

The Importance of Examples for Moral Education: An Aristotelian Perspective

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ABSTRACT: The paper develops and contrasts two views about the role of examples in moral education – one based on R.M. Hare’s recent “two-level” conception of moral reasoning and one based on Aristotle’s conception of *phronesis*. It concludes that a Harean view leads to a harmful and impoverished form of moral education by encouraging children to ignore or distort the complexity of particular moral judgments. It also concludes that an Aristotelian view, by emphasizing the importance of rich examples such as those found in literature, enables children to develop and exercise a capacity for moral judgment that is sensitive to the complexities of particular moral judgments. Finally, the role of examples in public moral education in liberal pluralist societies is examined.

KEY WORDS: Aristotle, examples, Hare, moral education

INTRODUCTION

What is the proper role for examples in moral education? The way we answer this question is important because the educative effects of moral examples may pervade our moral lives from infancy through adulthood. And the sort of examples we learn from, and the way we learn to reflect upon them, may help us to enrich and enlarge the moral lives we lead, or it may lead us toward moral inertia, or even degradation and failure.

A common and initially plausible view of the role of examples in moral education is appealing if one begins by assuming that moral judgment primarily involves believing in and acting in accordance with simple, general moral rules such as ‘Don’t tell lies’. For proponents of this view, examples ought to serve as rhetorical tools that serve first to teach, and later to remind, us of familiar, long-standing, shared general moral precepts and rules. Examples are useful for encouraging children to learn how to make good moral judgments; but judgment itself is something quite independent of the examples – namely an understanding of, and motivation to follow, the moral rules.

The assumption that rules are sufficient for moral judgment, at least for broad areas of the moral life, appears to be common in North American Schools. For example, the heart of the New York City Public School AIDS curriculum is focussed on encouraging students to adopt a firm commitment to the familiar precept: “Abstain from sexual relations (until you are married)”. And as the ubiquitous media blitzes admonishing children and adolescents to “Just say

'No'" to X (sex, drugs, etc.) remind us, certain kinds of example may be used as powerful tools for attempting to inculcate and reinforce a commitment to such moral rules. However, if this role for examples is justified in moral education, then the conception of moral judgment that underlies it must also be justified. Alternatively, if the conception of moral judgment is mistaken, as I will argue, then we have good reason to seek a different understanding of the role of examples in moral education.

In recent years the view that moral judgment largely consists in applying simple moral rules has received perhaps its most sophisticated theoretical explanation and defence from the British philosopher R.M. Hare (1981, 1988; see also Kupperman 1978). Recently, I have argued that Hare's 'two-level' conception of moral judgment entails a form of moral education that must attempt to induce a debilitatingly schizophrenic moral identity (McDonough 1992). I need not rehearse those arguments here. However, I do wish to review the general features of Hare's two levels of moral thinking in order to show that the conception of moral judgment they constitute entails a harmful view of the role of examples in moral education. First, I will consider Hare's conception of 'intuitive moral thinking', and the educational role this conception assigns to moral examples. I then contrast Hare's conception with Aristotle's understanding of moral habituation, and the educational role this view assigns to moral examples. Later, I will contrast Aristotle's conception of *phronesis* or practical wisdom with Hare's 'critical moral thinking', in order to examine the role each view assigns to examples in moral education. Both contrasts, I shall argue, highlight the poverty of Hare's conception of the importance of examples in moral education, and illuminate the advantages of Aristotle's richer understanding of the importance of examples for enriching and enlarging moral experience and judgment.

HARE'S THEORY OUTLINED

Hare's is a 'two-level' view of moral thinking. At the first level, which Hare labels 'intuitive moral thinking', he claims that we can rely on a set of relatively simple, general rules for most cases in which moral judgment is required.¹ Hare thinks that the rules constitutive of moral judgment at the intuitive level are sufficient for ordinary moral situations, and thus he claims that most of us will usually follow simple rules in our moral thinking. Importantly, for Hare these rules must be very simple ones because violating them has to induce in us strong feelings of compunction (Hare 1981: 29). Furthermore, we must be able clearly and easily to determine what the rules are and what counts as a violation of the rules. Thus, Hare says that a disposition to follow the rules is enforced by "the formation of relatively simple reaction-patterns (whose expression in words, if they had one, would be relatively simple prescriptive principles)" (1981: 38).

Hare calls the second level of moral judgment 'critical moral thinking'. Critical moral thinking is the act-utilitarian procedure of reflectively weighing the preferences of each person affected by a particular moral judgment, and acting on the basis of the preference whose overall intensity is greatest in that

situation.² Hare's critical thinker must attempt to approximate as closely as possible the thinking of the 'archangel', Hare's version of an ideal observer, who is able to act in full knowledge of 'logic and the facts' in particular situations. So in particular cases, if our rules are for some reason insufficient to determine our moral duty (eg. they impose conflicting and incompatible duties – I cannot both tell the truth and be kind to my friend), and assuming we are capable and not otherwise externally or internally impeded from undertaking the complex task of reflective thinking, Hare argues that we must suppress or ignore the strong emotional impulses that normally motivate us to employ moral rules at the intuitive level. This act of emotional suppression is necessary so that one may attempt to approximate the archangelic task which requires one to 'fully represent' to oneself all the preferences of those affected by one's action. And for Hare the preference(s) whose overall intensity is the greatest in that situation – ie. once the intensity of each of the preferences of each individual affected by a proposed action in the situation have been summed – must decide the 'definitively right' choice in that situation.³ For familiar and good reasons, Hare wishes to argue that we may employ act-utilitarian critical thinking only in rare cases. That is because act-utilitarian judgment is open to severe and well-rehearsed criticisms. For example, it permits agents to place a strong emphasis on evil desires and preferences such as those of Nazis or racists; furthermore, it does not allow a strong enough role to special obligations such as those of loyalty to friends and family.

Elsewhere, I argue that a form of moral education based on Hare's two-level theory would induce a paralyzing 'moral schizophrenia' since in complex moral cases, the standards of the intuitive level inevitably conflict, in a psychologically debilitating way, with those at the critical level. And Hare's theory offers no way for agents to resolve such conflicts. I need not rehearse these arguments here. However, it is instructive to consider the role that Hare's view of moral judgment must assign to moral examples.

For Hare, intuitive moral rules must be simple and general so that they can be applicable across a broad range of cases, otherwise we could not use them most of the time in our moral thinking. Furthermore, as I noted above, being able to apply these rules is largely a matter of having one's behavior conditioned to conform to 'relatively simple reaction patterns and to feel strong emotional pain at the thought of breaking the rules. Examples may be used to encourage such behavior in children. But they may play only a secondary role within a form of moral education designed to foster the inclination and ability to apply the moral rules.

The role of examples in moral education is largely implicit in Hare's account, but the nature of intuitive moral thinking suggests a couple of aspects to this role. Because of their vividness and imaginative appeal, examples may be useful for motivating children to do their duty by instilling the required feeling of 'compunction' at breaking the rules, and a strong and lasting emotional commitment to keep those rules (Hare 1981, 36; Kupperman 1978). There is a cognitive aspect as well. Educators may select, interpret and teach examples in order to promote an awareness of the rules and their meaning. For example, the story of George Washington and the cherry tree may be taught merely as an instance of

the rule “Never tell a lie”. However, both of these aspects of the role of examples in education – the emotional and the cognitive aspects – must be of secondary importance within a form of moral education designed simply to promote knowledge of and allegiance to rules. For Hare the rules themselves fully determine what is right and good at the level of intuitive level of moral thinking. Examples may be used for educational purposes as devices to illustrate what the rules determine to be right and good. However, what is right and good must, for Hare, be fully determined by the intuitive rules themselves.⁴

This understanding of the role of examples as mere illustrative devices fits comfortably with the moral lessons typically derived from Aesop’s fable, or the story of George Washington, or in latter day ‘fables’ about the modern moral dangers of sexual promiscuity (“Just Say ‘No’ to Sex”). But if the role of examples in moral education primarily consists of encouraging children to follow such rules, as Hare desires, then children will learn to judge and act in ways that frequently lead them into moral failure. It is often inappropriate to tell the truth, as George Washington did. Lies must sometimes be told. And even when we must avoid lying, as we must in most cases, the rule forbidding lies gives no guidance as to what we should do in particular cases. Sometimes we may be required to think of creative ways of avoiding lies while also avoiding revealing too much information. But how much can we reveal? How much can we conceal without falling into deception? What precisely counts as a lie in *this* case? A strong adherence to simple rules will cause us to overlook important moral features of particular contexts. Furthermore, familiar and widely accepted moral rules may sometimes work to exclude and oppress individuals and groups. For instance, the widely held rule to avoid pre-marital sexual relations must be repugnant to adolescents who wish to enter into gay or lesbian relationships.⁵ The point of this example is that a common feature of moral judgment is the need to decide *which* moral principles apply in particular cases, which principles to reject, etc. Moral education must prepare children to employ this sort of judgment; but a moral education devoted to cultivating knowledge about and an emotional conviction to follow simple rules neglects such educational tasks.

