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MORAL PERCEPTION THROUGH AESTHETICS

ENGAGING IMAGINATIONS IN EDUCATIONAL ETHICS

Kathleen Knight Abowitz
Miami University

Moral “seeing”—the ability to take in the particulars of a moral encounter, and to interpret and imagine its implications—is analogous to aesthetic perception. This article defends and explores the use of aesthetic experiences in educational ethics classrooms as a way to enhance students’ abilities to perceive and imagine moral situations and possibilities in their practice. Professional ethics pedagogy making use of aesthetic experiences and inquiry helps to engage students in critical, creative, and imaginative searches into moral situations, into their own moral thinking, and into social and cultural contexts that shape who they are and how they live. Aesthetic experiences can play an important role in helping educators to develop their own—and to see the importance of developing, in their students—qualities of perception and imagination in connection with moral events or situations.

Keywords: *aesthetics; educational ethics; moral imagination; moral perception; pragmatism*

Admittedly, reasoning can direct seeing. One might look into the trunk of a car to find the cause of a bothersome rattle. But being situationally appreciative is not like being a detective who hypothesizes about a cause on the basis of evidence. Instead, it is much like aesthetic appreciation; that is, it is a matter of letting the most striking feature of a situation catch one’s eye much as we let the aesthetically prominent features of a painting capture our attention when we perceive beauty. A visual ability is at work here, not an ability to reason.

—Bricker, 1993, p. 15

It is a hot September afternoon and I am standing with the students in my educational ethics seminar around a large painting in the Art Museum on Miami University’s campus. A group of us are examining the canvas titled *Hey, Let’s Have Some Red Man/The Arraignment*, painted by Philip Morsberger. It depicts a White man reaching into a pack of Red Man chewing tobacco, a smile on his face with other smiling faces of White men around him. These

are the murderers of the three civil rights workers—Cheney, Goodman, and Schwerner—that left this very campus in the Freedom Summer of ‘64 and were killed 2 days later in Mississippi. Morsberger painted *Red Man* from a photograph of the smiling, laughing killers sitting in the courtroom of their own arraignment. The two Morsberger paintings we’re examining today in class consist of dark and disturbing images from this particular chapter of the Civil Rights era, cast in striking, sepia-toned, realist style. It is a chapter of history that these students have only read about in books and seen in movies, but in whose legacy they live and work.

The students had been instructed to carefully look. “Examine the paintings, noting what you see, what you think it means, and what emotional responses it evokes,” we requested as we took them into the gallery.¹ A group of master’s students focusing on degree programs from reading education to secondary math to higher

education administration, the students had enrolled 1 month before in an applied ethics for educators course. For several weeks they had engaged in the typical sorts of activities found in educational philosophy courses: textual exegesis of texts in the field, dialogue focused on applying moral theory to practical questions and problems, and case analysis using moral dilemmas emerging from educational practice. The course itself begins with the three-language moral framework provided by Robert Nash in *"Real World" Ethics* (1996), a useful text providing students with a rich trio of moral languages in which to frame and understand their own moral thinking. Nash's discursive metaphor for applied ethical decision making—a first language of foundational metaphysical beliefs, a second language of virtue and moral communities, and a third language of moral principles—gives students a complex framework for moral reflection. Students learn, through these languages, to better articulate and defend their moral decisions as educators. So in being asked to look and use a new set of senses and intelligences today, the students begin another kind of ethical and professional inquiry.

Inquiry based in the aesthetic domain has a rich legacy in educational philosophy and teacher education (Dewey, 1934; Garrison, 1997, 2003; Girod & Wong, 2002; Greene, 1995, 2001; Hansen, 2004; Jackson, 1998). Aesthetic experiences through such exemplary programs as the Lincoln Center Institute's Teacher Education Collaborative lead teachers to think in new ways about student learning and curriculum (Greene, 2001). However, aesthetic experiences and inquiry are less commonly used in that subfield of philosophy known as educational ethics. Teaching ethics to educators typically involves the work of helping them to reason, that is, to understand the various arguments for and against ethical action, and to help them engage in their own moral problem solving by reasoning through moral cases. Morality is the problem to be solved; reason is typically the tool philosophers hope to help students more productively use to solve it. Reason implies bringing rationality and clarity to the complex realm of moral life. As Murdoch (1970) characterized the typical philosophical view of her time,

"morality is a matter of thinking clearly and then proceeding to outward dealings with other men[sic]" (p. 8). Bringing reason to the work of educators engaged in moral problem solving is usually the primary work of educational ethics courses.

