a culture has developed through its traditions. As an objective good, it has the capacity to nourish and exercise our minds beyond concerns limited to the minimal business of solving the immediate problems of daily existence (Haviland, 1991, p. 592). In order to answer those questions concerning the human condition which hold relevance for everyone (Elliott, 1986, pp. 60-61), it is essential we extend our cognitive boundaries beyond ourselves and develop a capacity for humanistic insight.

I

In order to act in good and beautiful ways, we have to be able to recognize what is good and beautiful in our lives and understand why it functions in this manner. The aesthetic interpretive process is what yields this understanding. Reimer (1992, pp. 42-45) describes it as more than knowing facts <u>about</u> something, knowing <u>that</u> something exists for a specific reason, or knowing <u>why</u> it has a particular function and place in one's psychological and cultural framework. Aesthetic cognition includes the ability to go beyond factual knowing to the knowing <u>of or within</u> meaningful structure (Reimer, 1992, p. 34).

This knowing of or within is a compilation of facts about an object's function, history, and most significantly, an understanding of how its content, form, and the context in which it is viewed contribute to how we perceive it and incorporate it into our personal and world views. Knowing of or within allows us to see the essence of an aesthetically perceived object's structure, balance, symmetry, harmony, and integrity, as representative of those same qualities of a

properly constituted self (Smith, 1992, p. 56). For example, when listening to one of Beethoven's compositions for string quartet, there is conveyed a continuity of theme, rhythm, tempo, tonality, texture, and harmony. There may be sections of discordance, which if left unresolved will affect the integrity and continuity of the work. Resolution in music, just as in life, is essential to the realization of harmony. Being able to hear the cohesiveness of varying lines, and yet sense a directed purpose occurs both on the cognitive, as well as affective levels. The result of understanding the interactions between the contributing parts of a musical composition is the knowing of or within. Just as the elements of music are integral to the coherent realization of its essence, so are continuity, cohesiveness, integrity, structure, and harmony integral to living a good life. The comprehensiveness of the aesthetic interpretive process can assist the individual in forming a coherent personal world view and life-philosophy (Elliott, 1986, p. 62).

The aesthetic as a cognitive activity offers an exciting challenge in the discovery and making of connections. Smith in *Toward Percipience in the Arts* (1992, p. 59) describes it as a combination of "making sense of something with making something make sense." For example, there are objects or events in our lives which are intelligible and yet we fail to understand them, for whatever reason. There are many examples in stories where a character's actions are intelligible, however we cannot understand them because we do not know the context, or the relationships that existed prior to the action. Once the facts are made known to us, we can make sense of the storyline. On the other hand, there are objects or events which taken at face value do not make sense, and we are required to draw upon our experience and knowledge of related areas to make them coherent. For example, Eaton (1988, p. 3) describes a work by Carl

Andre called *Stone Field*. This work comprises thirty-six boulders placed in varying locations and positions to each other. What are we to make of such an enigmatic piece of work? The cognitive act of aesthetic interpretation enables our contemplative and conceptual capacities to make sense of the insensible. This process is an instrumental mode of perceiving, experiencing and understanding. One might say that it is critical thinking which conjoins imagination and criticism in a single form of thinking. In this way, aesthetic knowing and understanding are the result of a complex and wide-ranging cognitive process enacted by the individual (Reid, 1986, p. 117).

Not everyone however, thinks of the aesthetic as a cognitive process. Hampshire (1959, p. 164) described the aesthetic as a gratuitous activity, one in which answers or solutions are not part of the activity's distinctive character. He maintains that response to a work of art is not imposed by the object, neither is a rationale for the response required (Smith, 1992, p. 168). Therefore, the aesthetic experience has no purpose beyond enjoyment. In a broader sense however, answers are a part of the aesthetic process. We interpret meaning for ourselves and we seek others' opinions and interpretations in making sense of what we see and hear. We also receive pleasure from contemplating, making associations, and conceiving new ideas, and these in turn may motivate us to take action in some way or form. Among the factors Hampshire fails to take into account is the impact of the sublime; that sensation of wonderment, fear, of being awe-struck, which gives us pleasure and causes us to reflect on beauty and goodness. The fact that something gives us pleasure is not where goodness or beauty arises; it gives pleasure precisely because it has value (Graham, 1990, p. 42).

This cognitive act of aesthetic interpretation is one way in which we can

embody the collected human experience. It provides a building block on which we base our experience, reason and understanding. We may appreciate and know many things aesthetically, such as nature, the spiritual, math, science, and morals. However, the particular vehicle of the aesthetic way of knowing as I shall focus on, is the work of art. It is through the human creations of what we, as human beings, deem beautiful and good which contributes to the development of character. The cognitive act of the aesthetic interpretive process should therefore be central to our experience of art.

II

The arts, such as music, painting, sculpture, drama, architecture, and dance, are public modes of displaying what we know factually, technically, morally, and metaphysically about our world. Our perceptions and interpretations of the world have traditionally been deeply affected by art, with each art form providing a different qualitative experience. In order significantly to appreciate what is being offered, we must develop the skills necessary to interpret and understand the object or event. Individuals who possess an extensive training in the qualitative modes of knowing will have an advantage over those individuals whose breadth of qualitative experience is relatively impoverished (Young, 1982, p. 11). My concern in this thesis is with the interpretive process of the spectator, and not the creator. Given this limitation of my argument, the function of the arts in my opinion, is to expand our aesthetic cognitive capacities by providing examples, representations, and interpretations of our world through a wide variety of artistic creations.

Lack of involvement with an aesthetic tradition in art would inevitably

leave us aesthetically myopic. As a result, our understanding of each other as human beings may be hindered. By involving children in the artistic traditions of their own cultures, as well as those of other cultures, their aesthetic and world views will be broadened. Art captures ideas, perspectives, and insights into human existence that may not be possible through the use of other symbol systems (Price, 1962, p. 391). For example, Picasso's *Guernica* is a painting which depicts the atrocities of war in a way in which no other symbolic representation could convey. However, in order to understand all the work has to offer, knowledge of the process of aesthetic interpretation is imperative. It is this knowledge that allows the observer to realize the virtues which may be represented in the work. As Read states:

> It is expected that maximum development of aesthetic sensibility, and frequent and intensive contact with art, will assist in fostering such welcome features as overall sensibility to all phenomena encountered by man, intense imagination, an open attitude to life (thus, an inclination to versatility) and, last but not least, optimism and affirmation of life (Golaszewska, 1988, p. 71).

Art accomplishes this by providing a safe haven from which to imagine life vicariously, both its actions and consequences. Artworks can exemplify the importance of bringing men to love the virtues they ought to practice (Price, 1962, p. 420), and show in vivid, concrete detail what the good life consists of. In this respect, the ability to understand art is beneficial because it provides us with a form of reflection, which contributes to a unique dimension of man's character, that cannot be developed through other means (Smith, 1992, p. 123-124).

According to Schilling (1986, p. 14), the basis for teaching a particular subject matter is not how it fits into a general structure of knowledge, but what point or purpose it serves in developing practical rationality, understanding and the capacity for right action. As Beardsley points out, art serves this instrumental purpose:

> The aim and justification of art education can be simply stated as the initiation of young minds into the artworld and its principal denizens, outstanding works of art, the proper (aesthetic) experience of which results in a state of human well-being or welfare that is both distinctive and valuable, indeed valuable because distinctive. Such a state of well-being is characterized by a fusion of cognitive and affective components that we rarely find in other kinds of commerce with the world. In this special sense we can say art shapes or educates feeling, although the terminology is misleading for more than affect is involved in aesthetic experience (Smith, 1984, p. 145).

It is a widely held assessment that art as an aesthetic means of educating, has been "removed to the margins of social and cultural life" (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 227). Only a minority of the gifted, specialists, or those with time to spend receive the benefits of an aesthetic education beyond the most rudimentary level. The rest might receive incidental benefits, but only as spectators or consumers. Where the idea of involvement in the arts was once socially central, the idea of aesthetic consumption is now all that is available to the majority (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 229). Television, radio, movies, newspapers, or magazines tell us what we should wear, think and how we should act. The external trappings of our identities are pushed upon us to the exclusion of all else. Our character is influenced by someone else's conception of what we

should be. This is not to say that the media does not depict personalities of good character. However, the intention of promoting a particular role model is often to sell a product or concept. Merchandise is associated with a particular kind of person in the hopes that we will want to emulate that person, and buy the related product. Without the benefit of an education in the aesthetic interpretive process we unknowingly fall victim to the media's desires and simply emulate the imagery put forth. We are in essence suspending our faculty of independent judgment, thinking through another's brain and working through another's hands (Rand, 1943, p. 607-608). In this way, what we are in fact teaching our young is to seek themselves in others. The development of character is more than just an imitation of a role model.

The story need not be as dismal as it sounds, however. Our greatest moments arise from a genuine uniqueness of judgment and understanding. We can cultivate our ability to judge and understand the arts regardless of whether or not we have unusual creative talent, and regardless of the type of information being thrown at us daily. The value of an aesthetic interpretive process lies in its capacity to teach us to think in unique, open, and yet critical ways. Benedetto Croce, at the turn of the Twentieth Century, suggested that "economic justice and aesthetic beauty were the result not only of the scientist's or the artist's genius, but of the layman's ability to conceive and to apply the true images of a consistent world" (Thomas, 1962, p. 311). This ability according to Croce, would in turn strengthen the individual against his weaknesses and fit him as a well-adjusted character into a rational pattern of life (Thomas, 1962, p. 311).

