Virtue Ethics in Education—
Grim Visage, Silent Partner, or Savvy Pioneer

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Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?

From T.S. Eliot, "The Rock"

In the final analysis the primary responsibility of all educators is enabling future generations to fully understand the complexities of growth, change, and progress across vast ranges of the human experience. Within the vital area of virtue ethics philosophers have made important and valuable distinctions for educators, but those quickly fall out of focus amid the clamor of countless other pressures on schools. Nearly all concur that schools should graduate students who have high character, prudent judgment, steadfast integrity, empathic souls, and civic responsibility. Those kinds of hopes are expressed in the mission statements of many schools. But even when those kinds of goals are specified, attention shifts quickly to simpler, more familiar, more measureable, more comfortable educational aims and outcomes. This loss of focus and the quick attention shifting mean that in the long run schools seriously impair both individual growth and cultural progress. And in so many of today's schools this also means that wisdom and good judgment are lost in the welter of measureable information about which T. S. Eliot warns us.

With the help of philosophers turning their bright lights onto important distinctions between deontic and aretaic models of virtue ethics, contemporary educators, who understand and accept their full range of responsibilities to their students and their communities can, in fact, deepen their school's curriculum and classroom practices. Experienced educators also

understand how this deontic – aretaic distinction is dangerous if it is only seen as binary. A more productive image involves seeing the deontic-aretaic distinction as opposite ends of a continuum. Subsequent analyses and professional deliberations about complex pedagogical activities and how to locate them on the continuum are the seedbed for educators sharpening and expanding their teaching materials and classroom practices. These improvements help students understand the vitality of the aforementioned high character and prudent judgment. A third way of conceiving of the deontic – aretaic distinction beyond the continuum imagery is understanding these two categories as interactive and mutually reinforcing. The opportunity and the challenge for educators to preserve the strengths of each model (deontic and aretaic) without succumbing to their weaknesses. Education has suffered from too many other false dichotomies. The continuum and the interactive images are much more valuable, though much more complicated.

On the one hand, educators can generally establish deontic as a set of basic ethical principles and virtue guidelines that are fundamentally sound markers for good decisions and good behavior. It is equally important to clarify that the deontic model works well if it is seen as a set of important, but not superior; clear, but not perfect, guidelines. When this model works badly it is merely a set of harsh, simplistic, preachy, abstract, and implacably severe rules. On the other hand, aretaic generally leads us to deal successfully with the subtle, complicated, contextual, conflicted, and emotional-social vexations we each face each day. The aretaic model works badly when it descends into inauthenticity, manipulations and opportunism wherein nearly any action can be buttressed by some form of supporting argument or evidence. The aretaic model works well when it humbly engages complexity, real and seeming contradictions, competing priorities, and good character as a composite of one's decisions and behaviors over a significant period of time. And it demonstrates to students that a key component of developing good aretaic judgment

involves connecting decisions and behaviors to a set of deontic ethical principles. Correspondingly, a deontic set of principles is of little meaning without engaging examples of how these abstractions can be implemented in complex life situations.

In the United States over the past half-century efforts by schools to include virtue, values moral, ethical, and/or character education have been unfocused, sporadic, sparse, and seemingly random. This is not to say that none have achieved bursts of national prominence or that they have been widely ineffective. The most serious difficulty is that even the effective efforts have appeared and disappeared comparatively quickly. American schools are highly demotic institutions where any and all voices are heard. One frequent consequence of this is rapidly shifting loyalties from one new shiny curriculum to another shiny new curriculum dependent primarily on the volume of demotic voices and less so on the quality of their arguments. This means that educators must exercise leadership by providing a foundational structure making curriculum decisions from many diverse alternatives. On matters of virtue ethics the deontic-aretaic distinction is one such structure. The cognitive and non-cognitive distinction regarding curriculum priorities and allocations is another important foundational structure issue. At first glance the deontic model accords fairly well with a set of cognitive educational objectives. This means that students would be successful if they could recognize a set list of deontic virtues and show a reasonable depth of understanding about each virtue with perhaps examples and linkage with a few other virtues. And the aretaic model accords generally well with the vast and vague domain of non-cognitive objectives. Establishing a student's level of success with the more complex and fluid aretaic understanding of virtues, in the much more hazy non-cognitive domain, is very much an unconcluded pedagogical task. But that does not mean philosophers and educators should drift back as so often happens to the simpler deontic and cognitive matters.

