

# Chapter One

## Educating Aesthetically

**T**HERE SHOULD BE little doubt that public education in America is in the midst of a crisis. Evidence that our grand democratic experiment is crumbling is as palpable as the harried and defeated look of our teachers. For one thing, there has been a dramatic decline in literacy and overall scholastic achievement during the last decade. Our Sputnik-inspired spurt in educational programs has been fizzling, and expectations by and for students have shrunk to fit their lack of academic accomplishment; we teach astonishingly less mathematics, science, and foreign language than is taught, for example, in secondary schools in the Soviet Union.

Complementing this academic decline is a crescendo of violence, truancy, and general apathy in the schools—not just in the “inner city” (read: minority ghettos) but in the suburbia of the middle class. Teachers take courses in self-defense, and attention that should be given to serious students is siphoned off by disciplinary demands. From the standpoint of a democracy in which a concerned and participating electorate is essential, what we see is frightening. We are breeding an uncaring, disturbed, semiliterate future citizenry.

It may be naive to diagnose this crisis in academic terms, but part of the problem seems to be a scholastic program and process which ignores students’ interests. Certainly, there are various nonacademic sources of this problem: inadequate funding, a subculture of poverty and drugs, extreme ethnic heterogeneity, and the like. But it would be equally facile to dismiss what actually goes on in the classroom as irrelevant to the present state of education. Classroom rhythm, organization of subject matter, and method of presentation must engage the students by speaking to their nonscholastic interests and questions.

Much contemporary classroom teaching, however, is indifferent to

the students' everyday experience, making classwork ineffective because, I shall argue, it is unaesthetic. Information and technical skills, for example, are imparted as ends-in-themselves rather than as ingredients in a process of human development. Irrespective of any connection with their daily concerns, the curriculum preestablishes the bodies of information and the levels of skill mastery that the students are to acquire or achieve. In fact, the two are seen as going hand-in-hand: The skills are the means by which the isolated bits of information are to be processed.

But in isolation from the students' everyday experience, interests, and perceptions, bodies of information and technical abilities lack meaning. Meaning must be "added on" to the information that is stored, *awaiting* occasion for relevance, and similarly with techniques; unless acquired as ways of "making sense" of what is in fact *experienced* as perplexing, neither will be understood. Successful application of mathematical formulae, for instance, will seem like so much magic.

Instead, we must pay heed to *how* information and technical skills are acquired. In aesthetic learning, they are introduced to meet a student's felt need, a need growing out of the student's investigation of something of interest. A technique or skill is ideally acquired when the student is called upon to *do* something by his inquiry; he feels the need to determine the length of the line derivable, for example, by Pythagoras' theorem. The same holds for information or data acquisition. Instead of memorizing such things as the royal succession in England or the capitals of all of the states in the United States as so much material to be ingested, students should discover them in the course of remedying a felt lack of understanding.

## **1. Teacher As Midwife**

More often than anyone else in history, Socrates is held up as the paradigm of the great teacher—one who, not so incidentally, heeded the aesthetic character of teaching and learning. He describes his teaching activity as midwifery, by means of which those associated with him may find in themselves "many fair things" and bring them forth, giving birth to worthwhile thoughts as a result of rigorous discussion with Socrates. His job, however, is more difficult than the literal midwife's because ". . . women do not, like my patients, bring forth at one time real children and at another mere images which it is

difficult to distinguish from the real."<sup>1</sup> Some of the student's opinions will be true, others merely plausible images of the real. Before assessing or inviting others to assess the student's intellectual offspring, however, the teacher must first assist in the birth, which may require inducing pangs of labor. Now this conception of teacher as midwife has been much used in pronouncements on the "art of teaching." But it does not seem to have been thought out; it sounds catchy but its implications have stayed hidden. To give meaning to the analogy, what we need is an account of the student's experience. In what follows, I shall offer an interpretation of this Socratic midwifery. While teachers will do other important things with students, this seems most distinctive of teaching, requiring a talent that perhaps cannot be learned or reduced to a set of plans.

We must begin with the student's ordinary life, as it is the seedbed for the ideas brought forth by the teacher's ministrations. The student, like all of us, attends to what is about him. The senses acquaint us all with a world of objects and events, so it is no wonder that we occupy ourselves with sense experience. Since the senses provide an ample supply of interesting events, we all naturally live the "life of the senses." But there is more to reality and learning than meets the eye. At least, such an assumption seems necessary if the midwife conception is to be meaningful.

The hypothesis I shall explore is that there is another kind of "attending" that is latent in our sensuous experience. It goes unnoticed because we are preoccupied with what we see, touch, smell, and hear. Yet, all the time we are registering, unaware, an aspect of the sensuous world that is not itself sensed. We are "seeing" (with our mind's eye, so to speak) the intelligible side of reality, a side which is hidden in the sensible. This hidden intellectual apprehension is a sort of latent learning: an unnoticed, submerged "life of the intellect" which accompanies the more obvious life of the senses. It is a kind of seeing "through" the objects of sense experience to their nonsensible relations. By virtue of such latent learning, we become acquainted with such notions as sameness and necessity.

Why do we say that the tree we see today is the *same* (identical) tree our senses disclosed to us yesterday? The tree we see today has fewer leaves than the one we perceived yesterday, yet we do not doubt that it is identical with it. How do we know that the person we see today is the *same* person we saw last year? We think she is the same even though many perceivable things about her are different. We cannot,

obviously, *perceive* the identity or sameness that we ascribe in the case of the tree or the person.

Similarly, "necessity" cannot be perceived in or between objects of sense. We never perceive the connection among sensible objects as necessary. There is no necessity in the fact that the dropped glass is followed by the sound of shattering or the feeling of wetness. It is possible for the dropping not to be followed by the shattering or wetness.<sup>2</sup> We can easily imagine the relation or order as other than the way the senses perceive them. How then do we ever form the notion of necessity?