Moreover, if moral educators successfully employ examples in the service of the sort of moral training that Hare’s ‘intuitive’ level demands, viz. teaching the moral rules, they risk creating grossly mechanistic moral agents. Examples, used in this way, will encourage children to act in familiar and patterned ways when complex situations require attention to contextual features, and new or unique moral responses. Hare in fact seems explicitly to endorse such a role for examples in moral education, when he argues that examples should be rooted in ‘fact’ rather than in imaginative literature since the latter is sometimes liable not to “portray the world as we are actually likely to find it” (1979, 103). What Hare ignores here is that ‘realistic’ and familiar examples, whose teachings are supposed make the rules “firmly built into our character: and motivations” (1981, 38), themselves shape and limit the ways in which we are ‘likely to find’ the moral world. Examples used primarily to encourage allegiance to rules, then, would encourage an injurious form of moral blindness.

In any case, it seems bizarre to say that the moral lessons of rich examples such as, say, *Hamlet* could be adequately described in terms of rules like 'Don't tell lies' and 'Don't commit suicide'. Furthermore, a careful examination of the contexts within which we make actually moral judgments may help us to refine and enrich our basic moral commitments or principles by forcing us to examine them in their complex relations to particular contexts. And as any historian, anthropologist, or lover of good literature, knows, a careful scrutiny of the contexts within which moral judgments are made often forces us to seriously question, doubt and revise our common sense principles, rather than to strengthen our commitment to such rules.

This is surely a desirable feature of mature moral judgment, but Hare's conception of rule based moral education, and the use of examples it implies, must impede its development. That is because to the extent that our moral commitments are conceived as general moral rules, and to the extent that moral education is designed primarily to encourage a capacity for moral judgment based on strong adherence to those rules, the ability to question and revise the rules when necessary will correspondingly be dulled. A conception of moral education that regards examples merely as rhetorical tools to reinforce our knowledge of and commitment to the moral rules will encourage such dullness either by employing radically oversimplified exemplars, or by severely distorting the rich and complex examples found in literature and experience in order to make their meaning conform to that of a code of rules. This is a matter of much more than mere academic importance, since a moral education based on such distortions is likely to neglect the development in children of an important component of moral judgment, viz. the capacity for enriching and enlarging one's conception of the good life.

The importance of examples in cultivating such a capacity, or constellation of capacities, can at this point be stated in outline. Judgment about questions of the sort raised earlier, ie. those regarding lying and sexual conduct, require a close scrutiny of particular situations. And moral examples are precisely actual or imaginatively (re)constructed instances of such judgments. Therefore, an appreciation of such examples will necessarily involve an appreciation not merely of the general moral principles those examples gesture towards, but also attention to the connections and tensions between those principles, and the manner in which those principles must be applied, in particular cases. I wish to argue that Aristotle's account of how moral judgment, or *phronesis*, is acquired allows us important insights into this educational role for examples. I will also argue that Hare's view does not merely ignore, but makes us blind to, this role.

ARISTOTLE ON HABITUATION AND EXAMPLES

Excellent moral judgment, as Aristotle recognized, is not codifiable and disallows description in terms of a decision procedure. In 2.2 Aristotle sounds a theme that recurs frequently in the *Nicomachean Ethics*:

But this must be agreed upon beforehand, that the whole account of matters of conduct must be given in outline and not precisely, as we said at the very beginning that the accounts we demand must be in accordance with the subject-matter; matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than do matters of health. The general account being of this nature, the account of particular cases is yet more lacking in exactness; for they do not fall under any art or precept, but the agents themselves must in each case consider what is appropriate to the occasion, as happens also in the art of medicine and navigation (1103b34–1104a10, Ross's translation).

So good practical judgment in particular cases cannot be defined by such rules “for nothing perceptible is easily defined, and [since] these [circumstances of virtuous and vicious action] are particulars, the judgment about them depends on perception” (EN 1109b21–25).⁶ Once we understand the complex nature of moral judgment and perception that Aristotle captures, there emerges a more desirable understanding of the role and kind of examples that moral education ought to be concerned with.⁷

However, before we can understand the educational role Aristotle assigns to examples, it is important to consider how he thinks humans acquire a capacity for virtue and reasoned moral judgment. For Aristotle, moral education is initially a matter of ‘habituation’. But Aristotle, unlike Hare, does not advocate moral ‘habituation’ on the grounds that it is instrumental for cultivating the mechanistic and relatively mindless obedience to rules or ‘simple reaction patterns’ in most of our ‘everyday’ moral judgments. Rather, the ‘aim’ of Aristotelian moral education is the person of practical wisdom, who evaluates each case with a sensitivity and perception designed to issue in a reasoned choice of action that is appropriate precisely for that situation.

This does not mean, of course, that rules play no role at all in Aristotelian moral judgment. For example, in his discussion of the mean, Aristotle suggests some sensible rules of thumb for guiding perception and judgment in concrete particular cases. He admonishes us to a) guard against taking the course of action to which we are more naturally inclined b) avoid more extreme actions when more moderate options are available and c) beware of the role that pleasure may play in luring us away from what is good and right (EN 2.9). But he immediately notes that these rules are imprecise and are merely general guidelines which require judgment for their interpretation in particular cases.

Nonetheless, it does not immediately follow from that particularity and non-codifiability of moral judgment that an Aristotelian moral education may not in its early stages require the sort of mechanistic conditioning Hare must go in for. In fact, a critic might point out that Aristotle – like Hare – regards moral education as initially a process of moral training in ‘fine habits’ or right moral ‘dispositions’ (NE 1.4, 2.3. 10.9). Thus, the critic may argue, an Aristotelian moral education must look substantially similar to the one required by Hare, even though the particularistic Aristotelian moral judgment such habituation is meant to produce looks quite different from Hare’s rule following. For the critic, the two men appear to use the same educational ladder, or the same brand of ladder, to reach different moral heights.⁸ We can strengthen the objection by noting that the frequent use of the term ‘habit’ in connection with Aristotle’s discussions of

moral training suggests precisely the sort of conditioned responses that can be represented in simple moral rules like ‘Don’t tell lies’.

The practical stakes of answering this objection are high. Hare’s conception of intuitive moral thinking requires that children learn to adopt a highly mechanistic form of moral rationality. And this is tantamount to creating morally deformed non-agents, since their mechanistic rationality makes them insensitive to the moral complexity of the situations they frequently face. But this is not a problem for Aristotle as it is for Hare. The reason why has to do with a) the connection in Aristotle’s analysis between habituation and the development of emotion; and b) the role of shame in moral education. I will consider each of these aspects in turn.

As Myles Burnyeat says, Aristotle is concerned even in the early stages of moral education with cultivating a “general evaluative attitude which is not reducible to rules or precepts” (1980, 72). For Aristotle the need for good moral ‘habits’ is connected to the need for young children first to obtain knowledge about what is truly good and fine, as well as an inclination to enjoy doing what is truly good and fine and to abhor actions that are truly bad or ignoble. Thus, children need to be “brought up in fine habits if [they] are to be adequate students of what is fine and just, and of political questions generally. For the origin we begin from is the belief that something is true, and if this is apparent enough to us, we will not, at this stage, need the reason why it is true in addition; and if we have this good upbringing, we have the origins to begin from, or can easily acquire them” (EN 109b5–10).