Prior to schools building bridges between both deontic and aretaic conceptions of virtue ethics as well as between cognitive and non-cognitive educational objectives, it is important to understand some of the traditions and habits of American schools with regard to the broad area of virtue ethics.

One long standing deontic tradition is deeply rooted in materials such as the McGuffey Readers that included the harsh observation, "In Adam's fall we sinned all." This visage of human nature emphasizes the darker side of human nature and the attendant need to civilize and acculturate the young. It became a powerful force in creating schools that directly and forcefully taught the young the correctness of certain actions and usually more frequently the incorrectness of many other actions. This grim visage of how schools address matters of virtue resuled in a set of fixed rules of behavior that corresponded at the curriculum level with a fixed set of subject matter concepts. These were often linked to preparing the young for a predictable and fixed future. The links between this deontic virtue ethics tradition and the heavy emphasis on cognitive learning are not, as our statistical colleagues might put it, in a causal relationship, but there is clearly a heavy correlational relation.

A second long-standing tradition in schools is really neither deontic nor aretaic with respect to teaching virtue ethics. Schools leaning heavily in favor of meeting their responsibilities for graduating a generation knowledgeable in basic cognitively measurable areas also enable school leaders to claim that the responsibilities for non-cognitive learnings rest elsewhere. This silent partnership and tacit agreement with students and parents that schools teach value-free facts, ideas, and concepts separated school learning from the fluid realities of daily life. It, for example, helped schools avoid the steadily burgeoning importance of cultural diversity and a very

wide range of moral-political-social complexities. One notable effort to integrate consideration of morals and virtues into the on-going curriculum was Laurence Kohlberg's Cognitive Moral Reasoning Project at Harvard University. But even this breakthrough curriculum was abstract and analytic. It did involve learners in levels of moral complexity, but it is heavily jurisprudential and analytic utilizing starchy and contrived examples of virtue-value problems. It is preferable to both the quite common, pure value neutrality silent partner model and to the grim visage model, but it remained rather distant from the very important details and nuances of real-life and from nuanced and artistically engaging representations of real life.

American schools are founded, in the deepest ways, on a dangerous dichotomy between cognitive and non-cognitive learning. It was simply too easy for schools to accept responsibility solely for the cognitive learning. Two forces -- the constant chorus of cacophonous demotic voices and the comparative ease of measuring its impact on cognitive teaching and learning -- have made schools susceptible both to fads and seductive, highly incomplete data on learning.

After George Bernard Shaw visited the elite French schools he commented that the students seemed to know everything, but the problem is they don't seem to know "anything else." Shaw's "anything else" is sweetly vague. The many derivations of virtue ethics surely qualify as a vital responsibility for schools reaching beyond having our students know so many small things cognitively. There are also other worthy components of Shaw's alluring "anything else." A rich understanding of the fine arts is one of those.

Alfred North Whitehead worried that far too much of the schooling that focused on cognitive mastery was not merely harmless, but was actually harmful because it gave students,

faculty, and parents the illusion of knowledge. He argued that such knowledge, which he identified as inert -- that is, "ideas that are merely received into the mind without being utilized, tested, or thrown into fresh combinations" (Whitehead, Aims of Education, p. 13) --leads students to believe they have mastered a fixed subject area. To achieve wisdom schools need to make the cognitive knowledge base come alive by having students constantly test its veracity, understand its usefulness and connections to other issues, and then explore new connections with other matters by throwing it all into unusual and "fresh combinations" with other ideas. Schools too swiftly by-pass many opportunities for students to enjoy, learn from, and develop reflective habits about the many rich possibilities within Shaw's "anything else." After working with the moral-ethical-virtue dimensions of so many issues and with the arts students realize the sadly narrow limitations of frequent school simplifications such as cognitive vs. non-cognitive or merely deontic virtues.