Reasoning is indeed a vital aspect of sound moral action for educators and plays a central role in the class that's currently discussing these Morsberger paintings. However, today we work on something as necessary and as pertinent: the ability of these educators to morally perceive and imagine. Moral perception is our ability to see and comprehend a moral situation encountered in experience. The moral imagination is our capacity to think of alternatives, to interpret situations beyond what is available to be known with certainty, and to formulate notions and ideals of ourselves and our worlds beyond what we currently experience or know as reality.

Moral perception and imagination are central components of moral decision making and the actions we take as educators; however, these constructs have not occupied a central place in the pedagogy of educational ethics. More often, educational ethics is focused on helping students to use more complex language and ideas to name the moral conflicts they encounter, and learn to reason their way to more defensible judgments. Students in my class learn about virtue theory, utilitarianism, principles, and conflicting notions of justice, for example. They learn to explore their concrete moral communities and the roles they occupy in educational settings (Nash, 1996). However, education must do more than merely help students articulate who they presently believe they are, as moral beings. Articulating defensible judgments does indeed include self-knowledge about our moral traditions and communities, and it includes learning the languages of rules and principles to better understand the vocabularies and reasoning available in our liberal democratic moral traditions. Yet articulating judgments is also a social and a creative act, involving transactive experiences in the world around us, astute perception of moral situations, self-knowledge expressed and filtered through social interaction, and imaginative interpretation of current realities

into new possibilities. Perception and imagination, self-knowledge, and creative expression are qualities enlivened and deepened through aesthetic experiences. Thus, the pedagogical experience that is described in this article puts the aesthetic domain at the center of our inquiry into our moral lives as professional educators. More succinctly and specifically, this article explores the question of how we as teachers and learners can use “aesthetic understanding[s]” (Girod & Wong, 2002, p. 205) gained through experiences with the visual arts to enhance our moral thinking and moral judgments in educational practice.

Education in professional ethics can involve engaging students in critical, creative, and imaginative searches into moral situations, into themselves and their own moral thinking, and into social and cultural contexts that shape who they are and how they live. Learning situations built around aesthetic experiences can play an important role in helping educators to develop their own—and to see the importance of developing, in their students—qualities of perception and imagination in connection with moral events or situations. In this article, I explain and defend this assertion. I begin with an exploration of moral perception and moral imagination, two constructs that are unfortunately usually viewed predominantly through a psychological rather than a social lens. I then develop a notion of moral perception and imagination drawn from the pragmatist tradition to describe the aesthetic experience, emphasizing the social and embodied nature of perception and imagination. Returning to the project of teaching educational ethics, I explore in the last sections how capabilities of moral perception and imagination might be developed among educators through the use of aesthetic experiences.

MORAL PERCEPTION AND DISCERNMENT AS TRANSACTIVE QUALITIES

Moral perception is typically defined as that which helps us determine what factors in a situation are morally significant, and how we can formulate action from what we see. Perception helps us to understand the morally relevant values in a situation. Blum (1994)

argued that perception consists of several “moral operations” often overlooked by contemporary principle-based ethical systems. Moral perception involves awareness, seeing and/or noticing, self-knowledge, reflection, and imagination, which Blum called “multifarious moral and psychological processes” (p. 31). These moral operations include “accurate perception of a situation and its component morally significant features,” as well as “explicitly recognizing those features as morally significant ones, to be taken into account in deliberating what to do” (pp. 44-45). Blum also stressed a third operation, that of “knowing the best specification of, and how to implement, the principles one takes to be conclusive in determining what to do” (pp. 44-45). This operation is discernment, and its focus and domain is in the subject, the one who reasons, weighs, and acts.

The subjective component of perception is also highlighted in the familiar move to link moral perception and discernment to intuition. Kant and Aristotle, though in different ways, both likened perception to intuition, a linkage continuing today. Bricker (1993) wrote that we identify moral facts by “exercising a form of ‘intuitive reason’ that is likened to ‘perception’” (p. 18). Most commonly referring to a kind of unconscious inner knowledge, intuition stands in distinction of reasoned thinking. Linking perception and intuition captures the “inner” quality that is most often associated with the term but falsely associates the idea of perception with a kind of sixth moral sense rather than an aspect of socially informed sense-making. In other words, perception, like sensitivity, is often equated with states or abilities of an agent’s “inner state of mind” rather than with more transactive, social meanings of this term as characterized by the pragmatist tradition (Dewey, 1916, p. 346).