The relations of sameness and necessity (among many others) are not themselves sensed, but rather are formed by the intellect in an unnoticed way. As we explicitly attend to sense objects, the intellect is implicitly making connections among them. The intellect abstracts certain features from sense experience and then, by some unknown process, forms general conceptions that apply to the objects sensed. This life of the intellect is obscured from us ". . . due to the natural outward direction of our attention through the senses." As a consequence, ". . . essential sides of the real, including the basic inactive [nonsensuous, intelligible] side, are left implicit, unattended to."<sup>3</sup>

Most of the time, most of us fail to attend to, let alone understand, our intellect's latent learning. What we "see" in this latent learning is the intelligible, nonsensuous side of reality. As we pass among the sensed objects of experience, the intellect glimpses relations among these objects. The job of the teacher as midwife is to provide an occasion for the student to recognize the presence of this unnoticed learning. The teacher must help make explicit what for so long has remained implicit in the student's mind. The student must be brought to attend to this hidden cognizing. This is why Socrates calls learning "re-cognizing": cognizing or seeing again, in a reflective way that calls for effort. In a sense, the teacher is instructing the student to "know himself" (another Socratic theme), to know explicitly what he has already cognized of the nonsensuous side of reality. This helps flesh out Heidegger's insight:

This genuine learning is therefore an extremely peculiar taking, a taking where he who takes only takes what he actually already has. Teaching corresponds to *this* learning. Teaching is a giving, an offering; but what is offered in teaching is not the learnable, for the student is merely instructed to take for himself what he

already has. True learning only occurs where the taking of what one already has is a self-giving and is experienced as such . . . . The most difficult learning is to come to know all the way what we already know.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to note something in what Heidegger says that is easily overlooked: that learning is not merely a self-giving, but is *experienced* as such. When we do experience it as a self-giving, there is an aesthetic quality which would be missing were we simply to take on the ideas of another:<sup>5</sup> a sense of self-completeness, in which we have come home to ourselves. There is a special *aisthesis* to this return, that distinguishes it from simply remembering facts or the opinions of others. In aesthetic experience proper, we help form an integrated whole by “funding” present experience with the reservoir of our past. (This will be elaborated upon in Chapter III.) We call upon this reservoir to complete and give meaning to the present material. In aesthetic education, the present interaction (between student and material, or student and another individual) occasions a similar inward turn. The structure of this return and its special *aisthesis* will be clarified shortly in the discussion of the peculiar kind of love involved in it.

In the self-giving that is experienced as such, a division in the self is overcome. The “forgetfulness” brought about by the life of the senses is overcome in the active gathering up of what has been unobtrusively learned by the intellect. Yet that other, dominant life of the senses is not then ignored. On the contrary, the intelligible relations made explicit in learning give order to the sensible. And while that is quite another (Platonic) story, it is important to mention here that this provides the experience with still greater unity. The intelligible side of things is first drawn out of the sensible experience (in the intellect’s latent learning) and then is returned to it, to make it understandable. This coming full circle adds to the aesthetic impact of self-giving. We give something to ourselves, i.e., come to know all the way what was “seen” by the intellect. We experience this *as* a self-giving, i.e., making the hidden explicit to ourselves by our own effort. And, finally, our full recognition of this intelligible side of reality enables us to organize and, ironically, “make sense” of the sensible. In the case of the identity of the perceived tree, for example, we must make explicit the intellect’s latent conception of sameness. Out of that conception we formulate a principle of identity that accommodates perceived change in the

object over time. Armed with such a principle, we could say why we believe that this is the same tree we saw yesterday. The principle would "make sense" of our perceptions.

Intellectually seeing, when it first took place in the past, was passively undergone; now it receives attention and is "activated." We actualize a potential hidden in our experience, just as we do in aesthetic experience proper when we fund the present material with our past. In this way, learning is aesthetically rich because the active and the passive are balanced in the uniting of the past with the present. When the student exclaims, "Now I see it!", he also senses that it is not for the first time. What was previously seen, but not said, is now brought into focus and speech by his own activity. What does the teacher do to assist in bringing the implicit learning into focus and speech? How does the teacher get the student to take himself past the life of the senses to the hidden life of the intellect?

As the metaphor suggests, labor pains can be brought on naturally or induced by the midwife-teacher. The pains signal the student's need and readiness for the intellectual effort to bring the indistinct learning into speech. The need is felt when the sensuous itself strikes us in a strange way, in fact when it strikes us as strange or perplexing. The ordinary seems unusual. Commonplace beliefs and perspectives which usually get us through our sensuous lives give way and are felt to be inadequate. In such moments we feel ourselves unguarded, open to suggestion and new possibilities. The awareness of the ordinary as appearing novel calls forth questions; we question the bases for our commonplace beliefs about the sensible world.

The identity or permanence of human beings, for example, may become problematic as we leaf through a photo album or read about an auto accident. In the first case, we notice how much people change physically, yet we persist in calling and considering old aunt Flo the "same" person. Conversely, the brain damage someone suffers in an auto accident seems to call into question our ordinary assumptions about human identity. In this case, the individual looks the same but can no longer think the way he used to. In what sense is he the same? In what sense do "normal," uninjured people remain the same as time goes by? These, and everyday instances like them, force us to conceptualize and evaluate the beliefs we ordinarily take for granted.

It is as if in such moments the latent seeing, hitherto unnoticed, now presses forward into the gap in our commonsensical thought. We voice as wonderment the feeling that our ordinary beliefs and assumptions are inadequate; we wonder why and how we ever manage to

think of an individual as the "same" from day to day or year to year. We wonder at the bases for such everyday judgments as these. At such times, the teacher can assist the student to appropriate fully what has all the while been his as a partial possession. In this case, it is his latent learning of the concepts of sameness and permanence.

This is the "natural way" of labor pains, the pains that indicate the need for inquiry into what makes the sensuous intelligible. The teacher may also have to induce the labor pains, that is, lead the student to feel the inadequacy of his ordinary sensible experience and its assumptions. One way is through questions. While there are other ways, such as ironic speech and storytelling,<sup>6</sup> this is the method I shall treat in discussing the process of midwifery. Because of its unique connection with the life of the intellect, questioning reveals much about teaching as bringing the student to self-giving. By questioning, the teacher can lead the student to see the inadequacy of his understanding. Ideally, the student learns how to question on his own. But before he can shape questions for himself, the student must become aware of his own lack, his own ignorance.

Forming a question is not easy; it requires that we see *how* our understanding is limited. Good questions mark a course of investigation into what we do not yet know but are aware of as a likely place to look. The teacher can prepare the student for setting his own course by first leading the student to see where and how his knowledge is limited. He may question the ordinary way we deal with sensible objects: Why do things with different features have the same name? After all, rather different objects are called "trees." The teacher may call into question the assumptions upon which our ordinary beliefs about the sensible world rest: How is communication between people possible when we cannot be sure that one another's experiences correspond? How do we tell that images are dreams?