For Aristotle, habituation is meant to provide an essential source of moral understanding, and an orientation and connection to actions that are truly noble, without providing ‘the reason why it is true in addition’. However, this does not imply that our habituated ‘unreasoned evaluative responses’ are equivalent to relatively mindless conditioned, rule-governed behaviors. Nor does it imply, as Tobin suggests, that the young child must merely “tak[e] on trust what she is told” (1989, 203), as one who learns a rule must do. Yet it is also true that the child has “yet to discover the truth of what [she has] been taught” (Tobin 1989, 203). Thus, Burnyeat is right to say that moral learners have “no steady conception of the good to reason from” (1980, 84). But this does not mean that they do not have a partial, unfinished and developing reasoned conception of the good. Aristotle’s account of habituation is best understood if we think of our habituated moral responses developing alongside, and not altogether separately from, our capacity for reasoning. And, as I will argue, examples may play an important role in this sort of moral development.

Aristotle stresses the truism that we acquire virtues by exercising them – through living and doing well. Furthermore, virtues “are concerned with actions and passions, and every passion and every action is accompanied by pleasure and pain, for this reason virtue will be concerned with pleasures and pains” (1104b 13–16). For this reason, in the early stages of moral education Aristotle is concerned with the development of the proper kind of ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ (Urmson 1988, 26). However, Aristotelian moral emotions are not merely affec-

tive buttresses to impartial rules, as they must be for Hare. Rather, Aristotelian emotions are, in Nancy Sherman's words, themselves 'modes of moral response' (1989, 2). The significance of this claim can be discerned by looking at what Aristotle says in Book 2 of the NE where he outlines the familiar doctrine that one becomes virtuous by doing virtuous acts. Here Aristotle says that, just as the skilled pianist becomes skilled by playing the piano, "so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, and brave by doing brave acts" (1103a 35–b2). Aristotle does not mean by this that we simply become conditioned to *behaving* in ways consistent with what a code of rules independently dictates, but that through behaving in certain ways we acquire a genuine understanding about, and love of, what is truly just, brave, altruistic. If our moral education is successful, we will be eager to defend a friend against injustice, even in the face of strong external pressures to do otherwise. We will experience pleasure in doing virtuous actions with the intensity of the person who truly loves reading, doing philosophy or helping others. We will enjoy nothing so much as doing just what the particular situation calls for. And our love of justice, courage or altruism is partially constitutive of what justice, etc. actually is. Thus, emotions are 'modes of moral response'.

But the sort of enjoyment involved in engaging in such activities is quite different than that of pleasurable sensations or feelings one experiences as a consequence of doing something (Urmson 1988, 106–8). For examples, one may enjoy doing philosophy because of the praise and admiration it brings from others. The libertine may enjoy sex because it brings admiration from his friends and because it gives him power over others. And someone might eagerly defend a friend against injustices inflicted by their peers because of the admiration and prestige such actions bring him from the school authorities. But Aristotle says: "Lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant; and virtuous actions are such, so that these are pleasant for such men as well in their own nature". (1099a 13–15) and here he is making a connection to the kind of love experienced by the person truly loves the theatre, sports or horses. The virtuous person loves the noble not because of whatever external goods may accrue to her, but for themselves and as constituents of human flourishing or *eudaemonia*. For Aristotle, it is this kind of enjoyment that moral education needs to cultivate.

The notion that virtues are 'pleasant in their own nature' suggests that virtues are plural and that their value is connected to an appreciation of the particular activities and practices within which they develop. Thus, Aristotle holds not only that pleasure admits of differences of degree (10.3), but also "... perhaps pleasures differ in kind; for those derived from noble sources are different from those derived from base sources, and one cannot get the pleasure of the just man without being just, nor that of the musical man without being musical, and so on" (1173b 20–25). In other words, the pleasure of the virtues is virtually indistinguishable from the activity of being virtuous, just as the pleasures of playing a musical instrument are virtually inseparable from actually being able to play the instrument. So the pleasures of the virtues are as various as the activities that constitute them. But if I am not fully just, for example, if I am impeded in any

way (eg. by distraction, bodily appetite, etc.) then I do not fully experience the pleasure of being just.

In order to bring out the significance of Aristotle's understanding of the role of emotion in moral judgment, a contrast with Hare is instructive since emotions may also play an important – but quite different – role in 'intuitive moral thinking'. As Hare says, agents require 'affective accompaniments' such as 'compunction' at the thought of breaking a rule (1981, 29). That is because the more we care about the rules, the more likely we are to notice when they turn out to be relevant in a situation, and the more likely we are to act on them. If I care only weakly about the rule against telling lies, then I may often neglect to notice that a lie has been told, or I am unlikely to examine very rigorously the lie's moral relevance in the situation. Thus, emotions play an important role in Hare's conception of moral thinking, by acting as a sort of moral adhesive designed to bind the agent's cognitive awareness of the moral rules with her moral motivations. Nonetheless, the role of emotions at the intuitive level must be a purely instrumental one. For Hare, emotions are important only insofar as they conduce to the agent's doing what is right; however, what is right in particular situations is determined at the intuitive level by something else, namely rules.

However, Aristotelian emotions do not simply serve the ends of reason, but are themselves necessary constituents of such ends. Thus, Aristotelian moral emotions themselves have a thoughtful component, and are not sharply distinct from reason. One aspect of this 'thoughtfulness' has already been suggested: emotions themselves select intrinsically valuable features of situations. They are thus cognitive features of moral perception, not merely a form of affective glue that binds us to what rationality independently determines (see also Nussbaum 1992a, *passim*). This understanding of what I refer to as the "thoughtfulness" of Aristotelian emotions can be deepened by examining Aristotle's discussion of the role of shame (the 'quasi-virtue' of learners) in moral education. Aristotle frequently notes that young people naturally tend to act in response to what is immediately pleasant, spontaneously, and as passion directs (eg. 1095a 4–8). And as we have seen, developing such spontaneity and enjoyment is an important part of moral habituation. However, in this respect a sense of shame distinguishes those who are "ready to be possessed by virtue", from those who merely "live by their feelings". Shame, Aristotle says, "is not properly regarded as a virtue, since it would seem to be more like a feeling than a state [of character]. It is define, at any rate, as a sort of fear of disrepute, and its expression is similar to that of fear of something terrifying." (1128b10–14). However, as the discussion of moral education in 10.9 shows, one point about shame is the educative one that it makes well brought up youths disposed to listen to and take to heart moral arguments. As Aristotle says,

Now, if arguments were sufficient by themselves to make people decent, the rewards they would command would justifiably have been many and large, as Theognis says, and rightly bestowed. In fact, however, 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 fine; but they seem unable to stimulate the many towards being fine and good.

For the many naturally obey fear, not shame; they avoid what is base because of the penalties, not because it is disgraceful. For since they live by their feelings, they pursue their proper pleasures and the sources of them, and avoid the opposed pains, and have not even a notion of what is fine and [hence] truly pleasant, since they have no taste of it . . .

Arguments and teaching surely do not influence everyone, but the soul of the student needs to have been prepared by habits for enjoying and hating finely, like ground that is to nourish the seed. For someone whose life follows his feelings would not even listen to an argument turning him away, or comprehend it [if he did listen]; and in that state how could he be persuaded to change? And in general feelings seem to yield to force, not to argument.

Hence we must already in some way have a character suitable for virtue, fond of what is fine and objecting to what is shameful (1179b5–31).

Of course, adherence to Hare's simple rules too requires the well brought up child to become 'fond of what is fine' (viz. following the rules) and to 'object to what is shameful' (viz. breaking the rules). That is the educational importance of 'compunction' for him. Rules must also play some significant role in moral education for Aristotle. After all, that is part of learning how to enjoy being just or honest, as much as it is of learning to act, navigate, play tennis, ride horses, etc. But the point about shame for Aristotle is precisely that it makes us examine more closely what is disgraceful or noble in particular cases. In this sense, shame, far from strengthening out attachment to the general moral rules, must often *weaken* our attachment to those rules.