III

The term "character" has occurred frequently throughout this discussion. However, before we can consider the relative values of an aesthetic education to character development, a more thorough understanding of "character" is required. Character has come to be particularly associated with morals. However, there is more to character than the ability to exercise moral reasoning and conduct. Along with moral reasoning, Aristotle identified courage, self-control, generosity, a spirit of good will, truthfulness, justice, a capacity for love and friendship, perseverance in the face of danger and suffering, and the ability to sacrifice for others (Crittenden, 1990, p. 106). Pring (1976, p. 21-22), a modern educational theorist, identifies four intellectual virtues associated with character and promoted by an aesthetic education. They include an openness to criticism and respect for other people as the possible source of criticism, a concern for truth, a collaborative spirit, and finally a sense of humility before the achievements of mankind. Having these virtuous attributes does not mean that we have no concern for our own needs. One's individuality is considered, but this individuality includes a desire to act for the general welfare where this desire has become a will or purpose (Price, 1982, p. 429-430).

A person of character, according to MacIntyre (1981, p. 27), embodies the moral and metaphysical ideas and theories of his or her culture. Here "culture" implies a common context that makes the actions of individuals intelligible to society. The traditions within a culture describe what is considered of value to that society in sustaining the relationship of the past, to the present and future (Haviland, 1991, p. 280). Scruton suggests that the great touchstones of culture justify our participation in the world. Touchstones give meaning and significance

to human existence and liberate our moral sense. Scruton concludes that

> great works of art give us aesthetic understanding or what John Ciardi called aesthetic wisdom: that body of knowledge and experience that enabled Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and other great writers to fashion their unique sense of the world (Smith, 1989, p. 181).

Aesthetic understanding is thus connected to an apprehension of what is ethically deep in human experience.

The traditionally accepted attributes of persons of good character are depicted by "heroes" in literature, painting, sculpture, myths, legends, music and drama. Heroes possess those qualities we consider exemplars of all that is best in humankind. On the opposite extreme of course, are the villains who represent all that is evil. Heroic and villainous characters provide the guidelines by which we identify those qualities we do or do not wish people to strive for in their thoughts and actions. Literature has given us numerous examples, such as Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham, Snow White and the evil Queen, or Tess Durbeyfield and Alec d'Urberville. What I mean by "good character" is that combination of qualities which lead us to think, feel and act from inclinations which are motivated by a pursuit of personal well-being and the well-being of society; these qualities being learned from traditions considered by our predecessors as having deep and enduring value.

Even though aesthetics as a distinct field of study did not exist prior to the Eighteenth Century, the arts have been recognized as highly influential in the development of character. Plato described art as having the capacity to create experiences which had the power to supplant the practical and everyday

experiences of men and women (Swanger, 1982, p. 261). There could be no stories in which the wicked were happy or the good unhappy; the moral effect on young minds could be negative (Russell, 1945, p. 110). Drama was banned because it contained characters other than faultless male heroes of good birth. The Lydian and Ionian harmonies were forbidden because they expressed sorrow and a carefree attitude (Russell, 1945, p. 110). Although Plato's interest in goodness and beauty was reflected in a concern with the seductive side of art, Plato was an aesthetician who recognized the power of aesthetic expression and sensitivity to influence character.

For Aristotle, virtues were the means for promoting and achieving the conditions in which human beings acted well and lived well, the conditions of well-being or happiness (Crittenden, 1990, p. 105) The virtues were precisely those qualities the possession of which would enable an individual to achieve happiness and the lack of which would frustrate his movement toward that telos (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 148). MacIntyre (1981, p. 219) suggests these virtues enable us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions we encounter, and will provide us with increasing self-knowledge and knowledge of the good. The telos for human beings as described by Aristotle, comprised those goods that were achievable by human activity (Crittenden, 1990, p. 105). Although Aristotle did not specifically refer to the aesthetic or art as a good, one might assume that as a natural human activity at which one could achieve excellence of thought and action, it would qualify as one.

An aesthetic education for Schiller was not to be contrasted with moral education, but did have an important moral function (Smith, 1992, p. 56). *On the Aesthetic Education of Man in a Series of Letters*[1], Schiller (1967, p. 63) suggested that an education through the concept of beauty might counter the

human extremes of coarseness and perversity. It was the decline of heroic virtues which served as an indication of man's failure to recognize beauty and goodness (Schiller, 1967, p. 69). Thus, the appreciation of beauty had to be carefully monitored, for when indulged it could lead to indifference, while its neglect could develop into a contempt because it was misunderstood (Schiller, 1967, p. 65). Schiller believed that true civil and political freedom could only be achieved through the formation of an ennobled character. The heroic virtues could be taught through an aesthetic education, which relied primarily on the study of immortal masterworks. Qualities of balance, harmony, and symmetry exhibited by artworks served as an example of what a properly constituted and good life could be (Smith, 1992, p. 56).

Children have a knowledge, a sense of what is pleasurable, beautiful and good, long before they have a concept of what is right or wrong. Thomas (1962, p. 307) suggests that because we have the ability to experience and imagine long before we reason, we are artists before we are scientists. I am not suggesting that the aesthetic is logically or developmentally prior to ethical or other kinds of knowledge, but that the aesthetic way of knowing plays a significant role in the development of those characteristics that contribute positively to society and the individual. Moral conduct is just one aspect of character closely enmeshed with other aspects, such as aesthetic sensibility.

We convey examples of good character through education in those subjects society has traditionally chosen to initiate newcomers into its culture. MacIntyre (1981, p. 187) refers to these as "practices", which are coherent and complex forms of socially determined human activity. The goods internal to a particular form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and definitive of that activity.

This results in the human powers to achieve excellence. Through participation, the human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. The aesthetic, as a unique way of interpreting situations, provides internal goods in the form of balance, symmetry, harmony, and integrity. The arts, as practices exemplify those goods which in turn develop those qualities requisite to being a person of good character. For example, O'Dea in *Virtue in Musical Performance* (1993, p. 54) cites musical performance as a practice with goods internal to it, such as honesty, patience, tenacity, and courage. These goods contribute to the development of the virtue of authenticity.

The debate over whether or not the aesthetic way of knowing can contribute to moral thought and action continues to persist. Swanger (1985, p. 89) believes that the aesthetic does not instruct morally or in any other respect, due to the ambivalence embodied in artwork. Art, as open form, supplies no right or wrong answers. Swanger (1986, p. 142) does, however, suggest that art has a parallel function to moral reasoning through its capacity to develop one's insight into moral situations through imagination. Through reciprocity, that is the ability to imagine ourselves in another person's position, to view things from his or her standpoint, we can arrive at a decision regarding what action to take.

As Berleant (1991, p. 49) suggests, "With art, there is an aesthetic reciprocity of both perceiver and object in the aesthetic situation." Art offers an outside vantage point from which the individual can reflect upon and evaluate what passes for everyday reality. Imagining alternatives and their consequences can provide new and unique answers to moral dilemmas. For example, "It allows persons to see that, like actors in an impromptu drama, they are not merely victims of circumstance but also creators of their own destiny" (Young, 1982, p. 13). With each encounter, a positive change of character can

occur due to our increased understanding and awareness of other world views, and our own and others' perceptual biases.

Contrary to Swanger, Eaton in *Aesthetics and the Good Life* (1989), is willing to accede that there is a possible link between the aesthetic and character development, with art as the primary vehicle. This link is established through a meaning-of-life value, which is neither just moral nor just aesthetic. Eaton (1989, p. 175) describes it as a meaning-of-life "should." Eaton (1989, p. 175), suggests a connection exists between being a person who has aesthetic knowledge (whether through art or other means), and being a person who has sympathies and insights of a kind required for constructive social interaction. That is, there appears to be a value associated with knowing and understanding beauty, which will lead us to act in humanistic ways.

> 'How' we aesthetically appreciate is just as important to our psychological and emotional being as 'what' we aesthetically appreciate. The 'how' determines what we think and do, and what we consider correct for ourselves and others to think and do (Carlson, 1981, p. 24).

With this in mind, Eaton's meaning-of-life value has important implications for the aesthetic education of character. In the following chapter, I explore these in depth.

REFERENCES

[1]Schiller's Series of letters were written from 1792-1803. These letters cover his impressions of the condition of society during the French Revolution, Reign of Terror, and France's war with Austria.

CHAPTER FOUR

Eaton's Aesthetic Theory

> What delights or repels us aesthetically, what we believe, and what motivates or offends us morally influence and interfere with one another. Beliefs and moral and practical interests, although controlled, are never completely put aside in aesthetic experience (Eaton, 1989, p. 178).

Marcia Eaton in *Aesthetics and the Good Life* (1989) provides a unified theory of the aesthetic which binds the aesthetic to an essential role in the pursuit of a meaningful life. The aesthetic interpreted with a meaning-of-life value provides a value beyond mere enjoyment, one which takes on moral implications and can ultimately contribute to the development of character. Eaton (1989, p. 9) defines the aesthetic as "that which is characterized by delight taken in intrinsic features of objects or events that are traditionally considered worthy of sustained attention or reflection." Eaton's definition reiterates the traditional aspects of aesthetic theory, that of the object, subject, and response. She expands upon traditional theory however, by proposing that traditions and past experiences play a significant role in how we aesthetically perceive.

