

Literature and Education: Recalling Matthew Arnold

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2012

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ABSTRACT

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In a democracy, every individual is thought to have the potential to achieve what Matthew Arnold considers the supreme characteristic of intellectual freedom, “the intellectual maturity of man himself; the tendency to observe facts with a critical spirit; to search for their law, not to wander among them at random; to judge by the rule of reason, not by the impulse of prejudice or caprice” (*The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, Vol. 1, p. 21). But Arnold finds a critical opposition between man’s instinctive efforts to develop “fully and freely” and the economic forces of the industrial culture of modern democracies, consumed with work and wealth accumulation. He maintains that in the aesthetic experience of literature we behold the being we are capable of.

First in his poetry, and later in his critical prose, Arnold confronts the malaise of modernity and the spiritual fragmentation at the heart of contemporary literature. The hope for his project for education is that it can free us to find new critical consciousness and recover the moral authority of aesthetic judgment. In this study I try to explicate Arnold’s conviction that collapsing the duality of literature and science expands our knowledge of the world and that cultivating humanity through the experience of ideas in literature affirms the integrity of the individual and reconciles his or her relation to nature and the human community.

The aim of this work is twofold. First it recasts Arnold’s uncertain legacy among philosophers of education in the perspective of philosophy as a way of life. I hope it also invites further inquiry into his synthesis of intellect and imagination in the aesthetic phenomenon and its capacity to critique conditions of existence.

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Acknowledgements

I am a Meno to David Hansen's Socrates. No expression of gratitude is adequate for his quiet, sometimes ironic, and consistently thoughtful mentoring.

Maxine Greene's reputation inspired my initial curiosity about the Philosophy and Education Program that led me to Columbia University and Teachers College. I feel privileged to have been her student and to call her a friend.

Megan Lavery and I crossed the Program threshold together, she as the new associate professor and I as the newest doctoral student. I am grateful for her model of balance between intellectual rigor and spiritual lightness in scholarship.

David Sidorski has my gratitude for lighting the way to a life of inquiry.

I thank Lydia Goehr for her inspiration on the aesthetic impulse and the generosity of her scholarship.

For William, Farrell and Marjorie

... does not every man carry about with him a possible Socrates, in that power of a disinterested play of consciousness upon his stock notions and habits ...
Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*

Chapter One

Introduction

Students of Matthew Arnold tend to compartmentalize his life and his work and in so doing stand to miss an intertextuality that finds common ground in Arnold's aesthetic ideals. His poetic sensibilities sought some embodiment in logic that would inform us how we are to live. His poetic ideals aimed to reveal things as they really are. An underlying assumption of the value of the aesthetic to the human condition connects the wide-ranging topics of his prose including literary and cultural criticism, education, religion, politics, and literary criticism. Arnold's work expresses the lived experience he deeply felt in an age of transition at the twilight of the Romantic and the dawn of the modern era. He was the orphan of one and would become a prophet of the other. But there is little clear consensus on his work, which found expression first in poetic images then critical prose. As Linda Ray Pratt points out, he exemplifies the uncertain role of the modern artist and the authority of the modern critic (2000, p. 1). As it now comes into clearer focus I find Arnold's work at a crossroad in aesthetic theory which shifts the artistic objective towards critical consciousness and moral authority.

Arnold offers an interpretative key to his outlook in a letter written to his mother in 1869. “My poems represent, on the whole, the main movement of mind of the last quarter century, and thus they will probably have their day as people become conscious to themselves of what that movement of mind is, and interested in the literary productions which reflect it” (Lang, (1998), p. 347). The quarter century to which Arnold refers is identified by a radical shift in man’s orientation to the world, which gives definition to modernity and modern literary production. Arnold breaks with the Victorian tradition, which held an objective sense of nature and landscape as something to reflect upon, and examine for evidence of transcendent truth. He shares the Romantic conviction that behind the objective phenomenon known to the senses there are truths that can be known imaginatively by eliminating the distinction between the subjective observer and the observed object (Roper, 1969). But in Arnolds’s view the dawn of the modern bears distinctly barren and unpoetic truths.

Over and beyond tracings of symbolic landscapes the poet observes his heroes alone on a “darkling plain” and the reality of nature haunting.

Yet, through the hum of torrent lone,

And brooding mountain-bee,

There sobs I know not what ground-tone

Of human agony (Arnold, “Obermann,” 1909, p. 175)

As poet, he looks beyond the visionary surface of nature and confronts an absent beauty. He suffers, along with modern consciousness, disillusionment, alienation, ennui, and an awareness of the self, alone in a world without order and without the ability to escape.

With the authority of metaphysical convictions succumbing to advances in scientific theory and the idea of an eternal or absolute in dissolution, he stares into an abyss. Thus Arnold poured himself into cultural and literary criticism. In that genre the central theme and motivating impulse, cultivating sustaining, moral consciousness emerges.

Arnold would say that the men of his age had fallen victim to the “tendency to cultivate strictness of conscience” which favors man’s intellect at the expense of the integrated whole of human nature. Restoration of fullness of man’s instinctual powers would require “spontaneity of consciousness” for which the ancient Greeks are his most illustrative models. Individuals in modernity would need intellectual deliverance to restore a moral balance and recover a critical spirit of inquiry and a free play of the mind. Thus he calls for the mediating power of culture through an aesthetic education.

The eighteenth century moralist, Friedrich Schiller, had an enormous influence on Arnold’s thinking. Hohr’s (2002) keen analysis of Schiller’s humanist’s claims elucidates four authoritative registers in aesthetic experience which foreground what my analysis will reveal of Arnold’s faith in “culture” to reconcile human freedom with the material world:

1. Illusion is the integrating medium of the individual, in the broadest sense the basis of morality. It provides the experience of purpose and meaning in life.
2. It initiates moral thought in the individual and becomes the foundation of moral authority in the life of society and of the individual.
3. Illusion is an experience of the world in its own right and as such is irreducible; thus it is subject to truth conditions as much as any other mode of experience.

4. Illusion is a medium of the criticism of reality. As the caretaker of desire and longing it has a utopian function.

Arnold uses culture and also semblance in the same way that Schiller uses “the beautiful illusion” for the medium of art. He stands on Schiller’s shoulders when he declares “poetry as criticism of life.” In the following chapters I hope to make evident a cohesive philosophy of education that grows out of this dictum.

While Arnold scholars have tried to find some unified vision to connect his thoughts and the various genres in which he worked, tensions inherent in the poet’s life, in his poetry and his prose produced “fragments” which eschew an easily deciphered coherence. He wrote with prophetic insights for his time but with a sense that he would find a more attuned audience in the future. Thus, his work and reputation are alternately applauded and criticized, often misunderstood. There seem to be as many critics as apologists. But the twentieth century work of Arnoldian scholars, starting with that of the Columbia University Professor of Literature, Lionel Trilling, introduced some unity to his work and generated interest in continued scholarship.

Trilling (1939) draws out important implications of Arnold’s thinking on matters germane to the present study, including the implications for a secular age inherent in the connections between his poetic ideals and the ancients’. He draws attention to the many syntheses of Arnold’s vision. And he lays the groundwork for continuing scholarship on Arnold’s view of the relation between the nature of sensuous and aesthetic perception and how they are bound up with the nature of the scientist and that of the artist. It grounds current thinking on how art and imagination stand in relation to culture and conduct and

the veering of the modern mind towards relativistic and nihilistic directions. Importantly, he explicates Arnold's conception of activism that runs through his critical prose.

In addition to the influences of the shifting currents of the literary and political thought in his time, Arnold's work also reflects the profound effects that modern philosophical developments had on his thinking. We can trace Arnold's sympathy with the German secular tradition of self-development or *Bildung* and its origins in Goethean idealism. His inquiry into the moral value of ideas through "imaginative reason" can be seen to extend the theories of the tradition on culture and the imagination and the construction of consciousness. Trilling compares Arnold's connection of moral and aesthetic judgment to Hegel's, "not in the old way of making morality the criterion of the aesthetic: on the contrary, he made the aesthetic the criterion of the moral" (1955, p. xii).

In 1983 Park Honan published the definitive biography of Matthew Arnold. Insights developed from a large amount of unpublished material infuse a close reading of Arnold's oeuvre to render a uniquely rich, real and present Arnold. Honan asserts the importance of understanding the "subtle, comparative attitude" Arnold introduced to cultural issues of modern society.

Critics, creative artists, and our wisest leaders have turned and will turn to Arnold for social perspective, and for that critical attitude which is the best help in our national and our international difficulties ... He turned from literary, to educational, and then to religious topics in his essays and books – with a sense of the complex interrelatedness of the forces that make modern life what it is. (1983, vii)

This work, more than any other, demonstrates the continuity in Arnold's writing, revealing how it responds sensitively and constructively to the radically shifting crosscurrents of the modern age. Over the last 20 years there has been renewed interest in the writing of

Arnold, particularly with the arrival of the centenary anniversary of his death in 1988. A variety of scholarly publications have revisited his life and his work in manners that explicate, analyze and offer criticism. The retrospection affords readings that re-contextualize Arnold's ideas and reassess the relevance of his legacy in relation to more modern sentiment and thought. The frame of reference for what had earlier been viewed more narrowly as "political", "aesthetic" or "moral/religious" in Arnold's writing has expanded and thus blurred those distinctions. The interdisciplinarity of modern aesthetic theory refocuses concepts central to his humanist thinking such as freedom, culture and equality in new light.

Recent scholarship offers modern perspectives on Arnold's view of the capacity for moral authority and vital moral agency inherent in the aesthetic about which Arnold's contemporaries may have had only inchoate notions. It connects Arnold's views on the power of the aesthetic experience with critical theories. And though Arnold's legacy may be difficult to characterize in terms of defined disciplines, a preponderance of scholarship confirms the enduring value of his prescient thought on a range of issues related to criticism and culture. Pratt (2002) claims, "The 'main line of modern development' Arnold identified in his poetry came to consciousness as the modernist intellectual crisis assumed sharper outline in twentieth-century literature" (p. 2). The shift in emphasis between the moral and the aesthetic and his hope for a new age of imaginative reason comes to light in more recent theories on secular society, particularly the work of the philosopher, Charles Taylor (2007).

I believe his intuitions on the affinity of the moral and the aesthetic that appeals to natural instincts, together with his profound democratic sympathies, constitute the basis of a fuller experience in education and a referendum for reform. Thus I find it surprising that scholars in the field of philosophy of education have been slow to engage with Arnold. In 1998 Routledge published a monumental collection of essays on philosophers of education since Socrates (Rorty). In acknowledgements as editor of the collection, Amelie Rorty remarks that omissions including Montaigne, Bacon, Luther, Durkheim and Arnold were due to a publisher's constraints on the size and scope of its publication. Notwithstanding this acknowledgement that Arnold's works stands with philosophers that were in fact included in the publication, historically the scholarship on Arnold's educational ideas in journals devoted to theoretical and practical work in education has been quite limited. It is my hope that this study will convince my readers to return to search the strands of his thought for continuing cultural relevancy, particularly for liberal arts education. I believe that Pratt is correct: "His inescapable and still unsettled legacy reaches into our future as the work of one of our sovereign educators (2000, p. 18).

Part of my aim is to recast Arnold's legacy for philosophy of education in the tradition of ancient Stoic practices of self-cultivation and show how the tradition relates to modern ideals of German aesthetic education. I do not pretend to be able to "settle" matters on how his work should be considered by new scholarship but I hope that my work will demonstrate the relevance of his thinking to current debates on liberal arts education and invite continued scholarly inquiry into it.

Based on a close reading of many of his essays and lectures I elucidate themes which connect intertextually as a coherent and accessible philosophy of education for democratic societies. I try to explicate concepts that are ambiguous, or no longer convey what I interpret Arnold to mean, conserving much metaphor and poetic allusions that he uses in timeless and refreshing ways. Then I juxtapose a reconstructed body of thought with ancient moralists and modern theorists to address the value of the aesthetic experience to education.

In Chapter Two, I contextualize Arnold's call to culture as a continuing process of self-cultivation in the light of *Bildung* and the ancient perspective of philosophy as a way of life. Drawing upon his best-known text, *Culture and Anarchy*, and several essays on criticism and culture in America, I amplify Arnold's conception of culture. I also explicate key themes in his work in criticism which frame his educational ideal to cultivate the individual by developing a practice of reading "the best which has been thought and said in the world."

The focus of Chapter Three is the standards of literary excellence that Arnold uses to judge what he regards the best, most enduring texts. Part of my aim is to correct impressions that Arnold advocates a fixed canon to support aristocratic ideals, or any ideology, which I argue distorts his legacy. I respond to his critics by explicating his belief that the best literature can disrupt the prejudice of ideology and historical contingency and supply a new spiritual basis to a society. I examine the main elements of literature which Arnold deems the work of creative genius and I clarify the tasks for which he holds

literature responsible in modernity. The literary classic comes into focus as a repository of moral value that obtain in the conditions of the aesthetic experience.

Then Chapter Four recontextualizes the perception of literature as pedagogy that teaches the wisdom to see things the way they really are, as true science. I try to illuminate the reader's involvement with literature and the unifying and reconciling powers of aesthetic phenomena. And I try to show how literature as a pedagogy of reflection can reveal a better condition of life from which our culture is alienated. I also consider Arnold's new aesthetic criteria in relation to other ancient and modern moral theory and its standing in relation to the free use of reason. Finally, I follow the path of theoretical scholarship that parallels Arnold's work in order to bring his legacy into better focus in relation to his contemporaries and the heirs to his thinking.

My conclusions in Chapter Five put Arnold together with modern cultural and educational theorists on what I consider the most urgent issues of late modernity. Against forces that degrade the human condition and threaten the future of society, Arnold's project for education stands as a beacon that lights the way towards a better intellectual and moral orientation of the individual and society in the world. I relate the wisdom of Arnold's aesthetic education to current reform theories and developments in American colleges and universities. Then the evidence of a utopian function to aesthetic education comes into focus.

Chapter Two

A Call to Culture

*Remember that it is no chance matter that
we are discussing, but how one should live.*
Plato, Republic, 352d

In Arnold's day the idea of democracy was seriously questioned and fiercely debated among educated people. Arnold conceived of democracy anthropogenically¹ as a force behind the continuous march of mankind; and he was critical of illiberal opinions that would retard its growth. Many critics considered it a potential threat to humanity. On both sides of the Atlantic, Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* provoked controversy over the notion of the tyranny of a democratic majority and the question of individual liberty of "equal men who revolve on themselves without repose, procuring the small and vulgar pleasures with which they fill their souls. Each of them, withdrawn and apart, is like a stranger to the destiny of all the others" (2000, p. 663). In like ways, Mill's *On Liberty* fueled the debates with popular libertarian ideals with which Mill proposed to protect

¹ anthropogenic: 1889, from anthropogeny (1839), from Gk. *anthropogeneia, from anthropogenes "born of man," from anthropo- + genes (see genus).

individual liberty from the tyranny of the majority. More than political ideals was at stake in the cross currents of that period.

At the same time scientific discoveries, especially Darwin's radical research, destabilized the authority of received tradition. A flood tide of secularism casts long-held religious ideals in suspicious light. This had the effect of unmooring the lives of individuals and the moral balance, as it was, of society. Industrialism swept through the western world creating new paths to power and wealth and radically new relations among people. These disruptive political and social currents, which Arnold observed in England and America, motivated Arnold's most enduring work in education and criticism. His thinking anticipated the Protestant ethic thesis that Max Weber made popular in the early twentieth century. Is human existence not degraded in modernity where work and wealth are valued as the end goals of life's pursuits?

Arnold wondered, too, what authoritative register would measure value in the new societies? Aristocratic governing bodies had set and enforced the standards for relations among men but now these gave way to democratic criterion. Where a new creed of work and wealth triumphs over simpler human associations and ancient gods, what is the effect on the character of man? What movement of mind accompanies the worship of power and technology? Arnold observed the English and Anglo/American cultures of his day and it seemed to him that the price of the progress of industry was the soul of humanity. Lionel Trilling articulates the modern cultural phenomenon that was a topic for Arnold and other literary figures of the time:

Men began to recognize the existence of prisons that were not built of stone, or even of social restrictions and economic disabilities. They learned to see that they

might be immured not only by the overt force of society but also by a coercion in some ways more frightful because it involved their own acquiescence. The newly conceived coercive force required of each prisoner that he sign his own *letter de cachet*, for it had established its prisons in the family life, in the professions, in the image of respectability, in the ideas of faith and duty, in (so the poets said) the very language itself. The modern self ... was born in a prison. (1950, p. xii)

Arnold envisioned a model of public education grounded upon his hope of redeeming the dignity of individuals and society through the active power of culture. In his essay, “A French Eton,” he wrote, “Human dignity needs almost as much care as human sensibility. First, undoubtedly, you must make men feeling; but the moment you have done that, you must lose no time in making them magnanimous” (*Complete Prose Works* VIII, p. 292).² He called himself “a liberal of the future” and was reconciled to the reality that cultural transformation takes generations. But his writing conveys patience and optimism for a spiritual renewal and a new epoch of progress in the future of humanity.