There are two promising ways for savvy pedagogical pioneers to resolve the stultifying dichotomies and find important, golden, Aristotelian middle ground for each. One is to for schools to elevate the stature of, and enrich the practices for, experiential education. Exploration of that concept would be best explored in a separate paper. The second one would be to elevate and enrich the integration of both the arts and character-virtue education into the traditional curriculum. Imagining those who undertake this task as savvy as pioneers and not as explorers is important. Explorers are completely unsure about what they'll find. Pioneers have some ideas from returning explorers, but they are looking to settle into the new terrain with families and friends and more permanent futures.

Too often reform in American education has amounted to no more than superficial and often heedless change. One such "reform" is the testing mania which has struck educational systems around the globe and directly weakened arts education programs. Restoring comprehensive arts education will afford excellent opportunities for educating students about character, wisdom, and virtue. In order to successfully integrate a deontic-aretaic and cognitive-non-cognitive understandings into education in the arts it is important to understand "re-form" as the central force in the term reform. Too many recent, and frequently narrow, reform efforts manifest themselves as plans for modest adjustments strengthening financial accountability, student mastery of a basic traditional curriculum, or improved economic productivity. Rarely do such reforms concentrate on an unmistakably high need such as comprehensive K-12 character education. Even more rarely do reformers ever imagine fusing the strengths of strong arts education with the strengths of strong character and virtue education, particularly aretaic virtues education.

Often the reformers began with only the presumption, or at times what they regarded as proof, that schools had become totally deficient in character and virtue education. Those presumptions and putative proofs are highly disputable. The public has been so easily distracted from thorough and thoughtful considerations of comprehensive reforms necessary for enriching solid character education with careful curricular integration of the arts. Recently, however, there has been much productive attention focused on "21st century soft skills." Some of this emerged from changes underway in the world of commerce. Tony Wagner's, The Global Achievement Gap, exemplifies this trend. These kinds of valuable reform ideas often omit the arts and character education. But, rich aretaic virtue ethics qualifies as a vital 21st century soft skill as well. Further, when properly taught, the arts help students advance a much wider range of soft skills.

Traditional cognitive-centered curriculum emphasizes either-or issues, competition instead of collaboration, and limitations on new imaginative third alternatives. By heavily emphasizing accountability, measurability and economic productivity, we have deflected attention from three vitally important abilities and key components of being well educated: observing carefully and precisely, making fine judgments in complicated situations, creating solutions to problems, and moving easily beyond conventional ways of thinking. Rich experiences in the arts connect to important elements of aretaic virtue ethics – nuance, complexity, layered meanings, context, and newness. These indeed may be difficult to measure in traditional ways. But it is worth recalling that at one time radiation was difficult to measure. We learned happily in that instance that the inability to measure something does not mean we should ignore it. Similarly, educators need to prevent the test-mania tail from wagging the pedagogical dog. We need to identify more thoroughly how fusing an appealing arts education program with high quality aretaic character education will profoundly re-form each other as well as transform the traditional curriculum subject areas.

The power of re-forming schools so they integrate both aretaic character education and the arts productively depends upon attention to three other important matters. First, there has long been a dissonance between America's rightfully proud traditions in pragmatism and the arts which percolate slowly as students and teachers develop their talents for careful observation through reflection, precise insights into, and creative solutions for problems and tensions. Second, the importance of seeing the arts as more than an appendage to a well-educated graduate is vital to a successful integration and a resolution of dangerous dichotomies. Third, is the historically complex tradition of trying to protect individual freedom by preventing schools from directly

addressing values, virtues, and ethics. Both the arts and character education activate talents in the vital, wide-open, non-cognitive, "anything else" that Shaw highlighted.

A comprehensive and effective integration of the arts into broader school reform would see each standard component of the general curriculum realizing its own connections to the ways of thinking involved in both the arts and in aretaic character education. Only then can students realize that the arts and artistic judgments are a fundamental part of personal growth, everyday life, civic responsibility, good character, and economic productivity, all of which are vital to a flourishing personal and community life. Such a comprehensive and fundamental reform depends upon a comprehensive definition of art.

