

Beauty and Moral Education

Rhett Diessner

Lewis Clark State College

Lewiston, ID 83501 USA

[diessner@lsc.edu](mailto:diessner@lsc.edu)

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Abstract

(a) Encouraging sensitivity to and recognition of beauty in the natural world and in art may lead the way to recognizing moral beauty in the human social world. (b) Recognizing moral beauty leads to the recently identified moral emotion of “elevation.” (c) Experiencing the moral emotion of “elevation” leads to moral (prosocial) action tendencies. As there is no empirical research evidence for the above hypothesis (a), that topic is explored rationally; however, there is very recently emerging research evidence to support hypotheses (b) and (c) (Haidt, 2003; Algoe & Haidt, 2004). Therefore it is advocated that curricula and instruction be designed to emphasize exemplification of moral beauty, and to encourage students to feel the moral emotions, particularly the emotion of “elevation.” Emphasis is placed on the roles of the principles of *unity-in-diversity* and *disinterestedness* (selflessness) in regard to perceiving beauty in the natural world, in art, and in human beings.

Beauty and Moral Education

“Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it.”

(Confucius, ca. 500 BCE/2004, p. 1)

The relationship between experiencing beauty and moral education has not been reported in journals of Education nor in Psychology journals in the English language (cf. Diessner, Adams, & Richel, 2003; implied in Algoe & Haidt, 2004). Using combinations of the words “beauty,” “moral,” and “education” there are no hits in ERIC or PsycInfo for articles in the *Journal of Moral Education*; and, in fact, in PsycInfo, “moral x beauty x education” turns up only 5 hits, but nothing after 1978 and nothing directly relevant to educators. There are 22 hits in ERIC for various combinations of “moral x beauty x education,” but there is only 1 of those 22 that actually has anything to do with curriculum and instruction regarding beauty and moral education (Armon, 1997). There are 2 hits for “moral beauty” in PsycInfo, and both are citations to Haidt’s work (2000, 2003) on “elevation,” a moral emotion that is elicited by moral beauty. Haidt’s work is allied with the recent theory and research in the Positive Psychology movement (Snyder & Lopez, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and emphasizes that experiences of beauty can elicit the moral emotions, and lead to moral action tendencies (Haidt, 2002; Haidt, 2003; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Haidt & Keltner, 2004; Algoe & Haidt, 2004).

This paper contains the hypothesis that encouraging sensitivity to and recognition of beauty in the natural world and in art may be a developmental stepping-stone to recognizing moral beauty in the human social world. However, there is historical evidence that simply becoming sensitive to and knowledgeable about beauty is not sufficient to cause moral action. Gardner (1999a) points out that the German intellectuals that ran the Nazi party in Hitler’s Germany were highly educated in the beauty of literary and visual art. Apparently, besides

knowledge of beauty, it necessary to experience the motivation of moral emotions, elicited by moral beauty, to bridge the gap between the knowledge of beauty and moral action.

Therefore, a second hypothesis in this paper is that recognizing *moral* beauty leads to moral emotions, and that, specifically, experiencing the moral emotion of “elevation” leads to moral (prosocial) action tendencies. And, indeed, there are initial research findings, regarding the moral emotions, indicating that this is true (Haidt, 2003; Algoe & Haidt, 2004).

Consequently, in this paper will be advocated that we design curricula and instruction to emphasize exemplification of moral beauty, and to encourage students to feel the moral emotions, particularly the emotion of “elevation.” Emphasis will be placed on the role of the principle of *unity-in-diversity* in regard to perceiving beauty in the natural world, in art, and in human beings, due to its central role in morality and spirituality.

The organization of the paper below begins by examining elements of a definition of moral education, particularly “selflessness” (in the context of “disinterestedness”) and “virtue” (“the virtues” are herein considered synonyms for “moral beauty”). Then elements regarding definitions of beauty will be described, focusing on “unity-in-diversity” and “disinterestedness.” Following that will be sections on integrating experiences of beauty, moral beauty, and the moral emotion of “elevation” with moral education. The paper will end with a few suggestions concerning the integration of beauty and moral education with psychomotor, emotional, intellectual and spiritual education.

#### Moral Education: Some Elements of A Definition

The following is not a comprehensive definition of morality, nor of moral education. Rather, it outlines definitional elements that are relevant to moral education themes that emerge later in the paper. In the context of this paper moral education refers to teaching and learning in

the domain of the moral. The domain of the moral is the good and the bad, the right and the wrong (Dewey & Tufts, 1909, see ch. 10; Frankena, 1973). Human morality involves voluntarily *willing* the good and the right (Dewey & Tufts, 1909); producing moral *emotions* (Haidt, 2002) that motivate us toward the good and the right; *thinking* about and intellectually determining what is good and right (with either quick, unconscious, and intuitive cognition [Shweder & Haidt, 1993; Haidt & Joseph, in press] or with slow, conscious, logical and deliberative cognition about what is good and right [Kohlberg, 1984]); and *doing* what is good and right.

Such a view of morality implies that the human psyche (soul) is endowed with three fundamental abilities: the abilities to will (conation), to emote (esp. to love) and to know (cognition) (cf. Hilgard, 1980; Danesh, 1997; Diessner, 2001; Diessner, Adams, & Richel, 2003; Diessner, Frost, & Smith, in press). Relevant to this, an important goal of moral education and integrative education is to unify the will, the emotions, and the intellect in the service of the good. Analogous to this, Socrates in Plato's *The Republic* (380BCE/1937, Book IV), explained that the psyche consists of three "parts": the logical-rational (logiston), the spirited or affective (thymia), and the desiring (epithymia). Socrates stated that when these three parts, or abilities, were unified and in harmony, then the human soul exemplified *justice*, and thus would be prepared to serve the Good. Later in this paper we will relate *beauty* to *unity-in-diversity*, thus indicating that when these three diverse abilities of the psyche are unified in service to the good, the human soul itself becomes more beautiful.