This point is made explicit in 7.6, where Aristotle says of the *akratic*, or weak-willed, person:

emotion would seem to hear reason a bit, but to mishear it. It is like over-hasty servants who run out before they have heard all the instructions, and then carry them out wrongly, or dogs who bark at any noise at all, before investigating to see if it is a friend. In the same way, since emotion is naturally hot and hasty, it hears, but does not hear the instruction, and rushes off to exact to penalty. For reason or appearance has shown that we are being slighted or wantonly insulted; and emotion as though it had inferred that it is right to fight this sort of thing, is irritated at once. (1149a 25–36).

And that which produces a conflict in the will of the *akratic* person is what makes the Aristotelian learner ashamed of herself. Shame highlights the conflict that underlies the action of the *akratic*, a conflict between one's noble unreasoned, spontaneous moral responses, such as those of justice and truthfulness, on the one hand, and one's reasoned understanding of what the particular situation requires, on the other. But for the Aristotelian moral learner, in whom the aim is practical wisdom, Aristotle suggests that shame represents the recognition of a mistake – a mistake that arises due to an overly generalized and inadequately particularized form of moral perception – and the recognition of the need to take a broader, more considered and reflective view of the particular situation. And for Aristotle, this means that moral education must promote an increasing awareness of the inadequacy of moral rules for judgment in particular situations.

However, there is a puzzle in the Aristotelian account of moral development as I have sketched it so far, because that sketch suggests that Aristotelian moral

education includes goals whose aims seem to be in tension with one another, even if they are not altogether mutually incompatible. Aristotelian moral education must cultivate deep moral commitments expressed in the spontaneous evaluative moral responses that characterize the morally habituated youth. At the same time, those responses must be cultivated in such a way that we are disposed to restrain them in particular situations, fearing their erroneous results and desiring more particularistic judgments. This is not a problem for Hare, because ‘compunction’ is designed to ensure that our actions conform to what the moral rules dictate, so at the intuitive level our actions and emotional inhibitions must always pull in the same direction in particular cases. Shame is an entirely different sort of moral response than Hare’s ‘compunction’. It arises only once the *inadequacy* of one’s general principles in a particular situation becomes evident. Shame, therefore, is meant to re-orient the learner’s attention to the situation itself, and away from the immediate response or principle. This is necessary because when moral complexity arises, we need not simply know *that* a certain action must be done, we also need to see *why* a particular noble act must be done. For example, our intuitions may tell us that we are required to perform conflicting and incompatible actions. Determining what we actually ought to do, then, requires a more reflective approach. Shame is the name Aristotle gives to the disposition toward reflective openness that allows learner’s to begin to learn how to determine what is morally required in specific situations.

At this point, Hare might object that the differences between his and Aristotle’s views recede or vanish once we take into account the role that critical thinking plays in moral judgment, and once we understand the role that moral education plays in developing this ability. After all, critical moral thinking is allowed to be highly particularistic and contextual. I will consider this objection in the next section. For now it is important simply to note that, whatever role critical thinking plays in moral judgment and moral education, Aristotelian moral habituation must assign a much different role to moral examples than does Hare’s conception of intuitive thinking. Consider the fact that children must be brought up to experience shame when the general moral rules they have been taught as very young children lead in particular situations to unjust or ignoble actions. But if shame is to have an educational use in such contexts, children must be provided with a context within which to engage in moral reflection. Otherwise, the experience of shame is likely to have morally debilitating consequences. However, such consequences are a likely result if rules constitute the basis of moral education, because when we are required to engage in the sort of reflection that moral complexity demands, the rules themselves cannot provide the background context required of such reflection to occur.

This, of course, is an absurd result of moral education. But it is a result that Aristotle, unlike Hare, need not encourage. Aristotle is concerned not with the inculcation of rules, but with the development of a capacity for excellent moral judgment in particular cases. And as Charles Larmore says, “the use of examples forms one way in which judgment is exercised” (1986, 1). And given Aristotle’s point that we learn to judge only by exercising judgment, and learn what is enjoy-

able only through learning to enjoy certain practices practices and activities, it follows that the kind of examples we use in moral education, and the way in which come to appreciate them, will influence the development of moral judgment. Rich stories from literature, history and experience engage children's imagination and spirit, teaching in ways that may make vivid the evils of oppression, the nobility of honesty, justice and respect, etc. In this way, children may be led to develop strong emotional attachments to actions that are just, and a strong aversion to actions that are unjust. But stories also provide the background and historical context against which specific judgments of honesty, justice, etc. are made. The story of Robin Hood may inspire children to abhor oppression without doing so in such a way as to encourage them merely to adopt a predetermined moral rule. In fact, the rules that might be distilled from such a story might well be morally objectionable in most cases – such as 'steal from the rich to give to the poor'. Furthermore, if a child takes the lessons of Robin Hood too literally and decides to steal from her wealthy friend in order to give to an impoverished classmate, reference to the details of the story – eg. its social and historical context, and comparisons with other examples – might highlight the importance of other morally relevant considerations, such as a respect for the property of others. The point is that students may learn much from examples that they cannot learn when examples are used merely as illustrations of simple rules. For instance, examples might show that fighting injustice and oppression is a complex and often morally ambiguous matter and that making judgments about such matters frequently involves a multiplicity of concerns, not all of which pull in the same direction in particular cases.

Complex stories can be important ways of weaving such complex moral responses into the 'fabric' of moral character in ways that simple, highly general rules cannot. Stories may be used to encourage children to reflect upon particular moral judgments, to take a more thoughtful approach to determining what is right in the particular case, and provide a context within which to engage in such thoughtfulness. They also often require children to think carefully about complex moral problems. And the child who takes to heart the moral importance of examples as *examples* – rather than as mere illustrations of simple, general moral rules – is likely to respond with shame when evils occur, and will be able seek moral responses that account for the moral complexity of the situation.⁹ This kind of moral response accords with the deepening appreciation – and the sometimes radically new understanding – that we do in fact acquire as we read and re-read good novels, or as we learn from a reconsideration of past experience.¹⁰ Stories provide a context for teaching the Aristotelian moral lesson that just, truthful and courageous acts are enjoyable precisely because they are examples of truthfulness, justice and courage, not merely because they are simple rules.¹¹ What should be clear is that Aristotle's conception of habituation highlights the importance of developing complex and subtle moral perception and judgment, and Hare's conception of moral judgment not only ignores the importance of such complexity, but strongly inhibits its development by assigning examples an impoverished role in moral education.

PRACTICAL WISDOM AND EXAMPLES

This outline of an Aristotelian account of examples in the early stages moral education already suggests the central and ongoing role that moral examples may play in promoting and sustaining the sort of reasoned judgment employed by the fully morally educated person, viz. the person of practical wisdom. This ongoing role can be suggested in outline by saying that examples are necessary for developing and exercising a capacity for reflective moral thinking. This formulation also suggests a response that Hare might wish to advance against the Aristotelian view I have developed so far. Hare might first claim that our worries about the mechanistic nature of moral training implied by the 'intuitive' level must recede or vanish once we understand the role of critical moral thinking. Second, Hare might claim that once we understand the role that examples play in the development of critical moral thinking, the advantages claimed for Aristotle's view of the role of examples in education can also be accounted for within his "two-level" view of moral thinking. However, before further evaluating the contrasting roles that Hare and Aristotle assign to examples, it is useful to look more closely at Aristotle's conception of deliberation, and to contrast that conception with Hare's conception of critical moral thinking.

*Aristotle on Deliberation*¹²

For Aristotle, judgment, practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, is "a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to human good" (1140b 21–2). And practical wisdom "is concerned with things human and things about which it is possible to deliberate; for we say this is above all the work of a man of practical wisdom, to deliberate well. . . . The man who is without qualification good at deliberating is the man who is capable of aiming in accordance with calculation at the best for man of things attainable by action." (EN 114b 8–12). The person of practical wisdom no longer requires shame to make her to seek the good in particular situations, nor does she need to muster up her will to overcome the appetites or contrary desires that pull her away from what reason requires, as the merely continent person does. This does not mean, however, that the person of practical wisdom must overcome or transcend her habituated moral responses. In Burnyeat's words, the deliberations of the person of practical wisdom, "must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character. That is, it is second nature to the virtuous man to love and find his greatest enjoyment in the things he knows to be good" (1980: 88). So, in the person of practical wisdom, habit is made more responsive to, but is not superseded by reason.