I

The central theme which runs through Eaton's theory is the importance of tradition to the knowing and experiencing of the aesthetic. Through the shared

traditions in which we are raised we learn what is valued and appropriate. According to MacIntyre, these traditions stem from their respective cultures which are then the given starting points for pursuit of the good (Callan, 1992, p. 6). We could then surmise that the aesthetic tradition is necessary for the pursuit of the aesthetic good.

The aesthetic tradition is that practice, as MacIntyre describes it, which sets the standards of excellence within the artistic domain of a given culture. Consider the practice of music which has the intrinsic features traditionally associated with it, of rhythm, tone, harmonies, timbres, and form. These features exist to varying degrees and combinations within cultures. For example, Western music utilizes an octave scale, whereas Eastern and Folk music uses a pentatonic scale. How we learn to appreciate these traditions is through initiation and experience within the respective culture.

Eaton is not suggesting that aesthetic traditions are stagnant and closed to change. Although traditions are a result of a long social and historical process in which standards and practices are continually redefined, they are always subject to reconsideration and modification in the light of new investigation and thought (Schilling, 1986, p. 14). For example, if we did not first have a tradition of musical elements, the Jazz idiom, based on a combination of European classical and African folk styles, would never have developed. The traditions from which Jazz evolved are still vital, even though modified. As Eaton states, "features of objects and events referred to as 'aesthetic', or believed to contribute to a thing's aesthetic value, differ across time and cultures, but have their locus in the object or event" (Eaton, 1989, p. 147).

Aesthetic traditions understood through art are necessary to a rational life, for without them there would be aesthetic chaos. We would have no sense

of what is considered beautiful within our culture or have the ability to generalize aesthetic practices to other cultures. Traditions, however, do not necessarily have meaning or value outside of the cultures in which they are embedded. Bullfighting may be aesthetically valued in Spain or Mexico; however, North Americans might feel compelled to view it with disgust, horror and pity. It has no aesthetic relevance to those outside of that specific culture, because we lack the training in how appropriately to perceive and understand its value. The same individual, however, might enjoy fly fishing for sport. In its own way, it contains aspects which are as disgusting and pitiful as the bullfight. As a culturally accepted tradition for us, however, these feelings are reflected positively, rather than negatively. This, however, does not mean we cannot learn to understand and eventually develop an appreciation for other cultures' aesthetic traditions.

Aesthetic features, as characterized by Eaton, must be initiated through a positive attraction by the viewer to some identifiable special quality. Although Eaton does not specify what these qualities are, other than that they have been traditionally recognized by a culture, one could safely assume they are representative of beauty and goodness. Clive Bell and Roger Fry, formalist theorists, referred to these special qualities of features as "significant form" (Berleant, 1986, p. 106). The relations and combinations of lines, colours, mass, space, light, and plane are what contribute to significant form. According to Eaton (1989, p. 145), the number of traditionally accepted, identifiable features an object or event possesses will determine its aesthetic worth. For example, the aesthetic worth of a children's song would be trivial in comparison to a Mozart concerto, because it does not contain the variety of features a concerto is composed of (Wilson, 1984, p. 93). However, quantity is not sufficient in itself to determine quality. Quantity of features contribute to the qualitative worth of

the object as long as there are no features which lack significance to its overall form. In the Mozart composition, every trill, tremolo, or cadence fulfills a purpose toward the integrity of the artistic work. A limitation of Eaton's theory, is that she fails to substantiate what quality means in relation to aesthetic features.

According to Eaton, aesthetic traditions are learned through the use of aesthetic language, which in turn shapes the tradition of artistic creation and assessment (Eaton, 1989, p. 122). Language, as Eaton interprets it, is used initially to determine whether an object or event is aesthetic or not. A word falls within the sphere of aesthetic language if that term has been traditionally used to identify or describe a property worthy of attention and reflection. The term and the property are both aesthetic at this point (Eaton, 1989, p. 27). Eaton (1989, p. 21) is comparable to Sibley in suggesting that it is agreement on terminology that determines the objective foundations of the aesthetic.

Another element of Eaton's theory with ties to modern aesthetic theory is that of pleasure. Eaton, however, refers to it as delight. As Eaton describes it, delight is more than just pleasure, it is a sense of well-being, satisfaction or even accomplishment. What makes Eaton's theory more plausible than theories that focus exclusively on pleasure, is that social context and the objective features of an experience are incorporated into the aesthetic process. Culture influences context, content, experience, and how we perceive and react to objects or events. Regardless of how we try to displace our biases and perceptions, they will impact on our aesthetic responses. To say that one can isolate his or her perceptions and view anything from a disconnected standpoint is rightly rejected as an unreasonable aspiration.

Delight is not solely the result of viewing an object disinterestedly, for its own sake. Our past experiences and associations determine how we perceive,

interpret, and understand our environment. We often appreciate and feel aesthetic pleasure because of the content or context in which we view an object or event. If we reflect purposefully, that means we are paying attention to every aspect which is influencing the aesthetic moment. If the context is not right, we will not view an object aesthetically. If I am in my office rushing to meet a deadline, I probably will notice the snow falling, but not take time to appreciate its beauty. Associations can also determine the degree of quality we experience. The associations which arise from my contact with an object or event may range from fear to enrapturement depending on my past experiences. Delight can be experienced in thick or thin degrees, ranging from mild excitement to profound interest.

In order for delight to occur, Eaton has identified the condition of "control." It is described as follows:

> Control, a necessary feature for aesthetic delight, as for delight in general, is that it must result from attention to certain features of a situation, features to which attention would be impossible or inappropriate if we (or others) were genuinely endangered or otherwise thoroughly engaged or practically committed (Eaton, 1989, p. 64-65).

Control is a weak version of disinterestedness or distance. Like the special attitudes of modern aesthetic theory, control is a conscious act which is necessary in order for delight to occur. A certain level of awareness and ability to restrain one's fears and associations from influencing the aesthetic response must exist. Bruner (1979, p. 70), similarly believes that to successfully behold a work of art involves a comparable act of containing impulses that have been

aroused. If fear, repulsion, or sadness affect the process beyond the point where emotion is all that exists, the response would not, and could not be aesthetic. This does not mean that the perceiver will never experience fear or sadness in an aesthetic sense. For example, control is lacking when I ride a roller coaster because my fear of heights combined with a fast moving vehicle overrides my rational capacities to cope with the situation. However, I can ride a gondola up the side of a mountain, still having a fear of heights, but be in control enough to enjoy the scenery unfolding below me.

Control is not an all-or-none criterion, though Eaton does not say so. There can be, like delight, thick and thin degrees of control. The degree of control is dictated by our past experiences, associations, and the related emotions. Similar to Bullough's over- and under-distancing, we can presume it is possible to have too much, as well as too little control. What Eaton suggests, is that unlike previous attitude theories, we do not have to be cut off from the flow of life; that is, our culture, traditions or past experiences. Control gives us the degree of restraint we need aesthetically to experience, and yet does not limit the potential of that experience.

Eaton draws the aesthetic elements together by suggesting that the aesthetic function lies in its contribution to a "meaning-of-life" value. This particular value is reflected in the demands a rational life make upon us in terms of "what we should like, what we should approve of and delight in, and what we should disapprove of and abhor" (Eaton, 1989, p. 169). The meaning-of-life value rests on our ability to reflect appropriately within our culture. If one were to ask "why should the aesthetic matter?", we would have to say that the aesthetic tradition is necessary to a meaning-of-life value, which ultimately contributes to development of those virtues necessary for character. The fact is,

other values can and do influence our aesthetic sensibility, just as the aesthetic can influence other values. These competing values may be spiritual, economic, political, religious, or moral.

What is striking about Eaton's theory is her contention that aesthetic value might outweigh other values in some circumstances. Her example of this is a story about the building of a hydroelectric dam. If built, people will lose a beautiful, natural part of the countryside, and I will add, the destruction of life, such as trees and animals. However, if the dam is not built, people will be deprived of cheaper electricity and jobs (Eaton, 1989, p. 173). Which value should take precedence? The decision is not quite so easy, because at this point, both the moral and aesthetic seem to be on an equal footing. What Eaton (1989, p. 179) is attempting to prove, is that we can live an immoral/aesthetic life, or a moral/unaesthetic life and in either case, the loss of value may harm and deprive others.

How do we decide which value takes priority? Eaton explains that judging value is dependent upon being rational. Rationality, as interpreted by Eaton (1989, p. 175), involves consideration of principles, means and ends, striving for validity, and a concern for truth and consistency. Being rational is a part of making decisions regarding the meaning-of-life value, and the rationality of decisions is highly context-dependent. Aesthetic, like moral values shift from time to time, but there are certain fixed principles, such as duty, reciprocity, friendliness, justice, mercy, and love which exist permanently (Thomas, 1962, pp. 365-366).

Rationality and the meaning-of-life concept rely on learning what is appropriate to each, but also how they inter-relate and influence each other. For example, a rational person, acting according to a meaning-of-life "should", would

consider the sale and subsequent viewing of a video game which depicts the stalking of women, who are either rescued or murdered, as wrong, both aesthetically and morally. Even though the viewer may anticipate or receive excitement from the chase or outwitting the stalker, the aesthetic value is wrong. One could argue that there is merit to the game, because the player receives satisfaction of a virtuous nature if the victim is saved. However, for all practical purposes, the intent of the game is not to teach virtuous behavior. In evaluating the merit of this game, the meaning-of-life value would take precedence.