In 1896 Herbert Spencer made a quite arch claim about the arts as an educational frill; he called them "the efflorescence of civilization" which should be "subordinate to knowledge…" He then went on to conclude, "As they occupy the leisure part of life, so should they occupy the leisure part of education." (Spencer, p.74-75). Schools, students, and our culture have suffered so often as this false distinction between art and knowledge is hauled forth, usually at decisive school budget meetings. With quick apologies and polite regrets local school committees usually conclude that the arts are a luxury which cannot be funded.

John Dewey has effectively challenged the "efflorescence" view and raised the stakes significantly with his famous observation that "As long as art is the beauty parlor of civilization, neither art nor civilization is secure." (Dewey, p. 344) Rather than a pleasant ornament art is fundamental and a vital element of being well educated. Robert Pinsky, distinguished international poet and America's recent Poet Laureate, has spoken often of humans as "art-seeking

organisms." For us to understand that true art is such a primal instinct as a creator and a clarifier of experience, but to fail to teach about it in schools remains one of the greatest educational failures.

Those interested in broadening and deepening good character and virtue education will recognize both the problems and opportunities facing good arts education. Arts education is grounded in Aristotle's important observation that "The aim of art is not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance." Working with deeper meanings and the fine nuances in all the arts – the perfect word in a poem, the powerful chord or key change in music, the camera angle in a film, the exact color in a painting, and the fresh shape in a sculpture- help us develop the habits of fine thinking. Good aretaic character and good art are both fundamentally complex and layered. They both require attention to detail, careful reflection, Whitehead's "fresh combinations," and respect for complexity.

Pioneering educators can persuade a large portion of their colleagues and members of the local community to expand and deepen the school curriculum by showing how much the arts and aretaic character education have in common. It would be of considerable value if the arts and aretaic character education were able to expand and deepen their teaching independently of each other, but the finest re-forming of the school's curriculum carefully integrates them. The most important first step in progress toward that integration is to peer into the several habits of mind and understandings about learning that each has in common.

Jane Hirshfield is explaining poetry, but her observations easily extend across all of the arts and at the same time are vital to aretaic character educators and students. She identifies that the

power of the arts can be best understood when students realize that while they are learning precisely what an artist is depicting they can also learn precisely what they as observers take into the experience that results in their seeing it in a particular way. She describes art as that which "leads us into the self, but also away from it." (Hirshfield, page 32.) By providing a new perspective, however subtle, the work of art expands each individual self. James Elkins focused primarily on the visual arts in his important analysis, The Object Stares Back, but we can easily expand his important principle that "Ultimately, seeing alters the thing that is seen and transforms the seer. Seeing is metamorphosis, not mechanism." (Elkins, Pages 11 & 12) He claims that we each take something into any work of art that shapes what we see and hear. We each notice different portions of any experience -- a poem, a concerto, a sculpture, a novel, a film, a song, and a complex moral problem. This important principle means that teachers and students must reflect carefully and communicate very carefully about the interplay between the object and the self. In aretaic character development this would mean that students realize that they can productively share those thoughts with others for the purpose of sharpening one's understanding of an object, of one's self, and a resolution to a moral matter.

The finest art education and the most sophisticated aretaic character education share several vital and complex intellectual processes. Success in each of these two important and neglected curriculum components relies on recognizing the importance of precision, newness, slowness, difficulty of conventionally measuring pedagogical outcomes, open inquiry and individual choice, and interpretive imperfection.

Precision

In both art education and in moral education careful attention to detail is of primary importance. In both art and moral issues the nuances and subtlety of the particular case need full attention. Historians often work with large forces such as nationalism. Social scientists work with central tendencies. Mathematicians work with governing principles and consistent patterns. Those working with the arts and aretaic judgments work with particular cases. Iris Murdoch distinguished between looking and attention. Looking is a rather passive act of surveying and casually keeping track until something commands attention. In both the arts and making moral choices we depend on our capacity to look beyond the obvious, to Aristotle's inner meaning. It means we best look from different angles and perhaps imagine elements that may not be evident, or even directly present. At times there is only a fine line between something superficial and something entrancing. An effective work of art draws us into it for more than admiration or easy gratification. As we puzzle, wonder, critique, and link with other ideas the engagement integrates as the art becomes part of us. Finding and understanding those fine, delicate, subtle connections give the work of art a more permanent significance. Crafting a solution to a complex moral quandary is fundamentally the same process. Easy moral questions and the facile art pass by quickly, but the ones that command attention, as Iris Murdoch puts it, and require intellectual and emotional effort and participation are the educative ones.