Similar to Socrates' argument that a just human soul is analogous to a just city or just state (Plato, 1937), Confucian scholars explicitly related beauty of human character to harmony

in the home and order in nation. David Myers (2000), in his *The American Paradox: Spiritual Hunger in an Age of Plenty*, attributes the following to the Confucian *Book of Rites*<sup>1</sup>:

If there be righteousness in the heart,  
there will be beauty in the character.  
If there be beauty in character,  
there will be harmony in the home.  
If there be harmony in the home  
there will be order in the nation.  
If there be order in the nation,  
there will be peace in the world. (p. 235)

### *Virtue*

Essential to morality is the development of virtues. Virtues may be construed as human traits or dispositions that are congruent with moral goodness and spirituality. Virtues may also be viewed as signs of moral beauty (cf. Haidt, 2003; Haidt & Keltner, 2004). Western philosophical works on virtue and morality range from the Hellenic period (esp. Aristotle's *arête*) up to the present controversy on the place of virtue in ethics (MacIntyre, 1984); from practical spiritual guides for the everyday employment of virtues (Popov, 2000; Popov, Popov, & Kavelin, 1997) to virtue being re-legitimized in the field of psychology by the Positive Psychology movement (Snyder & Lopez, 2002; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Most spiritual and ethical traditions emphasize the acquisition of virtues. For instance, 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921) was asked in Paris in 1912, "What is the purpose of our lives?" He reputedly answered, "To acquire virtues" (1912/1961, p. 177). The title of Lao-tse's famous

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<sup>1</sup> I am not sure this quote does come from *The Book of Rites*; however, it is very similar to a passage in the Confucian *The Great Learning*.

text, the *Tao Te Ching*, literally means Book of the Way of Virtue. The Confucian text, *The Doctrine of the Mean*, encourages the development of five fundamental virtues: a) *jen* (humaneness, benevolence), b) *li* (reverence, respect and loyalty to others; the main way of expressing *jen*), c) *yi* (acting on righteousness from selfless motives), d) *chih* (wisdom and knowledge), and e) *hsin* (trust or faithfulness) (Occhinogrosso, 2002; de Bary, Chan, & Watson, 1960).

It seems clear, whether in the East or the West, whether in philosophic or spiritual traditions, the importance of virtue in moral development is considered fundamental.

### *Selflessness*

One moral virtue that is sometimes ignored in Western philosophic ethics is the concept of *selflessness* (although it is often discussed in Christian ethics in regard to *agape* or unconditional love). Selflessness is essential to altruism: to truly do good for the other's sake, with no thought of reward for yourself, requires some degree of selflessness (cf. Post & McCullough, 2004, on kindness and unselfish altruistic love). Selflessness, as a moral and spiritual goal, is found through-out the spiritual and moral philosophies that began in the East and Middle-East. Bahá'u'lláh emphasized it in his description of the soul's spiritual journey in his *Seven Valleys* (1860/1978). Confucius emphasized *jen*, which is often translated as "humaneness" or "benevolence" but may also be translated as "selflessness." In his *Analects* (12:1) is written:

Yan Yuan asked about selflessness. The Master said, "To overcome oneself, and revivify ritual constitutes selflessness. If one day you overcome yourself and revivify ritual, the whole world will attribute selflessness to you. To be selfless depends on yourself; how could it depend on others?" (Confucius, 500BCE/1997)

And Lao-tse, in the *Tao te King* (2000; Section 7) is recorded as saying:

Heaven and Earth last forever.

Why do heaven and Earth last forever?

They are unborn,

So ever living.

The sage stays behind, thus he is ahead.

He is detached, thus at one with all.

Through **selfless** action, he attains fulfillment. (bolding added)

Of course, it is likely that a Chinese understanding of selflessness will differ from a Western view of selflessness; perhaps a Chinese view looks more toward the person being one with the Tao as selflessness, and the Western view may focus on unselfishly kind acts as selflessness. However, in both Eastern and Western cultures, selflessness will have elements in all three of the “Big Three” central moral concerns that are universally cross-cultural: Autonomy, Community and Divinity (cf. Shweder, 2003).

### *The Source of Morality*

The source of morality is the Mandate from Heaven (*T'ien-Ming*) (de Bary, Chan, & Watson, 1960). This does not preclude that through biological “evolution” humans have learned to cooperate and practice morality and so-called “reciprocal altruism” (Pinker, 2002). However, it is Great Teachers, such as Buddha, Christ, Lao-tse, Confucius (K'ung Fu-tse), Muhammad, and Bahá'u'lláh, who brought with them the Mandate from Heaven, that taught humans to strive for the heavenly and divine virtues, to be truly altruistic, and to become selfless through unconditional love ('Abdu'l-Bahá, 1908/1984.)

Another way of defining morality is that all “movement” toward development of the moral and spiritual virtues, and thus all movement toward the Mandate of Heaven, is moral development; all movement away from the Mandate of Heaven and heavenly virtues is vice.

### *Summary*

Moral education is the process of teaching and learning in regard to 1) knowing the good, 2) experiencing moral emotions to motivate us toward the good, and 3) choosing to will the good. It includes the teaching-and-learning process of acquiring the virtues, of becoming selfless, and of integrating the abilities to know, to emote (and love) and to will in the service of the good (i.e., moral action).