Blum (1994) and Bricker (1993) characterized perception as *seeing*, another metaphor for perception that, albeit unintentionally, underscores its subjective dimensions. Both authors wanted to emphasize that seeing is constructed by our traditions and our past experiences, an important contribution. Blum (1994) stated that “situational perception is not a unified capacity. Different parts of one’s moral makeup are

brought to bear in 'seeing' (and not seeing) different features of situations, of moral reality" (p. 46). These different parts include our moral traditions and experiences. Perception helps determine what the moral facts of a situation are; however, how one sees and names a moral fact influences how one interprets a situation. Perception is particular in terms of what it sees and how it interprets because it results from a "situational immersion" in practice and particulars by real human beings with histories and commitments (Pendlebury, 1995, p. 54). By comparing perception to vision, we "see" that moral thinking is particular and interpretive. However, the visual metaphor does not yet suggest to us the proper mediating influence of the social and lived experiences of moral encounters.

"Seeing" is subjectively experienced but is also discursively constructed and socially mediated, like language. Each of us sees and interprets situations based on our own traditions, experiences, and salient moral languages. A teacher with one particular kind of history or moral tradition will see, and interpret what she sees, differently from someone with another kind of history. Teacher A may see a student and notice that this student is visibly shaken, upset, and in need of counsel. Indeed, this student has just received upsetting news. Teacher B may see that student and note nothing unusual. Teacher A is sensitive to emotional suffering in a way B is not; B does not perceive as fully or deeply as the first. Yet let us suppose that Teacher B confronts a situation of conflict among a group of students and, through conversation with students and bystanders, quickly detects blatant unfairness in the way some students are being treated. Teacher A might learn of this conflict, talk to the same participants but at another time period or in a different conversational context, and detect none of the unfairness involved. Teacher B may be more sensitive to issues of fairness than the first teacher; however, in addition, each teacher encountered the situation through a different context, a distinct social encounter that framed the events uniquely. This is not to suggest that there are no moral facts in such situations, but that that different facts and interpretations will be used to frame different tellings of the situation depending on the

persons and contexts involved in the telling. Each of us brings a particular moral tradition, history, and set of social habits that guide how we see and understand moral situations. Each of us experiences moral situations as participants and our sense making and linguistic descriptions are based in this participation. Teacher A and Teacher B live within certain kinds of moral relations, within circles of social meaning in their classrooms, families, school, and their relations with students. Our perception is not merely a psychological process consisting of individual intellectual faculties; its particulars are shaped by our experiences within ongoing, lived situations with other participants.

Becoming more deliberate and conscious moral agents in schools is partially a process, then, of learning to see more clearly and carefully into moral situations. It is a process of learning to make sense of these situations, to imagine their nature and their complexities, in dialogue with others who are also within the context. Although Blum and Bricker rightly noted that moral perception abilities vary from person to person and are shaped by that person's particular background and personality, they do not shed enough light on the experiential quality, the sense-making social qualities, of moral perception. As Dewey (1916) asserted, in the fields of moral education and ethics, there tends to be "a separation of learning from activity, and hence from morals" (p. 360). We tend to oppose inner motivation, seeing, imagining and reasoning from outward conduct and symbolic expression. "These separations are overcome in an educational scheme where learning is the accompaniment of continuous activities or occupations which have a social aim and utilize the materials of typical social situations" (Dewey, 1916, p. 360). Dewey's notion of learning, using educational activities that highlight the social aims and materials of human thinking and growth, helps us remember that moral perception and imagination are intersubjective, social processes.

Moral perception and imagination can be developed through experiences that center on an aesthetic experience. Before turning our attention to pragmatism's sense of an aesthetic experience, it is useful to review what Dewey

believed characterized an educative experience in general. As Girod and Wong (2002) aptly argued,

Dewey emphasizes that educative experiences become more than events that merely happen. Instead, the forward movement of an experience has a unity among its elements: "Every successive part flows freely, without seam and without unfilled blanks, into what ensues" (Dewey, 1934, p. 36). Furthermore, in these experiences there is a sense of what could be, an anticipation of how things might come together. As an experience becomes imbued with qualities such as anticipation, development, and unity, it also becomes an act of thinking and meaning. Dewey describes educative experiences as having a plot or history, and pervading dramatic quality. (p. 203)

This "pervading dramatic quality" of an educative experience is one that suggests unity of events, anticipation, and a narrative or plot that provides the seams and dramatic sense of the experience. It is also suggestive of how abilities of perception and intuition are part of a larger moral inquiry process. As Garrison (2003) noted, Dewey believed that intuition was part of a larger perceptive quality, one that preceded conception and that informed inquiry by enabling moral agents to "feel the qualities of acts . . . before [agents have] and inducement to deliberate or material with which to deliberate" (Dewey, quoted in Garrison, p. 229). Perception, of which intuition is one important part, is a process that begins and informs the moral inquiry that should be prompted when we come upon novel ethical situations in educational settings. This moral inquiry is developed and dramatized as the inquiry proceeds through the experience. The aesthetic encounter, then, offers important parallels to the process of moral inquiry. Pedagogy centered on the aesthetic experience employs works of art to provide somatic, active engagements so as to provide opportunities for seeing more, and more perceptively, and more intersubjectively, into human situations. Putting aesthetic experiences into the mainstream of educational ethics pedagogy can expand our students' consciousness of and abilities to engage qualities of perception and imagination through their social, experiential, and embodied qualities.