It is a healthy sign when students complain that they are upset, uneasy, or confused by questions. The natural process by which their ordinary sensible world is called into question has received a pedagogical boost. By asking good questions the teacher aims to help the student formulate his own. Questions are of singular importance because they express a relationship of the individual to himself. When self-formulated, therefore, the individual has put himself in this relation and is not simply thrust into it by the teacher. What sort of relation to oneself is this?

Questions open up a search or inquiry. They mark a way of orienting ourselves in a subject matter: an advance over mere confusion in

which our perplexity is without shape or direction. This sort of orienting is also a way of orienting ourselves with respect to ourselves. Questions require a willingness to reconsider our experiences and opinions, and their bases. In questioning, we stand both negatively and positively oriented toward ourselves. We are ignorant, there is a gap in our understanding, but we are aware of it and have begun a remedial quest. In struggling to formulate a question appropriate to our perplexity, we come to see something of why we do not understand. We begin to get a hold on the hidden learning that has been going on unnoticed.

A good question gives a sense of tapping this hidden reserve of learning. The query gathers up this earlier learning and begins to make it explicit in speech. The quest is to make explicit what has been seen unreflectively by the intellect. This is why a good question leads us on to more questions. It tugs at some thread of our submerged learning, which in turn connects to other threads. In questioning the basis for identifying a person over time as the same individual, we might begin by noticing that physical alteration does not usually inhibit us from thinking that the person is indeed the same. This seems to suggest that personal identity depends upon something permanent in the mind or, more generally, the psyche. Yet here we might query: But the notion of personal identity seems to tolerate alterations in beliefs, attitudes, and emotional propensities. At the very least, we do not expect the same person to have the same thoughts or feelings all the time. We must then ask what in or about the psyche must remain unchanged and how unchanging that must be. Each question generates question-embedded responses.

As with aesthetic experience proper, questioning generates thought that reaches past itself. Although aesthetic experience is complete in itself, its richness suggests many directions and further possibilities. This is why a great novel, for example, can support a variety of competing, conflicting, as well as mutually enhancing, interpretations. This is also why works of art feed on one another, forming a tradition. Aesthetic experience takes us beyond our ordinary perception of things. It forces us deeper into ourselves in an attempt to gain a fuller view of the world. A good question is also aesthetic in quite literally composing the student's thought. As in aesthetic experience, it plumbs the individual's unarticulated depths of insight, except that here the purpose is primarily cognitive. In the quest for explicit understanding, for knowing "all the way," questions relate what already has become explicit to what still remains obscure. They bridge the gap between what we understand and what we do not, by

developing a special sort of love. It is the teacher's job to quicken this love that all have, and make it a controlling influence in the student.

## 2. Love and Learning

Consideration of this special sort of love will fill out the midwife analogy and also explain why the student would be willing to make the effort to bring the underground life of reason into the clarity of speech. What kind of love is it that the teacher must enliven in the student? Clearly it must be a love that initiates and sustains a quest. It is a love that might be distinctive of us as humans bound up with what a human being is, but also with what he is not yet. In this respect, it reflects the way a question orients a person both negatively and positively toward himself. Negatively put, this love is a *lack* in us and a longing for what we lack. It is expressed mythically by Aristophanes in Plato's *Symposium* as the desire to find our missing halves, that which would complete us. And there is truth in this myth, that the love we are here concerned with is a longing for that which will make us whole as human beings. We experience ourselves as lacking and seek completeness. What is wrong with Aristophanes' story is that it presents what we lack as outside ourselves, another thing (a person) altogether.

This takes us to the positive aspect of this love that prompts learning. It is also a desire to beget, to bring forth what is within us. To be human is to have a love of producing and giving what is within. This aspect of self-love is suggested by Diotima in the *Symposium*. Now these two aspects seem to be opposites. The first is a lack or need; the second a fullness or bounty. As aspects of one love, lacking and having would seem to be irreconcilable. There is, however, a way the two could be aspects of one love: if the positive aspect, the bringing forth from within, fulfills the longing for completeness. We seek what we are not (yet), what we are missing, by producing from within ourselves. This is possible only if our incompleteness is not absolute, only if we "are" in some sense what we are not. Heidegger gets at this when he says that the student takes "what he already has." And this idea of being or having something incompletely, not yet all the way, is found in the preceding account of the life of the intellect.

What will complete us is the explicit understanding of the intelligible side of reality. It is already present in us as a latent intellectual way of seeing. Our desire to produce, then, can be met by making this

latent learning explicit. The begetting aspect of love is realized when we attend to our hidden reserve of understanding. We "are" therefore what we will become by possessing knowledge in an obscure, incomplete way. The negative and positive aspects of love correspond to the two aspects of our latent learning. The negative side is the life of the intellect while still hidden from us, merely potential knowledge. This is experienced as a deprivation; its *aisthesis* is a longing for what will complete us (by completing our grasp of reality). The positive side is the desire and willingness to make the latent learning explicit. We take a joy in enlarging our understanding. This is experienced by us as a fullness; its *aisthesis* is a desire to beget, to bring forth something that we have to give.

Our longing for what will complete us can, therefore, be met in the same activity by which we produce from out of ourselves. We make ourselves more complete by making the hidden intellectual learning explicit in speech. This bringing out into a more stable, sharable knowledge makes us more complete as human beings.<sup>7</sup>

Insofar as our latent learning is not yet brought to the level of explicit understanding, we experience ourselves as incomplete. We are aware of our lack because the latent learning is not (yet) real knowledge. However, as that which is *potentially* knowledge, we experience our submerged intellectual seeing as a fullness. We are pregnant with thought, however inchaote or obscure. Like anything in the process of growth, our becoming is at once a lack and a presence. A sapling is not yet a mature tree, yet the tree is *potentially* present in its structure and functioning. But unlike other things that grow, we must take an active self-conscious part in our growth. Our latent learning comes to be knowledge only by our efforts. The desire to bring out what is hidden in our understanding of the world is a form of self-love. This is what motivates us to think and subsequently to realize our potential.