According to Eaton (1989, p. 175), the "should" is neither just moral nor just aesthetic, it is the "meaning-of-life should." The moral and aesthetic thought, both contribute to the meaning-of-life should and this is where their ultimate value lies. It is not good or evil which is at question here, but the actions and consequences which rational beings would or would not consider of value to their personal worth, or to the community at large. Ultimately, every tradition has relevance to the development of a rational life. They all have a function to the integrity of individual character. Basically, Eaton is saying that the overall value to life is influenced by the underlying values of morals, aesthetics, economics and so on, and that each has its place. If we learn the traditions and what is appropriate to each in the context of the larger meaning-of-life value it will subsequently contribute to a good and meaningful life.

II

Overall, Eaton's theory does not differ drastically from prior aesthetic theories. Control, tradition and delight are all refined versions of disinterestedness, taste, and pleasure respectively. What she has done

however, is to combine the necessary aspects of the subjective and objective approaches within a larger context. The aesthetic, as part of a meaning-of-life value is no longer a gratuitous activity. As with any theory, there are a number of points requiring clarification.

Eaton suggests that certain features of objects may have a special quality which promotes positive feelings. What exact qualities, and how many are necessary to the aesthetic value of an object or event? Although a sonata in comparison to a folk song, may have more elements or features which contribute to its overall aesthetic impact, this does not signify its excellence or quality. There are degrees of excellence in any object or event, regardless of genre. Eaton's tradition-based theory implies that features, by virtue of being traditionally valued, are automatically worthy. Traditions do not always identify what is good. Just because one belongs to a specific group with altruistic aims, does not mean those aims are the right ones for every person within that culture. Wilson (1984, p. 93), outlines four ways in which objects or practices valued within cultures may be unworthy. They may not be good enough to rely upon, which brings their quality into question; they may be positively wrong, such as persecution due to religious beliefs; they may be trivial in comparison to other things, such as gender and race; and they may be anti-educational, such as superstitions. Prizing something because it is valued by one's culture is similar, according to Wilson, to liking something because it is mine, rather than liking it because it is good (Wilson, 1984, p. 94). He suggests that we should seek beauty in things worthwhile in themselves, not because they are our cultural products.

A major concern with Eaton's theory is that she never adequately defines what she means by tradition, or confronts the need to assess traditions from a

disengaged perspective. She states that traditions are relevant to that which has been considered worthy of our attention and reflection (Eaton, 1989, p. 144, 147). I am not convinced that this is a good enough rationale to base aesthetic principles upon. It is questionable whether the reasons for a traditional practice are always acceptable, or that the people who practice specific traditions are rational. Fraternity initiations, which include the tradition of people drinking themselves into a stupor, are no less senseless for being traditions. A rational individual would consider the consequences to his or her mental and physical well-being and independently decide that this is a tradition not worth upholding. Other traditions may be more clearly immoral and not just imprudent. The tradition of hunting merely for sport is a possible example. According to Eaton, the meaning-of-life should takes precedence over other values, nullifying those not contributing to a rational, meaningful life. Eaton's meaning-of-life value might be elaborated to resolve such problems, though the idea remains sketchy in her theory.

Another point in Eaton's theory which requires clarification is its cultural relativity. I find it difficult to understand how we are to accommodate all aesthetic traditions within an increasingly pluralistic society. Traditions between cultures may come into conflict, or place us in the difficult situation of having to choose between alternative goods (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 13). Banning the Haida's Potlatch Ceremony, rich in aesthetic qualities, negated an important part of their culture and profoundly demoralized an entire people. Traditions can come into conflict, not only between cultures, but within them. For example, in Chaim Potok's (1990) novel *My Name is Asher Lev*, the son of Hasidic Jews paints himself and his parents within the symbolic context of the Christian crucifixion. The parents' faith prevented them from appreciating the painting's

artistic features. In this case, religion is the context from which the aesthetic elements of the painting are being judged by Asher's parents. On the one hand, the work has aesthetic worth, given a traditional perspective outside Hasidic Judaism, but inside that tradition it can have no merit.

If the perception of aesthetic value is always relative to a tradition, Eaton (1989, p. 175) is wrong to suggest that from within cultural value networks, judgments about the value of other cultures and sub-cultures can be made. This is contrary to her own culturally relative thesis, in which cultures, being unique, can only be evaluated according to their own standards and values (Haviland, 1991, p. 301). Should we attempt to change other's cultural traditions? Eaton does not answer this. When cultures have tried to do this in the past it has often ended in disaster. Eaton seems to think that by leading a rational life we will arrive at the appropriate decision. A rational life, however, does not imply that a culture's claims of what is good and right will transcend cultural barriers. Eaton's considered view seems to be that if we are rational beings, regardless of our cultural standpoint, we will be competent to make value judgments about another culture's activities. We can do this because the very rationality we are using is based upon a meaning-of-life value.

How do we choose what is of quality from other traditions? According to Eaton, the quality of an object or event may be determined by its contribution to a meaning-of-life value. Perhaps Eaton's rational being would be able to decipher this. However, her concept of rationality remains elusive. Rationality, in terms of making meaning-of-life judgments, can only occur to the extent that we have mastered the various forms of knowledge that human beings have developed for understanding their experiences, of which the aesthetic is one (Schilling, 1986, p. 3). Subsequently, being able to make rational choices, that

are appropriate, and the degree of delight we obtain from an aesthetic object or event, depends upon the level of understanding and experience we have in these various forms of knowledge. These forms of knowledge having been agreed upon by society as necessary for its survival.

III

Eaton's theory rests upon its meaning-of-life value as a universalizable concept. The aesthetic and moral ways of knowing are formally universal, but with different contents specific to each culture. In this there is consistency. Beauty and ugliness, right and wrong, are basic to every culture, although what determines content and context are unique to each culture. The intrinsic features of any object or event are as important to moral judgments as extrinsic features are to aesthetic judgments (Eaton, 1989, p. 170). Intrinsic and extrinsic features do not determine value judgments to the exclusion of the other. What Eaton has done is to free the aesthetic from the constraints of denying our experiences, our culture, and our traditions in determining our aesthetic outlook.

The aesthetic in this respect, has been made more accessible and approachable to every man; something with value beyond art for art's sake or the sole purpose of pleasure. We often forget that the ordinary activities of our lives involve making aesthetic decisions. The way we dress, speak, write, play, and interact with others is all judged explicitly or implicitly, according to its appropriateness or inappropriateness to our character and social context (Ground, 1989, pp. 14-15). The idea is not that ordinary life can be made aesthetic if only perceived in the right way, but that it has aspects of the aesthetic which can suffuse ordinary activities (Ground, 1989, p. 15).

Basically, Eaton is saying the goal of the aesthetic and moral are convergent in the development of a meaningful life. The meaning-of-life value determines those traditions of quality worthy of attention and reflection. Eaton might have been wiser to base the aesthetic upon a meaning-of-life value, rather than tradition. With this in mind, her definition of the goal of the aesthetic as delight needs to be revised. For example, if we took delight in an experience which we felt, on reflection, diminished the meaning-of-life, our reflective view would surely be that its aesthetic worth would be detracted from and in some instances considered non-aesthetic. Delight is only an element of the aesthetic process which can direct us toward what is aesthetically good and morally right or wrong. The goal of the aesthetic process is its contribution to the meaning-of-life value. This process is one of psychological, emotional and philosophical dimensions, all of which contribute to character development (Carlson, 1981, p. 24). The aesthetic can cultivate the virtues that enable us to act within the practices, narratives, and traditions in such a way as to make the best choices for our lives and to negotiate the same for our communal lives (MacIntyre, 1981, p. 13).

For the purposes of this thesis, Eaton's theory has provided a springboard from which a model of aesthetic education for the development of character can be advanced. Although traditions are relative to each culture, the meaning-of-life values that they arise from need not be wholly dependent upon tradition. This meaning-of-life value is a combination of the highest fixed and rational principles of justice, charity, love, and compassion. The meaning-of-life value to character development can be learned through the aesthetic interpretive process; an aesthetic model representing the entire process of integration and continuity of ideas, associations, and experiences. As described earlier, this

process consists of awareness; disposition (particular mental posture towards an object or event); experience, which involves contemplation; reflection through associations; and understanding, which leads to new ideas and generalizations. All of these stages, experienced through the vehicle of art, can point out values, traditions and behaviors which reflect the best and the worst in our cultures.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Aesthetic Interpretive Process

> Like all philosophy, aesthetics is a process, not an end product, an inquiry, not an almanac. Probably the best way to put it is as old Socrates' thought-it is a conversation among earnest minds (Stolnitz, J., quoted in Redfern, 1983, p. 8).

In this thesis I have taken the position that an aesthetic interpretive process, learned through the arts, contributes to the development of character. This aesthetic interpretive process is more than a gratuitous activity, it is one which facilitates a meaning-of-life value. I propose that the aesthetic interpretive process is not merely an attitude or a way of experiencing, but a total developmental process. It is this cognitive process which contributes to the education of character. Consider the following statement on the aesthetic (Reid, 1986, p. 116):

> ...when genuine, is a total kind of experience of personal life and a manifestation of a holistic personal development, a development of imagination, feeling, emotion, will, courage which can overcome the frustrations of apparent defeat. Disciplined following of this urge is an essential part of the life of personal mind in any sphere of knowledge.