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE, MORAL PERCEPTION, AND MORAL IMAGINATION

Moral perception and moral imagination are capabilities that we use alone and with others to make sense of our moral lives and experiences. Learning experiences centered on the aesthetic can expand our awareness of these qualities. Moreover, aesthetic experiences can help us to more astutely perceive and richly imagine moral experiences and moral responses to educational dilemmas.

The pedagogical encounter with art begins before students encounter the art itself. As Girod and Wong (2002) suggested, an educative experience has unity, anticipation, and a plot that builds. My students began their inquiry with Nussbaum's *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) in which she argued that the "narrative imagination" is a key component of cultivating the humanity and compassion of our students through a liberal arts education. Students in the class had discussed Nussbaum's writings on the narrative or moral imagination, defined as the ability to see, perceive, and feel moral situations through "habits of empathy and conjecture" developed particularly through experiences with literature and the arts (Nussbaum, p. 90). Nussbaum was inspired by the written word, and in her work, recommended the novel as a powerful aesthetic medium for cultivating qualities of moral perception and imagination. Nussbaum argued that a central part of a liberal arts education must include the cultivation of our moral imaginations; through our liberal studies we must develop capacities for what Steven Fesmire (2003) called "empathetic projection," or taking the attitudes of others into account when approaching social issues, and the "creative tapping a situation's possibilities" to find creative and better solutions to moral problems (p. 65). In reading Nussbaum, students were introduced to the idea of the moral imagination and the role that the literary arts can play in developing compassion among student readers. Instead of using Nussbaum's novel as the chosen form of narrative delivery, I chose three paintings on exhibit in our campus art museum to help students cultivate their moral imaginations. Each canvas related to the

Goodman-Cheney-Schwerner murders that took place in the summer of 1964. Two of the paintings, *Hey, Let's Have Some Red Man/The Arraignment* and *Missing #1*, were the work of artist Philip Morsberger. Also part of this exhibit was a large oil canvas painted by Norman Rockwell, titled *Southern Justice: Murder in Mississippi*.

Choosing visual arts as the focus of this experience is justified beyond the simple but powerful observation that we now live in an overwhelmingly visual culture, surrounded and conditioned by arresting mediated visual representations of many kinds. Choosing the paintings related to the Freedom Summer incidents in Mississippi also coheres with Girod and Wong's (2002) notions of an educative experience. Because the subjects of these paintings were actors and events connected with the Freedom Summer movement, a movement that was powerfully shaped by the activist voices of students and young people (like these students in my class), the artwork related to historic realities that were potentially meaningful to these students. Freedom Summer events were meaningful not simply because they were brave and effective actions taken by young people against the American bane of racism. Freedom Summer has a powerful connection to the place in which we were learning, in that some of the trainings for Freedom Summer workers took place on parts of the Miami University campus. Freedom Summer, its primary actors, its mission, and its geographical history on our campus all led to the unity, anticipation, and dramatic tone of the experience. That the artwork were expressions of aspects of Freedom Summer events made it more likely that the aesthetic experience would be educative, of moral import, and create an anticipation for the narrative qualities of the experience within these students.

When first approaching the paintings, students had (by design) no preparation for the historical content of their subjects. So as students studied *Missing #1*, none had been prepared with formal historical knowledge about the slain civil rights workers. This would come later. At the start of the experience,

students simply studied the paintings, as individuals and in small discussion groups. In small groups they discussed what they saw or noticed in the painting and tried to make some collective sense out of each painting. Students also easily discussed what feelings the paintings themselves had inspired in them, as each painting evoked emotional response with or without any knowledge of the actual events that had inspired the works of art. After their interactions with the paintings and subsequent small-group discussions, we showed a television documentary (George, 1994) about the events surrounding the killing of the three civil rights workers, providing them with a socio-historical context through which they could further interpret the paintings. The documentary included interviews with the victims' families, details about the Freedom Summer movement, and footage of and interviews with law enforcement officials, politicians, and Ku Klux Klan members who had harassed, intimidated, and assaulted civil rights workers. We followed the viewing of the documentary with a discussion of the paintings and our collective interpretations of their meanings for us, particularly in light of our ongoing study of Nussbaum's notion of compassion. This discussion continued into the following week as a topic on our class's electronic discussion board.