As suggested above, the intimation of this potential within us has a distinctive *aisthesis* or felt quality. It is this which the teacher must work to intensify in the student. Because of the strength of this self-love, the student makes the effort to form the questions which can bring the hidden learning to light. The *aisthesis* that attends our sense of inner potential develops as the labor pains issue in questions. When these receive satisfactory responses, there is a sense of aesthetic closure. A process begun in disturbance, carried forward in the shaping of questions, reaches temporary completion. But this is at the same time experienced as our own growth. The delight we take in seeing

anything grow is intensified when it is ourselves, for then we are "inside," experiencing the growth from within as well as watching it from without.

Thus we experience a small sense of growth and aesthetic closure when we are able to answer the question concerning the way we tell the difference between dreams and real objects. Shaping our perplexity into a question in the first place, of course, carries with it a sense of development and movement-to-conclusion characteristic of aesthetic experience. We might bring the hidden life of the intellect forward in such a way as to notice that there is less congruity within the dream world than there is within the real one. Time and place shifts, for example, often do not make sense in the dream. Furthermore, there is usually a marked discontinuity between the dream world and the real one. We jump quickly from a desert chase to our beds with nary a trace of sand or sun. Arriving at such principles as these rounds out the process begun in labor pain, and carries a sense of aesthetic completeness. (The criteria that emerge in this case, moreover, are themselves aesthetic or aesthetically oriented: continuity and integration of experience.) Because the expansion and completing of our understanding comes about as a result of our own efforts, the sense of aesthetic completeness is deepened.

The growth, and its aesthetic quality, is experienced as self-promoted, a self-giving. We are involved with ourselves in a way strikingly like the way we are involved with external material in aesthetic experience. However, in this experience of learning, we are both agent *and* object of the activity. The development and organization of the thought material occurs through our own efforts, just as when artist or appreciator actively engages the material in aesthetic experience. Yet the object to be brought to fuller completion is here part of ourselves—our own thoughts correspond to the colors, sounds, or word meanings found in aesthetic experience proper. In learning, therefore, agent and object are united in us: *Our* activity is responsible for the development of *our* thought. As in aesthetic experience proper, we are distanced from ourselves. In forming and dealing with questions, we treat our hidden learning as something separate from who we are. We question and work on our own thought as though it were another's. Yet we are intimate with ourselves—as in aesthetic experience. The hidden life of the intellect did, after all, occur within us; making it explicit is, after all, making clear what we have seen, what has been our obscure possession all along. Because the aesthetic closure which occurs in learning is the consequence of our own activity, and is a closure in our

own thinking, the unity of the experience is more pronounced than in other areas of aesthetic activity. We are decidedly unified as thinkers. Self-promoted self-completion is particularly elating.

### **3. Information and Techniques**

What I have said so far about midwifery and love must seem rather remote from the daily activities and subject matter of the classroom. Surely classroom learning is concerned with acquiring information and mastering intellectual skills or techniques. It would seem that a midwife such as I have discussed is hardly needed for attaining these goals. Moreover, what has "self-giving" and the "life of the intellect" to do with getting straight on the facts of the Crimean War or the election of presidents in a democracy?

No one denies the need for data or factual information. It is that about which we think, and our opinions can be altered radically by the addition or subtraction of a piece of information. The rub lies in the way students acquire information. Is it in "pieces" like so many computer "bits"? As the use of computers has grown, so too has the vocabulary. Students and teachers alike seem to speak of knowledge as so much information acquisition, regardless of how the acquisition takes place. Because our thinking unthinkingly follows vocabulary, we conceive of thought as information-processing. This makes it easy to transmit information in isolation from what it *means*—almost as an end in itself.<sup>8</sup> And this is actually detrimental to real learning or thinking.

Too often the teacher puts a premium on the students' ability to reproduce a body of information in a particular subject. The subject matter is regarded by teacher and student as complete in itself: something to be "gotten through" or "across." So, little effort is made to relate it to the students' interests and desires. The pupil "... acquires a technical body of information without ability to trace its connections with the objects and operations with which he is familiar."<sup>9</sup>

This, of course, points to the way students *should* acquire information: in connection with what moves them to inquire and think. The motivation occurs when the life of the senses is perplexing and the intellect's latent learning must be called upon. Instead of memorizing the major exports of Brazil or the Periodic Table of the Elements as material to be ingested, students can discover these things in the

course of making an inquiry, an inquiry begun *because* they experience a lack of understanding. Information is thereby acquired in a meaningful way. There is then no problem of "attaching" meaning to it. It is not simply stored away awaiting an occasion for relevance, but is connected to interest and fitted into a network of related facts from the start. The acquisition of factual information in the midst of a quest will not result in a mere piling up of unconnected bits of information. The data will be organized within the area of inquiry, meaningful since it is part of an intellectual self-giving.

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The mastery of intellectual technique is obviously also important in education. We operate more effectively and efficiently when we are skilled in mathematics, science, reading, spelling, and the like. But too often a value is placed on the technical facility for its own sake and it, too, is taught without care that the student understand what is going on. Education comes to be identified with skill mastery in addition to information-processing. Indeed, the two become nicely intertwined. Intellectual skills are the means or methods by which the information is "processed." The student is not likely to understand how the skill or technique works, what its purpose is, or how it relates to any subject matter, however, unless it is learned in response to his labor pains. Is the technique acquired as a method which draws upon the student's hidden life of the intellect? When learned in this way, the skill is acquired as a tool by which the life of the intellect can make sense of the life of the senses. Learning technical skills must be situated in the daily life of the senses, grown perplexing—in *need* of intellectual manipulation.

Teaching science as a collection of technical exercises, for instance, separates it from its function in everyday life. Technique then has no bearing on the objects and concerns with which the student is at home. The techniques or methods of science should be exhibited as bringing order and control to the ordinary life of the senses. Otherwise, the methods will seem to apply only to unfamiliar, "technical" material. They will be isolated from real life along with the body of information to be transferred in the classroom.

Without connectedness to ordinary interests and subject matter, the array of technical mastery will be without meaning. Each skill will become a specialized routine, rattling around unavailable for effective

use. This is pointedly illustrated in the case of reading, in which the technique can be without “meaning” in the strictly literal sense as well as the more general one indicated so far.