### Beauty: Some Elements of a Definition

#### *Spiritual Source of Beauty*

Heaven (*T'ien*) is perfectly beautiful; it is the source of all beauty, whether that be natural beauty or spiritual beauty. Heaven is also the source of the virtues (*te*), and every virtue of Heaven is beautiful. In this point of view, all created things, and all physical and spiritual realities, have the signs of Heaven within them; and to “see” those signs is to see beauty. “Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it” (Confucius, ca. 500 BCE/2004, p. 1). That is, whenever a human perceives beauty, it means that the human is perceiving the signs of Heaven revealed in that “thing.” Heaven’s beauty is proportionately “mirrored” into everything, according to the capacity of that thing (Bahá’u’lláh, 1976, see pp. 63 & 261; for full quotations, see Appendix One below). Socrates, the great philosophical sage of Greece, in Plato’s *The Symposium* (380BCE/1989), states that there is a developmental progression of loving beauty. Initially humans love beauty in physical things, especially beautiful bodies; then they advance to love the beauty of the non-physical human soul (psyche); then they advance to love the beauty of

a unified social order maintained by beautiful practices (such as *li*, and the other virtues [*te*]); then they advance to love the beauty of true knowledge, upon which the beautiful social order rests; and finally they love Beauty Itself, that is, they love the beauty of Heaven (i.e., the source of the Platonic Forms, the Form of the Good). Hegel (German philosopher, 1770-1831 CE), in his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (ca. 1835/1993) emphasized that beauty, especially in fine art, is “a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature” (p. 9).

*Beauty as glory.*

As a “vocabulary note,” notice that “beauty” and “glory” connote and denote each other. As the greatest dictionary of international English states, “glory:...4a(1): great beauty or splendor (*Merriam-Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, 1971, p. 967).” For brief quotations from several of the world’s spiritual traditions concerning glory and beauty, see Appendix Two below.

*Western Philosophic Definitions of Beauty*

It is as difficult to precisely define beauty as it is to define the other great attributes of Heaven. Witness the difficulties in exactly defining *jen* or love or justice or wisdom or even virtue (MacIntyre, 1984). However, there are two threads that run through Western philosophic notions of beauty that will be addressed here: a) unity-in-diversity and b) disinterestedness.

*Unity-in-diversity.*

Plato believed that all beautiful things were unified. He did not consider unity to be a synonym for beauty, but rather, unity is an attribute of all things that are beautiful. Dickie (1997) summarizes Plato’s view, “There are beautiful things that are simple (e.g., pure tones and single colors), and beautiful things that are complex. The simple things have unity in common and the

complex things have measure and proportion of parts in common [unity-in-diversity], which are also a form of unity” (p. 7). Etcoff (2000) summarizes Plato’s view of beauty by writing, “Plato said that beauty resided in proper measure and proper size, of parts that fit harmoniously into a seamless whole [unity-in-diversity]” (p. 15). The neo-Platonist, Plotinus (204-270 CE), expresses his view mystically and poetically:

...where the Ideal-Form has entered, it has grouped and coordinated what from a diversity of parts was to become a unity: it has rallied confusion into co-operation: it has made the sum one harmonious coherence: for Idea is a unity and what it moulds must come to unity as far as multiplicity may.

And on what has thus been compacted to unity, Beauty enthrones itself, giving itself to the parts as to the sum: when it lights on some natural unity, a thing of like parts, then it gives itself to that whole. (250 CE/1964, p. 143)

Augustine (354-430 CE), perhaps the first great Christian Philosopher, and also influenced by neo-Platonism, stated the following, in his *De Ordine*: “With regard to the eyes, that is usually called *beautiful*, in which the harmony of parts is wont to be called reasonable... (1964, p. 175).” He also wrote in his *De Musica*, “Beautiful things please by proportion...” and in visual beauty the parts must be “in harmony, *congruit*, with our eyes (1964, p. 191).”

Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), *the* renaissance philosopher and also a neo-Platonist, agreed with Plato that the object of all love is beauty. He wrote, “When we say Love, we mean by that term the desire for beauty, for this is the definition of Love among all philosophers. Beauty is, in fact, a certain charm which is found chiefly and predominantly in the harmony of several elements. This charm is threefold: there is a certain charm in the soul, in the harmony of several

virtues; charm is found in material objects, in the harmony of several colors and lines; and likewise charm in sound is the best harmony of several tones (1964, p. 207).”

The 18<sup>th</sup> century British philosopher, Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746 CE), is perhaps the most explicit in identifying unity-in-diversity as the cause of beauty. Dickie (1997) points out that Hutcheson reduced the cause of beauty to one particular principle: “*uniformity in variety*” (p. 14). The early 19<sup>th</sup> century German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860 CE), focused on the necessity of being disinterested to recognize beauty; that is, the perceiver of beauty must lose all desire, must at least temporarily suspend all will, to recognize the pure Idea manifested in their perception of beauty. Schopenhauer’s uses “Idea” in the tradition of the Platonic Forms; it is similar to the concept of an Attribute of Heaven. In regard to unity-in-diversity, he states, “The *Idea* is the unity that disperses into multiplicity by virtue of the temporal and spatial form of our intuitive apprehension...” (1819/1995, p. 148).

John Dewey (1859-1952 CE), the cogent unifier of ends and means in ethics, and of matter and form in art, explicitly attributes beauty to unity-in-diversity. He writes, “...beauty is the response to that which to reflection is the consummated movement of matter integrated through its inner relations into a single qualitative whole (1934/1958, p. 130).” He goes on to note, “There is an old formula for beauty in nature and art: Unity in variety....The formula has meaning only when its terms are understood to concern a relation of energies...For the unity in variety that characterizes a work of art is dynamic (p. 161).” Dewey points out that simply because there are elements and a unity in, for example, coins in a pocket, that it will not be beautiful. Rather, the distinctions among the diverse elements of a unity must have relational energies between them, what Dewey calls “reciprocal resistances” (1934/1958, p. 161), for something to be worthy of the appellation “beautiful.” He states, “The ‘one’ of the formula is

the realization through interacting parts of their respective energies. The ‘many’ is the manifestation of the defined individualizations due to opposed forces that finally sustain a balance (p. 161).”

The Spanish born Harvard professor of aesthetics, George Santayana (1863-1952 CE), although emphasizing the pleasure of beauty, considered beauty along two major lines, that of form and of expression. Regarding form, Santayana wrote, “Beauty of form, however, is what specifically appeals to an aesthetic nature...,” and that form is “the unity of a manifold [unity-in-diversity]” (1896/1961, p. 77). John Dewey, in his own *Art as Experience* (1934/1958), quotes Santayana as having written, “In a form felt to be beautiful an obvious complexity composes an obvious unity... (p. 292).”

