THE BEAUTY OF VIRTUE

The Role of Art in an Aristotelian Conception of Moral Development

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I. Living the Good Life

When asked to justify the $195 million the Roman Catholic Church spent building a lavish new cathedral in downtown Los Angeles when the money might have been better spent combating poverty, Cardinal Roger Mahony responded, "There are various kinds of poverty, of which material poverty is but one. When the hunger for the spiritual and the aesthetic is unsatisfied, we can experience a poverty in our souls."[1] In other words, in addition to material poverty, there is a spiritual poverty and aesthetic poverty. Like Cardinal Mahony, I have the intuition that beauty is important. Indeed, I might take the intuition further. It seems to me that that beauty is just as important as (and perhaps indispensable to) ethics. Admittedly, I may be alone in this. Most modern moral philosophers will immediately scoff. *What does beauty have*

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[1]Interview with the newspaper *Catholic Agitator* quoted in *Christianity Today*'s "Weblog" Column compiled by Todd Hertz, posted 8/14/01, URL: Http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/133/22.0.html

to do with ethics? This is a broad question. Too broad, perhaps, to tackle in a paper of this size. Marcia Eaton has recently taken 320 pages to address this question in her *Merit: Aesthetic and Ethical*. Here, however, I will have to be content with addressing a more focused, though related (and, to me, just as interesting) question: *What role can art play in moral development?*

One's answer to this question will depend on one's conception of ethics. In this paper, I will assume an Aristotelian understanding of morality. The ancient Greeks saw ethics as an attempt to make sense of one's life as a whole.[2] Ancient ethics is about how to *flourish* as a human being and how to live "the good life"-- in other words, how to be *happy.* This conception of ethics will sound initially bizarre to philosophers trained in the tradition of modern moral philosophy where ethics is concerned only with the strictly moral aspect of life, and morality is defined in distinction to things like prudence, self-interest, and happiness. But ancient ethics argues that being happy and being moral are the same thing. Or more precisely, being moral is the only way to be truly happy. Prudence and altruism, self-concern and other-concern, are seen as inseparably intertwined. To better see that the Greeks held to this interconnection, consider that *arete,* the Greek word usually translated as "virtue," literally means "excellence." Now it seems clear why living a "good" life is the same thing as living "excellently." It is not as surprising, then, that the Greeks thought virtue was necessary to happiness. In response to my project in this paper, most people, even modern moral philosophers, will probably admit that art plays an important role in the "good life." However, few of these same people will agree that art can help us become virtuous. Unfortunately, a full defense of the ancient conception of ethics is beyond the scope of this paper. We have to take it for granted that a rational agent will see that it is in her own best interest to be moral. But, since my project is specifically limited to

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[2]Cf. Annas, Chapter 1.

Aristotle's theory of virtue and *moral* development, I hope my discussion will be relevant to non-Aristotelians as well.

In the next four sections of this paper, I will attempt to specify the role art can play in an Aristotelian conception of moral development. In order to argue that art can help us be virtuous, I will begin in Part II by introducing the Aristotelian vision of a fully virtuous person -- attainment of which is the goal of the moral life. In the process of considering this ideal of practical wisdom, I will examine Aristotle's use of perception as a metaphor for the virtuous person's knowledge of the right action in a particular situation. Thus, I will conclude that the Aristotelian concept of moral development is best understood as the acquiring both of the virtues and of the "skill" of moral perception. In Part III, I will turn to Aristotle's concept of the *kalon* and its role in virtue. Though *kalon* is the Greek word for "beautiful," in the context of Aristotle's ethics, *kalon* is usually translated "fine" or "noble," which more naturally fits with the modern notion of ethics. But I will argue in this section that *kalon* makes just as much sense (if not more) when translated as "beautiful" in the context of Aristotle's ethics.