The experience described here is closely akin to Dewey's "consummatory experience" which can promote the development of virtue. How is this accomplished? I propose that it is a developmental process consisting of

sequential stages. These stages are awareness, disposition, experience, reflection, and understanding. Total integration of these will eventually culminate in aesthetic understanding. Understanding developed through this unique way of interpreting our environment can contribute to good character.

Others have written on the topic of aesthetic development, such as Smith in *Toward Percipience: A Humanities Curriculum for Arts Education* (1992, pp. 60-67). He outlines five phases of aesthetic development which are grade and age specific. Although the skills for each grade area are important and for the most part appropriate, reflection and understanding do not enter into the developmental process until the fifth and final phase. These phases are fragmented because they do not promote reflection and understanding within each phase. I suggest that the cognitive aspect of the aesthetic process is continuous and cumulative within each stage of development. What I mean is that dependent upon skill, age, experience, and pre-existing knowledge the individual will exhibit degrees of ability within the various stages. It is the quality and depth of the process which varies at each age. One cannot ignore the idiosyncrasies of each individual, as well as their capacities, strengths, and weaknesses. Different people reach different levels, some never going beyond a certain stage, or quality of experience within a particular stage (King, 1981, p. 19). This process is not meant to standardize individuals, but to help them develop their own uniqueness within their society's ideal of what constitutes good character. Through this process of thinking and experiencing, the development of character can take place. It is essential that this process be established early in the child's educational career, and maintained throughout.

In the aesthetic process, each stage builds upon and incorporates the previous stages, and stages cannot be skipped. However, a stage can be

terminated at any point in time. That is, one can be aesthetically aware, but due to some outside influence the process will proceed no further. On the other hand, the individual could have the experience and choose not to reflect on that experience. In order to have an intelligible experience, one must go through the awareness and attitude stages. This does not mean that one has to maximize a particular stage before they can progress to the next. Advances in the stages of aesthetic development are based upon cumulative abilities in perspective-taking, with the cognitive sense of relevance structuring each stage as a qualitatively different experience (Parsons, Johnston, and Durham, 1978, pp. 84-85).

I

Stage One in the aesthetic process is **awareness**. Why is this stage important to the initiation of the aesthetic interpretive process? It is important precisely because much of our lives we may suppress awareness. We may live mechanically, our decisions being determined by the commitments placed on us by our careers, families and friends. We become so preoccupied with our own little worlds that we fail to pay attention to what is going on around us unless it directly influences us. We are programmed and conditioned to see life as it fits into the narrow perspectives of work and home. More often than not, we only sleepwalk through life, moving from activity to activity without noticing people, places, things, or ideas.

What I mean by awareness is the ability or inclination to attend to external cues associated with the formal properties of external environment, be it natural, social, or cultural. As well, we need to be cognizant of internally derived images, such as memories (Young, 1982, p. 6). What this entails is that we observe and

study what is going on around us. For example, how many times have you walked past a painting or sculpture, or listened to your favorite song and suddenly one day, you notice something that has always been there, but you failed to perceive it for whatever reason? Had you really been observant and consciously studied the object you might have perceived the feature much earlier. Upon discovery of this feature, it is possible that your entire perception is altered. If the discovery seems insignificant at this time, it can when associated with a future experience enable you to interpret and understand that experience to a much greater degree. However, aesthetic awareness is more than just noticing things around us. It is a subtle skill of keeping our eyes and ears open and receptive to what passes us. Ross in *The Aesthetic Impulse* (1984, p. 104), calls this development of perception the pre-aesthetic level in the aesthetic growth of the individual. This suggests that awareness is a precondition for the occurrence of the aesthetic experience.

Young children are very far from knowing or caring about why we perceive things as beautiful or good. They just know! Distinctions develop over time, as do the kinds of things children find relevant to their experiences of an aesthetic object (Parsons et al., 1978, p. 84). As educators, we can develop this awareness by pointing things out to children in the course of their daily activities. Maybe it means stopping a math class to look at the geometric patterns of snowflakes. Hamrick (1989, p. 56) suggests it is important to teach children to view life and express the meaning of what they see in ways closer to their lived experience. Rather than just providing a common description, the use of sensuous, dramatic language in stressing a particular word in a poetic line can create aesthetic meaning. He gives the example of a line, "How my valley was **green**", which if stated "How **green** was my valley", takes on an aesthetic

importance. The "greenness" is what is important, not the fact that it is a valley or even "my" valley. Instead of just saying that something is nice, actually exhibiting its niceness through the use of terms which bring out its aesthetic quality will contribute to an increased awareness of objects and events around us. This does not mean that every single object is or needs to be attended to aesthetically. Aesthetic awareness is inherently selective. Wreen and Callen in the *Aesthetic Point of View,* suggest that regarding every object aesthetically would be defeatist, since instead of eliminating the junkyard and the slum, it tries to see everything as expressive and symbolic (Smith, 1984, p. 143).

II

Once we learn to be aware of our surroundings and thoughts, then we need an appropriate disposition from which to experience objects and events that have piqued our interest. In Stage two, we develop the aesthetic **disposition**. This is the capacity for receptivity, acceptance, positiveness, and a sensibility to the world and its formal properties, so that we have the ability to explore ideas and feelings which can lead to further understanding. (Young, 1982, p. 6). In the eagerness to experience however, a disciplined mind is called for. Disciplined with respect to disabusing ourselves of prejudices, and not allowing initial or immediate impressions to lead us into making value judgments before we have had the chance to experience fully what is available to perception. Once we place a label or judge the object or event against something else, the aesthetic process is precipitously ended. This is not to say that judging is not important to the aesthetic interpretive process, but it comes much later in the process.

Disposition reflects a measure of control in order that one can appreciate the object or event first of all for its own sake. Basically, it is the stage in which we establish our receptivity for an aesthetic experience. Upon becoming receptive observers, we have the opportunity to experience multiple situations which will broaden our aesthetic perspective. This is the point where many modern aesthetic theories stop and the aesthetic theory of Eaton takes over. That is, one's past experiences and the resultant associations lead to the following stages of reflection and understanding. The disposition stage is crucial for developing and expanding children's' interest in the arts. At this stage of development, Smith would say the individual realizes that others may have different perspectives, but cannot accurately judge those perspectives. Therefore, it is preferable to expose children at an early age to examples of genuine art even if their full appreciation is beyond their present stage of development (Osborne, 1984, p. 33).

How do we educate toward an aesthetic disposition? The teacher's role is to provide direction for the child's experience, creating an appreciation for varying works of art. By exposing children to a variety of traditions within their own and other cultural environments, the base is expanded from which they can draw relationships and transfer knowledge. It is important to teach children to "give" themselves to a work, without allowing it to overpower them. On the other hand, maintaining a certain distance from it without making a clinical or quick assessment is important. Children should withhold judgments until they have studied the work in its entirety (Redfern, 1986, p. 92). That is, to the fullest extent of their level of development. At this stage, what is significant is that they do not express whether one is better than another. Openness and objectivity are as important here as in the awareness stage.

III

The stage is now set for the aesthetic **experience**. This experience is an exploratory, cognitive activity which involves the attending to and contemplation of the object's or event's form, content, and context. The aesthetic experience enables one to recognize similar nuances of feeling and emotion when they are encountered in social situations, but does not necessarily inform a person how to respond to that which has been recognized (Young, 1982, p. 11). It is the experience and the quality of that experience which are the focus of this stage. In this stage, we have a sensation of delight and enjoyment which can range anywhere along a continuum from mild excitement to profound interest or awe. The quality of the experience is determined by the level of knowledge and understanding one possesses prior to the experience.

Rewards are derived, either proprioceptively or externally (Young, 1982, p. 6). Proprioceptivity means an immediate, unlearned pleasure which comes from sense stimulation by the external world (Young, 1982, p. 9). For example, a performing musician knows automatically, both mentally and physically when playing right or wrong notes. Similarly, when watching the Aurora Borealis, one knows intuitively that it is simultaneously beautiful and sublime, yet an explainable phenomenon. Further, external rewards are also provided through the creative aspects of aesthetic expression. By perceiving and creating works of art, cognitive pleasures result.

How do we help children to have aesthetic experiences? Children must be provided with opportunities for improvisation and imitation. These are the key tools for expressing and experiencing aesthetically. To ensure these activities are of the best standard, children should be exposed to as many artistic

traditions and ways of expression as possible. This includes great and vernacular works of art, artistic concepts and ideas, and concrete facts about the tradition of art in society. Children need exposure to different styles and quality levels, so they can see how the same thing can be done well or poorly. By providing children with a greater number of artistic examples depicting virtuous and non-virtuous behaviors, their frame of references are expanded. Subsequently, they are better equipped to interpret and understand life.

IV

The fourth stage in the development of the aesthetic process is **reflection**. As human beings we have a need to understand what we have experienced in our search for order and meaning (Young, 1982, p. 6-7). The qualitative elements of experience are reflected upon in order to supply this meaning. Reflection allows us to do this through daydreaming, night dreaming, expressive behavior, and self-talk. By scrutinizing a work in as much detail as possible, the individual eventually becomes capable of further generalization and comparison to other experiences, which promotes greater understanding (Young, 1982, p. 12). With increased experience, there is repeated reflection and inner dialogue.