Making use of the aesthetic as a focal point for an educational experience, as I have developed it in my class as a tool to develop moral perception and imagination, is about more than simply exposure to art. *Art as Experience* (Dewey, 1934) presents Dewey's ideas that art is not found in the commodified products that have value by their status in the art world, but in the interaction between objects or performances (poems, paintings, gardens, sculpture, a song, a woven cloth) and human beings.² Richard Shusterman (2000) noted that Deweyan aesthetic experience is not radically distinct from any other sort of experience but instead has a qualitative distinctiveness. Aesthetic experiences stand out from the ordinary flow of life because of their holistic engagement. An arresting song engages our cognitive, emotional, and sensual capacities; it absorbs us but also

immediately heightens our awareness of the elements of the song. It helps us to “see”—to experience a situation more fully, more perceptively. Shusterman (2000) explained:

Aesthetic experience is differentiated, not by its unique possession of some specific element or its unique focus on some particular dimension, but by its more zestful integration of all the elements of ordinary experience into an absorbing, developing whole that provides a satisfying emotional quality. (p. 23)

An aesthetic experience, like that of viewing paintings in an art museum and thus separated from the “everyday,” invokes an awareness that is distinct, in part because of its sensual and emotional qualities, and in part because of its capacities to captivate and sustain reflective thought. Encounters with art objects become events, as we imbue them with meaning (Jackson, 1998, p. 24), and they do this by disrupting the everyday habits of customary thinking by infusing and highlighting emotions and drama into an experience that we are undergoing (Garrison, 2003, p. 231). Working with the paintings disrupted our habits of moral thinking, if even momentarily, by absorbing us in the artist’s symbolic renderings with paint on canvas, and our own meaning makings of the artwork. This aesthetic encounter helped students see something new, and was a gateway, and created an anticipation, to the events depicted in the film and stories of Freedom Summer that were subsequently experienced. Thus, an aesthetic experience expands that normal threshold of our senses and emotional awareness. This expansion opens up our senses and the awareness of the situation, and this expansion expands even further through the social activities such as small- and large-group discussions during and after the visual exploration of the paintings.

Aesthetic experience, then, is not merely a reception of art. Dewey distinguished reception from perception. The former is the mere act of assigning the “proper tag or label” on something one senses, “as a salesman identifies wares by a sample.” However, perception is “emotionally pervaded throughout” and involves bare reception and an involvement with and in the object or performance. “Perception is an act of the

going-out of energy in order to receive, not a withholding of energy. To steep ourselves in a subject-matter we have first to plunge into it” (Dewey, 1934, p. 53). Or, as Greene (2001) elaborated in our own time:

Perceiving a dance, a painting, a quartet means taking it in and going out to it. . . . It requires a mental and imaginative participation (even when the mind does not “hold sway”), a consciousness of a work as something there to be achieved, depending for its full emergence on the way it is attended to and grasped. (p. 13)

Perception, in this sense, involves an interaction, and going out into and taking in of a situation. “Aesthetic experience is a construct of the relations of interactions of persons and objects” (Fisher, 1989, p. 57). Moral perception is not different from aesthetic perception in this way.

Perception is characterized by a “situational immersion and guided by imaginative discernment of the salient particulars of the situation” (Pendlebury, 1995, p. 53). The teacher who notices the abnormal quiet and tearful behavior of the normally sociable, outgoing girl is not simply taking in “facts” but is seeing and imagining, together. The teacher sees and infers, takes in what her senses collect, but also infers possible scenarios. Furthermore, the teacher might begin to formulate a response, and this response is based in who she believes she is and wants to be as a moral being. The teacher sees the situation holistically, with her sensual perception and emotional awareness engaged, with attention, or a concerned gaze (Jackson, 1998, p. 157). As Hansen (2004) pointed out, moral “seeing” and perception in this situation are closely linked to the aesthetic. Perception as an activity and cognition are required, Hansen argued, for recognizing students’ humanity.