The great Italian philosopher of aesthetics, Benedetto Croce (1866-1952 CE), primarily considered aesthetics and beauty in terms of an “expressionist” theory (1902/1960; Sheppard, 1987). He did, however, focus on both *form* and *unity-in-diversity* in regard to art. “The aesthetic fact, therefore, is form, and nothing but form” (Croce, 1902/1960, p. 16). “Another corollary of the conception of expression as activity is the *indivisibility* of the work of art. Activity is a fusion of the impression in an organic whole. A desire to express this has always prompted the affirmation that the work of art should have *unity*, or, what amounts to the same thing, *unity in variety*. Expression is a synthesis of the various or multiple, in the one” (1902/1960, p. 20).

Susanne K. Langer (1895-1985 CE), author of *Philosophy in a New Key* (1951), like Croce, developed a theory of aesthetics and art based on “expressive form.” In regard to beauty, she wrote (1953), “Every good work of art is beautiful....Beautiful works...contain elements....The emergent form, the whole, is alive and therefore beautiful....Beauty is

expressive form (p. 396).” Langer clearly does not equate beauty with unity-in-diversity, but, as cited above, she does note that integration of elements (diversity) into a whole (unity), is required for a work of art to become alive and beautiful. In Langer’s final book, *Mind: As Essay on Human Feeling* (1967), she uses such phrases as, “...unity which is generally considered the *sine qua non* of all good art...,” and “The inviolable unity of the total form...” (p. 208).

Iris Murdoch (1919-1999 CE), recently professor of philosophy at Oxford, labeled the essay that begins her text, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (1992), as “Conceptions of Unity. Art.” She goes on to address unity-in-diversity by stating, “All sorts of things have ‘aesthetic aspects,’ but what I have in mind is the traditional concept (now under attack) of the unified work of art” (p. 2).

In summary, although most philosophers of beauty and aesthetics do not directly identify beauty with *unity-in-diversity*, many consider it essential to the expression of beauty or the creation of authentic art, and nearly all philosophers have addressed “the issue” of unity-in-diversity, in one way or another, in regard to beauty.

*Disinterestedness, selflessness, and the will.*

Another theme in regard to beauty, that is addressed by most philosophers of aesthetics, is “disinterestedness.” By this term is meant that participating in beauty is an end-in-itself; that the relationship of the perceiver to the object of beauty is one of total non-utility – that the perceiver does not desire to possess the beauty, or use the beauty in any way. It does **not** mean to be **un**interested, but rather that one has no economic interest in the beauty, that one is impartial and unselfish in regard to the experience and object of beauty (Dickie, 1997). If a person does let their selfish interests enter into their observation of beauty, it will sully that

beauty, and they will not “see” the beauty in its purity; they will not be engaged in an act of aesthetic appreciation.

Jerome Stolnitz (1961-2) has written, “We cannot understand modern aesthetic theory unless we understand the concept of ‘disinterestedness.’ If any one belief is the common property of modern thought, it is that a certain mode of attention is indispensable to and distinctive of the perception of beautiful things. We meet it in Kant, Schopenhauer, Croce, Bergson...(p. 131).” The British philosopher Hutcheson, noted above in this paper as a champion of “uniformity in variety” as the cause of beauty, along with other early British philosophers, emphasized disinterest and unselfishness as critical to the appreciation of beauty (Stolnitz, 1961-2; note that Dickie [1964] disagrees with disinterestedness being critical to the aesthetic experience, and argues, rather, that what philosophers have considered disinterestedness could be explained simply as focused “attention”). Dickie (1997) states that, following the British, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), argued that “judgments of beauty are disinterested” (p. 22). However, the philosopher that took this concept to the furthest degree is Schopenhauer:

By calling an object *beautiful*, we thereby assert that it is an object of our aesthetic contemplation, and this implies two different things. On the one hand, the sight of the thing makes us *objective*, that is to say, in contemplating it we are no longer conscious of ourselves as individuals, but as **pure will-less subjects** of knowing. On the other hand, we recognize in the object not the individual thing, but an Idea; and this can happen only in so far as our contemplation of the object is not given up to the principle of sufficient reason, does not follow the relation of the object to something outside it (which is

ultimately always connected with relations to our own willing). (1819/1969, p. 209; bolding added)

Schopenhauer is emphasizing that, to truly appreciate beauty, and to see the eternal Ideas (the Forms, or Attributes of Heaven) revealed in the object of beauty (whether that is a mountain, a flower, a work of art, or a human being), one must entirely give up her “will” while engaged with the beauty of the object. In terms of moral and spiritual development, this means becoming selfless (cf. Diessner, 1991); it implies one must give up one’s will to the Will of Heaven to truly see the beauty in any and all things.

### Integrating Experiences of Beauty with Moral Education

#### *Some Requirements of the Teacher*

As Nel Noddings makes clear, if we want to morally educate, the teachers themselves must be moral. If we hope to help our students become more caring, we must *model* being caring (Noddings, 1992). Moral education very much depends on the quality of the character of the teacher. To integrate the love of beauty into the curriculum, the teacher must love beauty, especially moral beauty, and it seems, to be effective, the teachers must love beauty disinterestedly, selflessly. Think of how motivated (through vicarious reinforcement [Bandura,1986]) some students become when teachers simply show their spontaneous love (selfless and disinterested) of the beauty of arithmetic or a geometric proof; their celebratory love of beautiful rhyme in a beginning reader; and their appreciative love of a student’s written sentence, or paragraph, or story or essay. The teacher’s disinterestedness is shown in at least two ways: a) pure spontaneous pleasure at the perception of beauty, and b) they are not praising the beauty of the student’s work as a reinforcement to try to subtly manipulate the student to do

more school work; rather they are simply celebrating the beauty of the student's work in the moment.