At last, in Part IV, I will be prepared to discuss the role art can play in moral development. I will relate the work of Michael DePaul and Noël Carroll to what Annas calls the "outer fact" about virtue (virtues are skills learned through habituation and experience). And I will relate the work of Marcia Eaton -- as well as some of my own thoughts -- to what Annas calls the "inner fact" about virtue (virtue is "sought for its own sake"). DePaul and Carroll have shown how art can plausibly be understood as developing our skill of moral perception. Eaton has shown how aesthetic and ethical value are intertwined. I argue that art can develop our aesthetic sensitivity (or "taste") which in turn enables us to be attracted to the "right" things like virtue and other things Aristotle would classify as *kalon*. Thus, we will have seen at least four

ways art can contribute to our moral development. In Part V, I conclude by suggesting that the aesthetic sensibility produced by interaction with art can also help us make sense of our life as a whole. Let us start, then, with Aristotle's general conception of moral development.

II. The Aristotelian Virtues and Moral Development

In Aristotle, virtue is a kind of skill. The virtuous person has the ability to do something that the vicious person cannot do -- *viz*., act virtuously. The ability to act virtuously must be acquired through practice, or as Aristotle puts it, "habituation."[3] Aristotle thinks we acquire virtues the same way we acquire any skill:

> Just as we acquire crafts, by having first activated them. For we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it; we become builders, for instance, by building, and we become harpists by playing the harp. Similarly, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.[4]

We must practice being virtuous by repeatedly doing virtuous actions. Moreover, an action is only virtuous on Aristotle's view if it is performed habitually -- it must be done "from a firm and unchanging state"[5], *i.e.*, from a stable disposition. Performing an isolated act of kindness does not make one kind. Even a cruel person can do something kind once in a while. To be truly kind, one must habitually perform kind acts (and habituation involves emotion as well as reason). Aristotle, then, sees the process of moral development as one of habituation.

But there is a wrinkle. Virtue seems to be situation-relative. In one situation, standing one's ground would be the brave thing to do and retreating would be a cowardly thing to do. But in another situation, standing one's ground might be a foolhardy thing to do while retreating

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[3]See *Nicomachaen Ethics* (henceforth, NE) Book II.1

[4]NE1103a30-3 (here and throughout this paper, all translations are by Irwin).

would be consistent with bravery. This is Aristotle's famous "doctrine of the mean." We can have the feelings that produce virtuous actions, "both too much and too little, and in both ways not well. But having these feelings at the right times, about the right things, and in the right way, is the intermediate and best condition, and this is proper to virtue."[6] But how does the virtuous person know what action is appropriate to virtue in a particular situation? How does the virtuous person determine the intermediate action? She has the quality Aristotle called *phronesis*. Usually translated as "prudence," *phronesis* is practical wisdom. It is an intellectual virtue, as opposed to the strictly moral virtues, and is characterized by good decision-making. According to Aristotle scholar Terence Irwin, "Prudence is good deliberation about things that contribute to one's own happiness in general, resulting in a correct supposition about the end which in turn is the principle of further correct deliberation. ... Prudence is both necessary and sufficient for complete virtue of character. Since it is practical, someone cannot both have it and fail to act correctly."[7] Thus, Aristotle thinks that, through practice, the virtuous person becomes skilled in moral decision-making. Still, there are abiding questions. Once one has acquired *phronesis*, how exactly does this ability enable us to make good decisions? Merely asserting that the virtuous person is good at deciding what to do says nothing of *how* she decides what to do.

Here Aristotle introduces the metaphor of perception (*aisthesis* in Greek). The virtuous person has a kind *aisthesis* necessary for moral decision-making. *Aisthesis* is the ability to "notice the facts of the situation."[8] When the virtuous person is in a situation where a moral judgment is required, she can distinguish the morally salient facts from the morally irrelevant facts, allowing her to make the correct judgment. The person without moral skill either cannot

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[5]NE 1105a35
[6]NE 1106b21-24
[7]Irwin, 345
[8]Irwin, 342

perceive the relevant details or does not know which details are relevant. This kind of perception has much in common with the kind of "moral sense" described by ethical intuitionists like G.E. Moore. But there are important distinctions between Aristotle's theory of moral perception and Moore's theory of moral intuitions. Like intuitions, moral perceptions are non-inferential and self-evident, but unlike moral intuitions, perception is not seen as an innate faculty. Rather, the faculty of moral perception must be developed. Aristotle writes:

> Whereas young people become accomplished in geometry and mathematics, and wise within these limits, young people with *phronesis* do not seem to be found. The reason is that *phronesis* is concerned with particulars as well as universals, and particulars become known from experience, but a young person lacks experience, since some length of time is needed to produce it. ... But *phronesis* is about the last thing [i.e., a particular], an object of *aisthesis*, not of *episteme*.[9]

Thus, while the virtuous person does seem to "just see" what the right thing to do is, she must learn this skill through experience. This is partly because virtues cannot be codified into a neat set of rules without remainder and exception. Rather, "it takes an educated perception, a capacity going beyond the application of general rules, to tell what is required for the practice of the virtues in specific circumstances. … What Aristotle is pointing to is our ability to internalize from a scattered range of particular cases a general evaluative attitude which is not reducible to rules or precepts."[10]

It must be noted, however, that the perceptual skill of *aisthesis* does not altogether rule out the need for moral rules, at least for the moral beginner. While it is true that the educated perception must be able to see beyond the legalistic boundaries of strictly applied rules, moral rules and principles are still necessary to the process of moral development. How could one

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[9]NE 1142a12-27. Note that here *episteme* probably refers to deductive knowledge of necessary principles (see Irwin, 347). Thus, Aristotle's point is that we must inductively infer universal moral concepts from particular moral perceptions. More on this below. Cf., 1109b23 (and again in 1126b4) where Aristotle says judgment of the mean "depends on *aisthesis*."

[10] Burnyeat, 72

learn to develop *aisthesis* without starting from general rules and learning to apply these to specific cases? As Annas writes:

> We need rules to become virtuous, because we need to be guided to do the right kinds of things; and unreflective people may never achieve anything more. Those who make progress towards becoming virtuous reflect on the basis of the rules they follow; the virtuous person has an overall grasp of the inner significance of why she acts as she does. Virtue is structured by principles and rules, and does not depend at any point on non-rule-governed insight.[11]

It is important here to notice that the virtuous person knows not only *what* is the moral thing to do, but also *why* it is the moral thing to do. This understanding of the moral "why" is related to what Aristotle called *nous* (literally, "sense" or "understanding"[12]). We will return to this idea below.

First we must consider the question, *where do rules come from in the first place?* As we saw above, Aristotle apparently thought general rules could be abstracted from particular moral judgments. Thus, Aristotle's perceptionist account of moral judgment can legitimately be categorized as "particularist," but only if this term is understood in a moderate sense. Contrary to the school of contemporary Aristotelians known as "particularists" (or, better, "radical particularists"), Aristotle himself thought universals (though not, perhaps, precise and exceptionless rules) could be inductively inferred from experienced perception and practical understanding of particulars. Aristotle writes:

> In [premises] about action, *nous* is about the last term. … For these last terms are the beginnings of the [end] to be aimed at, since universals are reached from particulars. … We must, therefore, have *aisthesis* of these particulars, and this *aisthesis* is *nous*. … And so we must attend to the undemonstrated remarks and beliefs of experienced and older people or of people with *phronesis*, no less than

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[11] Annas, 106

[12] In the realm of science, *nous* is "theoretical understanding" as of self-evident mathematical and logical truths, but in ethics it is "practical understanding,"i.e., the ability to perceive salient details. See Irwin, 351.

> to demonstrations. For these people see correctly because experience has given them their eye.[13]

Thus, we can see that Aristotle thought young people must learn virtue from older, more experienced people. For example, in response to a particular situation, a father would tell his son "this is what virtue requires of us now."[14] Then, after the learner has encountered enough particular situations and has been told what the virtuous thing to do is in those situations, he can begin to abstract rules and principles from this experience which will allow him to more adequately perceive the right thing to do in new situations.