Moral perception implies considering students in the fullness of their developing humanity. It constitutes a way of looking infused with and informed by what might be called educational faith in things unseen, by which I mean the things students will be able to do tomorrow because of what the teacher helps them undertake today. (pp. 133-134)

I argue here that the “seeing” employed in an aesthetic encounter with artwork can help

educators learn to pay better attention—cast more consistently concerned gazes on their own students—in their own educational communities. The same regard, respect, and care that we promote in attending to works of art and their meanings is the not unlike the gaze we hope educators will turn toward their students. Aesthetic perception and moral perception are parallel capacities and ways of thinking. Aesthetic perception and moral perception can, despite our focus on narrower forms of reason in the educational ethics classroom, be honed and educated. In the next section we explore how students themselves interpreted this learning process.

EDUCATORS EXPERIENCING THE AESTHETIC

In a well-designed aesthetic experience, moral perception and imagination can be facilitated, deepened, and reflexively studied by educators. Collaborative inquiry into the Morsberger and Rockwell paintings involved students experiencing these paintings, as individuals and in dialogue with others; seeing, experiencing, interpreting, and discussing the content of the documentary; and making sense of these experiences in the context of Nussbaum's writings on the moral imagination and compassion. In this collaborative inquiry, educators could reflect on their own development as ethical agents and on their roles as moral educators. Two students gave expression to the meaning of this reflection process:

Had I not had the opportunity to discuss what the artwork and film meant to me and to my classmates, the experience would have just drifted into a vast array of other past art exposure memories I have. Instead I truly feel changed by what I learned and felt last [week in class].

I found the experience of viewing the exhibit on "Civil Rights; Looking Back, Moving Forward" to be powerful because it did, in fact, help cultivate my compassion for all those involved with the struggle for civil rights. Yet, for me, the power lay in our discussion about the works of art and the video (not in the works of art and the video in and of themselves). Thus, I agree with [my fellow student] that "understanding the historical, cultural, and social

context" makes the experience [of viewing visual images] more meaningful.

Context provides more than simply factual background; part of the holistic quality of the experience we created with the canvases was communicated through the narrative quality of the artwork, as well as the historical narrative in which the work is set. An aesthetic experience intended to develop educators' moral imagination and perception benefits from a narrative and a social dimension. The aesthetic experience was social in that we designed a variety of ways for students to interact with the paintings and with one another in their interpretations of the art, including online discussion boards that extended their opportunities to discuss the experience for days after the event. These social dimensions of the inquiry were supplemented with the strong narrative dimension in the art, as the lives of the civil rights workers came alive for them through the paintings, the documentary, and their own collective knowledge of the civil rights movement. One member of the class explores, via an electronic discussion board a few days after our museum visit, why a narrative component was so important to her aesthetic experience:

From my perspective, educators who use art and visual media to develop the moral imagination must accompany the art or visual images with stories in some way (via captions, audio voiceovers, or class discussion). Nussbaum (1997) notes, "The insides of people . . . are not open to view. They must be wondered about. And the conclusion that this set of limbs in front of me has emotions and feelings and thoughts of the sort I attribute to myself will not be reached without the training of the imagination that storytelling promotes" (p. 89). In other words, looking at an image alone may not allow us to fully see the insides of people. Certainly, the vivid expressions and scenes depicted in the exhibit and video on civil rights helped me glimpse the insides of people, but ultimately, I needed [the museum curator], the broadcast narrators, and our classmates to help broaden and deepen the view.

Educational experiences built around aesthetic encounters incorporate social and narrative dimensions, and these make the artwork come alive with pedagogical possibility for educational ethics. However, the emotional

quality of these works is also a significant factor. In the classes where I have used aesthetic experiences to foster the moral perception of educators, it is common for students to evaluate these experiences as “transformative” and “powerful.” Rarely have I received such responses from using case studies of typical educational ethical dilemmas in my class. Part of the impact of aesthetic experiences lies in their emotional quality, which within some ethical traditions has been posed as a faculty in opposition to reason and thus a quality not always explicitly sought in an educational ethics classroom. Aesthetic experiences can enhance moral perception and moral problem solving, but only if the emotional qualities of these experiences are truly informing our moral reasoning.

SEEING AND FEELING THE MORAL EXPERIENCE

Too often, the work of helping students clarify their thinking and build their moral reasoning skills in educational ethics classes can become void of passion, what Garrison (1997) evoked when he called “eros, or passionate desire, the supreme aim of education” (p. xiii). One of the ways encounters with art help link the drama and passion portrayed and communicated through the artwork is through their ability to evoke our passions. The ways in which such passions can promote learning, and better moral reasoning, can be understood through a Deweyan account of learning that links reasoning, emotion, and imagination. Before examining these interconnected moral capacities provoked through aesthetic encounters, however, let us more closely consider the emotional impacts of the works of art that occupied the center of my class’s educational experience that day at the Museum.