This part of the process requires a sincere effort in seeking connections between experiences and differing perspectives. It is through reflection that an urge for thrill-seeking can be converted to the art of adventure, sexuality to the art of love-making, and curiosity to creativity (Bruner, 1979, pp. 67- 68). The cognitive rewards of pleasure in exercising imagination and practicing critical inquiry skills are invaluable to character development. That is, the personal

evaluation and discipline required in this stage ultimately contributes to the development of good character.

What is involved in this reflective stage? It includes making associations to past experiences and how they influence our perceptions and biases. It also involves reciprocity, by placing ourselves in other peoples' shoes and imagining what and how they perceive, or what they had in mind when creating the object or event. The act of reflection is one of self-observation, not in the sense that we seek to criticize ourselves, but to learn actively to discover why we do the things we do. The reflective stage is where rational thought processes are developed for the purpose of making things intelligible. What aesthetic reflection has in common with other forms of learning is the attempt at making sense of what we see, hear, feel, and read (Smith, 1992, p. 59). However, the aesthetic process of reflection is more encompassing. This means that aesthetic reflection requires the experience be evaluated from all the differing forms of knowledge within the individual's frame of reference. The aesthetic stage of reflection should provide a feeling of wholeness or personal integration. Beardsley expressed it as follows:

> ...the coherence of the elements of the experience itself, of the diverse mental acts and events going on in one mind over a stretch of time, and the coherence of the self, the mind's healing sense...of being all together and able to encompass its perceptions, feelings, emotions, ideas, in a single integrated personhood (Smith, 1984, p. 145).

How can we as educators promote this reflective process? The reflective process can be promoted by challenging perceptions of our own work, as well as

that of master artists. Smith would place the reflective stage at the Grades four-six level, where a child is capable of understanding others' perspectives. At this level, the concept of reciprocity exists. Therefore, it would be appropriate at this point to introduce such virtues as empathy, compassion, charity, and a sense of justice. Children can now learn to see networks, societal perspectives, values, and non-verbalized actions. Pluralistic perspectives can also be considered here in more depth. However, my contention with Smith's model is that aesthetic reflective skills should not be limited to only specific grades. Rather, these skills can be applied through all the grades, as long as they are relevant to the maturity level.

What types of methodology can be used in developing reflective skills? Using the aesthetic vocabulary appropriately in written and oral descriptions, and comparisons of objects or events can develop reflective skills. Role-playing various scenarios, such as an art critic, artist, consumer, or interviewing people active in the arts can give a more personal perspective to artistic activity. Children can write words to music or create stories to accompany a song or painting which has significance for them. Dialogue is an effective means of engaging in inquiry between teacher and student, and student to student, because it promotes inclusion and validates the individual. Debating questions about art and beauty will provide conflicting views, which will require reflective skills for their resolution. This reflective process will conduce to independent judgments and depth of aesthetic understanding (Osborne, 1984, p. 37).

This critical reflection of give-and-take builds confidence and skill in defending one's own views, but also a readiness to listen to others and the ability to reconsider. As we experience and mature, we develop cognitive maps or schema for the way things ought to be. However, in order to be effective,

these skills need to be initiated early and refined throughout one's lifetime if the development of good character is to be realized. Herein lies the connection to Eaton's theory. By developing skills in artistic appreciation and the representations of life that art conveys, we will arrive at an understanding of why virtues are essential to being of good character.

V

The final stage of the aesthetic interpretive process is **understanding**. Understanding is a humanistic tendency necessary in the quest for selfhood (Smith, 1984, p. 243), and the impetus leading to change. Again, the degree of understanding and quality of thought and action are dependent upon the level of knowledge and life experience an individual possesses. A child of eight for example, can only be expected to understand at his or her level of maturity. For realization of this stage, it is necessary to presuppose that one has developed the relevant dispositions integral to the previous stages.

The stage of aesthetic understanding serves a humanistic purpose. Through understanding the context and content of an aesthetic experience, we can identify those positive character attributes which describe what a positive, healthy and meaningful life consists of. Appreciation is honed by learning how to identify those features which constitute standards of human excellence. We can now view art for its own sake, because the fundamental skills of percipience have been developed. We are also capable of developing our own philosophy of art in relation to our philosophy of life. This can further lead to action in the form of social criticism, religious faith, or political activism (Efland, 1992, p. 207).

How is an aesthetic understanding achieved? While the aesthetic is the

means to achieving a meaning-of-life value, the goal of art is the aesthetic. Art is not meant to carry a message, but it can elicit a unique reflection on the nature of human beings, their environment, and their spiritualness (Reid, 1986, p. 47). Through imagination and empathy we learn to appreciate the work, the artist, and how others might perceive it. Swanger suggests that the epistemology of art is empathy, and that an education without this knowledge is incomplete. It is through empathy that our self-awareness and other-awareness is simultaneously brought into play (Swanger, 1983, p. 21). For example, Margaret Bourke-White's photographs of World War II concentration camp victims allows us to come to know war through providing us with a variety of perspectives. We can not only see, but imagine the terror, the hopelessness, stupidity, cruelty, and the acts of kindness that are all a part of war. We are not told whether war is right or wrong, good or bad, but that life is full of contradictions. It is this knowledge which will develop understanding and determine how we react to situations in our own lives (Swanger, 1983, p. 26). The ability to empathize will lead to the development of those virtues required for being a person of good character.

VI

The aesthetic process may seldom be realized in all its possible richness, but is a goal towards which we should strive. A rich background in artistic traditions and aesthetic interpretations provides a context from which we can deepen our sense of life's meaning in a way that affects character. As I have maintained throughout this discussion, the aesthetic interpretive process encompasses both a quality of experience and a unique way of understanding.

Dewey describes the aesthetic process best by suggesting that

> ...meanings and values of prior experience unite with the qualities inherent in the work of art to produce a new, different experience, and because of this the self undergoes reconstruction; there is not just a meeting of self and object, but a reconstruction of the self (King, 1981, p. 9).

The aesthetic process is a total experience, a gestalt of the cognitive and affective realms.

CHAPTER SIX

The Arts and Development of Character

> Art awakens us from passivity. It is a wonderful tonic for the moral sense. Our moral judgments need to operate in a fully-rounded personality: alert, responsive, and compassionate. Artwork that has no clear message nonetheless may make us better persons, more in tune with life and the moral life, so that we can bring more of value to bear upon the exercise of our moral judgment when the time comes. For the life of me I cannot see what the moral of *Hamlet* is, though as a profound work of art it promises to do much for anyone's personhood, and that person will then be a better prepared moral agent (Ginsberg, 1992, p.31).

Art is the portrayal of life by the hands of humankind. Through art we gain a humanistic understanding of the problems and conflicts that confront us in our daily lives. The exposure to art provides us with the opportunity vicariously to participate in all kinds of dilemmas. Art accomplishes this through the acknowledgment of the qualitative aspects of artifacts which exhibit an unusual degree of skill or beauty, evoke an unusual degree of interest or contemplation, or as symbolic representations for the creation, exploration, and communication of meaning (Young 1982, p. 8). It is as symbolic vehicles that art contributes the most effectively to character development. Reid (1986, p. 128) states it best in his description of literature as an example of an art that

> ...informs about human nature, morals, society, sometimes ideology of 'life', the conditions of man...certainly. But it is as an art that literature, and particularly great literature, properly does so.

Or rather, it does not so much 'inform about' as give direct insight into life's meanings.

I

The appreciation of art is dependent upon features, context, and content. Art represents a narrative of life that often effects change more readily than a parent with age and wisdom on their side, telling their children they know what is best for them. Stories, and I will venture to say, art forms in general, can convey this wisdom more readily than any authority. MacIntyre (1981, p. 216) makes this point forcefully:

> Man is in his actions and practice, as well as in his fictions, essentially a story-telling animal ...We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters-roles into which we have been drafted-and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked stepmothers, lost children, good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mislearn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources. Mythology, in its original sense, is at the heart of things. ...the telling of stories have a key part in educating us into the virtues.

Art in the form of stories, music, painting, sculpture, drama, dance, and film can also give us knowledge about the world, shedding light upon and transforming our perceptions and understanding. To view art properly in an aesthetic sense means we have to address all its aspects. This implies more than the physical properties of an object or event but the individual's psychological and emotional state of being as well. This does not mean that we have to agree with the artist's intent, but rather to recognize it as a truth for that particular individual. To ignore a moral message would be to view it inappropriately or not in its fullest meaning. Hirst states in *Literature and the Fine Arts as a Form of Knowledge,* "that works of art are indeed artistic statements, stating truths that cannot be communicated in any other way" (Schilling, 1986, p. 8). The point can be illustrated by the painting of Asher Lev I described in Chapter Four (Potok, 1972). By painting his mother nailed to the crucifixion cross while he and his father stand by and look on, too busy with their religious crusades and painting to understand her sacrifice, Asher expressed a reality that no other form could have expressed as immediately and honestly as did the painting. To ignore the representation of this work beyond lines, colours, and textures would be inappropriate to understanding the work in its entirety.

Neither Smith nor Beardsley denies that one might become disposed to moral action through encounters with the aesthetic. If we consider Eaton's meaning-of-life value as the goal of the aesthetic, what we learn from art is then of primary importance, because it can influence our thoughts and actions. Through understanding a moral situation created through a work of art we gain insights into the lives and values of people which genuinely advances character development, expanding rather than constricting our concept of virtue (Swanger,

1986, p. 143).