The teacher can also sensitize their students to the principle of unity-in-diversity. The teacher can show how  $1 + 2 = 3$  takes two *diverse* elements (1 and 2) and creates a *unity* (3) by adding them together; how rhyme unifies two sentences or phrases through the medium of beautiful sound; and how sentences unify subjects and predicates, or verbs and nouns and adjectives. By noting both the unity-in-diversity aspect of all these different forms of curricula, and verbally stating that they are beautiful because of this, the teacher may better prepare students for perceptions of moral beauty.

#### *Metaphorical Nature of Experiences of Beauty*

Similar to the developmental progression of the love of beauty detailed by Socrates in *The Symposium* (Plato 380BCE/1989), students can be taught to recognize increasing complexities of unity-in-diversity from the mineral, to the vegetable, to the animal, and then to the human/moral level of existence. Rocks and minerals and planets cohere diverse elements into unities through the power of gravity and the various atomic and molecular forces; plants integrate (unify) all that minerals do, but also unify absorption of water and nutrients with photosynthesis through the power of growth; animals unify many of the diverse elements that plants do, but also unify more complex (greater diversity) systems of internal organs and sensory systems. Each of these levels of unity-in-diversity can become metaphors (Hatcher, 1987) to teach children about the unity-in-diversity at the human and moral level of existence. They can be a springboard for moving toward understanding unity-in-diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, or between the genders, or among nations, and thus help prevent racial and gender

prejudice and pernicious nationalism. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1922/1982) described in 1912 in his travels in America,

...in the world of humanity it is wise and seemly that all the individual members should manifest unity and affinity. In the clustered jewels of the races may the blacks be as sapphires and rubies and the whites as diamonds and pearls. The composite beauty of humanity will be witnessed in their unity and blending. How glorious the spectacle of real unity among mankind! How conducive to peace, confidence and happiness if races and nations were united in fellowship and accord! (p. 57; and note how *beautiful* his description is)

#### *Ubiquity of the Beauty Experience*

“Everything has beauty, but not everyone sees it” (Confucius, ca. 500 BCE/2004, p. 1). As everything has some attribute of Heaven revealed within it (Bahá’u’lláh, 1976) it is possible to integrate experiences of beauty with every type of curricular material. Schopenhauer (1819/1969) agreed, noting that, “Every quality of matter is also always phenomenon of an Idea, and as such is also susceptible to aesthetic contemplation...” (p. 214). One of the founders of the Impressionist art movement, Camille Pissarro, put it this way, “Everything is beautiful, only one must know how to interpret it” (quoted Srejovic, 1977, p. 138). And the linguistic philosophers, Lakoff & Johnson (1980), had this to say about the ubiquity of aesthetics, “Aesthetic experience is thus not limited to the official art world. It can occur in any aspect of our everyday lives—whenever we take note of, or create for ourselves, new coherences that are not part of our conventionalized mode of perception or thought” (p. 236). What is called for is the “aesthetic attitude” (Dickie, 1997).

For the purposes of this paper the aesthetic attitude means to “look with the eye of beauty” upon all things. It is critical, for relating beauty to moral education, that the teacher have the “aesthetic attitude,” and display it in front of her or his students. Simple interventions in the classroom include: a) as mentioned above, pointing out to the students the beauty the teacher sees in whatever curricular material the class is working with, b) asking students to indicate the beauty that they find in the curricular material under study, and/or c) having a few students, each day, report on experiences of beauty they have encountered in the last 24 hours (the teacher could rotate through 3 or 4 different students everyday.) I recently tried the latter approach with a small class of high school students, and they seemed to enjoy and look forward to the “beauty” reports each day (I did not, however, systematically collect data). I had the students report three experiences of beauty: 1) an experience of beauty in the natural world, 2) an experience of beauty in a human-made object, and 3) an experience of moral beauty (observing someone apply one of her or his virtues).

Is there beauty to be found in all things? It appears that at least Confucius, Bahá'u'lláh, and Schopenhauer think so. I do not believe that beauty is “in the eye of the beholder,” rather, I agree with Socrates that beauty is objective (cf. the “man is the measure of all things” disputation in the “Theaetetus” of Plato [380BCE/1937]). However, humans clearly differ in what they refer to as beautiful, and I do believe that the human phenomenological experience of beauty *is* in the eye of the beholder. Some of this difference can be explained by the “aesthetic attitude.” The more a student or teacher develops this attitude, the more beauty they see around them; the less developed, the less beauty they notice. Also, some of the difference among us in perceiving beauty is illustrated by Sheppard (1987): “So I might judge my red tulip to be beautiful, while you might think that is not tall enough to be a perfect specimen of a tulip and so is not beautiful.

The difference between us is that we are regarding different features of the tulip as relevant to our assessment of its beauty” (p. 74). Often, when one person finds an object ugly, and the other finds it beautiful, they have simply focused on different elements or attributes of the object.

This is similar to Noddings’ (1992) notion of “confirmation” regarding finding some element of moral beauty in students’ wrong-doing. “Confirmation requires attribution of the best possible motive consonant with reality. When someone commits an act we find reprehensible, we ask ourselves what might have motivated such an act” (p. 25). For example, we might see a student strike another student in class. Rather than focus on the wrong-ness of striking another, we know the student well enough to realize that they were concerned with justice, as the person that they hit had just stolen the pencils of her friend. We make it clear we disapprove of hitting, but we also make it clear that we see the beauty of the moral self trying to emerge by enacting justice. Noddings notes that the student who receives confirmation, then thinks about her teacher, “Here is this significant and percipient other who sees through the smallness or meanness of my present behavior a self that is better and a real possibility” (p. 25.). And that student does not then label herself as a “wrong-doer,” and have that become part of her identity (to be played out in future actions); rather the student then thinks of herself as someone who did something wrong that one time, but will not do so again, because the student now believes a bit more in that “better self” that the teacher identified.

Likewise, there is a story that ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1978) told about the great spiritual teacher, the Christ:

One must see in every human being only that which is worthy of praise. When this is done, one can be a friend to the whole human race. If, however, we look at people from the standpoint of their faults, then being a friend to them is a formidable task.