Working with the Morsberger and Rockwell paintings, the educators in my class were immersed in the ethical quagmires of racial inequality and conflict. Typically in education courses we want people to be “less emotional” and “more reasonable” when discussing race—we want our students to “think before they speak” and to keep “a cool head” when thinking through problems associated with this “hot

button” issue. Emotions are the hot responses we should avoid; reasoning is the cool salve of the mind that is to quell the emotional responses to racial problems so that we may get on with resolving them. Such dualistic thinking is easily jettisoned in pedagogy that places the aesthetic encounter at the center of learning. The problem of “race” and its thorny dilemmas is no stranger to educators; however, our encounter with this most American of American educational problems helped students engage racial issues in a concrete, particular, aesthetic, emotional, and historically grounded fashion. Through this concrete narrative of race and social justice told in the Morsberger and Rockwell paintings, these students could interpret and emotionally respond to the works. The emotions they felt for Cheney, Goodman, and Schwerner—as well as those felt for the subjects of the *Red Man* painting—were part of their perception into the ethical relevance of the situation. The aesthetic experience called up a range of emotions and desires, and these occupied a central part of discussion. The emotional impact of the aesthetic experience is part of why students found the experience to be powerful. Part of the reason why moral perception and imagination so richly inform our moral thinking lies in the ways that these capacities fully integrate typically segregated domains of thinking and feeling, intellect and body.

“Passion is part of practical reasoning; nothing is called into existence without it” (Garrison, 1997, p. 80). With attention to the canvases, passions are evoked that relate to racism and violence as well as love and hope. These passions provoke thinking, the reasoning that helps us to form new ends and new ideas about our shared moral lives. This reasoning process incorporates thinking “about those desirable imaginative possibilities that morally ought to be actualized even through they are not here now and may never have been before” (Garrison, 1997, p. 81). As Dewey (1934) noted,

No “reasoning,” that is, as excluding imagination and sense, can reach truth. Even “the greatest philosopher” exercises an animal-like preference to guide his thinking to its conclusions. He selects and puts aside as his imaginative sentiments move. “Reason” at its height cannot attain complete grasp

and a self-contained assurance. It must fall back upon imagination—upon the embodiment of ideas in emotionally charged sense. (p. 33)

We need not isolate the pragmatist tradition to make this point. Nussbaum (1990) used Aristotle's philosophy to regain a proper appreciation for the role that emotional response plays in our moral lives. Emotions, for Aristotle and others in ancient Greece, were "not simply blind surges of affect, recognized and discriminated from one another by their felt quality alone; rather, they are discriminating responses closely connected with beliefs about how things are and what is important" (p. 41). Emotions have a cognitive dimension, and Nussbaum urged us to consider emotional responses as "intelligent parts of our ethical agency, responsive to the workings of deliberation and essential to its completion" (p. 41). Emotions are part of reasoning in that they signal our particular, concrete, and embodied beliefs and signal the importance of these beliefs in our everyday interactions.

A teacher in the class describes how the aesthetic experience brought art and historical narrative together to elicit genuine emotional response:

The experience that I had at the art museum on Thursday was the first positive experience for me with art. It has never been presented in a way that was meant to invoke thought and feeling. I have always been told to describe texture, color, line. That use (describing) is of no interest to me. But to explore history through artwork is wonderful. When we arrived at the museum, I was not familiar with the story of these three men. As we looked at the first painting, a member of my group gave us a brief description. As we continued to view the other two pieces, the story became so much more real. The image of the men as they were being hunted by the KKK was so vivid, from the blood on the shirt to the expressions on their faces. The mockery that the men on trial were making of the whole situation makes my stomach turn. Combining these paintings with the *Turning Point* video brought to life this part of history in a way an article or textbook probably could not have accomplished. A textbook would probably have given more facts and background information, but it would not have stirred my emotions that way that our experience did. These forms of media (art and video) brought to life for me a story that made me want to learn more.

This teacher comments on the importance of the narrative behind the art, and vivid nature

of the artwork itself, the nature of the art as set against the documentary images and stories, and the visceral, embodied responses to all of it ("makes my stomach turn"). Clearly, this teacher describes an emotional response to the pedagogical experience but one that piqued her curiosity, opening up inquiry for her into these issues. Inquiry is what complex moral dilemmas demand of educators. Moral situations require moral agents who are not objectively detached but who perceive and understand thoroughly, "a person whom we could trust to describe a complex situation with full concreteness of detail and emotional shading, missing nothing of its practical relevance" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 84). Such perception and understanding are what Aristotle called *practical wisdom*. Nussbaum (1990) connected practical wisdom with the aesthetic experience:

The person of practical wisdom lies surprisingly close to the artist and/or the perceiver of art, not in the sense that this conception reduces moral value to aesthetic value or makes moral judgment a matter of taste, but in the sense that we are asked to see morality as a high type of vision and response to the particular, an ability that we seek and value in our greatest artists . . . whose value for us is above all practical and never detached from our questions about how to live. (p. 84)

As educators continually face questions on "how to live" as it relates to issues of race in our society, the educators who have engaged with the Morsberger and Rockwell paintings may now "see" race with the benefit of a new experience to inform their vocation. As Girod and Wong (2002) stated, the learning produced by the educational experience grounded in an aesthetic encounter is accurately described as "transforming," meaning that the learner and the objective conditions of the world emerge from the experience as changed. The passions evoked by the aesthetic help us to collectively tap into particular, concrete moral visions of how we as individuals wish to live and educate for future societies. Our passions inform and shape our moral thinking, and though these can always (like our reasoning) be flawed or simply wrong, they can be sources of reflective insight into moral conduct and meaningful moral lives.

One way that emotions can go wrong, Boler (1999) warned, is when emotions are used to simply consume “the other.” In the case of the Morsberger and Rockwell paintings, the danger is that students will experience their emotions and heightened moral perceptions gained through the aesthetic for mere entertainment. As if watching a Hollywood movie, students could potentially use empathetic projection, imagination, and perception to identify with aesthetic subjects in way that colonizes rather than accepts our full responsibilities for the welfare and treatment of these subjects. Identification with an aesthetic subject must be approached cautiously and with no easy slip-page into a simplistic universal humanist approach. In the case of the Morsberger and Rockwell paintings, the art was connected to a concrete historical narrative and thus forbade us, as teacher and students, from temptations to express easy understanding or empathy with the subjects. As White teacher and predominantly White student bodies in an aesthetic encounter reflecting the racialized oppression during the Civil Rights era of modern history, the harsh light of history helped to ward off easy consumption of the other represented in the canvases we studied. The documentary and our forthright class discussions cast a tone of heavy realism on the subjects of the paintings. Combining the emotion of the aesthetic with the grim realities of history cautioned us away from the tendency to colonize and consume the aesthetic subject that is other to us. Combining the emotional qualities of the aesthetic experience with the reasoning capacities involved in moral problem solving cannot be simply for purposes of “feeling with” the other but for purposes of deepening perception and imagination. Perception, the imaginative interchange of going out into the experience and coming back into oneself, relies on identification with the other while it also relies on the gap between self and other. That gap is part of what makes aesthetic experience powerful for students and should not be erased but exploited for its intellectual and moral challenges.

Reason and perception, logic and imagination are combined in a good aesthetic experience, as it should be in good moral reflection

(see Pendlebury, 1995). Going beyond the teaching of ethics to educators in a way that helps them to reason through dilemmas written on the page of a book, tapping into the power of aesthetic encounters brings into view the full range of moral thinking, particularly demonstrating their passionate and imaginative elements. At times, moral decision making is about logically reasoning one’s way to the correct rule and following it. More often, the complex moral work of education requires much more.

Morality as art emphasizes the aesthetic dimension of morally significant behavior ignored by the moral accounting metaphor. It is not possible to magically will away habits of cold-blooded accounting and cost-benefit calculating. But drawing from artistic production, experience, and evaluation does reveal imaginative dimensions of ethical reflection hitherto left to chance development. (Fesmire, 2003, p. 128)

Part of the ethical development we seek for educators lies in the imaginative, emotional, and experiential realms. These realms are resistant to authentic treatment in education classrooms because they can be viewed as antithetical to the intellectual, academic nature of the higher education classroom. Aesthetic experiences take up the perceptive, imaginative, emotional, and experiential realms in creative ways. Our purpose was not to give up “moral accounting,” as Fesmire put it, but to make ethics more fully informed by the concrete, particular, and emotional realms, those elements highlighted in the aesthetic experience.

NOTES

1. I worked with Cynthia Collins, Education Curator at the Miami University Art Museum, Oxford, Ohio, to construct this experience. I remain grateful for her expertise and energy in this collaboration.

2. As Shusterman (2000) pointed out, Dewey problematically collapses art into an overly broad notion of aesthetic experiences. However, *art*, as we use the term today, is a narrower category. “No matter how powerful and universal is the aesthetic experience of sunsets, we are hardly going to reclassify them as art” (p. 23).

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- Kathleen Knight Abowitz** teaches social foundations and educational philosophy at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, in the Department of Educational Leadership. Her scholarship focuses on questions about educational community, democracy, and ethics.