But just *knowing* the right thing to do is not enough for virtue. As we noted above, Aristotle thinks motive and emotion are just as integral to virtue as reason. A person must *want* to do the right thing. The road to virtue begins by being habituated to do the right thing which involes becoming habituated to seeing the right thing, but furthermore, "the learner is being habituated to like reacting in accordance with his intuitive perception of what is required."[15] How could one's motivations and emotions be habituated? To see this, we must return, as promised, to the "why" (or, alternatively, the "because") of ethics as opposed to the "what" (or the "that").

Remember that for Aristotle, prudence (i.e., self-concern) and morality are not distinct. In fact, the word we have been using as synonymous for complete virtue, *phronesis,* is usually translated as "prudence." Thus, on Aristotle's view, the virtuous person knows that it is most prudent (i.e., for achieving happiness) to be moral. So she does not even *want* to be immoral. When confronted with a particular situation, her highly developed skill of moral *aisthesis*

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[13] NE 1143b1-14

[14] This example comes from Sorabji, 215

[15] Sorabji, 216

("perception", or as Wiggins puts it, "situational appreciation"[16]) brings it about that the morally salient reasons are the only options she sees in a particular situation. There is no deliberation or need to argue for moral reasons over prudential reasons. In McDowell's influential and often cited expression, competing reasons are *silenced* to the ear of virtue: "To embrace a specific conception of *eudaimonia* is to see the relevant reasons for acting, on occasions when they coexist with considerations that on their own would be reasons for acting otherwise, as, not overriding, but silencing those other considerations – as bringing it about that in the circumstances, they are not reasons to act at all."[17] Thus, the process of habituating one's motivation happens as a direct result of habituating one's moral perception.

Let us continue our inquiry into this process of moral habituation. As we have seen, Aristotle thinks we start from particular and subjectively situated beliefs about what actions are virtuous and then come to understand the objectively true reality behind these beliefs. This move from *what* beliefs are virtuous to *why* those beliefs are virtuous is essential to the process of moral development as Aristotle understands it.

> For we should certainly begin from things known, but things are known in two ways; for some are known to us, some known without qualification. Presumably, then *we* ought to begin from things known to *us.* That is why we need to have been brought up in *kalon* habits if we are to be adequate students of *kalon* and just things, and of political questions generally. For we begin from the *that* [i.e., a belief *that* something is true, which is known to *us*]; if this is apparent enough to us, we can begin without also the *because* [i.e., knowing *why* it is true, which is known *without qualification*]. Someone who is well brought up has the beginnings, or can easily acquire them.[18]

Thus, Aristotle contrasts the young person who knows only "the *that*" with the person of *phronesis* who knows both "the *that*" and "the *because*" which allows her to apply her moral

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[16] Wiggins, 233
[17] McDowell, 370
[18] NE 1095b2-9. Here I have substituted the transliteration *kalon* for Irwin's "fine." This will become important in my Section III below.

experience to new and varied situations. Most commentators understand that by "the *that"* here, Aristotle means common knowledge of what actions are virtuous.[19] So, Aristotle thinks we must initially be *told* what is virtuous, even before we can abstract general principles from particular cases. We must have the relevant particular cases pointed out to us. As Burnyeat explains,

> the picture is as follows. You need a good upbringing not simply in order that you may have someone around to tell you what is noble and just – you do need that … – but you need also to be guided in your conduct so that by doing the things you are told are noble and just you will discover that what you have been told is *true*. What you may begin by taking on trust you can come to know for yourself. This is not yet to know *why* it is true, but it is to have *learned that* it is true in the sense of having made the judgment your own, second nature to you. … Nor is it yet to have acquired any of the virtues, for which practical wisdom is required, that understanding of 'the *because*' which alone can accomplish the final correcting and perfecting of your perception of 'the *that*.'[20]

Notice here Burnyeat's point about "correcting and perfecting." As the ethics student reflects on her beliefs *that* particular actions are virtuous or vicious, and as she begins to understand *why* some of these beliefs are true, it may turn out that she will discover that she had been mistaken in some of her particular beliefs. Contrary to the objection raised by some modern moral philosophers, Aristotle's students are not stuck with the beliefs they were taught as children. They can, to some degree, revise these beliefs in light of acquired practical wisdom (*phronesis*).[21]