The enduring value of his work rests in its contribution to the millennia-old tradition of self-cultivation. Arnold’s classical education initiated him into this tradition and his profound respect for the dignity of human life called him to advocate it.³ Hadot echoes Arnold’s philosophy:

[T]he normal, natural state of men should be wisdom, for wisdom is nothing more than the vision of things as they are, the vision of the cosmos as it is in the light of reason, and wisdom is also nothing more than the mode of being and living that should correspond to this vision. (2006, p. 58)

² Hereafter, citations from *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold* will be referenced with *CPW*, then volume and page number.

³ This tradition is also known as Wisdom Philosophy or, as Pierre Hadot introduced it to modern scholarship, “Philosophy as a Way of Life” (1995).

This tradition of self-cultivation reflects the strong influence of the German tradition of *Bildung*, particularly the writings of Schiller and Goethe.⁴ But Arnold offers his own brand of *Bildung*, which bears the distinct imprint of his English upbringing and his deep democratic sympathies. His organic view of democracy bridges humanistic tradition with newer humanitarian ideas. It is not exclusively self-regarding like the earlier German tradition that Thomas Mann describes:

The inwardness, the culture [‘*Bildung*’] of a German implies introspectiveness; an individualistic cultural conscience; consideration for the careful tending, the shaping, deepening and perfecting of one’s own personality or, in religious terms, for the salvation and justification of one’s own life; subjectivism in the things of the mind, therefore, a type of culture that might be called pietistic.... one in which the world of the *objective*, the political world, is felt to be profane and is thrust aside with indifference, ‘because’, as Luther says, ‘this external order is of no consequence.’ (as cited in Bruford, 1975, p. vii)

The call to culture in Arnold’s view answers a natural instinct that reconciles human freedom with the material world. His concept of *Bildung* is egalitarian rather than elitist. Schopenhauer and Nietzsche espouse a more radically individualistic doctrine in which the highest and most lasting pleasures of the mind are the exclusive reserve of a small minority of the population. Human freedom belongs to the rare genius that stands aloof from the world. By contrast, Arnold conceives of a salvation which liberates the masses. “The beloved friends of humanity have been those who made it feel its ideal to be in the things of the mind and spirit, to be in an internal condition separable from wealth and accessible to all” (*CPW* II, p. 322). German indifference to politics and the material world develops into a notion of critical distance and impartiality in Arnold’s view, subjecting habit to

⁴ See DeLaura (1988) and Lovlie, Mortensen, & Nordenbo (2002).

pragmatic scrutiny and change. An aesthetic appeal to natural human instincts anticipates a harmonious balance between industry and its promise of material advantages and the inward pleasures of the mind as education becomes available to all.

His radical and highly debated views on democracy beckon us to reevaluate our understanding of it in relation to our personal lives and the historical life of civilization.⁵ His writings on these subjects and his claims regarding the interventionist and educative value of literature, which are the focus of my work here, cannot be fully appreciated without understanding key themes of his social and political thought. Thus before considering Arnold's aesthetic pedagogy I will offer in this chapter a brief expository review of his most popular text, *Culture and Anarchy*. The purpose of this review is to orient readers to a perspective of democracy that is significantly more than merely an organizing concept in political theory. In addition, I will rely upon his lectures to explicate his understanding of the modern human condition, his assessment of which shapes his educational philosophy. I will make connections between these published lectures ("The Functioning of Criticism," "Schools and Universities on the Continent," "A French Eton," "Democracy, Equality and Numbers") to further explicate the background to his thinking on the condition of man in modernity, his assessment of which shapes his educational philosophy. I hope that my effort to condense the enormity of his thoughts on the progress of culture into a single chapter here will not leave my readers unconvinced about Arnold's expectations for culture to enlarge the individual self-image, and to restore modern men and women to a fuller life in society. I hope to provide a sufficient overview of his

⁵ See Novak (2002a). This work provides a more comprehensive historical context for Arnold's work and a cultural historical perspective of Anglo/American democracy.

thinking to frame the important focus I want to bring to Arnold's ideas on literature as a means, a technology of self-cultivation.

Culture and Anarchy

Arnold's best-known series of essays, published in book form in 1869 as *Culture and Anarchy*, responds to conditions in England and America when it was published. It is however more prophetic than historical and rooted in timeless and universal questions of human flourishing. The subtitle, "An Essay in Political and Social Criticism," indicates that Arnold pulled together many strands of his writing on literature, religion, and cultural and literary criticism into a single text that would embody the most important themes of his life's work. But *Culture and Anarchy* is not political theory per se. To read it as such risks missing the subtle strands of profoundly deeper thought on the life of human civilization.

The book was originally intended for a popular audience which had limited or no exposure to cultural ideas through formal education. The majority of his intended readers depended upon newspapers and other popular media for most of their information about political and social issues. In common vernacular Arnold attempts to explain the existential imperative that connects many of his other essays and lectures in a register that received much attention and much criticism. In often preachy, sometimes shrill, and occasionally sarcastic tones, but also with a few surprising, well-placed flourishes of humor, Arnold addresses his public on the most serious topics of human existence. His reading public includes his critics, political and religious leaders who he names directly and speaks to in a kind of running correspondence throughout the text. His preachy tones seem intended to

unsettle his readers and arouse interest and emotions about ideas for which they have limited intellectual background.

Following his arguments requires some investigation of words in common usage. For instance, he reframes popular notions of curiosity to introduce the ground of scientific passion, an intellectual gateway to the effort to see things as they really are. Arnold wants to convert the public fascination with science by opening its intellectual horizons to matters of human nature and human experience. He insists that to do so, one must be able to see beyond the *machinery* of modern life to the end for which machinery is valuable. Machinery here is synonymous with technology or any system such as work and wealth, industry and politics that is a means to something else. Machinery, he insists has come to be regarded as an end in itself and, pursuing it for its own sake, we exaggerate its importance.

Faith in machinery is ... our besetting danger; often in machinery most absurdly disproportioned to the end which this machinery, if it is to do any good at all, is to serve; but always in machinery, as if it had a value in and for itself. What is freedom but machinery? What is population but machinery? What is coal but machinery? What are railroads but machinery? What is wealth but machinery? What are religious organizations but machinery? (*CPW V*, p. 96)

Arnold aspires to a secure faith in *culture* that would radically reorient our experience of life. People of culture are called to revalue machinery including *freedom* as the means to improve oneself and the general human condition. Culture, by its “single- minded love of perfection” reveals the essential character of human nature which “follows one law with poetry.” Herein is the central theme of the text, that culture elevates reason and natural law over the unexamined operations of human expedience. In his view culture is a process originating as an inward spiritual activity that ascends to sweetness or beauty and

intellectual light and leads to fuller life in sympathy with others. It overcomes stock notions and mechanical actions to discover an intelligible, “steady law of things.”

Culture connects metaphysically to a law beyond *physis* or science.

Now, the [ordinary self’s] great defect being a defect in delicacy of perception, to cultivate in him this delicacy, to render it independent of external and mechanical rule, and a law to itself, is what seems to make most for his perfection, his true humanity. (*CPW V*, p. 92)

Delicacy of perception is needed to penetrate habits of mind degraded by materiality and a loss of connection to forces that carry mankind forward in its evolution. It takes delicacy of perception to see a larger spectacle of life and reorder man’s place in the cosmos; this larger view brings him to reorient his moral basis in the course of human history. Thus the spiritual practice Arnold has in mind requires seeing things differently, a refined perception that sees *more*.

The power which aims at moral perfection in Arnold’s view cannot be satisfied with relative moral perfection which confuses the activity of doing as one likes with the results of the activity. Arnold takes aim at Mill’s concept of individual liberty as a political end. He is more interested in what we may do when we are free to do what we like; he insists that personal liberty must be subordinated to right reason. Moreover, individual perfection cannot be achieved without a general perfection. On the premise that we are alienated from one another in our everyday selves, separate, personal, at war, he argues we are only safe from one another’s tyranny when no one has any power. But by extension, that security cannot save us from anarchy, the great threat to culture (*CPW V*, p. 134). His educational ideal is the perfection of the individual; the process of the cultivation of the individual ultimately leads outward to humanity. By our best self he says that we are

united in harmony with the rest of humanity. The idea of the expansion of our humanity as individuals and members of “one great whole” aligns ethical and moral aims, externalizing the process of perfection.

Greatness, he asserts is a spiritual ideal arrived at through habits of mind that cultivate a continuous expansion of wisdom and beauty. He rehearses again and again the meaning of culture as the pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know the best which has been thought and said in the world. He eschews denotation of culture as anything highbrow or bookish or any connotation of what is fashionable. Yet somewhat paradoxically he asserts repeatedly that *culture depends on reading, observing and thinking* and rests on authority therein. The point is that it matters a great deal *what* one reads. This important secondary theme of the book, germane to the current study, is that culture originates in an aesthetic practice of reading the best ideas that mankind has generated, reflecting on those ideas and observing their relevance to one’s personal life. The proposition that *ideas* in literature and aesthetic phenomena implicitly teach wisdom and beauty contained here weaves together much of Arnold’s writing. Literature provides a glimpse of efflorescence, what might be attainable as a result of a new perspective on the present life. Readers are drawn to the light of culture and refined perception through a literary practice that expands consciousness.

Lionel Trilling’s (1972) valuable insights remind us of how Arnold and his educated contemporaries viewed the mind and the power of ideas. The belief “that what mind might encompass of knowledge of the physical universe has a direct bearing upon the

quality of human existence” (p. 6) became an intellectual touchstone of the age. Trilling also explains the concept of mind that influenced Arnold’s generation:

What mind is, and what it should be, and what part it ought to play in human existence became an issue of public policy at least as early as the eighteenth century. If we regard the history of Europe between the Puritan revolution of the seventeenth century in England and the yet more drastic revolution in France at the end of the eighteenth century, we cannot fail to be aware of a new element in the life of mankind – the ever-growing power of ideas. (pp. 10-11)

Trilling credits the Romantics for insisting that feeling, imagination and will were integral to a proper conception of mind and that its powers grew from their development more than from the mind’s powers of analysis and abstraction (1972, p. 12). Beyond merely scientific reasoning, ideas such as democracy and equality, thought about imaginatively, could stir a movement of mind and thus a movement of society. In this emphasis on feeling and imagination Arnold is firmly aligned with the Romantic tradition. His philosophical orientation anticipates the twentieth century antagonism between (materialist) analytic philosophy and (idealist) non-analytic philosophy.

An older derivation motivates Arnold to preach the power of ideas associated with the inward activity of the mind which ideas nurture. In the light of ancient philosophy the force of ideas sets the foundation of a metaphysics that frees us from boundaries of historical contingency and opens us to a deeper understanding of the present. I will address these big ideas in subsequent chapters.

Students of Arnold must look to other essays and lectures to discover more about how he wants us to read to cultivate the self, what he wants us to read, and why. The primary focus of *Culture and Anarchy* is to call attention to the need for the practice of self-cultivation by creating doubt about the sufficiency of the materialism of the existing

culture. Arnold calls his readers to take stock of their habits in the light of his critical focus, to look inside themselves and to consider what it could mean to re-orient one's life to wisdom and beauty. Indeed, he begins the book by writing "the speech most proper, at present, for a man of culture to make to a body of his fellow-countrymen ... is Socrates': Know thyself!"

Arnold dissects his contemporary, classed society to reveal ordinary characteristics and generalized class habits,⁶ exhorting his readers to consider a common basis of human nature and find in themselves attributes of each segment of the population. Separately, each segment is incomplete, wanting a common element. Arnold's conviction is that that which is common to our nature is drawn to find the best self and this common trait tends to make one's distinguishing characteristic one's humane spirit. He asks his readers to consider a radical change in the measure of their self-esteem and public regard from material *having* and *resting* to *growing* and *becoming* a collective whole in this humane spirit, which will not suffer "one member to be indifferent to the rest." (*CPW V*, p. 94) I pause at these words and wonder if today Arnold's ideas would need a wholly new lexicon to penetrate the minds of a population ever more defined by individuality and the measure

⁶ On the aristocracy: "The Barbarians brought with them that staunch individualism... and that passion for the assertion of personal liberty... Only all this culture of the Barbarians was an exterior culture mainly: it consisted principally in outward gifts and graces, in looks, manners, accomplishments, prowess; the chief inward gifts which had part in it were the most exterior, so to speak of the inward gifts, those which come nearest to outward ones; they were courage, a high spirit, self-confidence. Far within, and unawakened, lay a whole range of powers of thought and feeling" (*CPW V*, pp. 140-41).

On the middle-class: "Philistine gives the notion of something particularly stiff-necked and perverse in the resistance to light.... and therein it specifically suits our middle-class, who not only do not pursue sweetness and light, but who prefer to them that sort of machinery of business, chapels, tea meetings... which make up (a) dismal and illiberal life..." (p. 140).

On the lower-class: "part of the working class is ... one in spirit with the industrial middle-class.... a great working-class power.... but the vast majority... has long lain half-hidden amidst its poverty and squalor – to this vast residuum we may with great propriety give the name of Populace" (p. 143).

of one's ability to acquire and conform to the mechanistic pulse of production and consumption.

Observing the English Victorian middle class in an earlier essay he finds them with a spirit not very open to new ideas, and not easily ravished by them; not, therefore, a great enthusiast for universal progress, but with a strong love of discipline and order, - that is, of keeping things settled, and much as they are; and with a disposition, instead of lending himself to the onward-looking statesman and legislator, to act with bodies of men of his own kind, whose aims and efforts reach no further than his own. (*CPW* II, p. 307)

The American society that he observed first-hand seems to him to exhibit these inherited characteristics in exaggerated form. With less of the diversifying traits of the English lower and upper classes, Americans' middle class aspirations for wealth and power appear to him as fetishes; satisfied with Philistinism they seem to acknowledge scant authority greater than the interests of "ordinary selves." Where public media is the primary source of information on social and political matters and with no other guide to right reason and human betterment, it is easy to be satisfied with ordinary habits and lesser ideals. Prophetic of a future in which media will monopolize new ideas, Arnold calls a self-satisfied society to grow in wisdom and beauty and thus transform itself. Arnold's analysis adduces the authority of right reason and the best ideas, a topic discussed more thoroughly in subsequent chapters.

Two chapters of *Culture and Anarchy* are devoted to another important theme that we find in several essays, the rival forces of *doing* and *thinking*. Arnold traces religious and cultural influences throughout human history and shines a studied light on the modern condition. Consistent with contemporary Western terminology, he describes the two points of influence between which one can follow the history of the movement of man's

habits of mind and spiritual disciplines as *Hebraism* and *Hellenism*. Hebraism evokes an energy driving at practice, a paramount sense of the obligation of duty, self-control and work and an earnest reliance on the best light available. He regards the opposing force of Hellenism as the intelligence driving at ideas that are the basis of moral practice and the sense for the development of practice and its changes and the impulse to know and adjust them harmoniously (*CPW V*, p. 163). While the ultimate aim of both forces is man's perfection or salvation, they differ measurably in how the goal is pursued. His analysis also points to the related idea of sin and the difference in attitudes towards it: the Greek quarrel with man's physical appetites is that they hinder right thinking but for the Hebrews, physical appetites hinder right acting. The progress of civilization depends on balancing these forces.

Arnold's scrutiny yields a variety of distinctions between Hebraism and Hellenism and, relying again on rhetorical repetition, he tries to infuse these ideas in the minds of his readers. To wit: The most important idea of the Greek force is to see things as they really are; the main idea of the Hebrew and later Christian force is conduct and obedience. Hellenism follows the whole play of a universal order, careful not to miss any part of it or to sacrifice one part to another; Hebraism seizes upon certain plain, capital intimations of the universal order and remains focused intensely on the study and observance of them. In terms familiar to readers of his other essays, Hellenism is characterized by spontaneity of consciousness and Hebraism by strictness of conscience (*CPW V*, p. 163). The spirit of Hellenism as the means of restoring equipoise functions as intervention.

To get rid of one's ignorance, to see things as they are, and by seeing them as they are to see them in their beauty, is the simple and attractive ideal which Hellenism

holds out before human nature; and from the simplicity and charm of this ideal, Hellenism and human life in the hands of Hellenism, is invested with a kind of aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy; they are full of what we call sweetness and light. (*CPW V*, p. 167)

His account of how we arrived in our modern condition follows that of other historians and cultural thinkers who have looked at the dialectical movement between faith and reason since ancient times. The movements follow man's shifting posture towards the world from a natural, liberal pose to one tethered to a dominant ideology.