Thus, the later stages of moral education, of which Aristotle's lectures are an important part, are designed to cultivate the sort of moral perception that discerns those actions that are truly just, courageous, temperate, etc. in particular cases (NE 1.8, 2.3, 10.9, 1179b 31). The key here is that the appetites and the dispositions towards the noble that have been developed by habituation now need to be integrated with our more reflective 'life plan' or conception of human flourish-

ing. To this end, Aristotelian moral education in the later stages is designed to make desire, character and reason work harmoniously in practical judgment. Cooperation between these distinct aspects of virtue is necessary since moral failing is apt to occur in cases where any of these three elements of virtue is detached from the others. Appetites that operate in isolation from a noble character may frequently lead us to act in ignoble ways. In addition, as the earlier discussion of shame suggested, noble intentions that fail to 'listen' to reason may obscure what reason reveals to be noble in particular cases. This is also Aristotle's point about the *akratic* or weak-willed person (see EN 7.3–4, esp 1147 a and b). Such a person is able to generate reasoned choices in a sense, but her appetites or evaluative responses cloud or obscure the knowledge of what is right in particular situations. Thus, the weak willed person might reason "I should not eat sweet things since I am already overweight". However, this reasoned knowledge of the good comes into conflict with another desire that arises when one is presented with a piece of cake, viz. "I would find this sweet thing pleasant". Such conflicts are not of course confined to bodily appetites. Similar conflicts occur with regard to the 'unreasoned evaluative responses' of the good character. Thus, like Aristotle's overeager dog, the *akratic* might find herself jumping to take revenge at the sign of an apparent wrong, even while she is aware on some level that there is more to the story, and that what is generally wrong is in this case justified. The *akratic* person is someone in whom such conflicts, and the moral failure they imply, have become 'second nature'.

In the person of practical wisdom, however, reason, desire and appetite have become harmonized through a lengthy process of moral education (Burnyeat 1980, 86–8). Such a person will be eager to act in accordance with her reasoned choices: "after deliberation, choice will be deliberated desire of things in our own power, for when we have decided as a result of deliberation, we desire in accordance with our deliberation" (NE 1113a11–12). Choice can be described as the outcome of a particular (ie. reasoned) form of desire, or a particular (ie. desiderative) form of reason. And in NE 6.2 Aristotle connects our reasoned choices with the reasoned good, while also making explicit the link between character and choice. Thus, he says, "virtue is a state of character concerned with choice" (1139a 22). We must have a good character (general desires, motivation) in order to make well-reasoned choices. For Aristotle, then, the morally educated person, the person of practical wisdom who deliberates well "without qualification", must not 'outgrow' her 'habits', as must be the case for an increasingly competent Harean critical thinker who relies increasingly less frequently on intuitive rules and increasingly more on directly applying the act-utilitarian standard. As Burnyeat stresses, for Aristotle deliberation is 'reasoning *from* the good' (1980: 83). Deliberation for Aristotle, then, is a process of practical reasoning through which we articulate in particular cases what our habitual moral responses point towards in general.

There are two features of such deliberation that I would like to highlight here. First, for Aristotle good habits and emotional sensitivity must constitute our reasoned understanding of the good if the decisions that result from deliberation are

not to miss important moral features of the contexts within which we deliberate. Thus, we might say that moral habits and emotions are necessary for ‘composing the scene’ of our judgments. Practical wisdom is deliberation about *eudaemonia*, or human flourishing. For Aristotle, all human action aims at human flourishing, and in that sense the end of action aims is beyond deliberation, since its desirability may not be questioned (see EN 1097b23–5). But an end like human flourishing is hardly independent of deliberation in the sense which, say, the act-utilitarian end of maximizing overall preference urgency is. As David Wiggins says, deliberation about such an end [ie. the end of human flourishing] demands a specification of the end itself – namely, what, practically speaking, counts as an adequate specification of this end in particular cases? (1980, 227). In Martha Nussbaum’s words, one may always ask of such an end, does this “course of action here and now really [count] as realizing some important value . . . that is a prima facie part of [one’s] idea of the good life; or even whether a certain way of acting . . . really counts as the sort of thing [one] wants to include in [one’s] conception of the good life at all” (1992a, 4). Here, the concerns that we bring to the situation in the form of habituated moral responses, as well as the emotional openness to particularity that our experiences of shame have made a part of our ‘second nature’, will be most useful for “specifying the end” of our moral judgments. As Nussbaum says, emotions are needed for moral judgment in order to provide a “valid portrayal of alternatives in all their color and singularity” (1992a, 76). As such, emotion and habit are essential for determining what counts as responding “at the right times, with reference to the right objects, towards the right people, with the right motive, and in the right way” (EN 1106b21–2).

Second, even once we have carefully scrutinized the particular situation for guidance as to which moral concerns are moral relevant, we may not simply be able to proceed directly to judgment. The sort of moral perception involved in ‘composing’ the moral scene may lead me to see that there are conflicting, incompatible and incommensurable values in any given situation. Such plurality or conflict might arise because, as we have seen, appetite, emotion and reason provide distinct sources of evaluation. In addition, as we saw earlier, for Aristotle the pleasures constitutive of virtuous activity differ in kind, not merely in degree. To assess the value of courage, justice or honesty must involve understanding the distinctive value that each kind of pleasure has in particular situations. But if these values are plural and (at least partially) incommensurable, then the potential arises for “irreconcilable contingent conflicts among them” (Nussbaum 1992a, 63). And Aristotelian moral judgment requires us to notice these conflicts and consider them in making judgments. Of course, if the moral values expressed in conflicting rules could all be translated into a common value-X-then it would follow that judgment would involve simply adopting the rule that led to more of X. For Hare, the common value is ‘preference intensity’. But as I’ve argued, moral values for Aristotle do not exist along a single line of metricity. Furthermore, there are many cases in which there is simply no morally desirable option available. For example, it may be true that in some cases the grievous historic injustices that motivate traditional aboriginal land claims cannot be restored, if

doing so would inflict grave injustices upon those who currently inhabit the lands. Justice requires that both forms of injustice be recognized, but in such cases there may be no response that does not do injustice to somebody or some group. Governments might offer monetary compensation, for example, to aboriginal groups as a symbolic acknowledgment of responsibility for past injustices. In itself this would hardly count as an adequate response to the historic injustices suffered by the aboriginal people. Nevertheless, symbolic reparation might be an important way of recognizing that injustices have occurred, and that responsibility must be taken for those injustices, even though moral judgment and action in this case must fall short of what justice ideally requires.¹³ The Aristotelian agent, who understands that justice is something “by its own nature pleasant”, must notice when particular actions must fall short of the ideal. But for the Harean archangel, or humans who strive to approximate its way of thinking, there is no need to do so, since justice at the level of critical moral thinking is fully met as long as the overall satisfaction of preferences is maximized in any given situation.¹⁴

As I’ve said, Aristotelian moral commitments do not vary simply according to intensity, but in quality as well. Values are heterogenous and often partially oncommensurable and must be evaluated according to different kinds of standard (which is not to say, of course, that rational judgments cannot be made) (Nussbaum 1992a, 56–66). Nevertheless, as Winggins says, “there is nothing which a [rational] man is under antecedent sentence to maximize” (1980, 232). When genuine moral values conflict it matters morally that we recognize the conflict, even when we cannot accommodate all of these values in our actions (Nussbaum 1992a, 64–5). Aristotle, by stressing the importance of moral habit and emotion in constituting reasoned perception and deliberation of the good, suggests the importance of noticing moral conflict and incommensurability.¹⁵

Hare’s theory too recognizes the possibility of conflicting and incommensurable values (ie. when rules conflict at the intuitive level). However, this view must assign a much different place and significance to such conflict than the Aristotelian view. The differences between Hare’s critical thinking and Aristotelian practical wisdom might be made clearer by considering an analogy. We can imagine moral judgment as analogous to painting a landscape. We are born with a blank moral canvas before us. For Hare, the moral rules compose a general outline of the landscape. However, when the rules conflict and impose incompatible duties, or if we find that we have no ready made rules to apply in certain cases, we must erase (as it were) the outline and begin again using the procedures of critical moral thinking. The concerns represented by the rules are morally irrelevant at the critical level. *Qua* archangelic utilitarian calculator, we must proceed in strict accordance with the aim of maximizing utility.