In an attempt to bring meaning to our world, we need to engage in problem solving and coping activities (Young, 1982, pp. 13-14). Numerous meanings and levels of meaning from public to private, are frequently found together in a work of art. Conflict, or several conflicts for that matter, can be presented simultaneously (Swanger, 1983, p. 17). Swanger (1983, p. 20) goes on to stipulate that the aesthetic, although it may present conflicts, is not capable of problem-solving, because it is too open-ended. I disagree however, for the very reasons that Swanger (1983, p. 25) later gives for the value of the aesthetic. That is, the very ambiguity of an artwork may force us into thinking about and resolving problems in our own lives. The process of having to resolve such ambiguities provides the character- building link. Love as an example, can be understood in many different forms. For instance, through literature, Maggie's love for her brother Tom (*The Mill on the Floss*), Silas's love for the child Eppie (*Silas Marner*), Tess's love for her husband Angel (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles*), and Huckleberry Finn's love for his friend Jim (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), are all differing depictions of love. Love portrayed in varying ways, allows us to experience or make mental associations without having been through it. The aesthetic interpretive process helps us to understand our own encounters with ambiguity, generates better coping skills, and increases our empathetic capacities.

II

Art gives us the opportunity to eavesdrop on another's thoughts or actions, and even though the character may be fictitious, it is still a

representation of life. Tess in *Tess of the d'Urvervilles* comes upon several pheasants in the stages of suffering after having been wounded and driven into hiding by hunters. Hardy (1891, pp. 352-353) portrays Tess's situation as follows:

> With the impulse of a soul who could feel for kindred sufferers as much as for herself, Tess's first thought was to put the still living birds out of their torture, and to this end with her own hands she broke the necks of as many as she could find, leaving them to lie where she had found them till the gamekeepers should come-as they probably would come-to look for them a second time. 'Poor darlings-to suppose myself the most miserable being on earth in the sight o' such misery as yours!' she exclaimed, her tears running down as she killed the birds tenderly. 'And not a twinge of bodily pain about me! I be not mangled, and be not bleeding; and I have two hands to feed and clothe me.' She was ashamed of herself for her gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature.

What characterizations of virtue can we learn from this excerpt? Compassion, reciprocity, empathy, injustice, a sense of duty, and an understanding of the ambiguity of life.

The steps from childhood to adulthood are often difficult. However, stories can personify dilemmas and explain how others have dealt with them. For example, *Twenty and Ten* by Claire Huchet Bishop, is a story set during World War II (Larrick, 1960, p. 103). Twenty French children living in the country have to agree to share their living arrangements with ten exiled Jewish children that the Nazis are searching for. Can they protect the ten, and can the smallest resist the temptations offered by the Nazis and keep the secret? The

decisions that needed to be made in this story reflect the thought processes that each participated in, both as an individual and as the member of a group.

Opera is another character-defining device which uses music and drama. In Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, we have three very different individuals which represent three different qualities of character. Heroes and heroines are not depicted as such, rather one sees the gray areas that exist in the search for virtuous behavior. Not only do we have the plot and the characters, we also have music to give meaning, as well as identify characters and moods through leitmotifs and harmonies. Don Giovanni, a womanizer of the worst sort, was depicted as a romantic hero. A hero because he was "a rebel against authority and a scorner of vulgar morality, a supreme individualist, bold and unrepentant to the last" (Grout, 1980, p. 517). Donna Elvira is the aging, tragic heroine who complains of being jilted by the Don. And there is the intermediary, Don Giovanni's valet, Leporello, who despite his role of servant-buffoon, exhibits sensitivity and intuition (Grout, 1980, p. 518). Through music, these three personalities are etched in the trio of Act I, scene 5:

> The big stride of Elvira's melody, with its angry wide leaps, abetted by the agitated runs and tremolos in the strings, contrasts sharply with the tight-lipped, light-hearted, mocking tone of Don Giovanni and the seemingly idle patter of Lepporello, playing down his role as healer of the bruised souls of the abandoned women (Grout, 1980, p. 518).

Mozart has depicted the realities of negative character traits and the consequences of being the type of person who would take advantage of others. Although you may not like the personalities, one cannot help but empathize with

each of them. One learns that there is more to character than following rules and exhibiting the right behaviors at the right times.

Poetry can tell a story or paint a picture. Something as simple as Robert Frost's poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* conveys a sense of adventure, invitation, commitment, and reciprocity between the driver and his horse. Similarly, fairy tales, simple as they are, better than anything else depict the plight of humankind, and those virtues which maintain the qualities of good character regardless of the circumstances. Hans Andersen's *The Little Match Girl* describes what it is to be poor and desolate, with no one to care for you. This tale provides us with the opportunity to learn about the what it feels like to be destitute, even though we may never experience it firsthand. There are also the wisdom stories, myths, and legends which reflect the cultural values and concerns of a people. From these we can learn a people's world view, history, and how they order their universe. Myths and legends set standards for orderly behavior and preserve a culture's customs and values (Haviland, 1991, p. 591).

Film can very strikingly depict character. For example, the film *Citizen Kane* depicts what can transpire when the desire for greed and power overwhelm a man's sense of what is good and right. This is done through the portrayal of human frailties and strengths via the acting, lighting, and camera perspectives. Making use of shadow gives the viewer a heightened sense of the non-virtuous behavior of Citizen Kane. Had the movie been filmed using a brightly lit set, it would have left the viewer with a reduced sense of the qualities being portrayed. Camera angles also provide relational points of view, from the protagonist, antagonist, and omniscient perspectives. By transferring this perspective-taking technique to our daily lives, we are able to have more compassionate and enlightened responses.

Hamblen and Galanes (1991, pp. 23-24), have identified six instructional approaches they consider necessary to an aesthetic education. First, the **historical-philosophical** approach provides the underlying knowledge of the aesthetic domain which leads to a wider appreciation of art and a heightened aesthetic response. Second, the **cultural literacy** approach is primarily knowledge and skill oriented, and based upon art as it conforms to a selected culture. Third, **inquiry**, an already established approach in existing pedagogic environments, is language-based instruction in higher order thinking. A teacher has to be prepared to develop unambiguous questions, use probing techniques for more complete responses, and redirect tangential responses (Lankford, 1990, pp. 54-55). Four, the **social consciousness** approach is based on the rationale that a critical, assumption-examining stance regarding content and context should be a part of all art study. Information should not be presented in a taken-for-granted, apolitical manner, nor should authorship of ideas be obscured, conflict minimized, or historical-cultural value systems be ignored. The fifth approach is **cross-cultural and multicultural** involving the study of diverse forms of art. The final approach encompasses **perception and experience** and is a studio-based means for focusing on response and appreciation. All of these instructional approaches can be integrated into the aesthetic interpretive process appropriate to the age and maturity level of the individual. By considering all aspects of Hamblen's and Galanes' approach, the educator will contribute to a comprehensive education in the arts, as well as promoting the aesthetic education of character.

Art is a means through which we can explain our environment, our role in it, and cope with the questions of human existence in our striving towards a meaningful life. As Haviland (1991, p. 592) states, it is "therefore not a luxury to

be afforded or appreciated by a minority of aesthetes or escapists, but a necessary kind of social behavior in which every normal and active human being participates." What is our responsibility as educators then toward ensuring that art continues to function in its aesthetic capacity to a meaningful life?

III

As teachers of art, we have an obligation to our students to provide them with as broad an experience as feasible. The purpose of the following is not to entertain more ways of teaching art, but to discuss the issue of neutrality. There is a marketplace of ideas and as educators, we are committed to choosing what is most worthwhile educationally. Although the arts have been traditionally valued in education, they have also been subject to censorship. Aesthetic and moral discernment is learned through practice and the student will not develop this capacity if we discuss only great works of art, or safe works of art. Our commitment to truth requires that we provide vivid contrasts of good and evil. As we advance aesthetically and morally, the range of artworks considered needs to be expanded. The point in question is not what works of art to employ in the task of educating, but what the teacher's position should be if asked for an opinion or interpretation, or why particular works of art are studied and not others.

With increasingly pluralistic classroom environments, the objective of the teacher has become one of being as neutral as possible. But dogmatic neutrality is as problematic in the aesthetic as it is in the moral realm. It has been the art teacher's responsibility to guide the student to an appreciation of art without being overly judgmental or expressing biases. Sitting on the fence does

not give examples of aesthetic reasoning. In order to learn critical thinking skills, children require exposure to different ways of aesthetic reasoning. Children want to understand their world, and therefore our direction is required. According to Warnock, by being neutral one suggests indifference, a lack of caring and, as a result one abrogates the responsibility of setting an example of competent reasoning (Brown, 1975, p. 168). When children ask, and you respond in a neutral manner, they can sense your dishonesty or insincerity, and an important bond of trust is broken.

The goal of the aesthetic, as I have stated earlier, is to contribute to a meaning-of-life value. How can the teacher do this without conveying biases or risking indoctrination? The crucial task of the teacher is deciding whether or not to be neutral. When a teacher decides to be neutral, opinions and beliefs can be expressed without indifference. This can be accomplished by helping children work through their own thoughts, and being honest in telling them you will be there to listen, but cannot make their decisions for them. It is important answers are not provided for them or they will not develop their own aesthetic autonomy.