It is customary for teachers to urge children to read with expression, so as to bring out the meaning. But if they originally learned the sensory-motor technique of reading—the ability to identify forms and reproduce the sounds they stand for—by methods which did not call for attention to meaning, a mechanical habit was established which makes it difficult to read subsequently with intelligence. . . . Meaning cannot be tied on at will.<sup>10</sup>

The student will attend to “meaning” when the subject matter is one into which he has begun inquiry. As an activity to further the self-giving, to help formulate a question or find an answer to one, reading is necessarily meaningful. As this indicates, the way techniques are mastered determines whether they will facilitate or obstruct subsequent learning and performance. When cut off from the purposeful task of sustained questioning, techniques and skills are isolated from other abilities. This is because general capacities of observation, analysis, and generalizing are not increased; the isolated skill does not broaden such powers. Speaking of spelling, Dewey notes:

. . . the more he confines himself to noticing and fixating the forms of words, irrespective of connections with other things [meanings, context of use, derivation], the less likely is he to acquire an ability which can be used for anything *except* the mere noting of verbal visual forms. . . . The connections which are employed in other observations . . . are deliberately eliminated when the pupil is exercised merely upon forms and letters of words.<sup>11</sup>

These last claims connect up this way. When technique is taught without reference to intellectual purpose, without inquiry into a subject matter, then its context of acquisition is narrow. When the context of acquisition is narrow, the abilities cultivated by the technique are specialized. When specialized, they do not admit of incorporation into other techniques or adaptation to new situations. It is difficult to integrate different techniques when they are acquired without being situated in a common experience or pursuit.

A correlate of learning techniques or methods in this way is a lack of understanding how or why they get the results they do. How many of us applied mathematical formulae or methods and then greeted the resulting answers as so much magical success? We saw *that* the technique worked but not how. Missing were the links of connection which make applying technique meaningful. When a student does understand how and why a technique works, it is because his latent learning has been made explicit. He grasps intellectually the whole situation in which the technique figures. Nonsensical concepts such as square root, exponent, and proportional variation, define the context within which the formulaic method works. Unless these concepts are integrated in an understanding of the whole mathematical "situation," the method or technique will seem mysterious and will be applied without understanding.

The isolated way of imparting technical mastery is unaesthetic in that it disjoins the technique from the individual's particular interests and questions. Because it does not grow out of the student's perception and appreciation of everyday connections, the perception and appreciation are restricted. In aesthetic education, however, the student's capacities are expanded because technique is situated in his overall intellectual labors. The technique must be situated in the student's ordinary experience if it is to be learned aesthetically and not as a fragment. The situatedness of technical learning implies that the student employs the technique when called upon by his inquiry to *do* something. It is part of a response to a question arising within the student's purposeful activity.<sup>12</sup>

The technique or method should be introduced by the teacher to satisfy a student's felt need. In the midst of a problem that he finds interesting, the student should experiment with techniques that seem promising. They are therefore meaningful from the moment of introduction; the student sees their connection with subject matter, function, and value. ". . . One has a knowledge of mathematical conceptions only when he sees the problems in which they function and their specific utility in dealing with [these problems]."<sup>13</sup>

When the student directly experiences the payoff from the technique in results in which he is interested, an "episode of inquiry" is completed. The sense of aesthetic closure washes back upon the technique. It is appreciated as an integral part of a process with distinctive contours and culmination. It is integrated into an aesthetically whole process in which problematic beginnings reach satisfactory

conclusion. Since it is crucial to the achievement of this aesthetic closure, the technique is valued in connection with the other human powers with which it has meshed.

Aesthetic integration of technique includes its role in effecting continuity in the student's thinking. Applying the technique not only enables the student to deal with the present material, but furthers the thought which follows. The skill or technique helps continuity in thinking by utilizing previous thought "... for some other stage, until ... the end ... which ... summarizes and finishes off the process."<sup>14</sup> In this way, for example, might inventory-taking be preparatory to book-balancing, which in turn furthers budget-projection. The idea is for technique to take its place in a whole in which each event contributes to the occurrence and worth of others. Techniques so enmeshed take their place in an aesthetically satisfying process. The "summarizing and finishing off" of the intellectual episode of inquiry, then, has a consummatory quality characteristic of aesthetic experience proper.

So far our discussion is still once removed from the ins and outs of actual classroom life. The teacher is a midwife who situates information acquisition and technique mastery in the student's labor to give birth to a hitherto dormant understanding. But what are the implications of this for the student's participation in the classroom?

#### **4. Platonic Dialogue As Aesthetic Model**

I propose examining the dramatic form of the Platonic dialogue<sup>15</sup> because I believe that Plato has the most to teach us about the aesthetics of education. He forms his instruction aesthetically—as a dialogue, and so might be expected to reveal something important about the aesthetics of education in that form. In drawing out the implications for the classroom, I will pay particular attention to the relationship of the dialogue's meaning to its characters and reader. Both the characters' and the reader's participation in the dialogue have something to say about the nature of student participation in the classroom.

The first thing to notice about a dialogue is that it is neither a play nor an essay. Yet it resembles both. Like a play, a dialogue is composed of characters, their speech, and their (limited range of) actions. The characters show emotion, sometimes interrupt or break off with one another, and occasionally storm out of or burst into the discussion. The drama of the dialogue is crucial to its meaning and what it has to

teach, but this does not make it a theatrical play. The characters' lives do not change as visibly or significantly as they do in a play, and the interest that brings them to talk together is always intellectual: to inquire into some topic of lasting human importance such as love, death, or justice. Bona fide plays are never (or ought never to be) so lopsidedly cognitive.

In this respect, then, a Platonic dialogue (hereafter "dialogue," for brevity) is like an essay or treatise. Positions are offered, arguments are proposed and modified to meet objections, examples are given, and analogies are drawn. It is too much like what goes on in a classroom or academic forum to be a "real" play, yet the fact that the positions and arguments are espoused by particular characters (hereafter "interlocutors" to indicate people in a dialogue) make it unlike a treatise on death or justice.

### **A. Agency**

The reader of a dialogue cannot simply identify with or reject the author's viewpoint, since that viewpoint encompasses the whole: all the opinions and their objections, and the ensuing movement of the discussion. The reader is forced to contribute to the thinking of the dialogue since he cannot simply accept a particular position as the "right" one. Rather, he must work his way through the interplay of positions. What then emerges is also conditioned by what is revealed of the interlocutor's personalities. The reader must, then, interpret what is said in light of who is saying it.