As one passes and repasses from Hellenism to Hebraism, from Plato to St. Paul, one feels inclined to rub one's eyes and ask oneself whether man is indeed a gentle and simple being, showing the traces of a noble and divine nature; or an unhappy chained captive, labouring with groanings that cannot be uttered to free himself from (sin to which we must die). (*CPW V*, p. 169)

When the unchecked appetites of the ancient Greeks eclipsed their monumental potential for wisdom and beauty the pendulum swung towards strictness of conscience and self-control and Hebraism ascended as the basis of conduct and orientation to the world. On Arnold's read of history, the Christian story of self-sacrifice - by the example of the one ultimate sacrifice - offered the counterforce to rescue men who could deny themselves nothing. The humanist origins of Christian ethics ushered the cultural prosperity of the Renaissance. Then the powerful Puritan influence in the seventeenth century was a reaction to the moral weakness that characterized the later Renaissance.

The Renaissance, that great re-awakening of Hellenism, that irresistible return of humanity to nature and seeing things as they are, which in art, in literature, and in physics, produced such splendid fruits, had, like the anterior Hellenism of the Pagan world, a side of moral weakness, and of relaxation or insensibility of the moral fibre.... and again this loss of spiritual balance, this exclusive preponderance given to man's perceiving and knowing side, this unnatural defect of his feeling and acting side, provoked a reaction. (*CPW V*, p. 173)

To those historians who take Hebraism as the law of human development, Arnold objects that the human spirit flows deeper than its practices; only when the forces of knowing and doing are in balance can we realize our potential for wisdom and beauty. A key thesis, central to his cultural theory, is contained in this account. That is, that we have been progressing toward a harmonious balance between these two cultural forces since the Hebraizing shift of primitive Christianity began over two thousand years ago. But on this view the Puritan influences on modern social and political developments have contravened the natural order. Their menacing mechanistic world-view and lack of humane spirit alienates us from the world and ourselves and sets us at the gates of cultural anarchy. The problem is not merely dehumanizing mechanistic forces but also blindness to our condition and the false view that we control our objective reality. Culture acts as the power of a disinterested play of consciousness upon stock notions and habits, that is, it acts as *criticism* to penetrate impoverished views and restore access to greatness.

In the concluding chapters of *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold considers the dangers of prioritizing the right of doing what one likes and undervaluing right reason as lawful authority. The legacy of Puritanism in this account is that, having conquered a limited part of our nature, we allow unchecked liberty to the remainder. Thus the other aspects of our nature and our potential for greatness are sublimated. We follow canons of “truth” as talismans instead of relying on the light of reason to judge for ourselves. Arnold’s call to culture hinges on an intellectual deliverance that will penetrate the totalizing effects of the habits of unintelligent custom in order to restore our path to human flourishing.

[W]hat we seek is the Philistine’s perfection, the development of his best self, not mere liberty for his ordinary self. And we no more allow absolute validity to his

stock maxim, Liberty is the law of human life, than we allow it to the opposite maxim, which is just as true, Renouncement is the law of human life. For we know that the only perfect freedom is ... an elevation of our best self, and a harmonizing in subordination to this, and to the idea of a perfected humanity, all the ... blind impulses of our ordinary selves. (*CPW* V, p. 173)

Cultural fetishes, pursued mechanically as ends in themselves, totalize the whole of society, its aims and its values. These preoccupations, such as industrialism, free trade and the production of wealth (technological advancement and global capitalism would update the list), operate without thought of their relationship to human life as a whole. The main business of culture he concludes is to create the frame of mind out of which fruitful reforms may grow in time to provide a sounder basis of knowledge on which to act (*CPW* V, pp. 221-225).

Thus the outline of Arnold's educational reforms is drawn but *Culture and Anarchy* leaves us with many questions. How does culture stand in relationship to education? What is the basis of fruitful reforms to secure a sounder basis of knowledge? What conditions would create an educational system that would function as the vehicle for these reforms?

The Progress of Culture

These questions will direct the rest of my study. The beginning of my answer examines Arnold's thinking on the active humanizing power of culture in education. As we have seen in *Culture and Anarchy*, culture promises to suffuse the mind and ennoble the spirit. The aim includes both the highest sense of itself and the sense of a collective whole defined by the virtues of its shared humanity. The promise of democracy is that culture is not an exclusive proposition. Arnold conceives his liberal model of education as the

guarantor of those promises. This sets his philosophy of education apart from earlier theories which conceive of liberal education for only a segment of the population, the elite or the governing classes. It reflects Arnold's deep democratic sympathies and his profound optimism about the future of a global society. Above all, it reflects his faith in *human nature*. He writes in "Schools and Universities on the Continent," "The idea of a general liberal training is, to carry us to a knowledge of ourselves and the world. We are called to this knowledge by special aptitudes which are born within us; the grand thing in teaching is to have faith that some aptitudes of this kind everyone has" (*CPW* IV, p. 300). Belief that everyone is indeed educable is not a given in modern societies. It is contested by some more recent American theories of education that challenge the assumption that all people share fundamental instincts of intellect and knowledge, of beauty, of social life and manners (Nock, 2010). Arnold's faith in human nature and his doctrine of democratic education call us to question whether the aim of today's American schooling reflects a limited vision of humanity and an ignoble view of society.

Arnold calls upon education to humanize men and women in societies where standards of conduct, beauty, and social life are without solid footing in unprecedented social and political order. As populations become participants in the social and political life of their nation, he insists that the most important commitment necessary is for public education to provide the foundations for the growth of humane and democratic spirits through formative knowledge. As his mentor, John Henry Newman taught, growth is the only evidence of life; growth in this view is measured in human, not economic, terms.

Four humanist features anchor his model of education and nourish hopes for the advancement of the whole society towards an ideal of perfection. He sees these features coalescing to exert a powerful influence on the progress of culture in modern polities committed to free public education for all.

1. Education appeals to natural and formative human drives. It aims at humanizing more than individuating the student by shaping the internal formation of the mind and spirit of the individual.
2. In free society, sufficiently large numbers enrolled in public education ensure the depth and scale of cultural transformation.
3. Equal access to fresh ideas and free association to those ideas liberate students from historical contingency and exploitation by utilitarian forces. Access to the best ideas expands critical consciousness. Ideas gain currency.
4. Democratic educational ideals bring students into porous relationships to other peoples' ideas, expanding intellectual horizons and sympathetic spirit.

These features frame Arnold's educational model to cultivate all individuals in society and elevate the intrinsic powers of multitudes. It is a blueprint for liberal education which grounds Arnold's aesthetic pedagogy.

Natural Drives. "Our aristocratical class... (has) no perception of the real wants of the community at home. Our middle classes...have no perception of our real relations to the world abroad...no clue, apparently, for guidance...except the formula of (a) submissive animal" (*CPW*, X, p. 240). This was Arnold's grim assessment of the English population when The Reform Act of 1867 enfranchised the middle class in a democratic reform that

would continue to erode the power of the upper class there. In America, with no aristocracy to slow the progress of the democratic way of life and with the size of the population vastly larger, the advance and scale of the movement was profoundly more conspicuous. Arnold weighed the dangers and the possibilities of the political and social movements that he considered part of an ongoing, natural development in the history of mankind.

In the essay, "Democracy," he disagrees with Tocqueville's disparagement of political equality and also with Mill's recommendations to legislate libertarian modifications of the new order. He asserts that the spirit of democracy is the result of natural and inevitable causes of our human nature "trying to *affirm its own essence*; to live, to enjoy, to possess the world" (*CPW* II, p. 7). Like self-preservation, Arnold could see no force that would alter the course of the powerful drive for equality. In the historical progress of man democracy was thus inevitable. The task of critical observers like him was to inspire a commitment to create circumstances that would encourage the masses to make the best of themselves in this untested social and political order. American democracy and all fledging democracies create their own models of society. In Arnold's view a society that is newly self-governing risks dysfunction by having social equality established before commonly respected standards of living and social life. Tocqueville observed,

I think that in democracies the ambitious are less preoccupied than all others with the interests and judgments of the future: the present moment alone occupies and absorbs them. They finish many undertakings rapidly rather than raise a few long-lasting monuments; they love success much more than glory ... Their mores have almost always been less high than their condition, which very often makes them bring very vulgar tastes to extraordinary fortune, and they seem to raise themselves to sovereign power only to procure small and coarse pleasures more easily. (2000, p. 603)

But the greatest danger Tocqueville warns for the American Republic comes from the omnipotence of the majority.

If ever freedom is lost in America, one will have to blame the omnipotence of the majority that will have brought minorities to despair and have forced them to make an appeal to material force. One will then see anarchy but it will have come as a consequence of despotism. (2000, p. 249)

Arnold insists that the *spirit of society* must be cultivated, elevating genuine equality and bringing people together by the “humanity of their manners.” Then, “The well-being of the many comes out more and more distinctly, in proportion as time goes on, as the object we must pursue.” The power of social life, he writes in “Equality,” is “one of the great elements in our humanization.... No individual life can be truly prosperous, passed ... in the midst of men who suffer.... To the noble soul, it cannot be happy; to the ignoble, it cannot be secure” (*CPW VIII*, pp. 288-89).

Arnold also acknowledges “the certainty that the unsoundness of the majority, if it is not withstood and remedied, must be their ruin” (*CPW X*, p.159). The blind forces of the masses need civilizing in order to create a successfully functioning society of equals, he reasons, with an education that appeals to human instincts, pushing towards an expansion of life (*CPW II*, p. 11). Then, democracy itself would be an active counterforce to the totalizing forces operating in the modern industrial culture which tend to enervate those natural instincts for a more expansive life. And education would operate not merely as a preparation for society and the workforce but importantly as a process of formation of

one's moral consciousness. In his view education, more than politics, would secure the future of democracy.⁷

Scale. Arnold's visits to the new American nation generated concerns about the dangers of a preoccupation with materiality, a life of comfort, and a craving for amusement. But his faith in an education that for the first time in history could reach a sufficient segment of the population convinced him that it could transform society for the common good and make the good prevail.

What one asks oneself is, why the faultier side in the Athenian character... should have finally prevailed rather than the nobler side... One asks oneself whether it is inevitable, then, that the faultier side of national character should be always the one to prevail finally; and whether, therefore, since every national character has its faultier side, the greatness of no great nation can be permanent. And the answer probably is that the greatness cannot be permanent of any nation which is not great by its mere material *numbers* as well as by its qualities ... Now, in a small community like Athens, a community counting its members by thousands instead of by millions, there is not a sufficient recruiting-ground from which to draw ever-fresh supplies of men of the better type, capable of maintaining their country's greatness at a high level permanently, or of bringing it back thereafter it has for a time retrograded owing to faults or misfortunes. (*CPW V*, pp. 291-92; my emphasis added)

In "Numbers" he asserts the magnitude of the population in the American democracy as its great strength. If everything depends upon increasing the size and influence of people who genuinely seek wisdom and justice, as he believes, America was the first fertile ground for the life of culture to nourish the whole of society. Unlike earlier cultures in democratic Athens and in the ancient Hebrew kingdoms, the scale of modern democratic populations can support a mass movement of cultural reform if the political will for liberal education is sufficient.

⁷ See Marcus (1993).

Arnold calls democracy the force in which the actions of a great number of men make up for the weakness of each man taken alone. It accepts a relative rise in men's general condition, obtainable as a result of the concerted actions of a great number, as something desirable in itself. But he warns that this defining good must find its balance between a strong self-reliant people bent on individual achievement in competition with each other and mutual cooperation that acquiesces to second-rate ideals (*CPW* II, p. 13). For a self-reliant people to aspire to more than a "middling good" and to work in concert for a general good requires an education which acknowledges and commits itself to that balance. But the force of the magnitude of a new democracy is both its true promise and its great danger. If a materialized multitude, satisfied with mediocrity, prevails then the democracy will perish as the ancient empires did. One need not look further than our own acquisitive society to observe the degenerative effects of corrupt financial manipulation and greed. Arnold's answer to save it from the fate of earlier empires is to morally fortify individuals through the elevating powers of worthy ideas.

Ideas, New Ideas, and the Progress of Mankind. Arnold has faith in the possibility of a future movement away from the "closed and bounded intellectual horizon" of the modern era towards a new epoch of expansion, a time "of faith and ardour... when the intellectual horizon is opening and widening all around us" (*CPW* V, p. 92). Its progress depends upon the inward operation of fresh thoughts in free play with the best ideas which have been thought and said.

Ideas, their force, their truth, their universality.... Ideas cannot be too much prized in and for themselves, cannot be too much lived with. There is the world of ideas and there is the world of practice ... neither is to be suppressed. (*CPW* III, p. 265)

The essay “Democracy” connects the concept of cultivation of the inner self with the love of ideas. Arnold called his contemporaries to consider the revolutionary wisdom from France, then “the lode-star of Continental democracy” so that new ideas might fertilize older tradition and raise the trajectory of the progress of the society. The best that has been thought and said in the world is also a forward looking perspective on knowledge that comes from new ways of seeing the world. His doctrine eschews insularity, casting a critical eye on provincialism and any manifestation of inflexible thinking that would lead a person to act in accordance with unquestioned principles. This is also the central theme of his highly regarded essay, “The Function of Criticism.”

The notion of a free play of the mind upon all subjects being a pleasure in itself, being an object of desire, being an essential provider of elements without which a nation’s spirit ... must, in the long run, die of inanition... It is noticeable that the word *curiosity*, which in other languages is used in a good sense, to mean, as a high and fine quality of man’s nature, just this disinterested love of a free play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake ... has in our language no sense of the kind... But criticism, real criticism, is essentially the exercise of this very quality. It obeys an instinct prompting it to try to know the best that is known and thought in the world, irrespectively of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever. (*CPW* III, p. 268)

Arnold’s Hellenic ideal is not only associated with openness but also with the active virtue of curiosity and a passion for inquiry. A love of ideas would thus subject any kind of tutelage to questioning and thereby expand the intellectual borders of knowledge. Recent scholarship on cosmopolitanism and the cultivation of detachment places Arnold in the tradition of cosmopolitanism based on these views which subject stock notions, custom and habits of mind to the scrutiny of objectivity, critical reason and aesthetic free play (Anderson, 2001, p. 97). But how do the best ideas *prevail*?

High Ideals.

Nations are not truly great solely because the individuals composing them are numerous, free, and active: but they are great when these numbers, this freedom, and this activity are employed in the service of an ideal higher than that of the ordinary man, taken by himself. (*CPW II*, p. 18)

In Victorian England, as in most of man's history, the elite class supplied standards for the common man. What would supply the new democracy with adequate ideals that would secure a collective dignity and greatness? How could the minds and spirits of the mass of people be raised to the highest sense of itself and avoid the dangers of the power of an unguided multitude? "All the liberty and industry in the world will not ensure ... high reason and a fine culture," Arnold asserted. "In modern epochs the part of a high reason, of ideas, acquires constantly increasing importance in the conduct of the world's affairs" (*CPW II*, p. 24).

Arnold believed the injustice of the older order of the English aristocracy was in its denial of an obligation to the masses to attend to the spirit of the individuals and thus to raise the crowd up in its own desires. The chance for new democracies is to be elevated in a way that it can be admired as a model which would reinforce its merits. Expanding and elevating the moral consciousness of its individuals heightens the image of the whole of society. Thus the new order can become worthy of being followed; a *noblesse oblige* of a new order (*CPW II*, p. 14). Then individuals who comprise it would naturally be inclined to protect their culture and its power would be generally enhanced. Integration of a people at a social level would thus have far reaching effects at a political level (p. 14).

In “Democracy” he reverts to the subject of an earlier lecture, “On the Modern Element in Literature,” evoking the ideal of the spectacle of another epoch when culture elevated the intellectual life of the society, its arts, its politics, and its sciences.

The most interesting, the most truly glorious peoples, are those in which the alliance of (culture and character) has been effected most successfully, and its results spread most widely. This is why the spectacle of ancient Athens has such profound interest for a rational man; that it is the spectacle of the culture of a *people*. It is not an aristocracy, leavening with its own high spirit the multitude which it wields, but leaving it the unformed multitude still; it is not a democracy, acute and energetic, but tasteless, narrow-minded, and ignoble; it is the middle and lower classes in the highest development of their humanity that these classes have yet reached. It was the *many* who relished those arts, who were not satisfied with less than those monuments. (*CPW* II, p. 25)

Another profoundly prophetic assertion in that essay demands national self-examination by all modern States: “character without culture (for men and nations) is ... something raw, blind, and dangerous” (p. 25).

Conclusion

I have tried to outline how Arnold’s response to the challenge of the modern human condition motivated his work in education and cultural criticism. Ideas for Arnold are the lifeblood of civilization, and he tries to float his ideas on a stream of interests found in the texts I have drawn upon here. He wants the stiff-necked Philistines to gain buoyancy as well, supported by heroic intellectual curiosity so that old habits of mind give way to a more flexible, critical consciousness. Then reason carried higher by feeling and imagination can be relied upon as the basis of moral practice.