It happened one day in the time of Christ - may the life of the world be a sacrifice unto Him - that He passed by the dead body of a dog, a carcass reeking, hideous, the limbs rotting away. One of those present said: `How foul its stench!' And another said: `How sickening! How loathsome!' To be brief, each one of them had something to add to the list.

But then Christ Himself spoke, and He told them: `Look at that dog's teeth! How gleaming white!'

The Messiah's sin-covering gaze did not for a moment dwell upon the repulsiveness of that carrion. The one element of that dead dog's carcass which was not abomination was the teeth: and Jesus looked upon their brightness.

Thus is it incumbent upon us, when we direct our gaze toward other people, to see where they excel, not where they fail. (p. 169)

To summarize: as beauty can be found in all things, when one “sees with the eye of beauty,” and takes the “aesthetic attitude,” then it is relatively easy to integrate experiences of beauty in the classroom without even introducing any new curricular materials. Of course, this doesn't mean that the teachers and students should not fill their classroom with beautiful visual art, books of beautiful prose and poetry, gorgeous music, etc. Let's do that too.

*The Virtue of Appreciation, Moral Beauty, and the Moral Emotion of “Elevation”*

In the official new “manual” of the Positive Psychology movement, “appreciation of beauty and excellence” is considered one of the twenty-four universal virtues and character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; see Appendix C below). “*Appreciation of beauty and excellence* (or simply *appreciation*) refers to the ability to find, recognize, and take pleasure in the existence of goodness in the physical and social worlds” (Haidt & Keltner, 2004, p. 537).

Haidt and Keltner (2004) propose that there are three kinds of goodness to which it is beneficial to be appreciatively responsive: a) physical or natural beauty, b) skills and talents, and c) displays of virtue or moral goodness.

We will focus on the appreciation of virtue in others, as a mode of moral education, but first we will make a note of the moral implications of the appreciation of physical beauty and the appreciation of the skills and talents of others. The active appreciation of physical beauty (a mountain range, a painting, a piece of music, etc.) is accompanied by feelings of pleasure, happiness and perhaps joy. Those emotions correlate with doing good to others, or being of service to them. The happiness from being engaged by beauty makes one more open to, and motivated to, help others; it is an example of the classic finding in social psychology of the “feel good – do good” phenomenon (Myers, 2001). In regard to appreciation of the skills and talents of others (i.e., non-moral excellence), such appreciation brings out the moral emotion of “admiration” (Algoe & Haidt, 2004). Admiration has at least two moral implications: 1) admiration increases our praising of others, especially praising the person whose skill we observed, and increases our desire to deepen our relationship with that person, and 2) after experiencing the emotion of admiration, we are more motivated to work hard on our own goals and projects (Algoe & Haidt, 2004) (perhaps even assigned school work!), i.e., its good for achievement motivation. To the degree that praising others is moral, and being inspired to work harder in developing your own skills is moral, admiration is a moral emotion.

It is, however moral beauty, in the context of moral education, that is the primary topic of this paper. In general, I believe that anything that expresses, manifests or reveals the Attributes of Heaven contains moral beauty; and, as those attributes are generally known as virtues, all virtues are, or are signs of, moral beauty. I hypothesize that observation of persons enacting any

of the twenty-four universal virtues, identified in the Positive Psychology movement (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), can elicit a perception and appreciation of moral beauty (see the list of these 24 virtues in Appendix C). The appreciation and cognition of moral beauty can then lead to the moral emotion of “*elevation*” (Haidt 2002, 2003; Algoe & Haidt, 2004). In particular, Haidt (2002) states that “Acts of charity, kindness, loyalty and self-sacrifice seem to be powerful elicitors” of “*elevation*” (p. 864).

Haidt (2002) offers a “preliminary definition of the moral emotions as *those emotions that are linked to the interests or welfare either of society as a whole or at least of persons other than the judge or agent*” (p. 853). Haidt then describes “two prototypical features of moral emotion” as being “disinterested elicitors” and “prosocial action tendencies” (2002, pp. 853-4). Similar to the description above regarding “disinterestedness” in perceptions of beauty, Haidt indicates that disinterested elicitors are events that do not directly touch the self; that is, such events as “triumphs, tragedies, and transgressions” that occur to others, even to complete strangers. Prosocial action tendencies are motivational and cognitive states that lead to helping others. In Haidt’s review article of “The Moral Emotions” (2002) he describes three “other-condemning” moral emotions, “contempt, anger and disgust”; three “self-conscious” moral emotions, “shame, embarrassment, and guilt”; and two moral emotions from “the other-suffering family,” “distress at another’s distress (DADD) and sympathy/compassion.” He then mentions that there may be many “positive moral emotions,” but the emotions that he reviews in “the other-praising family” are gratitude and “awe and elevation.” It is “*elevation*” that is of particular interest to the goals of this present paper, for two reasons: 1) Haidt (2002) notes that it is the only positive moral emotion, reported in the field of psychology, that meets his two criteria of disinterestedness and prosocial tendencies, and in his research he finds that “*elevation*” is

particularly elicited by “moral beauty” (Haidt, 2003; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Algoe & Haidt, 2004).

*Elevation: “The” moral emotion.*

Imagine this scene: you are a 10 year old child in a school during lunch time. You notice that the child sitting in front of you has only a little mound of dried rice for lunch. As you are empathically worrying about this, you see the student on the left of this student quietly reach over and put a piece of fish, from her lunch, next to the little mound of dried rice. You think to yourself, “What a nice thing to do! How generous and kind!” You feel a warm sensation in your chest, like your actual heart is opening up. You have an emotional feeling that is similar to “awe” combined with a feeling that is somewhat like “admiration.” (This emotional feeling is what Haidt calls “elevation.”) Then you say to yourself, “The next time I see a fellow student without enough lunch, I will give them some of mine immediately.” (And that is what Haidt calls a “prosocial action tendency.”)