Because no position offered in a dialogue is complete or unassailable, "... the reader's soul is constrained to search for the result and be set on the way on which it can find what it seeks."<sup>16</sup> In Plato's *Crito*, for example, Socrates claims both that citizens owe obedience to the state *and* that citizenship includes the responsibility for making free choices. The conflicting views cut to the core of the issue, forcing the reader to search for a means of resolving or synthesizing their opposition. The result is that the reader must actively think through the views and bring the interlocutors' personalities together with their argumentation.

This is what I claim for aesthetic classroom education. The student must be brought to *feel* the need for his own active involvement, to feel the deficiency when he merely "takes what is offered" by another. Thus, the first lesson Plato teaches is the necessity of making the student feel the need for his active engagement. This is beautifully

mirrored in the agency of the dialogue's interlocutors.

A dialogue is perhaps unique in developing "... language as a discussion in which man's agency is explicitly incorporated."<sup>17</sup> The discussion of justice in the *Republic*, for instance, begins with the initiating, originating acts of its participants: Socrates goes to observe a strange festival; two others force him to discuss politics. The importance of the characters as agents who originate conversation is thereby strengthened by the way this dialogue (and others) itself originates. Moreover, the dramatic form displays the effectiveness of agency "... through spontaneous speech and then more deeply through the interplay of personality, temperament, and context which this makes possible."<sup>18</sup> In the aesthetic classroom, students initiate discussion and the teacher is mindful of the part the students' personalities play in what they say. Student expression and interaction is dramatic, not simply intellectual.

By treating discussion as the expression of human agency, Plato emphasizes precisely what is needed in an aesthetically nurturing social environment: the creative power of individuals coming together to determine matters of common concern. (The next chapter explores the lack of such agency in contemporary society and its significance for distinctively contemporary forms of violence.) The dialogue also offers a double reminder of the place of agency in aesthetic experience. Not only is exercise of the *reader's* creative powers needed to appreciate the dialogue, but the *interlocutors'* agency within the dialogue is essential to its aesthetic depth and unity. This suggests that the agency of the student in the classroom must be taken into account and fostered in order for education to be aesthetic.

There is more to agency, whether an interlocutor's or a student's, than the isolated use of intellect; the individual's desires, emotions, purposes, and particular situation enter in as well. The dialogue shows how an individual's thinking is entwined with these nonintellectual elements of the psyche.<sup>19</sup> To return to the beginning of the *Republic*: There we hear Cephalus offer his conception of justice, a conception which is rooted to his concrete situation. His view that justice is debt-repayment grows out of his emotional response to his old age. He fears dying with a blemish on his earthly record and so wishes to "square accounts" with his associates. He is also glad of the release old age brings from the hold of strong appetites, since powerful appetites can make it difficult to keep accounts even. The appetites can get in the way of repaying debts since the latter may require giving up appetitive satisfaction. Moreover, an unappetitive individual is less likely to

incur debts in the first place. In Cephalus, we see how the agent's particular situation shapes his conception of justice: absence of debt aided by release from the power of appetites.

If we take the lesson of the dialogue seriously, then the teacher must deal with the particular concerns students bring to class discussion. Locating the student's thought within the emotions and desires germane to his situation is crucial to showing the student the limitations or deficiencies of his thinking. A complete account of justice, for example, must take in more than the cancelling of debts and the cessation of appetite symptomatic of someone in Cephalus' situation. The class, like interlocutors in the dialogue, can explore the *implications* of the student's thought for a more complete understanding, one that extends past his particular situation. Cephalus' loss of appetite, for instance, can be extended to other stages of life and related more deeply to the concept of justice. What is one to do who still has strong appetites, who is not released by old age or infirmity from their power? One suggestion is that self-control will be needed. The loss of appetite found in Cephalus' life points to a more universal feature of justice. It requires freedom from rule by desire. For those with strong desires, therefore, effort at self-control will be needed.

Awareness of the individuality of the student's agency enables the teacher to develop and extend his original thought. Consider white male students in discussions on the justice of reverse discrimination: hiring minorities, such as women and blacks, over white male job applicants. White male students tend to speak out of their individual, practical concern. They worry about the implications for themselves of favoring minorities in the business world. Consequently, many reject reverse discrimination as a legal working out of justice. After all, the white males are the ones who will be (reversely) discriminated against in the name of justice. These concerns must be taken into account if the opinions that express them are to help the class to an adequate understanding of justice in the business world.

In a dialogue, the weakness of an interlocutor's conception is revealed by exposing the limitations of his viewpoint. The particularity of his view is shown rooted in the particularity of his situation.<sup>20</sup> In the case of the white male student, the teacher needs to introduce a larger perspective in order to expose the limitedness of his viewpoint. But more is needed. The larger perspective must be *felt* as more adequate by the white male student. The classroom must be extended imaginatively into the real world; the white male student must imagine himself in a different situation, feeling different concerns. Enlarged perspec-

tive is needed not only to alter the student's thinking, but to solidify it.

Even if the white male student publicly concedes (grudgingly?) the weakness of his position, it does not follow that his thinking has really been enlarged or developed. The dialogue shows how intellectual agreement alone is not enough for true education. Enlargement of perspective must engage the whole student, his emotion and appetite as well as intellect. Emotion and appetite must be made congruent with the conclusions of reason, otherwise they will overturn these conclusions at the first provocation. An aesthetic means must be found to bring the appetites and emotions into line with the work of reason. Thus, Socrates offers a myth at the end of the *Republic* which indicates how a comprehensive psychological ordering is essential to the ordering and development of thinking.

The myth illustrates the aesthetic interplay among reason, appetite, and emotion. Socrates presents it in order to stabilize the thinking and psychological ordering of reason, appetite, and emotion begun in the interlocutors earlier in the dialogue. The myth is a philosophical work of art and does not give the interlocutors something they "in no sense understood before," but enables "a more complete possession of what was partially grasped."<sup>21</sup> The strength of emotion or appetite is liable to upset the focus that reason brings to questions of lasting importance, in this case, justice. Our understanding can become blurred by fear or greed, for example. Similarly might a student's assent to what is agreed upon in class become obscured later in emotional and appetitive response to everyday concerns. The myth tries to give the interlocutors and reader experience in ruling emotion and appetite with reason. Without going into too much detail, let us examine how this myth tries to bring emotion and appetite into line with the tentatively held opinions of reason.