Annas summarizes the preceding details of Aristotle's account of virtue, and calls them collectively the "outer fact about virtue." Aristotelian virtues, says Annas,

> have both an affective and an intellectual aspect. On the intellectual side, the person who has developed so as to be fully virtuous will have developed practical intelligence or *phronesis*. ... The fully virtuous person, then, has no trouble in

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[19] Burnyeat, 71-72
[20] Burnyeat, 74
[21] Annas, 114-115. Note that, as Annas points out, Aristotle was not troubled about the possibility pointed out by moral skeptics that a society's traditional beliefs could be "systematically warped" since he believes that virtues are grounded in human nature. Cf. Annas, 444-445

> discerning what is the morally right thing to do; indeed, we have seen that sometimes Aristotle uses the language of perception to express the immediacy of this discernment in the person who does not suffer from competing intellectual forces. On the affective side, we find even stronger results of the point that virtues are developed dispositions. To be fully virtuous is to have one's feeling and emotions trained and habituated in one way rather than another. The fully virtuous person thus finds himself with no motivation not to do the right thing. He will, of course, still appreciate that certain factors in the situation give other, not fully virtuous people reason to act otherwise; but these factors do not tempt him.[22]

Thus, we have seen that on Aristotle's view, the virtuous person is one who has, through the habituation of virtue, developed the skill of perceiving the right thing to do and, moreover, wants to do the right thing. At last, as we turn to what Annas calls the "inner fact" about virtue, beauty enters the picture.

III. Beauty and Moral Development

Besides having a unified intellectual and affective component, virtue, Aristotle thought, must be sought "for its own sake." This is what Annas calls "the inner fact" about virtue.

> The virtuous person, insofar as she is virtuous, has a characteristic aim. This is the *kalon*, a term which as been translated as 'fine', but which some translators render as 'noble', and in some contexts is the ordinary Greek word for 'beautiful'. If we examine what it comes down to, for the virtuous person to have the fine as her characteristic aim, we shall see the sense in which virtue is sought only for its own sake by the virtuous person. ... It is aiming at the fine which characterized the virtuous person, as opposed to the person who does what she does because she has to do it, or does it because she just wants to do it, or finds it useful to do it. The fine is the internal aim of virtue.[23]

For reasons I hope to make clear, I prefer to render the Greek *kalon* as "beautiful" rather than "fine" or "noble." To that end, let us look more closely at how Aristotle uses the word.

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[22] Annas, 368-369
[23] Annas, 370

The first point to notice is that, as Annas alludes to in the passage above, Aristotle distinguishes the *kalon* from the pleasant and the useful: "For there are three objects of choice – *kalon*, expedient, and pleasant – and three objects of avoidance – their contraries, shameful, harmful, and painful."[24] Here we see that the *kalon* is that which is desirable *for its own sake* rather than for the sake of pleasure or some other good that could be instrumentally gained by pursuing the *kalon*. Another good example of this point occurs in Aristotle's discussion of the virtue of magnificence. To help explain this virtue, Aristotle considers its opposite, vulgarity. Aristotle thinks that the vulgar person, like the magnificent person, spends lavish amounts of money; but unlike the magnificent person, he does so instrumentally rather than for its own sake: In all of his spending "he aims not at the *kalon*, but at the display of his wealth and at the admiration he thinks he wins in this way."[25] Thus, in Aristotle's theory, the *kalon* is linked with virtue. In fact, Aristotle says that "the *kalon* … is a common feature of the virtues."[26] The *kalon* is what unifies the virtues, and it is *the only thing* that motivates virtuous person to act virtuously.[27] As we noted before, doing a virtuous act is not enough to make someone virtuous. One must do it *because* it is virtuous. In other words, one must do it for its own sake. In still other words (in this case, Aristotle's own words), one must do it for the sake of the *kalon.*

One of the implications of Aristotle's view of the *kalon* is that rational arguments are not sufficient by themselves to make people good. People must experience the beauty of virtue for themselves and, through habituation, come to love acting virtuously for its own sake. Aristotle writes:

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[24] NE 1104b31
[25] NE 1123a24
[26] NE 1122b6, Cf. 1120a12,23: "It is more proper to virtue ... to do *kalon* actions than not to do shameful ones. ... Actions in accord with virtue are *kalon* and aim at the *kalon."*
[27] See Annas, 371.