His conception of culture is one of active interventionism, standing against atomizing forces that dehumanize individuals in modern society. But on this view *culture*

is a technology of the spirit more than a political tool. His conception of democracy as a natural human drive shapes his social and political outlook and inspires his aspirations for the restoration of human dignity and an ideal of perfection for humanity. In response to the process of secularization, Arnold preaches a gospel of perfection for a secular faith in culture.

His project for education is based on a practice of self-cultivation in the long tradition of wisdom philosophy that brings a free play of the mind to objective reality. It aims at autonomy at a social and political level but moreover, as the following chapters should make evident, his project elevates human freedom to a much higher plane. Public education based on formative knowledge would subjugate instrumental knowledge and vocational training to a literary pedagogy that satisfies common instincts in human nature. I hope to reaffirm the remarks of H. R. Super, the editor of Arnold's collected works, "Matthew Arnold was an educator in the true sense of the word. Watching Democracy breed self-satisfied Philistines, he realized that not all the liberty and industry in the world would insure the rule of right reason. If we are to survive, he said, we must seize on the best and make it prevail. The fate of civilization depends on our schools" (*CPW* II, cover).

Is the best that has been thought and said in the world adequate pedagogy to restore consciousness of an unmediated world in concert with the one law with poetry? If as Arnold believes, great literature can instill a delicacy of perception to see life steadily and to see it whole then there may be reason for optimism. In the next chapter I consider Arnold's aesthetic criteria for the best ideas and the most uplifting literature mankind has produced.

But be his

*My special thanks, whose even-balanc'd soul,
From first youth tested up to extreme old age,
Business could not make dull, nor Passion wild:
Who saw life steadily, and saw it whole:
The mellow glory of the Attic stage;
Singer of sweet Colonus, and its child.⁸*

From Arnold's *To A Friend*, 1849 (1909, p. 40)

⁸ In this sonnet Arnold praises Homer, Epictetus and Sophocles. To see life steadily and see it whole would become a maxim for John Henry Newman.

Chapter Three

Literary Excellence

*Nor love thy life, nor hate; but, what thou liv'st,
Live well; how long or short permit to heaven.*

Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Matthew Arnold writes a great deal about what he considers the best, most enduring works of literature, its style and composition, and the elements that make it prevail as what we refer to as classic. In numerous essays, most notably, “Preface to the First Edition of Poems,” “On the Modern Element in Literature,” “Preface to the Second Edition of Poems,” “The Study of Poetry,” and “On the Study of Celtic Literature,” he defines the idea of aesthetic excellence in literature. In his critical works “Marcus Aurelius,” “Milton,” “Dante,” “Count Leo Tolstoi,” “Wordsworth,” and others we have examples of his literary ideal. I use this chapter to pull together Arnold’s ideas on the best that has been thought and said in the world in order to frame what he suggests reading and contemplating for the inward development of the individual. I hope it will refocus Arnold’s readers’ attention towards conceptual standards for literary excellence and away from the notion of a fixed canon of literary work, which I assert is inconsistent with Arnold’s

project. What I hope to make evident are standards of literary criticism that apply equally to ancient and modern texts with which he was familiar, as well as to texts he had not read, and literature published after his time. Arnold's idea of classic literature is fluid and evolving based on a standard of excellence which is not partial to any particular tradition. While my primary aim is to recommend his literary ideal, to which end I try to explicate his instincts and intuitions as well as his studied criticism, I do not mute my own voice where it may add emphasis or update his.

We know from the last chapter essentially *why* he recommends reading, that is, to elevate the reader's experience of humanity; and the following chapter will explore in more detail Arnold's thinking on the experience of reading as an aesthetic phenomenon. But first I want to focus on his views about the aesthetic object which prevails as a literary classic. In his work in literary criticism Arnold shows that the best that has been thought and said educes wisdom and beauty and thereby teaches us how to live in the world. And by its conciliatory powers it affirms the integrity of the individual in a world experienced as fragmented.

Arnold's expectations for excellent poetry and literature (I will use these terms interchangeably as he does) relate to the work's intellectual clarity, which because of the art of its creator uniquely penetrates the minds of its readers with *ideas* that inspire the most beautiful and profound elements of human nature. The *effect* of the art upon its readers completes the creative process and makes the difference between merely good and excellent literature. Arnold indicates that difference, referring to the shortcomings of two of his notable poems, he asks,

but what does it *do* for you? Homer *animates* – Shakespeare *animates* – in its poor way I think ‘Sorab and Rustom’ *animates* – the ‘Gipsy Scholar’ at its best awakens a pleasing melancholy. But this is not what we want.

The complaining millions of men
Darken in labour and pain –
what they want is something to *animate* and *ennoble* them – not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dreams. (Lang 1996, I, p. 282)

He blames the melancholy of his own nature for the failure of his poetry but that failure can be seen to extend to Victorian literature generally. Victorian nostalgia cannot adequately stir a reader’s mind to self-discovery as Arnold expects of the best literature. He wants literature to open new perspectives to seeing the way to a fuller existence. More than merely visionary, the best literature is a dynamic education on how to live life. It is an authoritative register of individual and collective dignity and greatness. The best that has been thought and said *edifies*. I draw upon some specific literary examples to try to make evident how literature edifies. Then I relate the evidence to Arnold’s more abstract doctrine on the literary ideal.

Artistic Genius and Ideas that Turn the Mind

While he describes literary excellence in many of his essays on literary criticism, I find Arnold’s remarks on particular writers and particular works extremely helpful for an understanding of his literary ideal. For example, of Milton and *Paradise Lost* he says that the soul of his power of poetry at its best resides chiefly in “the refining and *elevation wrought in us* by the high and rare excellence of the great *style*” (*CPW* XI, p. 331, my italics). Milton brilliantly manages the subject matter of his Puritan epic and the

architectonics⁹ of the poem are powerful, but in Arnold's estimation it is the effect that the poem has on us that is its certain distinction. And while we may not be able to state what affects us in the poem, that it affects us is clear. Arnold likens Milton's style to Pindar, Virgil, and Dante, a style which has received "peculiar kneading, heightening and recasting...which seems to have for its cause a certain pressure of emotion, and an ever-surging, yet bridled, excitement in the poet" (*CPW V*, p. 362). He extols this special intensity that the poet delivers as masterpieces of poetic simplicity. He regards Shakespeare as a master of this poetic style asserting the playwright's "instinctive impulse" towards style that was the basis of extraordinary beauty of expression, "unsurpassable for its effectiveness and charm" (*CPW V*, p. 364). The effect of the style is to penetrate, refine and elevate our humanity by the excellence of the art.

Arnold also places Tolstoy's work in that rare realm of literary excellence. He suggests that we take the story of *Anna Karenina* as "a piece of life" more than a work of art. He writes,

Things and characters go as nature takes them, and the author is absorbed in seeing how nature takes them and in relating it. But we have here a condition of things which is highly favourable to the production of good literature, of good art. We have great *sensitiveness, subtlety, and finesse*, addressing themselves with entire *disinterestedness* and *simplicity* to the representation of human life. The Russian novelist is thus master of a spell to which the secrets of human nature – both what is external and what is internal, gesture and manner no less than thought and feeling – willingly make themselves known. (*CPW XI*, p. 284; my italics)

Arnold credits Tolstoy's sensitiveness, subtlety and finesse, what he later refers to as "delicacy of perception" (*CPW V*, p. 92) and his fidelity to it for his genius. Tolstoy's art works to give his readers the reality of Anna's world. There we encounter the most genuine

⁹ Arnold uses the term to indicate the structural harmony of a poem as between expression and action.

of personages, together with their pleasures and pains, their observations and reflections which are not merely believable but vividly familiar and their conduct, noble and ignoble, entirely natural, genuinely *human*. Even what is painful or unpleasant in this world is entirely natural and untainted with “lubricity” that Arnold finds “trouble the senses” in many modern novels (CPW XI, p. 292). Levin’s spiritual development (which Arnold asserts mirrors Tolstoy’s own) is triggered by self-conscious, critical reflection on an idea expressed by one of his peasants, ‘living for his soul; living by the rule of God, of the truth’ (CPW XI, p. 294). Under the spell that Tolstoy casts, the secrets of human nature emerge – ‘make themselves willingly known’ - including those most inward, intimate movements of the mind and spirit which give meaning to one’s existence. Levin finds freedom:

‘But my inner life has won its liberty; it will no longer be at the mercy of events, and every minute of my existence will have a meaning sure and profound which it will be in my power to impress on every single one of my actions, that of *being good*.’ (CPW XI, p. 295)

Anna Karenina is an excellent example of the uncommon master craft that Arnold wants to set the standard for literature. Readers experience a messy and complex world of Tolstoy’s creation, including intimate inward experiences and external displays of its personages. They share the knowledge of a profound spiritual turning and attainment of moral confidence and spiritual constancy that Levin undergoes. The ‘piece of life’ in the aesthetic moment attains immediacy in our own progress in living with the same emotional power of real-world experience. This is because the ideas the story turns on – expressed as intimate human perspectives, ethical struggles, and personal reflections – engage our sympathies as convincing moral ideas. They relate to timeless human concerns to which

every reader may relate and by the creative power of the author become a thing of captivating beauty. The ideal of beauty as perfection is “in a word, only truth seen from another side” (*CPW III*, 290). Thus ideas in the mind of a reader have a vital force, a certainty that has the “semblance of experience” evocative of Schiller’s “beautiful illusion.”

Arnold refers to this experience in one of his best-known essays, “The Function of Criticism:”

[I]n the Greece of Pindar and Sophocles, in the England of Shakespeare, the poet lived in a current of ideas in the highest degree animating and nourishing to the creative power; society was, in the fullest measure, permeated by fresh thought, intelligent and alive. And this state of things is the true basis for the creative power’s exercise, in this it finds its data, its materials, truly ready for its hand; all the books and reading in the world are only valuable as they are helps to this. Even when this does not actually exist, books and reading may enable a man to construct a kind of semblance of it in his own mind, a world of knowledge and intelligence in which he may live and work. This is by no means equivalent to the artist for the nationally diffused life and thought of the epochs of Sophocles or Shakespeare; but, besides that it may be a means of preparation for such epochs, it does really constitute, if many share in it, a quickening and sustaining atmosphere of great value.” (*CPW III*, p. 263)

Arnold has confidence in the normative value of ideas in poetry. Preparing the mind for new possibilities initiates personal growth in the individual and a sustaining atmosphere, widely experienced as valuable, can shape the flow of life in society. Thus literature becomes culturally productive.

We learn more about moral ideas from his critical essay, “Wordsworth.” In praise of what he regards as Wordsworth’s poetic superiority, he asserts its distinctive character and greatness is the result of its application of ideas to its subject. Conditioned by the laws of poetic beauty, Wordsworth’s art applies *moral* ideas to his poetic subject, that is, ideas

‘On man, on nature, and on human life.’¹⁰ As Arnold sees it, moral refers to nothing idealistic or didactic; it means no more and no less than how one chooses to live in relation to the world and to others in it. He writes,

If it is said that to call these ideas *moral* ideas is to introduce a strong and injurious limitation, I answer that it is to do nothing of the kind, because moral ideas are really so main a part of life. The question, *how to live*, is itself a moral idea; and it is the question which most interests every man, and with which, in some way or other, he is perpetually occupied. A large sense is of course to be given to the term *moral*. Whatever bears upon the question, ‘how to live,’ comes under it. (*CPW IX*, p. 45)

As Arnold employs the term, moral refers to the broadest conception of human relationships. In his thought, the moral impulse runs towards perfection on an individual and collective basis. Moral ideas respect unity as well as pluralism.

If there is a single essay that seems to encapsulate most of what Arnold wants us to appreciate about the standing of moral ideas to the literary ideal I think it is his critical remarks on Marcus Aurelius. He regards the Stoics, Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius as great masters of morals and Marcus Aurelius “the most beautiful figure in all of history.” Arnold claims that Marcus’ system of morality “takes possession of human life,” to give it “happiness in the practice of virtue” by recommending moral maxims on how to live (*CPW III*, pp. 133-157). His view of the Stoics parallels Hadot’s analysis that emphasizes philosophy as practice. Marcus perceives moral order first as an idea and then embodies it as a law of life. The philosophy that evolves in his *Meditations* is a practice of self-cultivation as Hadot describes. The fascinating power the *Meditations* have exercised over generations, Hadot asserts, is due to the rare feeling that we as readers have of witnessing

¹⁰ Line from Wordsworth’s poem, *The Recluse* quoted in Arnold’s essay, *Wordsworth*.

the living practice of spiritual exercises of someone in the process of training himself to be a human being (1995, p. 201).

Even for the ancient sage, Arnold observes a sense of labor and sorrow in his march toward his goal and the need for him as for all men of inspiration from a joyful emotion to move them to moral action. Marcus' writings, he says, carry a warmth and charm that inspirits men. And he sees this as the peculiar character and power of his *Meditations*. His writing "suffuses" morality with a unique "light of spiritual refinement," in a way that religion lighted up morality.

It does not melt the clouds of effort and austerity away, but it shines through them and glorifies them; it is a spirit, not so much of gladness and elation, as of gentleness and sweetness; a delicate and tender sentiment, which is less than joy and more than resignation ... a sympathetic tenderness. (*CPW* III, p. 149)

Like the spell Tolstoy casts through *Anna Karenina*, Marcus' *Meditations* captivates his readers with a tender charm that takes them inward, the result of the author's creative powers attending to contentment in the practice of life. More than merely a poetic description of a spiritual practice, Arnold asserts that Marcus' artistic genius produced a classic text because of its combination of fresh ideas and creative power. It brings alive the vibrant inner world of the ancient philosopher/king. His writing excites more than rational understanding. Intimate and perplexing personal reflections sensually draw a reader to surrender her innermost spirit to the enjoyment of genuine beauty. In the next chapter I examine this aesthetic experience.

Criticism of Life and The New Order

Arnold's critical comments on Dante's *Divine Comedy* draw his readers to consider how solitude works in the cultivation of an inner life. He characterizes Dante as "a born spiritualist and solitary" and says Dante's artistic genius is supported by his aloofness from the world. Arnold attributes solitariness to the spiritual vitality of the artist which he views in the extreme in Dante's lived example.

The grand, impracticable Solitary, with keen senses and ardent passions ... but with an irresistible bent to the inward life, the life of imagination, vision, and ecstasy; with an inherent impatience of the outward life, the life of distraction, jostling, mutual concession; this man 'of humour which made him hard to get on with,' says Petrarch; 'melancholy and pensive,' says Boccaccio; 'by nature abstracted and taciturn, seldom speaking unless he was questioned, and often so absorbed in his own reflections that he did not hear the questions which were put to him;' ... this lover of Beatrice, but of Beatrice a vision of his youth, hardly at all in contact with him in actual life, vanished from him soon, with whom his imagination could deal freely, whom he could divinize into a fit object for the spiritual longing which filled him. (*CPW* III, p. 9)

Arnold himself maintained a sense of reserve in society but he does not recommend living aloof from the world. In order for the outer world not to dwarf a person's inner life or choke free any spontaneous experience Arnold prescribes a more moderate practice of inner freedom from the world's influences and distractions which he refers to as *disinterestedness*. This mode of objectivity is precisely what Arnold praises about Tolstoy's rendering of 'a piece of life' in *Anna Karenina*.¹¹ As a posture in relation to the material world, it assumes a certain independence and objectivity.

Anderson's recent text, *The Powers of Distance* (2001), frames a pattern of intellectual practices since the nineteenth century that subject aesthetics and human

¹¹ See quote above, p. 40.

sciences to an ideal of critical distance, consistent with Arnold's practice of disinterestedness as a positive achievement of character and culture. The issue of moral character helps define her use of the term "detachment" which she applies across the fields of natural science, social science and art, blurring the distinctions between those fields.¹² Anderson sees disinterestedness as a path to seeing things as they really are that promotes positive ideals of self-critical practice which challenge assumptions of authoritarianism and nostalgia typically associated with the Victorian writers (2001, p. 20).

Because it grapples with eternal issues of human existence, Arnold considers great literature always contemporary. In his inaugural lecture as the Chair of Poetry at Oxford, he suggests a synthesis of the *moral* and *critical* in literature. When it was finally published eleven years later, "On the Modern Element in Literature" contributed a key theory which has become a touchstone in his ideas on literary excellence: "To know how others stand, that we may know how we ourselves stand: and to know how we ourselves stand, that we may correct our mistakes and achieve our deliverance" (*CPW I*, p. 21). Years later when he was asked to select and edit a collection of poems by Wordsworth and write a preface for the text, his ideas on literature as a criticism of life were more fully developed. It is worth quoting at length from that preface to better appreciate how he sees that moral ideas in the best literature intrinsically educe critical consciousness without pedantry or didacticism.