It is important to emphasize that Hare’s critical procedure does not ignore particulars, as intuitive rules must do. After all, critical deliberation is designed to allow principles to be as specific as the situation requires, taking into account the most minute details. As Nussbaum points out, such a procedure may issue in highly complex universal principles, tailored for a single situation (1992a, 72). Nonetheless, for Hare the ultimate end of such principles must always be of the

same kind – viz. the kind that maximize overall preference utility. Thus, as critical thinkers, we are not quite merely painting by numbers, since the relevant contextual facts (viz. preferences) are not given to us, but must be discerned by perception and judgment. Nevertheless, we must paint according to a very strict formula, since the contextual features of the situation are regarded as merely inputs to act-utilitarian calculation procedure. The act-utilitarian end, by requiring that all values be translated into the common denominator of preference intensity, must therefore undermine the plurality of values that Aristotle emphasizes.

However, the act-utilitarian formula is no better for issuing in moral judgments than are formulaic painting methods for producing great works of art. The point here can be seen by considering the role that critical moral thinking must assign to moral examples. Again, this role has an emotional and a cognitive aspect. In addition to encouraging children to follow the rules when that is required, examples must be used to induce in children the emotional disposition to use act-utilitarian judgment when *that* is required; or they may be used to promote cognitive competence in act-utilitarian judgment by replicating act-utilitarian judgments. However, in neither their emotional nor their cognitive use any examples determine what is morally permissible or required in particular cases. That must be done by the act-utilitarian decision procedure alone. Examples may serve as useful buttresses to critical moral reasoning, but they may not tell us anything substantially new about what constitutes good and right moral reasoning. Right judgment is entirely determined by the act-utilitarian decision procedure. But if moral examples are taught merely as instances of act-utilitarian judgment, then many of the best novels, myths, histories and political biographies must cease to have the kinds of moral meaning we now give to them, and must be assigned a radically different meaning, namely an act-utilitarian one. However, anyone familiar with moral problems in literature and life will justifiably think this is a bizarre result of moral theorizing. Moral problems represented in great literature – as well as those that occupy much of our moral lives – are no more instances of act-utilitarian moral reasoning than they are of rule following. Moral problems in literature are, as Larmore says, instances of moral judgment, in all their variety and moral complexity. As Hare does not recognize, however, such problems do not therefore demand the use either of a condifiable set of rules, or a determinate act-utilitarian decision procedure. More to the point, if examples of complex moral deliberation and judgment are not reducible either to rules or to act-utilitarian decision making then a moral education that encourages students to regard such examples merely in these ways will distort the moral significance of the examples themselves. And if children take the lessons of a distorted form of moral education to heart, then they will surely develop a severely misshapen understanding of moral deliberation and practical judgment.

A much different role for examples in education emerges from Aristotle's view. For Aristotle, moral habits and emotions are essential tools for composing an outline of the moral landscape as they are for Hare. And the details are fleshed out by reflective deliberation. However, as we proceed in our delibera-

tions we may find that the detailed picture we are constructing leads to hideous results, or is in some way not right. In that case we may need to consult our 'habits' in order to reconsider the overall composition of our painting. And judgment may involve an ongoing interactive process of this sort, in which the end towards which we are working, the finished 'moral landscape', is quite unclear until we have actually finished constructing it. And for this kind of judgment, as Nussbaum says, "the only procedure to follow is . . . to imagine all the relevant features as well and fully as possible, holding them up against whatever intuitions and emotions and plans and imaginings we have brought into the situation or can construct in it" (1992a, 74).

Here the vivid and rich particularity of literature, history, anthropology, biography and experience may help as an educational tool which works to combat rigid rule bound generality and mechanistic rationality. The role of examples at this stage of moral education must be somewhat different than the role that examples play in the early stages. In deliberating we are presumed to have acquired a 'taste' for the noble, and the good habits and emotions that constitute that taste. In addition, Aristotle believed that as our moral development progresses, shame becomes a progressively less appropriate response: "we praise young people who are prone to this feeling, but an older person no one would praise for being prone to the sense of disgrace, since we think he should not do anything that need cause this sense" (1128b18–21). Nonetheless, the responsiveness to specific contextual features that shame has helped to cultivate in the first place has now become, or is in the process of becoming, 'second nature'. Thus, we develop virtues like patience and tolerance of other views. But such virtues are likely to push hard against other of our constitutive virtues, such as those of courage and loyalty. And it is when such conflict arises that an appreciation of the incommensurability of value becomes important, and when the interaction between 'habit' and reflection is required to specify the end toward which our actions should be aimed. Such interaction is a part of almost all our judgments to some degree, since as Hare himself notes, "almost all acts are to some degree self-educative" (1988, 229). In other words, we always have something to learn in particular cases about what actually counts as a constituent of our 'prima facie' values, and whether or not we wish to include a particular value in our reasoned conception of the good. Consider the sort of judgment involved in a monogamous romantic relationship. In seeking to maintain and enrich one's commitment to the relationship, one must, among other things, avoid exploiting one's partner, help her to flourish according to her own lights, and honor her integrity. However, as the relationship evolves we are often likely to be unsure about what counts as love, exploitation, flourishing, and integrity in particular cases. Rules may be of some help here. We usually cannot lie, break promises, etc. However, we need often need to rely on examples of love and care – both from literature and life – in order to understand how these principles can guide our actions within this particular relationship. Relying solely or primarily on rules or on a maximizing calculative procedure is not merely insufficient, but reprehensible, since by themselves such forms of judgment point us away from

what our relationship with this particular person demands. If we rely too much on general rules, or on a utilitarian procedure, we are likely to feel that we understand what others require of us without attending to their particular needs and interests. We will tend to fit them into pre-set categories, even as we ignore the ways in which those categories are likely to distort or oppress their perspectives. And such distortion and oppression is likely only to be heightened if we resort to treating our loved one with archangelic impartiality. However, the well brought up Aristotelian has been given an “eye” to the good; and rich, detailed examples may help her to “see aright”, as well as avoid the rigidity encouraged by rules (see EN 1143b14).

Toward a Conception of Moral Examples for Pluralistic Societies

The Aristotelian account of the role of moral examples I have offered so far has emphasized the specificity and concreteness, as well as the plurality and incommensurability, of values that moral judgment must strive to recognize. The emphasis on specificity and concreteness suggests that novels and other stories, as well as experience, will generally be better guides to moral education and judgment than will stock fables or simple exemplars. But this answer leaves untouched the question of the moral content that such examples must include. And without some guidance for determining such content, little progress can be made in actually helping children to learn to make better moral judgment.¹⁶ Furthermore, in pluralistic societies moral judgments require a sensitivity to individuals whose moral views are shaped by a wide range of cultural and religious traditions. However any particular tradition may tend to ignore or be insensitive to important human goods. The Aristotelian emphasis on the recognition of the plurality, incommensurability and conflict that may arise in moral judgment implies that individuals must be able to recognize the plurality, incommensurability, and moral conflicts that actually occur in people’s lives. And the Aristotelian emphasis on the importance of valuing goods like justice for their own sake implies that we must notice when a particular tradition is insensitive to some forms of injustice.

Much more needs to be said about both of these points. However, enough has been said already to show that this Aristotelian account of the role of examples in moral education conflicts with a prominent view recently advanced by Alasdair MacIntyre. For Aristotle, as MacIntyre recognizes, examples are meant to teach us how to make wise and particularistic judgments. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues that a precondition of making wise practical judgments is an understanding of the narrative structures of the tradition or traditions that constitute the community within which judgments must be made:

I can only answer the question “What am I to do” if I can answer the prior question “Of what story or stories do I find myself a part?” We enter human society, that is, with one or more imputed characters – roles into which we have been drafted – and we have to learn what they are in order to be able to understand how others respond to us and how our responses to them are apt to be construed. It is through hearing stories about wicked step-mothers, lost children good but misguided kings, wolves that suckle twin boys, youngest sons who receive no inheritance but must

make their own way in the world and eldest sons who waste their inheritance on riotous living and go into exile to live with the swine, that children learn or mis-learn both what a child and what a parent is, what the cast of characters may be in the drama into which they have been born and what the ways of the world are. Deprive children of stories and you leave them unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words. Hence there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources (1984: 216).