> Arguments seem to have enough influence to stimulate and encourage the civilized ones among the young people, and perhaps to make virtue take possession of a well-born character that truly loves what is *kalon*; but they seem unable to turn the many toward being *kalon* and good. For the many naturally obey fear, not shame; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful. … Arguments and teaching surely do not prevail on everyone, but the soul of the student needs to have been prepared by habits for enjoying and hating *kalon*-ly, like ground that is to nourish seed.[28]

Why does Aristotle say this is so? Because the uneducated masses "have not even a notion of what is *kalon* and truly pleasant, since they have had no taste of it. What argument, then, could reform people like these?"[29] A parent or teacher cannot force a child to love virtue. The child must come to love virtue through seeing for herself that it is good and beautiful. As Burnyeat explains: "To understand and appreciate the value that makes [virtues] enjoyable in themselves I must learn for myself to enjoy them, and that does take time and practice – in short, habituation."[30]

So, if the *kalon* is what is inherently attractive, why translate it as anything other than beauty? I do not think the common philosophical resistance to incorporating beauty into ethics can be traced exclusively to the Anglo-American heritage of Christian Puritanism in which beauty (and indeed pleasure of any kind) is denigrated. Perhaps, then, this resistance also stems from a contemporary tendency to think of beauty only in physical or sensory terms. Of course, it is obviously absurd to think of beauty as purely physical. Even if we confine the realm of beauty to art, we often speak of a "beautiful story" or some other beautiful *X* where *X* is non-sensory. But we do not ordinarily confine beauty to art. We also speak of a "beautiful idea" or a "beautiful personality." Mathematicians have even been known to speak of a "beautiful theorem"! It seems that in all these cases what we have in mind when we call something

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[28] NE 1179b5-27
[29] Ibid.
[30] Burnyeat, 78

beautiful is a thing's intrinsic qualities which cause delight when attended to for their own sake.[31] This delight taken in attending to intrinsic qualities is roughly what Aristotle means by *kalon,* so "beauty" is a legitimate translation of the word, even in ethical contexts. Acting virtuously is acting beautifully. Rendering *kalon* as beautiful, consequently makes our transition to thinking about art quite natural since art is the laboratory of beauty.

IV. Art and Moral Development

Now that we have examined Aristotle's theory of moral development, we can see that there are at least two general ways art can plausibly be thought to contribute to making someone virtuous: (1) art can help habituate one's perception, and (2) art can help develop one's motivation. These two ways are roughly parallel to the "outer" and "inner" facts about virtue we considered above. Two more specific functions of art fall under each of these general categories: (1a) art can give us valuable moral experience, (1b) art can help us reflect on and clarify our moral beliefs, (2a) art can help us understand moral value, and (2b) art can develop our sensitivity to the *kalon.* First let us consider (1), i.e., art's relationship to the outer fact about virtue.

As we said above, virtue is a skill that must be acquired through habituation. The virtuous person must learn to perceive the morally salient features of complex particular situations. Thus, as Aristotle pointed out, children and other inexperienced people cannot be fully virtuous. Young people lack the breadth of experience necessary to the development of *aisthesis*. This fact is what Michael DePaul calls the "problem of naiveté." A naive person will

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[31] This characterization of beauty is adapted from Marcia Eaton's characterization of "the aesthetic" in *Aesthetics and the Good Life*.

not have sufficient skill in moral perception to see what a particular situation requires. To remedy this situation, the naive person needs more moral experience. And this, explains DePaul, is where art can help. Art (in this case narrative art, such as literature, theater, film, etc.) provides the kind of experience we might not have adequate access to in our real life.