Haidt’s (2002) research indicates that *elevation* “is elicited by moral beauty” and “appears to be caused by seeing manifestations of humanity’s higher or better nature; it triggers a distinctive feeling in the chest of warmth and expansion [dilation of the breast]; it causes a desire to become a better person oneself; and it seems to open one’s heart, not only to the person who triggered the feeling but also to other people” (p. 864). Haidt notes that it shares in common with “gratitude” a sense of affection for the person who elicited the emotion, but it’s prosocial action tendencies go beyond gratitude’s to include a “generalized desire to become a better person oneself and to follow the example of the moral exemplar” (2002, p. 864). In the scenario in the above paragraph, the generosity of the student, in sharing her fish, becomes a perception of moral beauty for you. It triggered a distinct warm physiological feeling in your chest, and helped

create a prosocial action tendency to share your own lunch in the future with any student who needs it.

The importance of moral emotions cannot be over-emphasized. Although the careful, deliberative moral reasoning that was advocated by Kohlberg (1984) is crucial to solving conflicts of justice, and effective in finding the moral principles embedded in socio-moral problems, his great theory had trouble bridging the gap between a logical moral judgment and moral action (Kohlberg, 1984; Kohlberg & Candee, 1984). The missing link is motivation. Moral emotions can “move” us from cognition about moral judgments, and cognitions about moral actions, to performance of those moral actions (cf. Shweder & Haidt, 1993; Haidt & Joseph, in press, on intuitive ethics and moral emotions).

#### Moral Beauty, Moral Emotions, and Moral Education

Why emphasize beauty in moral education? Experiences of beauty may prepare us to recognize and appreciate the moral beauty of human beings. Why emphasize moral beauty? Moral beauty is a casual factor, and elicitor, of the profound moral emotion, “elevation.” Why emphasize “elevation?” Because to enact our moral intuitions or moral reasonings, we must be motivated, and emotions motivate us to bridge the gap between moral thinking (intuitive or deliberative) and moral action; and because elevation creates in us the desire to improve our moral selves and to serve others (Haidt, 2002, 2003; Keltner & Haidt, 2003; Algoe & Haidt, 2004).

Another critical reason to emphasize beauty and moral beauty in the educational process is “unity-in-diversity.” Perhaps the greatest moral problems of our historical age are centered on this issue. How can separate nation states serve the best interests of their citizens if there is no effective international law among nations? Do not nations need to be allowed a relative

sovereignty within their borders, while still submitting to international law and standards?

Religious prejudice is tearing apart many corners of our world – do we not need unity in diversity of religion – that is, respect for the world’s great religions and their followers, whether we are an atheist, an agnostic, or a member of a particular religion? Do not the cultures of the world need to unify in respect for each other, while maintaining their distinctiveness? Do we not need to transcend racial and ethnic prejudice, and love everyone regardless of the color of their skin?

By approaching experiences of beauty in the classroom, through emphasizing the definitional element of beauty, “unity-in-diversity,” we can developmentally prepare our students to “see” the moral beauty in a united, but diverse, humanity. Ideally, educators can design curricula and instruction in such a way as to make “unity-in-diversity” experiences elicit the moral emotion of “elevation.”

To be clear, by advocating for unity-in-diversity, I am in no way encouraging hegemonic globalization or cultural uniformity (which is the opposite of unity), but rather, to embrace the beauty of the diversity of nations, cultures, ethnicities, religions etc. On the other hand I am not pretending that every cultural practice is good, nor am I a value relativist. I am confident that every culture has semi-unique moral goods which could help enlighten and “develop” other cultures; and every culture has its own semi-unique moral disorders as well, which it would be best not to share with the rest of the world. By taking a unity-in-diversity approach, ensuring the attitude that every culture has its own moral beauty, we can put the cultural differences on the table and discuss them in a spirit of loving respect.

Suggestions for Integrative Practice in the Classroom

*Psychomotor Education*

Art projects in the classroom increase fine motor control, while directly encouraging students to both observe beauty and create beauty. Music education does the same, whether it is lessons in singing and voice or with musical instruments. Physical education, such as sports and martial arts, provide many situations in which to observe “poetry in motion,” or in our context, “beauty in motion.” Using the vocabulary of beauty, as put forth in this paper (unity-in-diversity, disinterestedness, virtue, etc.) to describe movement in sports and martial arts, and to focus students in art and music lessons, is one form of moral education.

*Emotional (Intelligence and Competence) Education*

Current research on “emotional intelligence” indicates that it is more important for personal happiness, or even success in the business world, than is traditional “IQ” type intelligence (Goleman, 1995; Mayer & Salovey, 2004). Perhaps the easiest and most powerful way to integrate moral and emotional education is through literature. The selection of texts for the students to read should be full of moral exemplars, and immoral villains, to draw out the positive moral emotions of elevation, awe, admiration and the moral aspects of the negative emotions of disgust (at degradation), anger (at injustice), and shame (from moral errors) (see Haidt, 2003, esp. the quotation from Thomas Jefferson on this topic [p. 275]).

*Intellectual Education*

Intellectual education, or in this context, cognitive education, can well be integrated with emotional intelligence and moral education, by what is immediately suggested above. In many cultures linguistic intelligence is valued as one of the most, if not the most, important of the various intelligences (Gardner, 1999b), and teaching students to analyze characters in literature

can enhance intellectual and emotional intelligence, and contribute to their moral education when that literature relates to moral emotions and moral beauty.

And, as indicated earlier in this paper, the beauty of mathematics, and the beauty of the natural world (esp. noting all the examples of unity-in-diversity present in math and science), can be directly indicated to the students, or indirectly modeled by the teacher's own emotional response of "elevation" to the beauty of math and science.