¹² Anderson (2001) suggests Arnold's position on disinterestedness foregrounds cosmopolitanism. At issue for Arnold, she writes, is what precise posture should be adopted toward the conditions and challenges of modernity. The proper stance from an Arnoldian point of view from which one can contemplate and comprehend the world requires a point of detachment (p.96). For a wide-ranging discussion of this issue see David Hansen (2011).

It is important, therefore, to hold fast to this: that poetry is at bottom a criticism of life; that the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life, - to the question: How to live. Morals are often treated in a narrow and false fashion; they are bound up with systems of thought and belief which have had their day; they are fallen into the hands of pedants and professional dealers; they grow tiresome to some of us. We find attraction, at times, even in a poetry of revolt against them; in a poetry which might take for its motto Omar Kheyam's words: 'Let us make up in the tavern for the time which we have wasted in the mosque.' Or we find attractions in a poetry indifferent to them; in a poetry where the contents may be what they will, but where the form is studied and exquisite. We delude ourselves in either case; and the best cure for our delusion is to let our minds rest upon that great and inexhaustible word *life*, until we learn to enter into its meaning. A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against *life*; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards *life*. (*CPW IX*, p. 46)

The implication I take from this is that literature that tries to sever the connection of ideas to how we live or remain merely what Arnold regards as a dialogue of the mind with itself is aesthetically impotent; its capacity to animate or elevate is undermined by negating forces. It suggests languor in strains of contemporary art that reject moral and aesthetic value in our experience of it.

One of Arnold's better-known essays, "The Function of Criticism," states that the proper business of critical power:

in all branches of knowledge, theology, philosophy, history, art, science, [is] to see the object as in itself it really is. Thus it tends to make an intellectual situation of which the creative power can profitably avail itself. It tends to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces; to make the best ideas prevail. Presently these new ideas reach society, the touch of truth is the touch of life, and there is a stir and growth everywhere; out of this *stir and growth* come the creative epochs of literature. (*CPW III*, p. 261, my italics)

In this view the best literature unites creative power with critical power to produce a touch of life that is not merely representational but permeated with the poet's disinterested perspective on timeless moral ideas. The poet interprets life for us. Presented through the

creative process, those moral ideas strike readers with a spark of a truth which may replace something upon which they have previously relied but have *outgrown*. Hence the power of art can penetrate the established order and replace it with a new order of ideas. It can fill a metaphysical void. Arnold insists art act as a criticism of life and tradition in order to originate a new order in modernity. Anderson pairs Arnold with Kant “in identifying modernity largely with the critical spirit, or, to adopt Habermas’ terminology, with the postconventional interrogation of prevailing customs, routines, habits and norms” (2001, p. 102). This view refutes Graff’s (1994) gross misinterpretation of Arnold’s project as “committed to the Hellenic free play of reason only as long as its dictates coincide with those of unreflective custom, tradition, and consensus” (p. 188).

Graff’s misinterpretation seems to derive from his uncritical association of Arnold with proponents of a common culture. His analysis of *Culture and Anarchy* should be considered in the light of his loyalty to the spread of theory in literary and cultural disciplines which he presumes Arnold would oppose based on the power of theory to challenge traditional ideals of universality. His mistake is to interpret Arnold only through *Culture and Anarchy*, where statements about “Establishments” create ambiguity. *Culture and Anarchy* is missing the broader context that his critical essays supply, especially “Literature and Dogma” and those collected in *God and the Bible*. In the light of a broader context Graff would be less inclined to charge as he does:

For Arnold no true culture can exist without a common basis of things taken for granted, a culture impervious, in other words, to the more unsettling effects of rational inquiry. It is this view that underlies Arnold’s frequently stated idea that great art requires a settled society of implicitly shared beliefs, that the great works of the human spirit, as he puts it, “come, not from Nonconformists, but from men

who either belong to the Establishments or have been trained in them.” (1994, pp. 188-189)

In his preface from which this quote was taken, Arnold juxtaposes the utilitarian motivations in the morality of Nonconformist Puritan leaders, who he calls “believers in machinery,” with a “lover of perfection, who looks to inward ripeness for the true springs of conduct” He finds that the most exceptional “Establishment” of men of spiritual development is the “cosmopolitan” spirit of originaive Christian and Jewish thought (*CPW V*, pp. 237-238). Such spirit rising from inchoate perceptions represents for him Hellenic intelligence driving at ideas based on man’s experience with the need for goodness rather than hardened dogmatism. The tension that Arnold calls us to notice is between the Hebraic tendencies of the Nonconformists and the Hellenic temper of Judeo-Christian thought and not as Graff asserts, a tension between national tradition and critical rationality.

As Arnold developed his ideas on critical interpretation in *Culture and Anarchy* we can appreciate his more radical call to culture as criticism,

getting to know, on all matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world; and through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically. (*CPW V*, pp. 233-234)

In Arnold’s view self-knowledge necessarily comes before effective social and political power. But it would be wrong to assume that his literary ideal primarily serves social and political functions. The schemes of really fruitful reforms can only grow with time he says by cultivating a frame of mind that would make clear the nature of real good and thus point

the way to solid operations that would ensure the good for the whole of society (*CPW V*, p. 221). Self-knowledge is the first step to cultivating a critical perspective of the good upon which a more solid social and political foundation can be built. Culture as criticism is not a matter primarily aimed at *improving* the existing order. It aims at a clarity of purpose that may *disrupt* existing conditions. Arnold's project for education can thus be radically, heroically subversive.

There is a certain resonance in Arnold's conception of poetry as a criticism of life that he shares with Schiller's sense of illusion as caretaker of desire and longing. Its supreme function will draw the reader to mount "some new step in the arduous ladder whereby man climbs towards his perfection; towards that unattainable but irresistible lode-star, gazed after with earnest longing, and invoked with bitter tears; the longing of thousands of hearts, the tears of many generations" (*CPW II*, p. 325). Wisdom to steady one's step in the eternal march of civilization constitutes the really fruitful reform that comes from contemplating the best that has been thought and said.

At its best, literature's creative element presents a lucid narrative with intellectual clarity that derives from the rare perspective to see life steadily and see it whole. In Arnold's words,

The grand work of literary genius is a work of synthesis and exposition, not of analysis and discovery; its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain order of ideas, when it finds itself in them; of dealing divinely with these ideas, presenting them in the most effective and attractive combinations, - making beautiful works with them, in short. But it must have the atmosphere, it must find itself amidst the order of ideas, in order to work freely; and these it is not so easy to command. This is why great creative epochs in literature are so rare. (*CPW III*, p. 261)

The literary genius confronts fragments of life and draws together what may appear as disparate strands to represent a vector of human evolution as a certain thing of divine beauty. In accordance with the law of poetry, something of humanity's universal and constant "truth" presents itself. Pratt (1988) asserts that Arnold's literary ideals restore a unity to the self which is impossible outside the boundaries of art. She associates Arnold's own poetry as a move away from idealizing Romanticism and towards a confrontation with the nihilistic vision at the heart of modern literature and his aesthetic reliance on images in art "to allow what life denies" with the modern stance of the poet (pp. 81-97). The value of literature for Arnold rests on the affirming, unifying power of its art.

Recent scholarship of late eighteenth and early nineteenth century art theory and practice examines how both poetic and pictorial art evidence a "shift in Romantic critical theory from a faith in an immutably grounded reality to a concern for and preoccupation with vanishings, the amorphous and the indeterminate" (Starzyk, 1994, p. 1). That shift, as Pratt (2000) tells us, is the measure by which Arnold is recognized as a modern poet. Arnold would argue that the gifted poet captures an evanescence that may appear to an average person as merely a glimmer, if it appears at all, when his genius "finds itself in" a revealed order of ideas that has ontological status. The spectacle of a world depicted in excellent literature he says "is invested with a kind of aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy" (*CPW V*, p. 167).

Arnold's literary criticism defines the modern direction of a crossroad in literary perception that rejects the functional importance in nineteenth century literary criticism of finding the meaning of a text. Iser (1978) asserts that the presumption of the critic in

Arnold's day was that the meaning of a work of literature is a message or a philosophy of life. The difference that characterizes the modern critic is the conception of meaning as the product of an interaction between structured indicators of the text and the reader's imaginative act. That interaction brings something into existence that is found neither outside the book nor on its printed page. The text and the reader are no longer subject and object and it follows that the meaning is not an object to be defined but rather an effect to be experienced (Iser, 1978, pp. 20-27). As Arnold avows, "the touch of truth is the touch of life" (*CPW* III, p. 261).

The value of art and indeed the life of the spirit today in Arnold's view depends upon something more than purely rational analysis and discovery. "The poetry of later paganism," Arnold tells us, "lived by the senses and understanding; the poetry of medieval Christianity by the heart and imagination. But the main element of the modern spirit's life.... is imaginative reason." He goes on to praise the period in Greek life, the century preceding the Peloponnesian war, "in which poetry made ... the noblest, the most successful effort she has ever made as the priestess of the imaginative reason, of the element by which the modern spirit, if it would live right, has chiefly to live" (*CPW* III, p. 230). The age of ancient Greece is for Arnold the preeminent example of the rare creative epoch in literature which he refers to as *modern*. To understand more about his conception of modern I turn here to his inaugural lecture as the Poetry Chair at Oxford. I examine the concept of imaginative reason and its pedagogical value in the next chapter on literary perceptions.

The Modern Element: A Spirit of Inquiry

An intellectual deliverance is the peculiar demand of those ages which are called modern; and those nations are said to be imbued with the modern spirit most eminently in which the demand for such a deliverance has been made with most zeal, and satisfied with most completeness. Such a deliverance is emphatically, whether we will or no, the demand of the age in which we ourselves live. All intellectual pursuits our age judges according to their power of helping to satisfy this demand; and all studies it asks, above all, the question, how far they can contribute to this deliverance. (*CPW I*, p. 19)

What Arnold finds salutary in both the age of ancient Greece (Pre-Socratic Greece) and our own time is the spirit of inquiry and “free play of the mind” that seeks to see things as they really are. Arnold’s intuitions about the obstacles to seeing things as they are, the key theme in *Culture and Anarchy*, anticipate later theorists in the Continental philosophical tradition. Writing at about the same time as Arnold, Nietzsche addresses the problem in his criticism of Pre-Socratic philosophy: “The sixth and fifth centuries always seemed to promise more than they produced; they never got beyond a promise, and an announcement” (1984, p. 261). The structure Nietzsche came to see as the pathos of truth is drawn out with greater promise in the later work of Martin Heidegger. *Alètheia*, *uncovering* and *revealing*, is the saving power that he claims will bring us into a “*free relationship* with that which concerns us from its essence” (1989, p. 313). His well-known claim that modern science’s way of representing pursues and entraps nature as a calculable coherence of forces can be seen to extend Arnold’s thought that “we seek to naturally combine the pieces of our knowledge together, to bring them under general rules, to relate them to principles; and how unsatisfactory and tiresome it would be to go on forever learning lists of exceptions, or accumulating items of fact which must stand isolated” (*CPW X*, pp. 62-63). In “Literature and Science,” which I examine later, Arnold famously

asserts that the strength and worth of the poet's criticism of life helps us to relate the results of modern science to moral ideas.

In "On the Modern Element in Literature" Arnold asks what past literature, what elements of the spectacle before us will naturally be most interesting to a highly developed age like our own? He answers:

The literatures which have most successfully solved for *their* ages the problem which occupies ours: the literatures which in their day and for their own nation have adequately comprehended, have adequately represented, the spectacle before them. A significant, a highly developed, a culminating epoch, on the one hand, - a comprehensive, a commensurate, an adequate literature, on the other, - these will naturally be the objects of deepest interest to our modern age. Such an epoch and such a literature are, in fact, *modern*, in the same sense in which our own age and literature are modern; they are founded upon a rich past and an instructive fullness of experience. (*CPW I*, pp. 21-22)

Arnold acknowledged the ambiguity of his lecture and the *problem* he refers to which allies our age with that of ancient Greece.¹³ We know that his more developed theory of literature as art, which teaches how to live, is bound up with his Hellenic ideal. The best literature provides each age with a spectacle of an order of life, unique in particular conditions yet relating in abstract ways to a world ordered between Hellenist and Hebraist habits of mind and energies from which moral practice derives. In *Culture and Anarchy* Arnold insists that the forces that carry mankind forward in its evolution are shaped not

¹³ When Arnold delivered his inaugural lecture as the new Poetry Chair at Oxford he introduced it as the first of a course of lectures, a few of which followed but were never published and have been lost over time. The course was never completed because Arnold came to feel that his "knowledge was insufficient for treating in a solid way many portions of the subject chosen." Not until eleven years later was the inaugural lecture even printed and then with apologies from the author for "the imperfection of (the) sketchy and generalizing mode of treatment" of the subject matter. When he finally did publish it, it was because Arnold felt that it would help develop the idea of Hellenism that he had worked out in a more satisfying way and written about in *Culture and Anarchy*. He hoped his earlier attempt to describe the element that he calls modern in literature would breathe some greater life into his notion of a Hellenic spirit to carry civilization along its course in an uplifting way. Arnold finally printed his inaugural lecture "with the hope that it may serve, in the absence of other and fuller illustrations, to give some notion of the Hellenic spirit and its works, and of their significance in the history of the evolution of the human spirit in general" (*CPW I*, p. 18).

merely by great ideas that engage the spirit but also in varying degrees by the interpretative framework through which the ideas are reasoned and understood. Thus evolutionary forces have their basis in all that has preceded each age but in every age the task exists for some observers to adequately represent the world for others. In a dialectic which carries mankind through alternating periods of intellectual and moral development and fatigue, “of man’s ... effort to see things as they really are, and the effort to win peace by self-conquest,” he contends, “the spirit proceeds” (*CPW V*, pp. 102-103).

His lecture, “On the Modern Element,” continues,

One of the most characteristic outward features of a *modern age* ... is the banishment of the ensigns of war and bloodshed.... [W]ithin the limits of civil life a circle has been formed within which man can move securely and develop the arts of peace uninterrupted.... An important inward characteristic ... is the growth of a tolerant spirit; that spirit which is the offspring of an enlarged knowledge; a spirit patient of the diversities of habits and opinions. Other characteristics are the multiplication of the conveniences of life, the formation of taste, the capacity for refined pursuits. And this leads us to the supreme characteristic of all: the intellectual maturity of man himself; the tendency to observe facts with a critical spirit; to search for their law, not to wander among them at random; to judge by the rule of reason, not by the impulse of prejudice or caprice. (*CPW I*, pp. 21-24)

Arnold indicates aspects of such highly developed characteristics in other historical literature with which he was familiar that provide additional examples of the constancy that is the fruit of man’s intellectual maturity. In “On the Study of Celtic Literature” he examines modern elements in a variety of creative impulses.

Not in the outward material world of Wales or Ireland does he find the Celtic genius but in its inward world of thought and science, towards knowing things as they are as a spiritual power (*CPW III*, p. 298). “Possessing a special, profound, spiritual *discipline*”(*CPW III*, p. 316, my italics), their bards committed poetry to memory, they

survived the Roman conquest and emerged in the twelfth century with a burst of literature which survives. He deems sentiment the main basis of its genius. And sensibility, “the power of quick and strong perception and emotion, ...one of the prime constituents of genius,” made the Celts love learning and the things of the mind. The Celts in this essay offer an example of the reconciling power Arnold attributes to science:

true science recognizes in the bottom of her soul a law of ultimate fusion, of conciliation. To reach this, but to reach it legitimately, she tends. She draws, for instance, towards the same idea which fills her elder and diviner sister, poetry, - the idea of the substantial unity of man; though she draws towards it by roads of her own. But continually she is showing us affinity where we imagined there was isolation. (*CPW* III, p. 330, my italics)

In this sense, the genius of science finds the law which poetry yields. The modern element he wants to emphasize depends on the experience of science which unifies and connects more reliably than reductive science which individuates. The essay provides numerous examples, especially from philology, to illustrate the reconciling power of Arnold’s notion of *true science*.

Arnold finds the crucial difference between the highly developed culminating epoch of ancient Greece and the ancient Celtic culture to be a sense of measure and patience which he says the sentimental Celts lacked. This explains the Celtic lack of success in material and political development as well as the defect in architectonics, which he considers the highest power of composition. Thus he concludes that the sensual Celtic genius shines in its poetry but misses in the plastic arts:

Celtic poetry seems to make up to itself for being unable to master the world and give an adequate interpretation of it, by throwing all its force into style, by bending language at any rate to its will, and expressing the ideas it has with unsurpassable intensity, elevation and effect. It has all through it a sort of intoxication of style. (*CPW* III, p. 366).

Celtic literature then falls short of Arnold's standards of excellence despite its conciliatory power and the captivating pleasures of its exemplary style because it fails to revert back to the world as a medium of criticism to supply a moral basis upon which to act.