DePaul actually thinks moral experiences provided by art are, in some ways, *better* than those provided by real life. He identifies three ways this might be true.[32] First, narrative art can provide us with more variety of experience than we are likely to encounter in our own lives. As DePaul notes, "the kinds of complex situations which require careful moral judgment do not arise all that often in a person's life." But literature can allow us to experience them. Consider an example from the film *Gattaca*. The film portrays a near-future where genetic engineering has moved from research to reality. Viewers are able to exercise their moral thinking about genetic technology even before they are capable of encountering such situations in the real world. Thus, art can allow us to exercise our moral skills in new, interesting, and unusual cases. Second, art allows us to encounter moral situations in a safely detached way. In real life, when we encounter moral situations, our untrained emotions can bias our discernment. But when we are reading about the same sort of situation in a book, DePaul thinks, we are able to remain more objective and to see the morally salient factors more clearly. Perhaps encountering a hermaphrodite in real life would be too shocking and emotionally disturbing for us to reflect rationally on how this type of person ought to be treated. But watching the film *Boys Don't Cry* in the comfort and safety of our own home, we can have enough emotional distance to make the proper ethical determinations. Third, moral situations portrayed in narrative art are less complex than real life situations. Therefore, they can provide moral learners with a kind of training scenario appropriate to their level of moral skill. DePaul explains how this works:

> Situations are interpreted for us to a certain degree in a novel. The author is able to provide some guidance as we attempt to understand the situation he describes. This not only provides an example that might help a person to see how to sort out the salient features of a real life situation for himself, but it provides a manageable task on which to exercise a less than completely developed moral faculty.[33]

Thus, DePaul offers three ways art can help us develop our skill of moral perception.

Another way art can contribute to the habituation of our moral perception is in helping us reflect on our moral traditions (what we have been calling "the *that*"), thereby helping us to either learn *why* they are true or to *revise* them if they turn out to be false. This process is called "clarification" by Noël Carroll.[34] Carroll believes clarification happens when we are given the opportunity to consider how the abstract moral principles we have been taught can be applied to specific situations and how our various moral beliefs can be brought into greater coherence. Carroll's primary example is the play *A Raisin in the Sun*. According to Carroll, white audience members are encouraged to recognize "that African-Americans are persons like any other and therefore should be accorded the kind of equal treatment for persons that such audiences already endorse as a matter of moral principle."[35] Thus, the audience members have revised their beliefs and increased their level of moral coherence. As Carroll puts it, "audience members put together previously disconnected belief fragments in a new gestalt in a way that changes their moral perception."[36]

Now let us turn to the "inner" fact about virtue, and the second general way art can contribute to our moral development. Marcia Eaton defends an account of the relationship between aesthetics and morality that nicely complements what we said above about beauty's relationship to virtue. Eaton writes, "If people are virtuous they feel pleasure when they attend

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[32] DePaul, 563ff
[33] DePaul, 563
[34] See Carroll's "Art, Narrative, and Moral Understanding"
[35] Carroll, 142-143

to the right features -- those that bring them to do the right thing; if people are aesthetic they feel pleasure when they attend to the right features -- those that reward sustained attention."[37] Here we see that she thinks, like Aristotle, that both virtue and purely aesthetic beauty involve choosing something for its own sake -- or, in Aristotle's words, choosing them for the sake of the *kalon*. Thus Eaton demonstrates that aesthetic value and ethical value have a similar structure. Moreover, just as Aristotle thought prudence and morality ultimately converge for the rational person, Eaton thinks beauty and morality also converge for the rational person. She explains that this convergence is due to the fact that aesthetic value and ethical value are two species of the same genus. Anything that is valuable derives its value from the fact that it contributes to the "good life." Thus, Eaton concludes, "Once the aesthetic and the ethical (and the practical, etc.) are seen as contributing to an overall meaningful life, there is a way of integrating them. ... Delight taken in intrinsic features deemed worthy of attention is an important part of life. It contributes in crucial, primary ways to a good and rational life."[38]