The myth tells of an afterlife in which people are given the opportunity to choose the kind of life they wish to live in their next stay on earth. Like gods, the people exercise *total agency* in selecting the lives that seem most attractive. The selection occurs after the people have seen the suffering of those punished for the kind of life just led on earth. The prudent take this into account in selecting their next kind of life. Some, however, choose imprudently, such as one man whose gluttonous appetite induces him to choose the life of a tyrant. He later reconsiders, lamenting his shortsighted decision. The myth forces the interlocutors and reader to respond to the *whole* of time and to the threat of death. As with the white male student in the classroom who considers the justice of reverse discrimination, the interlocutors

in the *Republic* are not going to respond completely to argument alone. A dramatic means is necessary to engage their emotions and appetites. This particular myth makes emotion and appetite oppose their own excesses; they see the need to limit themselves. Fear of suffering as a result of yielding to greed or gluttony, for example, curbs the influence of these strong emotions and appetites. The philosophical art presents us with an image of choosing in which our agency as whole people, not just intellects, is called upon to respond: imagination giving us a grip on our lives as an aesthetic whole.

The interlocutors and reader see that some thought must be taken to the whole span of life. They see and feel it, moreover, with their *whole* psyches. Similarly, the white male student must give some thought to the whole of *society*. Considerations of justice refer to all of society's members. A dramatic means might enlarge his social view to convey the interdependence of the different segments of society. The white male members of society suffer, for example, because of the loss of productivity due to the subjugation of women. Rather than extending the temporal perspective of the *individual* into the future, as the myth does, an imaginative means might vivify the discriminatory treatment which took place in the society's past. Social discrimination could also be likened to stealing: the products of slaves' labor being stolen from them and subsequently "inherited" by contemporary white society.<sup>22</sup>

The Platonic suggestion is that the ordering of thought, which might seem to be the sole concern of education, requires a more general ordering of the whole psyche. It is not enough for a student to give his assent to a position in language of the intellect alone. The emotions and appetites must concur in the intellect's verdict. In the question of the justice of reverse discrimination, fear for one's own loss must give way to concern for those who have been wronged and the functioning of society as a whole. The student's imagination must be enlisted if he is to be drawn out of his particular situation. Works of art such as myths are simply the most obvious way to do this.

## **B. Aesthetic Discussion**

What sort of classroom life is most conducive to ordering the students' thinking and psyches? To begin, the teacher must steer the class clear of two extremes—license and constriction, each of which leaves its respective imprint on the students.

By license I have in mind the classroom that is a-buzz but without

direction. So much importance is placed on student "participation" that students are popping off without paying much attention to what one another are saying. Issues are not joined; still less are conclusions reached. At best, topics are thrown out for discussion and the students jump from one to the next, attaining little depth. I consider this licentious because it amounts to students saying what they feel or wish without regard for a standard which directs what they say. There is no regard for the limits imposed either by the subject matter or the input of others. The licentious classroom encourages the student to yield to the promptings of emotion or desire. His thinking becomes capricious curiosity. Consequently, he receives little practice in either intellectual or overall psychological ordering. This style of classroom teaching seems to have sprung up as an over-reaction to the earlier constricted classroom in which students had almost no role in what took place.

In this latter extreme the teacher simply puts the students through their paces. Whether or not rote learning actually takes place, a routine prevails in which the students are always responding to the teacher and following his lead. In this constricted extreme, students rarely address one another, rarely initiate or alter the course of discussion. All responses pass through the teacher; he alone determines what takes place.

The teacher-as-lecturer is but the most obvious form classroom constriction takes. All forms of it operate and affect the student in the same way. "Covering material," narrowly directing thought, and defining what is valuable for the student, are achieved at the expense of student-generated discussion or thinking. Constriction prevents growth and initiative. The student's reason is not given practice in developing itself. Consequently, what psychological order exists is imposed from without, from the teacher, as the student's reason is constrained to follow outside influence.

If the first licentious extreme overemphasizes the student's spontaneous expression, the latter extreme strangles it. In the first, all is means to no end. In the constricted classroom, on the other hand, achieving prescribed ends leaves the student with no independent means. Nothing novel can develop since the students are not allowed real interaction; the teacher's "plan" functions as a blueprint totally delimiting what will be thought or said.

Aesthetic experience involves a balance between doing and undergoing, between activity and receptivity. The first extreme actually exaggerates the "doing" side of aesthetic experience. The student is all

activity, with little receptivity to outside energies. The second extreme simply reverses the emphasis. The student is made passive recipient of information and technique. What doing there is that takes place is mere following of thought, not initiating, collaborating, or reformulating it. If either the doing or undergoing side of participation is eliminated, then *a fortiori* the two cannot be maintained in balance. No chance for aesthetic classroom interaction exists when the student is all-doing or all-undergoing.

As with all extremes, we tend toward them because the "mean" is difficult to achieve. How much easier it seems for the teacher to attain pedagogical objectives by simply handing them out, telling the students what is what or what to do. It seems easier, also, to get students to talk if no one is too worried about what is said, ordering it, or taking it somewhere. And as with extremes in other areas, classroom license and constriction can alternate with one another; days or periods of lecturing, for example, can alternate with free-wheeling sessions. A semblance of the ideal is presented by such alternating. But students probably become bored in both extremes, even though alternation might stave boredom off for a time. Failure to go anywhere or accomplish much must make undirected discussion empty, just as passive reception dulls attention. To focus discussion, however, is no easy task.

Aesthetic discussion is "free," possessing the spontaneous excitement of students generating ideas found in license, but with the control and direction predominant in constriction. It represents a practical synthesis of opposed approaches. The students' speech is not self-contained, the expression of merely private thought as it is in the licentious class. The control, on the other hand, is not imposed from without. It comes from students paying attention to what others say. Just as "a dialogue develops through the mutual modification of the originative contributions of its participants,"<sup>23</sup> so is the class discussion determined by the modification of the students' contributions. The participants in discussion, moreover, are themselves modified in the course of the reshaping of their intellectual contributions.