### *Spiritual Education*

Integrating the three fundamental abilities of the human psyche: the powers of knowing, of emoting (esp. loving), and willing, in the service of the good, is crucial to spiritual education (Danesh, 1997; see Socrates in Plato's *The Republic*, esp. Book IV, 380BCE/1937; we note that the Greco-Socratic meaning of *logiston* (reason), *thymia* (affect) and *epithymia* (desire) are likely not equivalent to our modern meanings of knowing, emoting and willing – we are only implying they are analogously similar). One of the greatest attributes of Heaven is Justice, and Socrates makes the argument that when the three fundamental abilities of the human are properly integrated, then the human soul is just. To explore the implications of what this means, and how to morally educate for it, would require another paper. However, I will give a brief example relevant to this paper. As we read about the lives of Kung Fu-tse and Socrates, we exercise our power to know. Their lives inspire in us a feeling of *jen* or love and/or "elevation," that is, moral emotion. These emotions give us a prosocial tendency to act to better ourselves and to serve others, as Kung Fu-tse and Socrates served others. Our "will" then commands our body to act, and changes the prosocial action "tendency" into true action of service to others.

Of course, as the virtues are all signs and attributes of Heaven, all education that helps students develop virtues, directly or indirectly, is spiritual education. And, last, but not least,

although unity-in-diversity is a fundamental aspect of the natural and social world, it is also a fundamental aspect of Heaven (*T'ien*) and spirituality. Therefore all education that helps students cognitively understand, and emotionally engage with, unity-in-diversity is spiritual education.

#### Concluding Example of Grateful Sensitivity to Beauty

'Abdu'l-Bahá' (1971) describes Muhammad-'Alí-i-Isfahání, a Persian who had been jailed, along with Bahá'u'lláh, in the prison city of 'Akká, Palestine in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century (1868-1892 CE):

Muhammad-'Ali would carefully consider every blessing that came his way. "How delicious my tea is today," he would comment. "What perfume, what color! How lovely this meadow is, and the flowers so bright!" He used to say that everything, even air and water, had its own special fragrance. For him the days passed in indescribable delight. Even kings were not so happy as this old man, the people said. "He is completely free of the world," they would declare. "He lives in joy." It also happened that his food was of the very best, and that his home was situated in the very best part of 'Akká. ...Here he was, a prisoner, and yet experiencing comfort, peace and joy. (p.25)

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Appendix One

Bahá'u'lláh on the Source of Beauty  
The Beauty of Heaven and The Beauty of the Lord-on-High (*Shang-ti*)  
are Mirrored in Every Created Thing

“From the exalted source, and out of the essence of His favor and bounty He hath entrusted every created thing with a sign of His knowledge, so that none of His creatures may be deprived of its share in expressing, each according to its capacity and rank, this knowledge. This sign is the mirror of His beauty in the world of creation. The greater the effort exerted for the refinement of this sublime and noble mirror, the more faithfully will it be made to reflect the glory of the names and attributes of God, and reveal the wonders of His signs and knowledge. Every created thing will be enabled (so great is this reflecting power) to reveal the potentialities of its pre-ordained station, will recognize its capacity and limitations, and will testify to the truth that "He, verily, is God; there is none other God besides Him" (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976, p. 262).

“The portals of Thy grace have throughout eternity been open, and the means of access unto Thy Presence made available, unto all created things, and the revelations of Thy matchless Beauty have at all times been imprinted upon the realities of all beings, visible and invisible” (Bahá'u'lláh, 1976, p. 63).

Appendix Two  
Love of Beauty in the World's Spiritual Traditions

Relevant to the quotations below, note that a major definition of “glory” is “great beauty:” “glory:...4a(1): great beauty or splendor (Merriam-Webster's Third New International Dictionary, 1971, p. 967).”

Hindu: “Fain would I see, as thou Thyself declar'st it, Sovereign Lord! The likeness of that glory [great beauty] of Thy Form wholly revealed. O Thou Divinest One” (*Bhagavad-Gita*, 2000, Ch. 11, n. p.)!

Jewish: “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (*Bible, Psalms*, 29:2, KJV)

Buddhist: “By day it is the sun which shines, at night the moon shines forth. A warrior shines in his armour, and a brahmin shines in meditation. But at all times, by day and by night, the Buddha shines in his glory [great beauty]” (*The Dhammapada*, 1993, Ch. 26, n. p.).

Christian: “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory [great beauty], the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth” (*Bible, John*, 1:14, KJV).

Muslim: “And he said, ‘Truly do I love the love of good, with a view to the glory [great beauty] of my Lord’” (*Qur’án* 2000, 38:32).

Bahá'í: “If trials afflict thee not in thy longing to meet Me, how wilt thou attain the light in thy love for My beauty” (*The Hidden Words of Bahá'u'lláh*, 1975, p. 15 )?

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Appendix C

The Twenty-Four Virtues and Character Strengths of the Positive Psychology Movement  
(Peterson & Seligman, 2004)

Strengths of Wisdom and Knowledge

1. Creativity [Originality, Ingenuity]
2. Curiosity [Interest, Novelty-Seeking, Openness to Experience]
3. Open-Mindedness [Judgment, Critical Thinking]
4. Love of Learning
5. Perspective [Wisdom]

Strengths of Courage

6. Bravery [Valor]
7. Persistence [Perseverance, Industriousness]
8. Integrity [Authenticity, Honesty]
9. Vitality [Zest, Enthusiasm, Vigor, Energy]

Strengths of Humanity

10. Love
11. Kindness [Generosity, Nurturance, Care, Compassion, Altruistic Love, “Niceness”]
12. Social Intelligence [Emotional Intelligence, Personal Intelligence]

Strengths of Justice

13. Citizenship [Social Responsibility, Loyalty, Teamwork]
14. Fairness
15. Leadership

Strengths of Temperance

16. Forgiveness and Mercy
17. Humility and Modesty
18. Prudence
19. Self-Regulation [Self-Control]

Strengths of Transcendence

20. Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence [Awe, Wonder, Elevation]
21. Gratitude
22. Hope [Optimism, Future-Mindedness, Future Orientation]
23. Humor [Playfulness]
24. Spirituality [Religiousness, Faith, Purpose]