Eaton is clearly following in the Aristotelian tradition. As Aristotle makes clear, only a morally sensitive person can truly be happy and flourish as a human being. Eaton adds that only an aesthetically sensitive person can truly flourish. I might go further and suggest that *only an aesthetically sensitive person can be truly be moral*. This is because the way Aristotle conceives of *aisthesis* it is an aesthetic virtue.[39] The person of *phronesis* can use *aisthesis* to discern what action would express *kalon* in a particular situation. In other words, the virtuous person has the ability to perceive beauty and to express it in action. Moreover, art helps us develop this important sensitivity to beauty. Just as one can only become sensitive to moral virtue through

[36] Carroll, 143
[37] Eaton, 161
[38] Eaton, 179
[39] In fact, the English word *aesthetic* is obviously derived from the Greek *aisthesis.*

personal experience, one can only become sensitive to aesthetic virtue through personal experience. As Aristotle says, the person who has never "tasted" the *kalon* cannot have it explained to him through philosophical argument. He must experience it for himself. And this is precisely what art is designed to do. Viewing art gives us direct experience of beauty and exercises our aesthetic faculties which allows us to better understand aesthetic merit and to become sensitive to aesthetic value. Consequently, we will be able to find the right things beautiful -- things like the virtues and the other things Aristotle called *kalon*. It might be possible to come to a deep understanding of the *kalon* without art, but it would be much more difficult. And certainly, it seems that anyone who is truly virtuous -- anyone, as Aristotle says, who is a true lover of the *kalon* -- would also be a lover of art.

V. Living a Beautiful Life

I began this paper by suggesting that ancient ethics is about making sense of one's life as a whole, or learning to live "the good life." Now that we have seen the interrelation of virtue and beauty, we can see that an alternative way to characterize the ancient understanding of moral development is *learning to live a beautiful life*. And we have seen that art can play a significant role in this process of development. Thus Annas says, on Aristotle's view, "Ethics is not a distinct compartment in one's life. Taste, style, and social behavior generally are not neutral matters, indifferent between the good and bad: ethical differences will affect all such aspects of your life."[40]

If what I have said is right, then art is more important than we have thought. This is not to say that art's only value is instrumental. Just as one is not fully expressing a moral virtue

unless she is acting virtuously for its own sake, so one is not fully expressing aesthetic virtue unless she is attending to art for its own sake. Nevertheless, art does have an instrumental value beyond its intrinsic value. It is important because it contributes to morality by developing our skill of perception and our sensitivity to beauty. As I said in the beginning, art might be just as important as other aspects of morality.

In conclusion let me summarize the points I have made and make an additional observation on them. Virtue is a skill acquired through a process of habituation. This process involves practice and experience as well as coming to love virtue for its own sake. This “love” is directed at the *kalon,* i.e., beauty. Once we are habituated into virtue, we are skilled moral deliberators with the quality of prudence or practical wisdom (*phronesis*), and we have a kind of perception (*aisthesis*) of the right thing to do in particular situations. As Aristotle puts it, “these [prudent] people see correctly because experience has given them their eye.”[41] But this “experience” need not be in the real world. Art -- especially narrative art like literature, theater, and film -- can provide the ethical learner with valuable moral experience that she might not have access to or might be prevented from usefully reflecting on because of emotions or prejudices. Finally, art can develop our sensitivity to beauty allowing us to experience the aesthetic value of acting virtuously, thereby helping us become habituated into virtue. Thus we can see that, ancient ethics is in at least one important respect different than modern moral philosophy. Modern consequentialist and deontological theories of ethics try to answer the questions “How ought I act?” or “What is my duty?” Ancient ethics (and some forms of modern virtue ethics) realize that these questions are inseparable from the question, “What kind of person ought I become?” We can now see the answer to this question. *I ought to be a beautiful person.*

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[40] Annas, 126
[41] NE 1143b14

If, as the ancients thought, one's purpose for living is fulfilled by living virtuously, and virtue is intimately bound up with beauty, then we could just as easily say that one's purpose for living is fulfilled by living beautifully. Living a virtuous life and living a beautiful life are the same thing. They are two ways of expressing what it means to live the good life.

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