He credits the Celtic influence on the English creative power in style, passion, and natural magic. The English genius provides another example of the characteristics of the *modern* age: "Passionate, turbulent, indomitable reaction against the despotism of fact" (*CPW* III, p. 372-373) fires the excellence of Byron and Milton. The fiery impulse of the English poets seems to contrast sharply with a more leveled self of our current age. We might question whether scientific specialists today trade a sense of being able to order the world and ourselves with being open and vulnerable to a world of spirits and forces which cross the boundary of the mind and negate the very idea of there being a secure boundary (Taylor, 2007, p. 300). Passion and magic, exemplified by the English genius, create personal vulnerability and open a person to an expanded consciousness beyond the secure borders of the rational mind.

He finds the genius of the German culture characterized by steadiness, a pre-eminent freedom from whim or flightiness and patient fidelity to Nature, - in a word, he says, *science* leading it towards a better life (*CPW* III, p. 342). The plainness of its poetic style stands it apart from the Celtic creative power but he pronounces German poetry, with Goethe as the preeminent bard, "the only first-rate body of contemporary poetry." His reason for such high accolade has to do with the peculiar demand for intellectual deliverance of those ages like our own which may be called modern according to his definition. Not since the Greeks, he asserts, has poetry risen to the task of what he calls the

grand business of modern poetry – a moral interpretation, from an independent point of view, of man and the world (*CPW III*, p. 380). Goethe stands out among ancient and contemporary poets as the rare observer who adequately interprets the collective life of humanity, the genius who “has risen to the comprehension of his age” (*CPW I*, p. 20). He is that most uncommon interpreter of life who finds “the true point of view from which to contemplate... a significant spectacle” of the collective life of her age (*CPW I*, p. 22).

As students of Arnold know, when contemplating an important theme, a more complete doctrine emerges only by drawing on multiple sources. His lecture on Celtic literature builds on the skeleton of his earlier lecture on the *Modern Element* by developing the idea of the interpretative task of the poet. From the first lecture we appreciate the significance of point-of-view. The rare adequate observer of the spectacle of the collective life of her age rises above the limitations of birth and historic contingency to a level of comprehension that is unattainable by an ordinary observer. From her elevated perspective the poet answers the demand for intellectual deliverance. But not until he delivers his lecture of Celtic literature does he declare the need for literature to mediate purpose in life. There he refers to Goethe’s task, and inevitably the business of literature henceforth, and as it was for the poets in the days of Pericles, to “interpret human life afresh, and to supply a new spiritual basis to it” (*CPW III*, p. 381). To illustrate his point, he contrasts Dante’s task as setting forth the lesson of the world from the point of view of mediaeval Catholicism, which was the given basis of spiritual life; Dante did not need to make it anew. Even for Shakespeare who set forth a world where man’s spirit was reawakened in the Renaissance, the basis of spiritual life was still the traditional religion of Christendom (*CPW III*, p. 381).

Now, as it was for the poets of ancient Greece, the task of literature goes beyond the aesthetic criteria of style and charm. “It is a work for science” in the sense that Arnold uses “true science” for an adequate interpreter to supply purpose and meaning to overcome spiritual fragmentation. Critics, Arnold writes to a poet friend,

still think that the object of poetry is to produce exquisite bits of images – such as Shelley’s *clouds shepherded by the slow unwilling wind*, and Keats passim: whereas modern poetry can only subsist by *its contents*; by becoming a complete magister vitae as the poetry of the ancients did: by including, as theirs did, religion with poetry, instead of existing as poetry alone, and leaving religious wants to be supplied by the Christian religion, as a power existing independent of the poetical power. But the language, style, and general proceedings of a poetry which has such an immense task to perform, must be very plain direct and severe; it must not lose itself in parts and episodes and ornamental work, but must press forwards to the whole. (Lang, 1996, 245-6)

Here is Goethe’s understanding of the task of literature, which reflects the enormity of his influence on Arnold’s thinking. Goethe reinforces Arnold’s emphasis on interpretation as science, affirming spiritual constancy and integrating ideas into a larger whole.

When and under what circumstances, in any nation, does one become a writer of classics? There are a number of preconditions: If the writer finds in the history of his nation great events which together with their consequences form a harmonious and significant whole; if his countrymen exhibit nobility in their attitudes, depth in their feelings, and strength and consistence in their actions; if he himself is permeated with the spirit of his nation and if he, because of an intuitive understanding of this spirit, feels capable of identifying with the past as well as with the present; if his native country has attained a high cultural level, thus facilitating his own educational process; if he has collected sufficient material and is aware of the perfect and not so perfect attempts of his predecessors; and if enough favorable external and internal circumstances coincide to make his apprenticeship less arduous so that in his mature years he is in a position to conceive of a great work, organize it, and produce finally a coherent and unified whole. (1994, p. 190)

Conclusion

I have attempted to examine Arnold's literary criticism within a framework that demonstrates its pedagogical value. His literary standards provide a basis for productive debates about what constitutes good liberal arts education and literature's role in it. To briefly summarize, the completion of the work of literature in its effect depends upon the talent of its creator. The distinction between good (or average) and the best literary art centers on its ability to engage our sympathies and raise critical consciousness. Only the rare and sensitive genius of any age can achieve an adequate, objective perspective and capture a glimpse of evanescence that can yield integrating secrets of human nature; his art conveys them with emotion and poetic simplicity. Beauty, through the artist's creative style captivates the reader in an uncommon engagement that awakens more than rational perception, expanding the realm of how we experience it.

Arnold's claims regarding literature's power call to mind the most compelling and long-standing reasons supporting the value of literary arts to human agency. He insists that the greatest contribution to civilization is the power of the best literature to penetrate historical contextual limitations and synthesize the wisdom of other ages; as the object of critique, the reader constructs her own freer association with timeless ideas in the experience of new ontologies. Moral models of temper and attitude, revealed as semblance of experience, can shift one's moral axis and thus be transformative.

Periods like our modern age call for a spirit of inquiry that reconciles our knowledge of life, moral and scientific. When totalizing forces erode a stable moral basis to the life of the individual, literature's affirming powers become increasingly important to

the life of society. The artist's ability to rise to a level of critical comprehension that escapes conforming ideologies and degrading utilitarian perspectives to find constancy and possibility becomes paramount. Thus the critical power of literature can mediate the existing order and subvert what is dehumanizing. Poetic interpretation can reorient the individual existentially. Simply put, the best literature can teach us how to live well and affirm our place in the world.

Giving voice to the same wisdom philosophy that undergirds Arnold's aesthetic measure, with distinct poetic simplicity, Goethe advises the poet in every person:

Let us take the flow of life as a guide, and on occasion examine ourselves. Then we can see instantly whether we are truly alive, and, reflecting later in life, whether we have been truly alive. (1994, p. 210)

Chapter Four

Literary Perception

*The world is nothing but change.
Our life is only perception.*
Marcus Aurelius

The great sixteenth century humanist Michel De Montaigne poses a question that should engage educators in any age: “Since all philosophy is the art which teaches us how to live, and since children need to learn it as much as we do at other ages, why do we not instruct them in it?” (2004, p. 57). Pierre Hadot indicates why modern educators may find the question irrelevant by reminding his readers that modern philosophy, “having become almost entirely theoretical discourse,” has forgotten the ancient tradition of philosophy as a way of life (1995, p. 206). Arnold perceived the fate of philosophy in modernity and sought to replace its pedagogical value with literature, believing that fulfilling the potential that is the unique natural endowment of human beings requires instruction. Indeed, he believes that the fate of society depends on it.

As Chapter Two demonstrates, Arnold follows the German aesthetic tradition, which celebrates art as a key to understanding the world, that is, art as revelatory. His

aesthetic doctrine also tries to forge a path between the Anglo/American suspicions about art's ideological inclinations and a more organic interpretation of it as experience that eschews ideological pretense. His project for educating people in modern democracies depends upon restoring legitimacy to the aesthetic experience. The word aesthetic, deriving from the ancient Greek *aisthētikós*, means perceptible to the senses; it is generally thought to signify value in perceptual experience. The history of aesthetics reflects a dynamic association between art and our appreciation and experience of it; thus how we value a work of art depends upon our interpretation of it and involvement with it, matters of ongoing philosophical debate. Today our perception of art also depends upon a culture's demands for certainty and scientific methods of verification. In this chapter I will shine Arnold's light on the perception of literature.

I will explore Arnold's notion of imaginative reason and his view of the reader's involvement with literature, how we interpret it and its potential effects on the individual and society. Building upon the last chapter, I hope to make apparent how our involvement with literature can restore integrity to one's sense of self and overcome the alienation of egoism and the hyper-individualistic conditions that threaten modernity. To do that I return to several of the essays I drew upon in the prior chapters and turn to others from Arnold's *God and the Bible* to elaborate his views on the substantive value of our involvement with literature and its moral authority. I bring Arnold into communication with later theorists on the topics of the unifying nature of literature, interpretation, and the question of freedom as it relates to his project for education and his work's legacy in relation to contemporary theory. I will show how Arnold's call to cultivate the self through the practice of reading

the best literary works bridges the oldest philosophical tradition with modern aesthetic phenomenology by granting the authority of aesthetic judgment.

For rigorous teachers seized my youth
 And purged its faith, and trimm'd its fire
 Show'd me the high, white star of Truth
 There bade me gaze, and there aspire.

“*Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*” (1909, p. 272)

True Science

Arnold writes,

The design of abasing what is called ‘merely literary instruction and education,’ and of exalting what is called ‘sound, extensive, and practical scientific knowledge,’ is, in this intensely modern world of the United States ... a very popular design, and makes great and rapid progress. (*CPW X*, p. 55)

Few people, I think, would disagree that this observation from “Literature and Science,” the essay which R. H. Super deems Arnold’s finest statement of the value of liberal education, still represents the general educational trajectory in American schools. Arnold tries to convince his audience of their mistake in setting science in opposition to literature and of the error of constructing a dualism between the disciplines. “All learning is scientific,” according to Arnold, “which is systematically laid out and followed up to its original sources ... and genuine humanism is scientific” (*CPW X*, p. 57). All knowledge, he says that reaches us through books, including Euclid’s *Elements* and Newton’s *Principia* is literature. And he insists that literary production serves our natural instinct to want to connect isolated pieces of knowledge to our sense of how to act and our sense of beauty. Steve Jobs could have made the case for collapsing the duality of science and humanities. The product evolution of Apple is an amazing success story about what can

come of cross-pollinating technology with human needs and desires and a sense for the aesthetic. But Arnold's conviction about the value of the humanities to the sciences was forward thinking for his time and seems so in even in our own.

Recall Arnold's perspective of a work of literary excellence, in "The Function of Criticism," as synthesis and exposition, not merely of analysis and discovery; "its gift lies in the faculty of being happily inspired by a certain intellectual and spiritual atmosphere" (*CPW* III, p. 261). He argues that our world demands more than reason alone; modernity's gift is its *expanded* spirit of inquiry that characterizes a *modern* epoch. "Literature and Science" is an attempt to explain how literary works compliment discoveries of science "because they serve the paramount desire in men that good should be for ever present to them ... to establish a relation between new conceptions, and our instinct for beauty, our instinct for conduct" (*CPW* X, p. 66). We find by experience, he argues, literature's power to engage the emotions, which heightens a man's scientific training, albeit in ways that are difficult to explain. Thus the specialist, through experience of literature, can make more of methods of scientific discovery through moral and aesthetic intuitions, with feeling and imagination. If a choice is required between humanities and sciences he exhorts educators to prioritize the arts that equip us to find natural and necessary currents to connect all knowledge. "The glorious beauty of the Acropolis at Athens did not come from single fine things stuck about on that hill, a statue here, a gateway there; - no, it arose from all things being perfectly combined for a *supreme total effect*" (*CPW* X, p. 71). The other side of his claim, in the stark example of the Manhattan Project, stands as a sobering reminder of the perils of cold science unameliorated by a sense of beauty and a sense of conduct.

In a report on Continental Education to the British Schools Commission Arnold remarks that one man's aptitudes are for knowing men and another for knowing the world.

The circle of knowledge comprehends both, and we should all have some notion, at any rate of the whole circle of knowledge. The rejection of the humanities by the realists, the rejection of the study of nature by the humanists, are alike ignorant. (*CPW IV*, p. 300)

Arnold's circle of knowledge metaphor evokes timeless wisdom. Observation and analysis yield aspects of integral knowledge as facts but in a larger perspective our understanding of the facts is always provisional as today's interpretation can be overturned by tomorrow's discoveries. Arnold was a great admirer of Emerson and most assuredly read the American's poetic interpretation of the metaphoric circles of life and knowledge.

Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens. (Emerson, 2003, p. 225)

In this ancient view that he shares with other nineteenth century naturalists, the supreme total effect is the result of harmonious alignment of connected knowledge. Facts in a stream of thought become starting points for continuous revision; the product of science creates a new object of observation and analysis. "Everything is interwoven, and the web is holy;" writes Marcus Aurelius in the first century AD, "none of its parts are unconnected. They are composed harmoniously, and together they compose the world" (2003, p. 86). True science is continuously constructing and reconstructing knowledge. Fresh discoveries illuminate every field of study by their converging currents.

Restoring unity and reconciling our place in the continuously changing world requires more than reason or faith for Arnold. "The main element of the modern spirit's

life ... is the imaginative reason.” Recall Arnold’s descriptions of the spirit of cultures that marked earlier epochs, “Now the poetry of Theocritus’s hymn is poetry treating the world according to the demand of the senses; the poetry of St. Francis’s hymn is ... treating the world according to the demand of the heart and imagination.” The Renaissance turned again toward the senses and understanding in this account; and the German reformation turned the world to subjugate the senses and understanding (*CPW* III, p. 225). His analysis of recurring historical cycles of poetic spirit which attend to the demands of the world was first made manifest in his poetry and later reflected upon in his literary criticism (Culler, 1966). The spirit and the promise for modernity in this analysis demand imaginative reason, the *modern* element. The essays, “The Study of Poetry,” “On Celtic Literature,” and “On the Modern Element,” shed light on the significance of imaginative reason as a key to interpreting the world and man’s relation to it.

“The Study of Poetry” is a mature reflection on the work of literature which asserts its substantial value to a culture that must invent its myth and meaning.

More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. (*CPW* IX, pp. 161-162)

Consistent with German *Bildung*, poetry for Arnold takes the place of religion and philosophy in the life of the spirit. The life of the individual which in earlier epochs has been nourished by and comforted with the elevating and steadying effects of faith or fidelity to ideas as systems of belief needs to learn to rely on the power of poetry to reveal wider and deeper perspectives.

Turning to his work on Celtic literature brings some clarity. The grand business of modern poetry, he says, is “a moral interpretation, from an independent point of view, of man and his world” (*CPW* III, p. 380). While Arnold discounts contributions to the life of the material world from Wales and Ireland in his day he is salutary about the enduring power of their ancient literature.

It cannot count appreciably now as a material power; but, perhaps, if it can get itself thoroughly known as an object of science, it may count for a good deal, - far more than we Saxons, most of us, imagine, - as a spiritual power. (*CPW* III, p. 298)

In Celtic literature there is a strain that lights upon unity which Arnold tries to describe.¹⁴

“[C]ontinually she is showing us affinity where we imagined there was isolation” (*CPW* III, p. 330). By its creative style the ancient Celtic literature intimates something deep and transcendent that is a source of unification and reconciliation. The spiritual power of its synthesis operates in a realm in which science and poetry share the same laws. Arnold is clear that the source of this power is something other than pure reason. Reason on this view is not considered the preeminent natural instinct or power.¹⁵

Imaginative reason mediates our experience, as Arnold sees it, and disrupts the duality of science and literature. Then a “law of ultimate fusion” can “deliver” us from an unpoetic, atomistic world to new heights of wisdom and beauty. Such is the intellectual deliverance that Arnold introduced in his early lecture, “On the Modern Element in Literature,” a “harmonious acquiescence of mind which we feel in contemplating a grand spectacle that is intelligible to us” (*CPW* I, p. 20). Like the redemptive power of religion, there is an inventive aspect to imaginative reason (Culler, 1966, p. 280). In what Arnold

¹⁴ See the preceding chapter, pp. 55-58.

¹⁵ For an in-depth consideration of the preeminence of reason, see “A Reason for Socrates’ Face” in Alexander Nehamas (2000).

regards as a complementary association, the creative effort and the critical effort operate to illuminate ideas in the mind. “Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea *is* the fact. The strongest part of our religion today is its unconscious poetry” (CPW IX, p. 161). A synthesis of intellect and feeling, imaginative reason combines the best elements of science and religion and goes beyond both. Arnold’s literary critique of the English translation of Spinoza’s *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* provides his summary version of the radical seventeenth century treatise, including his illuminating interpretation of Spinoza’s notions of imagination and reason, which align with his own.¹⁶ “Only an idea can carry the sense of its own certainty along with it, not an imagination;” but the power of imagining is “the power of feeling what goodness is” (CPW III, p. 162). Knowledge, in this view, is transcendent and unifying.