Newness

Salman Rushdie has been credited with reviving the term newness. He was focusing on how cultural diffusion causes newness, but his claims that real transformation comes from the "unexpected combination of human beings, cultures, ideas…" and "a bit of this and a bit of that is how newness enters the world" (Rushdie, p. 19) are easily transferable to art and to moral quandaries. The respect for, understanding of, and pleasure in newness is at the center of the arts.

This habit of mind and intellectual skill is useful for students learning how to craft creative solutions to complex issues. Without it moral decisions can easily become formulaic and narrow.

Two developments help illustrate this key quality. They are evidence of rather sudden changes in architecture and in moral choices. Art educators found their argument on Clement Greenberg's famous observation that "All profoundly original art looks ugly at first." His position may be a bit exaggerated, but certainly new art frequently first looks, or sounds, or feels ugly. The Eiffel Tower experience serves as an illustration of initial resistance to daring new ideas. Upon completion it was denounced by many artists and prominent Parisians as an "odious column of bolted metal" and "a tragic lamppost" that "not even commercial America would have." Not long after that it became a widely beloved icon of French innovation and élan.

Similarly, not long ago the concept of gay marriage was far outside the conceptual framework of many Americans. The rather sudden reversal in public opinion as reflected in polls, elections, court cases, media analyses, legislation, and public discourse seems almost inexplicable. But the change is real and it is comparatively sudden. Of course, many still regard gay marriage as unacceptable, but it is generally safe to say the corner has been turned. The explanation of the change in public opinion is complex, just as it was with the Eiffel Tower, but unmistakably a portion of the public mind (and of those trying to influence the public mind) involves a respect for newness; that is, new opportunities, new framing of the issue, and new stories of individuals directly involved.

Slowness

A powerful side effect of the digital revolution has been an increased sense of hecticness. Hectic, hasty, and speedy are not a convivial atmosphere for creating and understanding art or for aretaic character education. These both require careful and detailed reflection, understanding diverse points of view, and thorough consideration of possible causes and consequences within one's self and across one's community. Infusing a finer sense of art and richer aretaic capacity for moral issues enrich our talents for attending to detail consideration of short—and long-term impact, and appreciation of subtlety. Each of these take time and may appear on the surface to be inefficient.

Both art and moral choices have a public dimension, but more significantly in a free society they embody individual experiences. As such they provide an important respite from the maddening rush to mass culture and mass communication. Both art experiences and moral choices often come before us suddenly. When well-educated for these circumstances young people can understand the need to slow down at the intersection of stimulated emotions and analytic thought. Understanding what prompts the initial appeal, or initial resistance, to either a work of art in any form or a moral conflict requires attention to a wide range of details. And it best generates careful reflection as well as conversation with others about the meaning of these kinds of experiences. In experiencing the arts Coleridge speaks of the need for a "willing suspension of disbelief," that is, our letting the work of art have its full say before we decide that it is not believable or that it is false and not a worthy representation Similarly, in a complicated aretaic moral situation we benefit when we suspend, when possible, our moral habits to review a wide range of opportunities. Implanting a degree of slowness in our students' habits and in our cultures' consciousness represents an enormous contribution by art educators and aretaic moral educators. Iris Murdoch claims that "art pierces the veil and gives sense to the notion of a reality

which lies beyond appearance." (Murdoch, page 88). It may appear inefficient, but in the long run it is ultimately productive to look beneath the surface, beyond the obvious, and through the deontic to capture fully and make good sense of all experiences, stimulating aesthetic ones and complicated real ones.