There is an obvious element of truth to this account, as well as two serious errors. It is true that without an understanding of the stories and myths that reveal a community's narrative structures, children are likely to have considerable difficulty determining appropriate actions in particular cases, since they will need to evaluate each case on its own merits without any assistance whatsoever from the simplifying and coherence conferring narrative structures of tradition. For example, children or parents whose identity is completely severed from the shared norms that determine the roles of adults and children in their community will be at a loss as how to behave in particular cases. They may thus become "unscripted, anxious stutterers in their actions as in their words". So the stories and examples of a particular narrative tradition must certainly constitute a *part* of one's moral education.

However it is equally true, and this is the first of MacIntyre's errors, that a sophisticated understanding of the narrative structures of a particular tradition may be used to exploit those whose understanding is lacking or less complete or less sophisticated, or is may be ostentatiously displayed rather than responsibly exercised. Such understanding is thus too broad a condition for determining the kind of moral examples that moral education must include. More importantly, and this is the second error, it is also too narrow a condition for determining the role of examples in moral education since the 'stock of characters' that constitutes the dominant structures of a particular narrative tradition may turn out to be exclusive or oppressive of other perspectives. As Susan Moller Okin has recently observed, MacIntyre's own list is revealing in this regard, since most of the characters in his list are male, and the female characters are either evil (wicked stepmothers) or oppressively stereotypical (the suckling wolf). Thus, she concludes persuasively, "Faced with the choice of roles – human but wicked, nurturing but bestialized – surely girls are more likely to be rendered "unscripted, anxious stutterers" by being *subjected* to rather than by being deprived of such stories. For these stories, as well as many others in "our" mythology, are themselves basic building blocks of male domination" (1989, 45). Nonetheless, it is still true that the teaching of the dominant narrative structures and archetypes of a particular tradition may sometimes lead to a severe and debilitating *misunderstanding* of the goods that a particular society attempts to foster, and may obscure values that the particular narrative tradition itself is ill suited to illuminate. So, contrary to MacIntyre's assertion, there must be ways of "giving us an understanding" of social goods that are independent of the particular narrative structures of one's own tradition or community. And answering the question "What am I to do?" must sometimes involve answering the prior question "Which story or stories, of which I currently find myself a part, should I now reject?"

One might object that Okin is exaggerating here since stories that are, or have been, used as a means of domination may also be re-told or re-written in ways that subvert that domination.¹⁷ And MacIntyre might point out that the fact that we must first know the stories that constitute our tradition constitute the basis for moral education need not entail that we have to accept the existing *limitations* of these particular narratives (1984, 221). Okin's point, however, is not simply that justice requires that traditional roles and identities of women sometimes need to be altered or reinterpreted, but it also requires that they must sometimes be rejected altogether and new ones sometimes need to be created.

Here the Aristotelian moral educator, who seeks to cultivate a love of justice for its own sake, and who wishes to cultivate an appreciation of the plurality of human goods, will notice two other aspects of the educational role for moral examples. Since an understanding of what justice requires may not come merely from within the existing dominant identities or narrative structures of a particular tradition, we also require skill in imagining ways of life quite different from our own. Moral examples must not merely give us an understanding of the narrative structures of our own tradition, but also an understanding of and ability to imaginatively interpret other, rival traditions (see Callan 1991, 1992).¹⁸ Along the same lines, moral examples may introduce us to 'utopian' and 'dystopian' ways of thinking. We may have examples of imaginative descriptions of ways of life that have not (yet) been lived by actual human beings. The latter sort of examples may be necessary in order to undermine our attachment to, and to help us imagine alternatives to, the moral beliefs internal to any particular tradition.

MORAL EXAMPLES AND LIBERAL POLITICS

A problem with the Aristotelian account of moral examples I have advocated arises here which is part of a more general problem within liberal democratic politics. The problem is extremely intricate and complex, and I cannot address it adequately here. However, I would like to briefly address one aspect of the problem since it can be interpreted in a way that lends support to the educational role for examples advocated by MacIntyre. The problem in this context can be put as follows: in a pluralistic society, there are many different conceptions of the good life, and there is no apparent consensus about whose examples – the representatives of which conception of the good life – should be included in public school curricula. Heated debates about censorship of school texts and about the exclusiveness of the canon in universities provide evidence that these disputes are far from benign. However, it is often argued that since consensus about the nature of the good life is currently or foreseeably available, liberal politics must rest on a conception of state neutrality that disallows state institutions, including public schools, from requiring parents to expose their children to alternative conceptions of the good life.

This view is nicely captured by Joel Feinberg's somewhat surprising claim that "Liberalism is a theory about the rightful limits of state, not about the

content of education for children” (1990, 88). If this view of liberal politics is accepted, someone might say that the commitment to state neutrality means that parents must be allowed to choose for themselves the kind of moral examples their children may be exposed to in public schools. This may also be a powerful tool for religious and cultural conservatives who support parental freedom to choose the kinds of moral examples their children may be exposed to, for example by enrolling them in state supported religious and cultural maintenance schools, or at least by very selectively determining the content of the examples to which their children may be exposed in public schools. At this point, the educational implications of liberal neutrality converge with the traditionalist perspective advocated by MacIntyre.

One way of responding to this argument is to reject the liberal commitment to state neutrality by arguing that there is indeed an objective and substantive conception of the human good which must be actively supported by state institutions against competing conceptions. Such an account has recently been advanced by Martha Nussbaum, based on what she calls Aristotle’s conception of ‘human functioning’ (Nussbaum, 1992b). If such a view is coherent, it could avoid the conservative educational implications that converge in the form of traditionalism advocated by both neo-Aristotelians like MacIntyre and by cultural conservatives who accept liberal neutrality. It would do so by showing that the Aristotelian view of ‘human functioning’ allows the plurality and diversity demanded by liberal pluralists, while also providing objective and substantive guidance as to what sort of essential human capabilities must (morally) be supported by state institutions. Thus, Nussbaum argues that her account of Aristotelian ‘human functioning’ allows for a recognition of the plurality of cultures and traditions, as well as of the concrete specificity of local contexts, that determine how particular constituents of the human good are to be specified in a particular situation. Furthermore, she argues that it allows for a recognition of the role of personal autonomy in determining how objective human goods are to be pursued by individuals. Finally, she argues that this conception allows for the possibility that the objective conception of the human good applies to beings that are currently considered outside its scope (as women were considered outside of Aristotle’s own account of the highest human good) (see Nussbaum 1992b, 224–5). In spite of its plurality however, if such a view is correct, then moral education would require the use of examples that sensitize all individuals to a broad range of human values – from the need for the fulfilment of bodily needs like shelter, food and sexual desire, to the recognition of the place of death, practical reason, affiliation to other human beings, relatedness to nature, humor and individuality in human lives. Such a view would probably disallow the use in public schools of examples that portray female circumcision as a morally valuable practice. It would also require or encourage the use of examples that help to show what is morally repugnant about such practices. This view might therefore provide the basis for constraining and criticizing the educational views and practices of both neo-Aristotelian and liberal traditionalists.

However, there is reason to believe that such views can be criticized even if one accepts the doctrine of neutrality as it applies to the liberal state. I would

like to briefly outline this argument, since a mistaken but intuitively appealing objection to it might be thought to provide a death blow to the Aristotelian view of moral examples I have so far developed, by justifying a parental *right* to determine what kinds of examples children may be exposed to (and thus to prevent children from exposure to moral examples from a wide range of traditions, as well as examples that are designed to undermine attachment to any particular existing tradition). Will Kymlicka has recently argued that liberal politics is guided by what he calls the principles of “the revisability of the good life”. Kymlicka argues that individuals have a highest order interest in leading “as good a life as possible, a life that has all the things a good life should have”. (1989, 10–12). This principle does not violate liberal neutrality, since it need not commit the liberal state to supporting any particular conception of the good life. However, if Kymlicka is correct that something like the principle of revisability is intrinsic to modern liberal democratic societies, then moral examples must play the sort of role that I have so far advocated – namely of broadening and enriching one’s moral perspective by providing access to alternative moral perspectives, as well as the ability to interpret and understand such perspectives in their concrete particularity.