I quote Arnold’s description of a vast nexus of knowledge and experience which precedes the present age that he considers the legacy of all of humanity. It stands in contrast to a modern view of knowledge as information, instrumental facts, useful for measuring and controlling.

The spectacle, the facts, presented for the comprehension of the present age, are indeed immense. The facts consist of the events, the institutions, the sciences, the arts, the literatures, in which human life has manifested itself up to the present time: the spectacle is the collective life of humanity. And everywhere there are connexions, everywhere there is illustration: no single event, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in its relation to other events, to other literatures. (CPW I, pp. 20-21)

¹⁶ Spinoza’s influence is signal in Arnoldian scholarship, although not directly connected to a philosophy of education but as his work in interpretation and on God and religion had such profound influence on Arnold’s oeuvre.

The perspective of a nexus as a model of cultural production yields a rich inheritance of connections and continuity that scientific method as currently conceived cannot adequately render. Emerson extends the thinking,

The law dissolves the fact and holds it fluid. Our culture is the predominance of an idea which draws after it this train of cities and institutions. Let us rise into another idea; they will disappear.... Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself. (1982, pp. 226-227)

True science, as Arnold conceives it, not only restores a greater dynamic and larger dimension to how we comprehend the world, it also shapes the fundamental make-up of the individual and the community.

The Unity of Man

Pierre Hadot addresses the magnitude of the spiritual movement of the individual who takes up a practice such as Arnold's call to culture. "(T)he point is not to forge oneself a spiritual identity ... but rather to liberate oneself from one's individuality, in order to raise oneself up to universality (1995, p. 210). Recall Arnold's focus on the reconciling power of true science which "draws ... towards the same idea which fills her elder and diviner sister, poetry, - the idea of the substantial unity of man; though she draws towards it by roads of her own" (*CPW* III, p. 330). The first chapter of *Culture and Anarchy* is entirely devoted to this doctrine. Escaping the limitations of historical contingency with the refined perspective of disinterestedness, the individual turns inward in a movement of the mind and spirit. Then "culture directs our attention to the current in human affairs, and to its continual working, and will not let us rivet our faith upon any one man and his doings"

(*CPW V*, p. 110) The Arnoldian ideal of a practice of human perfection leads to “*general* perfection, embracing all our fellow-men.... Such is the sympathy which binds humanity together” (*CPW V*, p. 215). In the realm of feeling more than thinking, sympathy realigns moral order. “The idea of perfection as a *general* expansion of the human family,” he says, “is at variance with our strong individualism, our hatred of all limits to the unrestrained swing of the individual’s personality, our maxim of ‘every man for himself’” (*CPW V*, p. 95). “Perfection,” as the aim of a studied practice of reading, observing and reflecting, brings the reader to recognize herself in a new standing in relationship to the human community.

Hadot asserts that this process releases the individual from exteriority in the material world and inseparably links to a heightening of the mind and spirit, “a higher psychic level” in the world of nature.

This is a new way of being-in-the-world, which consists in becoming aware of oneself as a part of nature, and a portion of universal reason. At this point, one no longer lives in the usual, conventional human world, but in the world of nature.... In this way, one identifies oneself with an “Other”: nature, or universal reason, as it is present within each individual. This implies a radical transformation of perspective, and contains a universalist, cosmic dimension.... Interiorization is a going beyond oneself; it is universalization. (1995, p. 211)

In other words, one could say it frees us to more authentically *inhabit* the world.

Thus in turning away from the everyday world of convention and releasing oneself to the natural order of things – the law of poetry – we gain a new perspective of ourselves in a radically transformed moral alignment. In the view that Arnold and Hadot share, the inward growth of the human spirit leads to greater sympathy with the rest of mankind that derives from the recognition of a common basis of human nature. Going into ourselves, we

(re)turn to universal being. Arnold's conviction about man's shared essence has its logical outcome in recognizing oneself in community with others as we come to know ourselves (*CPW V*, p. 179).

Arnold is unequivocal: we need others in order to know ourselves, and self-knowledge will ground the possibility of transformative growth. "To know how others stand, that we may know how we ourselves stand: and to know how we ourselves stand, that we may correct our mistakes and achieve our deliverance" (*CPW I*, p. 21). He warrants that the "supreme characteristic" of a highly developed age is a critical spirit that comes as a result of the inward development of the self. The more modern heir to this thinking, Hans-Georg Gadamer, says all art is a way of confronting ourselves in which we become mindful of ourselves; literature evokes in us, "you are that" (1992, p. 90). The point for both is that through the aesthetic medium we can recognize our authentic being in sympathy with the narratives and personifications of literature in ways that can be radically transformative. The conviction of critical perspectives on self-knowledge yields transformational growth.

And the power of ideas heightened by a current of feeling and imagination can trigger new modes of understanding. In the sense of "a rising to a new life" (*CPW V*, p. 183), the spirit of inquiry of the modern age can supply a new spiritual basis to life. Hadot concludes, "Whoever concretely practices (these spiritual exercises) sees the universe with new eyes, as if he were seeing it for the first time. In the enjoyment of the pure present, he discovers the mystery and splendor of existence" (1995, p. 212). As we come to see ourselves as part of a larger human circle the growth of critical spirit liberates modern man

from totalizing forces in the material world in a move towards intellectual and moral autonomy.

How the best literature inspires this transformative process in us as readers is a question that eschews explanation but aesthetic phenomenology and recent work in literature¹⁷ suggests renewed respect for the idea that moral and aesthetic values inhere in literary practice.

Interpretation

With his reader-response theory, Wolfgang Iser set literary theory in the direction of modern philosophical work in hermeneutics. In its light Arnold's literary theory may be revitalized. Meaning as effect, Iser writes,

is a perplexing phenomenon, and as such perplexity cannot be removed by explanations – on the contrary, it invalidates them. The effectiveness of the work depends on the participation of the reader, but explanations arise from (and also lead to) detachment; they will therefore dull the effect, for they relate the given text to a frame of reference, thus flattening out the new reality brought into being by the fictional text. In view of the irreconcilability of effect and explanation, the traditional expository style of interpretation has clearly had its day.... As meaning arises out of the process of actualization, the interpreter should perhaps pay more attention to the process than to the product. His object should therefore be, not to explain a work, but to reveal the conditions that bring about its various possible effects. (1978, p. 10 and p. 18)

Certainly, Arnold would agree that the important part of literary interpretation is the process rather than the product. Implicit in his method of synthesis and exposition is the notion that there is already something existing as the special domain of artistic production

¹⁷ See Singer (2003). Singer's work emphasizes the coherence of modern aesthetics with the older Greek tradition of equating aesthetic judgment with protocols of human deliberation and rational action. It supports the proposition that there is continuity between aesthetic value and rational value, specifically as a means of rational self-reflection and ethical action.

which can be grasped through our involvement with literature. Distinct from a purely subjective experience, the act of reading in his view uncovers truth-value in art through “semblance of experience,” which we considered in the last chapter. A semblance may not be endowed with “meaning” in the sense Iser uses the term, but Arnold would argue that it has an objective quality to it which informs our experience of the aesthetic.

Recall the dynamics of the elements, the conditions that constitute Arnold’s standard of literary excellence. The effects of charms or spells intimate secrets of human nature.¹⁸ Literary style, as he describes it, refines and elevates. Emotion, passion, or intensity attaches to fact in poetic simplicity, the distinctive characteristic of grand or classic literary style. Then captivating beauty, in accordance with nature, mediates sense perception as truth in semblance of experience, satisfying our instinct for beauty and our instinct for conduct. The description of this psychic movement echoes the play dynamic of Schiller’s aesthetic doctrine that asserts beauty consummates one’s humanity (1967, p. 103).

Reflecting on these literary techniques I am reminded of the story of Alcibiades’ encounter with Socrates when the young Athenian had reached an age that he thought readied him for public life. In a dialogue about knowing the self, Alcibiades is at first so bewildered by Socrates’ line of questioning that he begins to doubt that he can be sure of anything. Socrates has captured his attention. Alcibiades’ loss of sure footing is a gateway

¹⁸ There are obvious, notable similarities between Arnold’s description of the literary techniques that calls or compels the reader’s involvement and the “kitch” of commercial media that Arcilla claims has the effect of “extorting” the audience in *mediumism*. (2010, p. 71). The crucial difference as it pertains to the concerns here is in the response each evokes. In the case of the best literary examples, the natural curiosity of the reader is aroused, motivating an intentional engagement while the calculating media rapture that Arcilla militates against serves, as he argues, to distract our most human instincts, to merely entertain, and to enlist audiences in the ranks of consumers. An unwitting audience *succumbs* to the media as victims of beguiling commercial forces.

to refined thinking in partnership with his mentor. Then, as the two interlocutors settle into discovering what they may be sure about, pedagogy as practice begins. The dialogue can be seen to mirror the movement that Arnold emphasizes in his descriptions of the features of the best literature. An element of it is spellbinding, dislodging the reader from attachments to the as-is. The clarity of its poetic style elevates and excites her intellect and imagination, and the beauty of the artistic creation rewards her intuitions with the pleasures of new modes of knowing. Then the reader may glimpse the as-if, or possible, or not-yet. Thus begins the pedagogical literary practice in Arnold's project for education. Literature assumes the role of mentor in his project for liberal education.

Iser's work demonstrates the author's strong conviction concerning the dialogical nature of reading and its disruptive power. As communication, "it impinges upon the world, upon prevailing social structures, and upon existing literature." And these "encroachments consist in the reorganization of those thought systems and social systems invoked by the repertoire of the text" (1978, p. ix). Gadamer places greater emphasis on the interpreter in the literary experience, which seems to more closely mirror Arnold's thinking. The first condition of hermeneutics when something addresses us, Gadamer writes, "is the fundamental suspension of our prejudices. Such suspension of judgment and prejudice has the logical structure of a question. And the essence of the question is to open possibilities and keep them open" (2000, p. 299). Arnold's notion of curiosity as "a high and fine quality of man's nature, just this disinterested love of a free play of the mind on all subjects, for its own sake" (*CPW* III, p. 268), releases his inquirer to the same state of openness. How can this kind of heroic curiosity operate in a culture like our own which

insists that all knowledge be scientifically ordered, flattened as it is, by the limitations of certainty? Arnold's response: "you must plunge yourself down to the depths of the sea of intuition; all other men are trying as far as in them lies to keep you at the barren surface" (Arnold, "Original manuscripts of unpublished poems, notes on lectures and other matter," p. 14). His metaphor of plunging into a sea elicits the notion of abandoning the safety of what one thinks one knows and the familiar structure of knowledge. Then reading the best ideas can be understood as a liberating means to carry us farther into a vast sea of learning and unfamiliar currents of meaning where circles of knowledge connect in more than just rationally ordered ways.

In Letter II of *Letters from a Stoic* (1969, pp. 33-34), the ancient Roman moralist Seneca offers related direction to his young student Lucilius in the practice of reading. Seneca encourages him to extend his stay among the best writers by reading and re-reading them to gain their intimate acquaintance. And he suggests after going over a lot of different thoughts, selecting one to be reflected upon thoroughly each day. Approaching it this way, reading becomes a focused and deeply personal process rather than merely entertaining, capricious encounters. With the intention of reading literature for intimate insights and intuitions this wisdom suggests we can expect to find deeper and wider currents of meaning and greater resonance in everyday life.

Freedom to Think

What conditions are necessary to plunge, freely, fully into a current of ideas? How can curiosity be fully exploited as criticism, as Arnold asserts it must, "to know the best ...

irrespective of practice, politics, and everything of the kind; and to value knowledge and thought as they approach this best without the intrusion of any other considerations whatever?" (*CPW* III, p. 268). The ultimate aim of Arnold's *culture* as education is to *liberalize* individuals in society "by an ampler culture, admitted to a wider sphere of thought, living by larger ideas, with ... provincialism dissipated, ... intolerance cured, ... pettiness purged" (*CPW* II, p. 322). Is this magical thinking? I think not if there is a commitment to a balanced and well-founded perspective concerning what constitutes genuine liberal education.

We have already recognized continuity in Arnold and Gadamer's thinking. In other ways Gadamer seems to complete Arnold's instincts about aesthetic education that would liberate the mind and spirit. They share the ideal of education that is built upon intellectual freedom to enter into "the infinite conversation concerning destiny, which we call philosophy" (Gadamer, 1992, p. 164). And in both accounts critical consciousness of oneself in the world as the true object of education depends on an ethos that privileges that conversation. In Gadamer's essay, "The Ideal of the University" (1992), he warns that freedom which would permit a theoretical orientation in education must be considered a task and not just a privilege (p. 57). "Freedom will not be guaranteed us, if we do not know how to use the small space of freedom which has been left to us" (p. 52). The question of how to use that small space that is supposed to characterize *liberal* education returns us to Arnold's teaching on the priority of literature to science in "Literature and Science."

Gadamer brings sobering amplification to Arnold's concerns about the duality of science and literature with his twentieth century perspective on the dangerous distance we

live from ourselves, “which possess an eerie presence in the impulses of the human souls as, for example, the phenomenon of suicide shows, or is seen in the terrible legacy of war against one’s own kind not known anywhere else in nature” (1992, p. 55). In Arnold’s view, “The misery of the present age is not in the intensity of men’s suffering - but in their incapacity to suffer, enjoy, feel at all, wholly and profoundly” (“Original manuscripts of unpublished poems, notes on lectures and other matter,” p. 3). Gadamer also emphasizes the precariousness of the relationship between the modern ideal of scientific method and the capacity to formulate an adequate world-view. A growing confidence in the manageability of all events in nature and human events, he warns, threatens to undermine human capacity to see things in radically novel ways. Instead both men valorize close reading in the humanities and the idea of “living with ideas” to appreciate man’s truer relationship to nature.

Arnold and Gadamer call us to question whether our educational emphasis on science and technology derives from a distorted perspective of literature, which Arnold famously railed against in “Literature and Science.” Gadamer puts it another way:

[T]he human sciences will remain undermined . . . if there should be no other rationality than that of the lawfulness of empirical facts. . . . The human way of life contains its own rationality, as do all creatures and structures which crystallize out of it and which we call culture. (1992, pp. 42-43)

Their work suggests we seriously reconsider our perspective on literature and true science.

Arnold, Contemporary, and Later Theorists

Considering the legacy of Arnold’s literary perspective in relation to speculative philosophy brings us to another theoretical intersection. By the middle of the twentieth

century, philosophy, or at least philosophy in America, had reconciled the theoretical divide between science and ideas and adopted a generally unified view of Naturalism. One of its most illustrious and articulate spokesmen was John Dewey in whose shadow the work of innumerable scholars, including Arnold, who preceded him in the fields of philosophy, arts and aesthetics, and education recedes. But a closer look at the background to Naturalism brings the continuing relevancy of Arnold's project for education into greater relief.

Naturalism overcame a great many theoretical obstacles by its opposition to the duality of *Nature* and other realms of being – the empiricist antithesis of nature and experience; the idealist distinction between natural and transcendent; and the modern post-Kantian dualism between nature and man (Randall, 1944, p. 357). But on a practical level those dualisms continue to disrupt a unified perspective. Science continues to operate over and against the natural forces it works to analyze and control. Religious fundamentalism stands in unrelenting opposition to any inclusive conception of naturalism and secular perspectives on the life of the spirit. The egoism of the self as world-creating remains a pervasive modern perspective. Largely missing in twentieth and twenty-first century progressive theory is the suggestion of *practice* that would attenuate fragmenting dualistic views. The aim of "Literature and Science" is to recommend a practice in education to restore a balanced view of man's experience in the world and his position in nature, to *know ourselves and the world*. The means to this end, per Arnold, *to know the best which has been thought and said in the world* would lay a sufficiently broad and deep foundation

for that knowledge of ourselves and the world and that critical perspective on life which constitutes *culture*. Literature teaches us how to live.