Open inquiry, personal choice

Most commonly when discussing both the arts and moral education in schools the general public thinks of the arts as either individual creativity or learning the masterpieces; moral education is almost exclusively deontic. A much more consequential plan would involve the arts beyond individuals learning to produce art creatively, which clearly is valuable. But education across all of the arts helps us interpret and connect artistic experiences to our daily lives. And good moral education does the same thing. Neither need to be seen as so fragile and worrisome with educators first and foremost being fearful of offending.

Jacques Barzun's advice on the fragility of the arts is direct, clear, and sensible. He argues that art "can certainly stand manhandling better than it can stand frigid respect or our enemy, prepared hokum," (Barzun, page 105). He goes on to make the case that understanding the significance of art "is like the slow subtle growth called education." The nuances of art have a lot in common with the nuances of learning. Knowing that a good work of art is durable and that we need not understand it quickly, and further that we cannot understand it superficially, all lead to what Barzun calls productive "manhandling." The complexity and vexations of good art lend its sturdiness and help prepare students for the complexities of important aretaic moral choices.

Rather than having students experience any work of art or any moral dilemma and then receive the best interpretation of either is basically the "prepared hokum" Barzun feared. A far superior plan is to have students establish exactly what meaning, complexities, and nuances they find in the experience, deliberate their conclusions with fellow students and teachers, and then re-work their ideas into their conclusions in their own words.

Too often art and aretaic moral considerations are excluded or seriously restricted from schools because they are regarded as largely subjective, personal experiences similar to one's religion. Analyzing art and moral issues in a secular school leads some to claim that it opens the door to challenging students' personal belief systems and religions. They go on to argue that allowing schools to challenge personal belief systems would then allow schools to challenge and weaken religion. Advocates of a thorough art education and aretaic moral education need to make the case that experiencing art and moral choices and attempting to understand them occurs best in a forum of exchanging ideas. The fear that any personal belief system will be weakened instead of enriched by experiencing something outside of it, something that other well-intended members of the larger community regard as significant, is a fear that can be assuaged by examples of students productively sharing ideas about art, and at times, about their own personal belief system. These kinds of exchanges occur all the time in literature, science, and history classes. Art educators and aretaic moral educators can easily show that their instruction falls into those categories. One virtue of schooling featuring open discussions is its ability to show how those processes help us understand one's self better. But also a good art program encourages students to communicate their thoughts about art so they learn from teachers and one another. Art and aretaic moral education, like religion, are both personal and communal activities. When done properly, they, rather than merely affronting others, generate sensitivity, caring, and respect for

different points of view. Only rare religious communities claim that they must operate independently of, or in ignorance of, other religions in American society.

Immeasurable

Large portions of the general population and a significant portion of professional educators believe firmly that curriculum rigor, objective testing, and accountability are the cornerstones of a sound educational system. In that group both the arts and aretaic moral curriculum programs are devalued because they are claimed to lack rigor and are difficult, if not impossible, to measure in a reliable and accountable way.

It is generally true that the arts and aretaic moral education are inconvenient to traditional measuring devices and systems. If our educational goals include having students develop diverse ways of reflecting on experiences and drawing fine moral distinctions about what to do in complicated moral conflicts; if they want students to devise new subtle shadings of understanding and expressive language as well as new ways of observing phenomena, then the conventional, easily tabulated tests will be insufficient. This leaves educators with two choices—either omit all this kind of teaching and learning because we cannot readily determine whether the goals have been reached, or develop completely new measuring systems to identify the wide range of subtle learning that emerges from well-planned arts and aretaic moral education.

Too frequently, of course, our culture has chosen the former. The latter is expensive. But we need to make a solid case that it is more expensive in the long run to ignore the refinements, creativity, problem-solving, talents and moral clarity emerging from improved arts and aretaic moral education. Solutions need not be developed *de novo.* There are many successful, reliable,

serviceable opportunities available in qualitative and longitudinal assessment programs. These both have matured over the past four decades and can quite easily be adapted for the more expansive educational objectives found in the arts and aretaic moral curricula. When all is said and done about all that occurs to students in schools what really matters is what kind of person each graduate becomes, what talents they have, what subject areas they have chosen to have some mastery. The narrow band of cognitive testing dominating and shaping so much of what occurs in schools often produces a great deal of data about learning that does not have any significant staying power. The constant, recent mantra about data-driven decisions too often obscures important other elements of decisions (pedagogical and otherwise) such as principles, morals, ethics, and long-range results, among others. Arts educators and moral educators would do well to band together while enlisting educators from other areas who are concerned not only about excessive testing, but also about narrow testing.