However, the principle of revisability might at first seem like a suspect claim from the perspective of liberals who endorse the ideal of state neutrality and who also wish to advocate public support for private religious or cultural maintenance schools. There liberals may acknowledge (as they would have to) that any conception of the good life must include the resources necessary for fulfilling its deepest moral commitments, whatever those commitments happen to be. But they might also point out that is less obvious that any particular conception of the good life also requires the resources needed to criticize, revise or reject its own deeply rooted moral commitments. For example, many religious traditions depend precisely upon strong fidelity to commitments that prevent or strongly discourage their adherents from being able to consider a wide range of possible alternatives. Other conceptions of the good life may be designed to ensure the survival and enrichment of a fragile or endangered cultural tradition. And cultural survival and enrichment might depend upon excluding or discouraging from consideration certain options that threaten to extinguish or irreparably damage that culture.

Thus, the objection might continue, because the neutral liberal state must refrain from making judgments about the truth or falsity of different conceptions of the good life, some conceptions of the good life *within* the liberal state may legitimately be inoculated from the sort of revisability Kymlicka regards as intrinsic to liberal democratic societies. Parental selection of the kinds of moral examples to which their children may be exposed would likely be a primary means of such inoculation. And if the objection succeeds, the liberal doctrine of neutrality must endorse a parental *right* to such selection and thus overrides the principle of revisability.

This objection must be taken seriously, and I cannot adequately respond to it here. However, there is at least some reason to believe that it is mistaken. That is because, as we have seen, the roles, structures and identities that constitute a

particular cultural or religious tradition may turn out to exclude and oppress certain groups and individuals – in other words we may at any time discover that our current beliefs, however sincerely and deeply held, in fact turn out to be tragically false. Furthermore, even when one's commitments and belief are true under one set of circumstances, a new set of circumstances may render those commitments false and misguided. It is not always clear in particular cases what one's moral commitments are, and one can not always be sure what counts as moral failure or success in those situations. This is true, however deep and faithful one's commitments are under any given set of conditions. Furthermore, the vulnerability of moral beliefs to the exigencies of changing circumstances is not merely an abstract possibility, but a reality of everyday life in a pluralist society – not just for religious or cultural fundamentalists but for housewives, bigots and philosophers as well. However, if one does discover that one's moral commitments are false and misguided, then one must possess the resources for revising one's moral commitments or for determining alternative commitments, or else one risks falling into a debilitating anomie and moral inertia. And if this is true, then the Aristotelian account I've developed, or something like it, must also be true. For the ability to understand the stories and characters that constitute a tradition – one's own or another's – as well as the ability to create new traditions and identities, requires an engagement with examples, stories and traditions other than those most familiar and dear to oneself. It also requires a sensitivity to the moral conflicts and incommensurabilities that are bound to arise as the individuals whose lives (re) enact such stories, engage and interact with one another. In any case, it should be clear that examples cannot be merely be used to encourage the traditionalist form of judgment that MacIntyre advocates.¹⁹

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NOTES

¹ I develop the following discussion and criticisms of Hare's conception of moral judgment and moral education in more detail elsewhere. See McDonough 1992.

² The phrase 'overall intensity' is important here. It does not mean that the most intensely held preferences necessarily win out in the act-utilitarian calculation. For example, in a society where a majority favors slavery for a small minority, that prescription may survive the process of universalizability. The many preferences of the majority (though relatively weak) may trump the few (though intense) preferences of the slaves. Thus, the strongest preferences 'overall' are maximized.

³ The relationship between Hare's two-levels is actually slightly more complex than this. We do not ascend to the critical the act-utilitarian level of moral thinking only when our 'intuitive' rules conflict (e.g. when I simultaneously must adhere to a rule of promise keeping and a rule that enjoins me to break a promise in a particular situation); critical moral thinking is also used to select the most desirable set of rules at the intuitive level, which moral agents are to follow in their everyday lives. But the complexities involved in this procedure do not affect my point here.

⁴ Thus, Hare would say that while the rules do not necessarily represent what is 'definitively' right, namely what is right on an act-utilitarian analysis, the rules are nonetheless 'prima facie' right, since they determine what is right at the intuitive level of moral thinking. See Hare 1981, p. 38.

⁵ I am indebted to an unpublished paper by Cris Mayo, delivered to the Educational Policy Studies philosophy of education discussion group at the University of Illinois, for these insights.

⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to Terence Irwin's translation of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985).

⁷ For interesting recent discussions of importance of examples in Aristotle's conception of moral judgment see Larmore 1987, 1–5; and Nussbaum 1992, 54–105.

⁸ I thank Walter Feinberg whose comments on an earlier draft forced me to clarify my position here.

⁹ Someone might object here that rules might also be woven into the process of moral education for the purpose of cultivating complex moral responses. However, these rules would have to be considerably more complex and detailed than the rules required by Hare's intuitive thinking.

¹⁰ The reflection of Iris Murdoch's M provide a good example of the second sort of case, see *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Ark, 1985), pp. 17–18.

¹¹ Aristotle himself may have been quite insensitive to the importance of examples at the early stages of moral education. Even though he recognizes the need for examples to guide complex moral judgments for nature moral agents, in book 10 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* he mentions only the need for children to be guided by 'laws' in the early stages of moral education. My argument that Aristotle's conception of habituation demands the use of rich examples is not, of course, vitiated by Aristotle's own (apparent) insensitivity to what was educationally required by his own conception.

¹² All subsequent references to NE are to David Ross's translation, revised by J.L. Ackrill and J.O. Urmson, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988).

¹³ For an interesting discussion see Jeremy Waldron (1992).

¹⁴ Of course, the Harean archangel and his human imitators must also attempt to represent to themselves the various conflicting relevant aspect of moral concern, etc. But the point is that for the Harean critical moral thinker the various aspect of concern or value are simply factors in an overall act-utilitarian calculus. It is the utilitarian standard that is of ultimate moral importance, not the conflicting features of moral concern. For a more detailed analysis of Harean critical moral thinking see McDonough 1992.

¹⁵ This point is not undermined even if it is true that Aristotle was insensitive to moral conflict, as some commentators think (see Larmore 1987). The point is not that Aristotle recognized the importance of moral conflict, but that the importance of moral conflicts can be discerned only after one recognizes (as Aristotle clearly does) the plurality of moral values. There is considerable disagreement in the literature as to how sensitive Aristotle himself is to the place of conflict in moral judg-

ment. Charles Larmore asserts that Aristotle is insensitive to such conflict (Larmore 1987, p. 10), while Nussbaum argues that Aristotle is almost unique among philosophers for his sensitivity to it (Nussbaum 1992a). In any case, the point here, the Aristotle's conception of moral judgment highlights the need to recognize the possibility of such conflict in pluralist societies, does not presuppose an answer to this exegetical dispute.

¹⁶ It might be thought that Hare's act-utilitarian theory is a better educational guide than Aristotle's since at least it allow us a determine way of determining what examples are right and good. The devastating and much rehearsed objections to all forms of act-utilitarianism ought to be sufficient to devastate this objection as well. For example, since act-utilitarianism judgment must allow judgments that endorse evil preferences, and since it is committed to judgments that disallow partial attachments such as those toward family and friends, act-utilitarian educators must endorse as right and good educational examples that promote and endorse such attitudes.

¹⁷ I am grateful to Kal Alston for pointing this out to me.

¹⁸ It is important to knowledge that it must also make us sensitive to the ways in which our attempts to interpret other's traditions are prone to distort and oppress others' self-understandings.

¹⁹ I should hasten to add that there may be other justifiable grounds for demanding state support of some kind for schools designed primarily for goals of cultural maintenance and enrichment. For example, such schools may sometimes be necessary for providing the basis upon which individuals within a particular culture can successfully participate within a larger and often hostile dominant culture.

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