Teachers are also responsible for setting examples of rational people involved in the process of critical thinking, by pointing out what direction they think the evidence points (Brown 1975, p. 165). Teachers in this respect examine and assess all the facts, presenting the best argument to their students. This means entertaining other opinions, options and relevant facts. It is important to think out loud, so the student can see what is involved in making aesthetic judgments. This process allows teachers to convey what they, and others before them have found worthy of an object or event. The goal is not to convince the student that there is only one way of perceiving a work of art, but

that there can be many interpretations. In this way, children will be led to discover that it is possible to hold views which are different from others. With the teacher as guide and role model, the student learns what is good and worthy about works of art. More importantly, the artistic portrayal of characters or ideas can exhibit what is exemplar in living a life of meaning and value.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Aesthetic Education and Character Development

> Education worthy of the name is essentially education of character. For the genuine educator does not merely consider individual functions of his pupil, as one intending to teach him only to know or to be capable of certain definite things; but his concern is always the person as a whole, both in the actuality in which he lives before you now and in his possibilities, what he can become (Buber, 1947. p. 132).

I have argued throughout this thesis that an aesthetic education as experienced and learned through the arts can contribute significantly to the development of character. Through the search for and contemplation of the beautiful and the sublime, one can reach an understanding of what "the good" in life consists of. More importantly however, the individual learns what is necessary for the development of character in order to realize a meaningful life. It is for this reason that the aesthetic has both intrinsic and extrinsic value. As we mature, we have a desire to find out about the world, not for its own sake, but for our own sake, so we can begin to establish the virtues as part of our identity (Hansen, 1984, p. 65). Character as I have defined it, comprises virtues such as honesty, compassion, trust, justice, courage, good will, generosity, and sacrifice. Since these virtues can be developed in ways that express our individuality, character is as much an assertion of "who I am distinct from anyone else" as it is "who I am in comparison with others" (Babladelis and Adams, 1967, p. 262). The learning of virtues is not limited to the aesthetic interpretive process, but this process is a necessary facet of a total education for character. The quality of character I am suggesting educators strive for in both themselves and their

students is basically a humanistic one. It is humanistic because we are relational selves, not isolated entities.

Living a meaningful life is possible regardless of what is going on around us, if we are willing to practice the virtues intrinsic to good character. Langer makes the observation in *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* (1988, p. 384) that

> Charity, nobility, honor, and even pity are never in very generous supply among average people. Sometimes the inherent viciousness of human beings breaks out in "crime waves"; sometimes it appears more generally in long, slow periods of degeneration, when cynicism desecrates and corrupts even the most basic ethical commitments. Sometimes great individuals without fame live by their ideals from birth to death with purest candor in the "worst" of possible worlds.

A life of meaning and purpose thus consists of a sense of self-worth, positive interpersonal relationships, world awareness, a desire to expand learning, and spiritual awareness (Alberta Education, 1992, p. 120).

Many modern aesthetic theorists endorse reductive conceptions of the aesthetic which abstract it from the larger context of ethics and personal meaning I have stressed. By reducing the aesthetic to just an experience, emotion, or concern with self-gratification of desires and appetites, aesthetic experience becomes a merely private idiosyncratic response. If this were the case, rational discussion would be rendered impossible and aesthetic discriminations reduced to preference alone (Redfern, 1983, pp. 49-50). Eaton's theory of the aesthetic moves beyond this reductionism by taking into account the key roles experience, content, context, and the associations we derive from them play in the pursuit of a good and meaningful life.

The aesthetic interpretive process is a heuristic activity, involving rational thought and problem-solving techniques, and an active discovery, which includes the discovery of meaning (Hamblen and Galanes, 1991, p. 16). This active definition of the aesthetic I have argued, takes place through the developmental stages of awareness, disposition, experience, reflection, and understanding. As a learning process, it allows us to translate and transfer this concomitant learning to all aspects of life. It is through the aesthetic process that we become progressively concerned both with the aesthetic merits and demerits of an object or event, and with the integrity of our own judgments.

The stage of **awareness** develops our observation skills. It is through observation that we see examples of the worthy and unworthy in terms of actions and products. The **disposition** stage teaches the individual to be positive and receptive. The aesthetic **experience** is the attending to intrinsic features of objects or events, which results in the sensation of delight. Through appreciating the beautiful and sublime, associations between contexts, contents, and past experiences are triggered. This directs us to the next stage, that of aesthetic **reflection**. This stage is where we consider both the intrinsic and extrinsic qualities of the experience. Through reflection, we have the opportunity to examine pre-determined ideas, thus learning about ourselves and others (Hamblen, 1986, p. 70). This in turn, takes us to the final stage, that of **understanding**. Through understanding, we recognize the strengths and weaknesses of being human, and in acknowledging this can make positive changes in our own characters.

John Stuart Mill's essay *On Liberty* contains an appropriate statement on the aesthetic process as a form of character development:

> It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in

> themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth, within the limits imposed by the rights and interests of others, that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to (Mill, J. S., quoted in Osborne, 1986, p. 106).

Ultimately, the aesthetic process covers the entire realm of human affairs, and it is through a philosophical sense imbued with critical inquiry that a meaning-of-life value is attained. Through this process, we can as Noddings (1988, p. 224) says, "nurture a vision of our best selves."

Art as the means to developing the aesthetic value within a meaning-of-life context reflects the cultural norms and concerns of a people. An aesthetic view of art serves as a historical document from which we can intimate about the lives and values of those who created them and those who admired them (Smith, 1984, p. 243). What and how we learn from these artistic documents is important to the development of character. In studying art, one is studying people and life, which in turn can be transformed into life-skills. Art, as the aesthetic vehicle has the capacity to depict the past, present and future. The skills and insights provided by an aesthetic education can be the means for children to envision the best future for their world.

Beyer (1985, pp. 391-393) suggests that as representational artifacts, works of art capture ideas, perspectives, and insights into human existence that may not be possible through other symbol systems. These artifacts give voice to ideas, values, and perspectives that have a particular content or meaning,

contributing to our understanding of the human and social world. He goes on to say that the aesthetic appreciation of art provides insights which make possible alternative ways of seeing, valuing and making sense of our own situations and predicaments. He concludes by suggesting that it opens undisclosed worlds to us, thereby challenging existing relationships, social patterns, and personal values. As we mature, we are exposed to works which arouse awe, admiration, and a quality of thought and feeling beyond selfish concern.

I have argued that lack of an aesthetic education in art can lead to a void in one's character. However, the current trend toward science-based studies does not mean one has to live by technology, but rather learn how to live with it. Aesthetic knowledge may be an important counter to the overly technicized linear-based, efficiency oriented activities which have dominated curriculum work (Beyer, 1985, p. 395). A cardinal task confronting teachers of the aesthetic is facilitating entry for students into the artistic world. As educators, giving children what they want in order to maintain an active interest is important; however, more important, is giving them things they had not even known they wanted (Hansen, 1984, p. 64). In the following statement, Buber (1947, p. 133) expresses the dilemma facing teachers in the education of character :

> As soon as you openly try to educate their characters, they rebel. And those, too, who are seriously laboring over the question of good and evil, rebel when one dictates to them, as though it were some long established truth, what is good and what is bad; and they rebel just because they have experienced over and over again how hard it is to find the right way.

Teaching for the education of character requires that it be done in such a manner as to respect the student's intellectual integrity and capacity for

independent judgment (Scheffler, 1964, p. 67). The aesthetic, with art as the means, can meet this requirement. Reimer (1989, pp. 25-26) suggests that, first of all, it has to be prepared for early in the child's education, not left until behaviors are difficult to change. Second, understanding and transmitting the aesthetic value of art requires the educator to be acquainted with its deepest values as understood by professional scholars whose task it is to explain them. Third, the educator needs to understand the insights about the value of art, organize them into a coherent philosophy, and use this philosophy as a guide for teaching.

The aesthetic concept has long been a controversial issue and one in which it is difficult to gain a consensus of opinion. Further study is needed to discuss the role of aesthetics in developing social consciousness, which is still a highly speculative and prescriptive area (Hamblen and Galanes, 1991, p. 18). In terms of classroom techniques, how does one evaluate aesthetic development, and, more importantly, how does one evaluate the qualitative impact of an aesthetic education to character development? The implications of feminist theory to the aesthetic, especially regarding the concept of caring to the aesthetic development of character is also an area that needs further research. Throughout this thesis, my argument has stressed the importance of art as the most appropriate aesthetic means to character development; however, this does not imply that it is the only means. Further, I would be remiss if I did not consider the connection between aesthetic development and Kohlberg's stage developmental theory of moral reasoning in further ascertaining the relational impact on character development. Lastly, the Aesthetic Interpretive Process I have proposed requires further analysis as to its implementation into the existing curricula.

The aesthetic influences every aspect of our lives and is invaluable in developing rationality, understanding, and the capacity for empathetic thought and action. As educators, it is our responsibility to expand the aesthetic boundaries for our students, so they can better understand the world they are inheriting. Edwards (1987, p. 5) defines an aesthetic education as an education for empowerment, which is important for fostering and maintaining the individual's eclectic abilities. As human beings we have a natural desire for an aesthetic dimension in our pursuit of living lives filled with meaning and value (Alexander, 1992, p. 95). With this in mind, the aesthetic as a unique form of experience and interpretation, makes an aesthetic education vital to the development of character.

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