Incomplete, imperfect, and interpretive

Moral dilemmas end in imperfect answers. If a problem had a pure answer it would not be a dilemma. Similarly, as Milan Kundera argues for the novel, art is not didactic; it probes and asks questions by engaging us in something both familiar and new. Both good art and complex moral questions respect uncertainty and incompleteness. This of course does not mean judgments and decisions are optional. It does mean they are subject to re-consideration, reflection, and deliberation with others and with one's self. All good and lasting art reminds us there is always more to the story or the symphony, or the poem, or the painting. Good arts education programs often include studies of masterpieces -- paintings, music, poems, films and others. But too often the masterpieces are exalted and regarded as inaccessible beyond all others in a genre. In fact, they are usually masterpieces because they are vivid and vexing. Vivid means they are attractive,

impressive and we care about them; that is, they are familiar enough so we understand something of them, but with an engagingly fresh perspective. In addition, they are at least a bit puzzling and make us wonder. Our attraction is muted and enriched by mystery. Masterpieces are hardly ever settled and didactic. In the end they are usually complex representations with fundamental questions such as was King Lear really mad?; is Stravinsky needlessly noisy?; what is Mona Lisa conjuring? We come to revere these works because they ask and sometimes answer good questions which produce fresh insights. But these insights are intensely personal, idiosyncratic, and interpretive. They are also subject to frequent modification. Good arts education and good aretaic moral education programs show students general guidelines about how to come to decisions and make choices in these areas, but also that there is no set formula for doing so. Living productively with the dynamics of change and of nearly uncountable variables in each work of art and each moral choice is a quality that can be enhanced by guidance and practice, even though it may not be conventionally measureable.

The arts are an ideal element for elevating the importance and quality of subjective judgments. Teaching students about subjectivity is often repudiated as relativistic or solipsistic. In fact, students and adults are required to and do make important, complex subjective judgments all the time. The arts bring to them the subtlety, the experience, the distance, and the reflection required for sound subjective judgments. Thoughtful experiences in the arts enable students to quickly surpass hasty, hazy, and empty justifications represented in statements such as "that is acceptable in my culture," or "it is a value judgment." The implication is that such decisions are inaccessible to further analysis. The arts demonstrate how ill-advised such implications are. On matters of relativism, the arts help students move beyond conventional, limited and casual ways of thinking. The arts are an engaging way of seeing our customary behaviors and thinking from

fresh angles. We may choose to modify those ways or we may remain committed to them. In either event an engaging work of art produces serious decisions and is therefore a serious educational moment.

Clearly there are instances of weak defenses of the arts in the curriculum along the lines of "students like it" or "it involves their other styles of learning", or "it shows them parts of life in which there are no right answers." Sound art education and sound aretaic character education are consistently much more sophisticated than that. Subjective judgments are not just highly individuated decisions as commonly represented in statements such as "I just don't like it." or "It is my opinion, and everyone has a right to an opinion," or "I feel like it is beautiful." True study in the arts penetrates those kinds of unreflective, self-absorbed, taste-based observations. Similarly, first rate aretaic character education encourages students to range widely and reflect carefully on all conceivable solutions to a moral dilemma.

Alfred North Whitehead counsels us well

> Those societies which cannot combine reverence for
> their symbols with freedom of revision must ultimately
> decay, either from anarchy or from atrophy of life stilled
> by useless shadows. (Alfred N. Whitehead, 2, "Uses of Symbolism")

All academic areas can productively show students how their fields have grown, evolved, and even made errors. The arts are especially valuable as students cultivate the responsibilities vital for a true "freedom of revision."

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