Within the contours of aesthetic interaction, the psychological ordering of the students takes place. The students' thought and psyches become ordered as their contributions become integrated. The order within the student and the meshing of the discussion depend upon each other. The more the students' psyches are ordered, the better able are they to contribute to what others are saying. Conversely, as the class discussion increasingly ties together, the

students' own ideas, feelings, and desires should harmonize. The student (part) and the class discussion (whole) bring each other to completion in aesthetic interaction with the result that class activity ideally constitutes an aesthetic experience for the student. An aesthetic experience develops from the movement and ordering of the class discussion as a whole, together with the corresponding psychological and intellectual ordering within the student.<sup>24</sup>

In aesthetic interaction the student responds to what others say rather than pursues an exclusively private line of thought. Issues are joined, criticisms exchanged. Taking part in discussion entails reciprocity; each opines expecting response, and criticizes as one who has been and will be criticized. Each speaks to others as a listener, and listens as a speaker. As indicated above, the aesthetic classroom actually has two "objects" being aesthetically formed: the discussion of subject matter, and the psyches of the participants. Each is modified by the other in the course of discussion, but the fundamental concern of education is with the psychological community. The development of the students' powers in a community of inquiry is more important than the specific content of the discussion. What is of importance, then, is *how* the content is discussed; how the discussion unfolds is crucial to the development of the student. Again, the Platonic dialogue is revealing.

### **C. Comprehensive Thinking**

A dialogue grows, and the way it grows discloses further aesthetic aspects of classroom experience. Arguments and opinions are elaborated by the interlocutors. Questions and objections are then raised, and in the ensuing attempt to take account of these questions and objections the thought moves on. Positions are patched up or given up for alternatives as suggestions are made for revisions or substitutions. Positions and arguments thus grow out of what precedes and in turn are succeeded by new or modified thought. In the most aesthetically rich dialogues, succeeding positions are ever more inclusive, comprehending what has preceded. Almost like an onion, layers of thought enclose one another as the interlocutors work toward ever more complete understandings of the subject. The inadequacies of a view force the speakers to go beyond or beneath it, to ever more fundamental matters. Thus, difficulties in the conceptions of justice offered early in the *Republic* prompt a deeper discussion of human nature or the soul.

The beauty of a dialogue is that it does not simply pluck a problem out of thin air and begin considering opinions or arguments. The issues are situated in the interlocutors' lives; therefore, opinion-giving and argument grow out of their interested interaction, just as they would in the ideal classroom. Interlocutors or students opine together. Out of the conflict among their opinions arise argument, agreement, and accommodation. To draw out the aesthetic lesson for classroom teaching, it is important to distinguish between compromise and synthesis as ways of overcoming the inevitable and desirable conflicts in viewpoint.

On many issues students are divided. Sometimes the division falls neatly into opposing viewpoints, or at least sharply contrasting positions. When this occurs it is rarely the case that one of the viewpoints is defensible and the other unsupportable; each usually has some credibility and supporters. The typical constructive classroom response is to try to effect a "compromise" between the two positions. The term "between" is a clue to the nature of compromise, for it indicates a position which falls within the intellectual space separating the antagonistic viewpoints. By taking a little from each, by bending each in the direction of the other, they can "meet each other half way" (or thereabouts) at a new position. This would seem to be a nice balance between independence and capitulation. The students are not "giving up" their original viewpoints by "giving ground" in the subsequent compromise. They do not desert their position, yet they are heeding their peers' advocacy of an opposing view, its criticisms and alternatives.

To some extent this is certainly true. But what is missing is a resolution of the conflict whereby each view brings the opposed viewpoint within its own scope. In compromise, it is true, the opposed viewpoint is heeded, but from outside one's own, in a linear, quantitative sort of way. In compromise, no alteration *within* the originally opposed views occurs, no change in the concepts that *define* the positions. A dispute over political governance or ruling with illustrate the difference between compromise and "synthesis" in education.

Students usually disagree over a state's "right" to rule its people. On the one side are those who see the need for obedience to a central political authority. Without it, they argue, people's lives and welfare would be jeopardized; it would be difficult to get organization needed for concerted action. Let us call this the view of "Statists." On the other side, students argue that the individual is the ultimate authority and should obey only his own "conscience," will, or desires. No one has the

right to tell the individual what to do; he is obliged to obey no one.<sup>25</sup> Let us call this the view of "Individualists." Now obviously these characterizations are extreme and somewhat simplified; however, they not only come close to real divergencies in people's thinking, but they serve well to illustrate the way such divergencies are often compromised.

Compromising such opposition involves getting concessions from each side. The Statists concede that the state does not have the right to command obedience on everything, every aspect of the people's lives. The state should not be totalitarian. The Individualists concede that centralized political authority is sometimes needed, to avert disasters or (as a consequence of their basic claim) to prevent infringement on those very individual rights so cherished. In compromising, each side gives ground to the other, agreeing that while the individual's authority is crucial, the state does not have the right to command obedience in *certain areas* or under certain conditions.

Notice that the compromise affects only the *sphere* of rule, not its nature. Where the Statists' viewpoint originally saw political authority over a rather large area of life (perhaps, in principle, unlimited), the Individualists' saw it over *none*. Each gives ground to the other. The Statists narrow the scope of the state's right, the Individualists expand it. But neither really questions or alters its *conception* of "ruling" or "authority." At bottom, they share a conception of ruling as commanding. The state either has the right to tell people what to do or it does not; the people are obliged to obey or they are not. The ruler is distinct from the subjects. This command view of political authority is not altered in the compromise, only its sphere of legitimate application.

In synthesis, however, each position is changed within. The new position goes beneath the concepts which define the original opposition in order to produce a more inclusive, encompassing viewpoint.<sup>26</sup> In the compromise proposed above, the authority of the individual and the state are simply given separate spheres to oversee. In a genuine synthesis, however, the very concept of authority or ruling is altered. Rather than segregate the authority of the individual in a private sphere, it could be *incorporated* into the very way political rule in the state takes place. We then cease to view ruling as one group telling another what to do. Ruling ceases to mean a command-obedience relationship between separate groups.

Rather, a conception of "self-rule" can bring the originally opposed views more closely together in a more inclusive one. In such a conception, those designated as "government" are responsible for proposing policy, posing alternatives, providing information to the