Arnold's project for education is pragmatic: assimilate science to a practice of self-cultivation and refocus the business of life from a narrow conception of work and material progress to the broadest conception of humanist ideals, which formal theory seemed to have accomplished with Naturalism. In vogue at the end of the nineteenth century, Naturalism restored man to his ancient Greek status *within* Nature. But by the middle of the last century, American naturalism – already fragmented as pragmatic, genetic and experimental naturalists, realistic, structural or logical naturalists, and poetic naturalists – had been put on the defensive against rival brands of specialized knowledge (Larrabee, 1944, pp. 351-352). Arnold's project shifts the activity of critical interpretation of man's relation to Nature from philosophy to literature as pedagogical practice, a life-long commitment to reading, observing and reflecting upon the nature of existence. As Honan asserts, Arnold's approach to all literature derives from a central doctrine of "a work's *developing meaning*" (1983, p. 361). True science, as Arnold conceives it, synthesizes the best ideas that prevail over time and come to us through written language and its meanings are subject to fresh interpretation as society evolves to enrich human progress. As Stone sees it,

If a pragmatist may be defined as a pluralist with standards – someone who believes in subjecting the doctrines inherited from the past, and the unexamined presumptions of the present, to critical reflection; one whose aim is the improvement of the kingdom of this earth, bolstered by humanist ideals that promote social and individual transformation – then Arnold must be seen as an important precursor of pragmatism. (1997, p. 140)

Literature, in a perspective which pragmatist Richard Rorty has recently revitalized, is used to fill the void of metaphysical certainty (Stone, 1997, p. 159).

Naturalistic philosophy worked to distinguish itself from older supernatural and anti-natural idealistic theories while holding onto its humanistic insights. In Dewey's work there are echoes of Arnold's faith in literature and imaginative reason, his democratic insight, and his profound respect for human social capacities. Dewey's more systematic philosophy is the fruit of Arnold's belief in the affinity of the aesthetic and the critical instincts of man and his unyielding optimism about prospects for the future of mankind.

Reflecting on Arnold's faith in literature as the realm in which mankind will find a surer and surer footing as time goes on, Dewey affirms the high calling of poetry. He elaborates Arnold's conviction that poetry attaches emotion to an idea so that "the idea *is* the fact." The imagination rests upon belief, Dewey says, here echoing Arnold's "On the Modern Element:"

Let the philosophy of a time be materialistic, mechanical, and the poetry of that time is artificial and unworthy. If the poet succeeds in rising above the thought that has taken possession of contemporary life, it is because by instinct or by desire he falls back on the larger and freer ideas of an earlier day. (2008, pp. 113-114)

He asserts that Arnold's faith in poetry is a reaction to the professional philosophy of his day that did not keep pace with the scientific ideas which so radically transformed the culture. He appreciates how poetry can supply a richer, more sympathetic voice to the message of science and report the truth in tones that resonate with the spirit of man. But unlike Arnold, who relies on literature, the aim of Dewey's work is to find expression *in* philosophy that would bring man and man and man and nature into a broader and more intimate unity (2008, pp. 123-124).

George Santayana places Arnold in what he sees as the last generation of humanists whose thinking, he claims, was eclipsed by the fuller and freer inspiration embodied by the American humanists of recent centuries. The liminal point of the earlier humanist thought, defined by “the genteel tradition,” he suggests subjugates unbounded humanism to the need for conscience. “Kant and other German philosophers have actually reduced religion to false postulates or dramatic metaphors to the heroic practice of morality,” he claims. In this account, the Platonic/Christian tradition culminated in nineteenth century Romanticism. Arnold would not be as wholly sanguine about the prospects for the future of science as Santayana, who proclaimed,

Society has gradually become a rather glorious, if troubled, organization of matter, and of man for material achievements. Even our greatest troubles, such as the late war, seem only to accelerate the scientific bridling of matter: troubles do not cease, but surgery and aviation make remarkable progress.... Spiritual distress, too, cannot be banished by spiritual anarchy ... yet this spiritual distress may be disregarded, like bad dreams, so long as it remains isolated and does not organize any industrial revolt or any fresh total discouragement and mystic withdrawal, such as ushered in the triumph of Christianity. (2009, p. 560)

Santayana attributes to Arnold the Romantic perspective of Christian thought which appeals to Supernaturalism. Arnold would deny this.

Missing in Santayana’s understanding of Arnold is his conviction about unifying ideas in human nature, including those that bring man to see himself in others, and the notions of intellectual beauty and moral order as conceived in pre-Socratic Greek culture (*CPW* VII, p. 208).¹⁹ He regards the ancient moral order of righteousness that inspired Greek poetry conditioned by the nature and instincts of man. A closer reading of Arnold

¹⁹ This reference is from the collection of essays titled, *God and the Bible*, which is considered by many to represent some of Arnold’s best achievements. As R. H. Super reports on the jacket cover of this work, “Arnold defends his conceptions of Christianity – Christianity stripped of metaphysics and dogma, and morally based upon man’s experience with the need for goodness” (*CPW* VII).

would find him in substantial agreement with Santayana's Naturalism, which asserts only one natural unit in morals: the individual man (2009, p. 571). Santayana writes about the "animal obstinacy" of all individuals as the backbone of all virtue, "though intelligence, convention, and sympathy may very much extend and soften its expression.... As the brute unconditionally wills to live, so the man, especially the strong masterful man, unconditionally wills to live after a certain fashion" (2009, p. 571). Likewise, Arnold insists that man's "moral habit and rule evolved out of the instinct of self-preservation" and out of his instinct for reproduction (*CPW* VII, p. 225). That is, culture develops from practice that is found to be life-sustaining. "Unnatural" as they are to man in his rudimentary state, moral perceptions and moral practices endure in culture because they are life-sustaining he maintains. Moral intuitions constitute the "God of Experience," Arnold argues. Thus, morality is touched with emotion and made more powerful by it as with his example of the commandment to honor thy father and mother,

When Israel fixed the feeling of a child's natural attachment to its parents by the commandment: *Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Eternal thy God giveth thee*, he showed that he had risen to regard this feeling, - slowly and precariously acquired though by our supposition it may have been, - as sure, solid, and sacred part of the constitution of human nature. (*CPW* VII, p. 225)

Whether people believe that it comes from a "magnified and non-natural man in the clouds" or from man's intuition, its powers are undiminished. Arnold's conception of "The God of Experience," (*CPW* VII, pp. 203-236) parallels Santayana's insistence on seeing the moral origins and the limits of the moral sphere, removing supernatural obstacles to the purity of moral feeling (2009, p. 570). The supposition for both is of moral habit and rule that evolves from natural instinct.

Santayana's thinking on the most important matters upon which Arnold bases his call to culture is entirely consistent with Arnold's, and explicitly extends the idea of plurality.

A reasonable physician of the soul would leave his patients to prescribe for themselves, though not before subjecting them to a Socratic or even Freudian inquisition, or searching of heart, in order to awaken in them a radical self-knowledge, such as amid conventions and verbal illusions they probably do not possess. Evidently a regimen determined in this way has no validity for any other being, save in the measure in which it, as a matter of fact, that other being partakes in the same nature and would find his sincere happiness in the same things. This is seldom or never exactly the case. Nothing is more multiform than perfection. No interest, no harmony, shuts out the legitimacy or the beauty of any other.... [F]rom nature, in her indefinite plasticity, nothing is shut out *a priori*.... Perfection is the most natural form of existence, simply carrying out the organic impulse by which any living creature arises at all; nor can that impulse ever find its quietus and satisfaction short of perfection. (2009, p. 572)

As Arnold observes, the perfection of the self finds unity in general perfection. Santayana also finds that in the mindful person passions acquire a sense of responsibility to one another (2009, p. 573). Thus the intellectual path of philosophical naturalism can be seen to parallel Arnold's aesthetic ideals pushing against a materialist, reductive view of life in favor of humanist ideals that can transform degraded human existence through radical self-knowledge.

Conclusion

In the work considered here, Arnold demonstrates the value of ancient wisdom to modern day problems. Responding to the degradation of life in a world which Taylor (2007) describes as plagued by the malaise of immanence, he refreshes timeless good sense with the idea of a practice that would raise our consciousness and interpret life through a

critical spirit. With literature as mentor he recommends turning inward to recover moral capacities for unity with nature and the human community. His claims on the value of the aesthetic experience that more than reason alone can instruct us in how to judge a good life anticipate modern hermeneutic theory. Moral interpretation of life through literature will bring us to new modes of understanding and reveal connections that undermine what reason alone may deny. Then a law of ultimate fusion can restore a more satisfying equipoise in the life of the individual and in the collective life of society.

Arnold asks us to trust the moral authority of aesthetic judgment that can fill the void of religion and philosophy and rescue the millions who long for escape from the darkling plain. He makes obvious the reasons to seriously consider a radical shift in emphasis that would subjugate the intense focus on scientific knowledge to humanist ideals. He brings to educational theory what Nietzsche faults the ancient Greeks for missing: the priority of art and literature to science and technology. His view that reading literature as a natural practice unveils a deeper and wider nexus of reality which human nature shares with the physical world is a premise for fundamental educational reform. His work makes a convincing case for closer scrutiny of new theories in aesthetic phenomena to consider that art can reveal unity and continuity as much in matters of neuroscience and quantum physics as in human existence. It suggests that a truer relation of literature to science is not rival but augmenting and cooperative.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: the Direction of Literature in Academia

When we remember that our aim is spiritual progress, we return to striving to be our best selves. This is how happiness is won.

Epictetus

I have tried to amplify direct quotes from Arnold and his contemporaries and nineteenth century rhetoric and to reinvigorate the meaning of many of the terms he uses to signify key themes in his work. Already challenged in his own time when critics would exclusively equate culture with highbrow *Belle Lettres* or ancient Greek and Latin, “culture” has devolved into a nearly meaningless word today. With the epistemological change in the use of the term comes a conceptual loss for Arnold’s project. Instead of culture standing for a unifying concept, it has become fragmented in its different uses and interpretations among a variety of notions of multiculturalism, pluralism and native culture and the ideas that those terms engender concerning inclusion and exclusion. The activism of Arnold’s idea of culture seems farther removed from its common usage today. The apparent lack of meaning, Jacoby (1999) asserts, signals an intellectual retreat.

The economic structure of society – call it advanced industrial society or capitalism or market economy – stands as the invariant; few can imagine a different economic

project. The silent agreement says much about multiculturalism. No divergent political or economic vision animates cultural diversity. From the most militant Afrocentrists to the most ardent feminists, all quarters subscribe to very similar beliefs about work, equality and success. The secret of cultural diversity is its political and economic uniformity. The future looks like the present with more options. Multiculturalism spells the demise of utopia. (p. 40)

The “bedrock principle” of pluralism has become “the ideology of the market and the individual” (Jacoby, 1999, p. 47) and its elevation in cultural discourse obscures a more penetrating cultural criticism. Without excavating deeper currents of influence in the origins of our capitalist structure, any idea of a more substantive egalitarian impulse is submerged in the rhetoric of new cultural criticism. The tyranny of the Puritan work and wealth fetish remains unchallenged. At the same time, the new economic metrics of rational choice theory, in common and increasing use, insult the humanity of our population. Economic market forces shape how we as a nation, and as a global influence, measure and compare “quality of life.” As Nussbaum (1995) asserts in *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life*, which I consider in more detail below, these forces threaten the hope of human solidarity and a more humane construal of the world.

Jacoby (1999) tracks the demise of utopian ideals through an intellectual history of modern ideology that appears to have taken a society, already spiritually unmoored, even further out to sea. He champions the boldness of liberal thinkers like Arnold and decries the loss of true egalitarian ideals when culture critics embraced “mass culture as complex terrains of subversion and contestation” (p. 69). He continues,

That people are equal and should be treated equally is one matter; that their thoughts and activities are equal is another. The second does not follow from the first or, at least, it does not directly follow; it must first pass through history and society. This means that the principle of human equality and its concrete expression

in society are not the same. By virtue of inferior education or destructive condition, equal people develop unequally. (p. 69)

An uncritical acceptance of the fundamental status quo forfeits any imperative to seek the kind of radical disruption of injustice in the system, which Arnold's concept of culture embodies. Conservatives, who understand the fundamental shift we are called to consider by his idea of culture, blanch at his writing. On the other side, by associating Arnold with conservative nineteenth century elitism, modern liberals dismiss him as anachronistic. As he reflected upon his own legacy in later life, he admits to having become a,

nearly worn-out man-of-letters, with one nostrum for practical application, his nostrum for public schools for the middle classes; and with a frippery of phrases about sweetness and light; seeing things as they really are, knowing the best that has been thought and said in the world, which never had very much solid meaning, and have now quite lost the gloss and charm of novelty. (*CPW X*, p. 74)

Jacoby insists that if we cast Arnold aside, we cast aside the promise of seeing a better future. "The point is: Arnold did not defend 'sweetness and light' as abstract goods; he defended a bountiful world against a cramped life of money and work" (1999, p. 96).

Recent work that examines the status of literary studies in today's colleges and universities suggests that his ideas have not been permanently eclipsed either by more recent relativistic cultural criticism or a less enlightened perspective of human flourishing. His work resonates with a variety of critical perspectives on the place of literature among the growing spectrum of academic specializations that currently exists in American colleges and universities.

New Pedagogy

Nussbaum makes two claims in *Poetic Justice* that suggest the relevance of literature as pedagogy: first, that reading literature provides insights that can play a role in the construction of an adequate moral and political theory; and second, that it develops moral capacities (1995, p. 12). She brings these insights to inform the education of lawyers and judges (in a course she teaches at the University of Chicago called “Law and Literature”²⁰) and, hopefully, to provide a counterweight to prevailing models of utilitarian rational choice. Her goal is to have what she calls the “literary imagination” recognized as a part of public rationality.

Nussbaum targets the normative economics of social science - rational choice theory - that operates in public policy-making, sociology, political science, welfare and development economics, and the law. She wants to make room for a more moral and less utilitarian picture of human beings and human rationality. The science is based on four assumptions: commensurability, aggregation, maximizing, and exogenous preferences. Most contemporary models of rational choice theory deem all value factors as measurable on a single scale that exhibits differences only of quantity, i.e., lacking any regard for quality. All things are thus commensurate with one another; no single option is essentially better than any other that one might choose. Pooling all the data on and about individual

²⁰ Nussbaum (1995) describes the course: “The law students and I read Sophocles, and Plato, and Seneca, and Dickens. In connection with the literary works, we discuss compassion and mercy, the role of the emotions in public judgment, what is involved in imagining the situation of someone different from oneself. We talked about ways in which texts of different types present human beings – seeing them, in some cases, as ends in themselves, endowed with dignity and individuality, in others as abstract undistinguishable units or as mere means to the ends of others. Since the University of Chicago Law School is the birthplace of the law-and-economics movement, we discussed the relationship between the literary imagination and economic reasoning” (xiv).

lives without regard for differences produces a social measure by *aggregation*. The idea of *maximizing* ignores what is aimed at (for example, wealth, power, satisfaction, or pleasure) and calculates individual and social rationality only as aimed at getting as large an amount of something as possible. Lastly, individual preferences are assumed to be *exogenous*.

Utilitarian rational choice theorists claim to be able to predict behavior on the presumption that the end of individual choice is always the maximization of satisfaction of individual self-interest. A more extreme version of rational choice theory maintains that “all of man’s deliberative, forward-looking behavior follows the principles of economics” (as cited in Nussbaum, 1995, p. 47). Public policy makers in decision-making increasingly use the science of utilitarian rational choice. Arnold could hardly have imagined a more mechanistic perspective to inform how we regard the life choices of human beings.

Based on her commitment to the idea that storytelling and literary imagining can provide essential ingredients in rational argument, Nussbaum reads Dickens’s *Hard Times*, a satire on perfect scientific rationality to infiltrate the purely economic perspective of her law students. (Recall Trilling’s description in Chapter Two of the coercive social and economic forces and society’s acquiescence to them that was a popular topic of literary figures of Arnold’s time and the theme of Dickens’s satire). The story’s main character, Mr. Gradgrind, economist, public man, and educator is right, she says,

Literature and the literary imagination are subversive. We are accustomed by now to think of literature as optional: as great, valuable, entertaining, excellent, but something that exists off to one side of political and economic and legal thought, in another university department, ancillary rather than competitive. The segmentation of the modern academy – along with narrowly hedonistic theories of literary value – has caused us to lose hold of the insight that Mr. Gradgrind securely grasped: that the novel is a morally controversial form, expressing in its very shape and style, in its modes of interaction with its readers, a normative sense of life. It tells its readers

to notice this and not this, to be active in these and not those ways. It leads them into certain postures of the mind and heart and not others. And as Mr. Gradgrind all too clearly perceived, these are the wrong way, and highly dangerous postures, from the point of view of the narrow conception of economic rationality that is, in his view, normative for both public and private thought, (1995, p. 2)

Nussbaum argues not only that literature illuminates the personal life and private imagination but also that literary forms have a unique contribution to make when larger social and political concerns are at issue. She shares the perspective of literature as dialogical with Arnold, Iser, and Gadamer and introduces it to new pedagogical territory in a school of law.

Good literature is disturbing in a way that history and social science writing frequently are not. Because it summons powerful emotions, it disconcerts and puzzles. It inspires distrust of conventional pieties and exacts a frequently painful confrontation with one's own thoughts and intentions. One may be told many things about people in one's own society and yet keep that knowledge at a distance. Literary works that promote identification and emotional reaction cut through those self-protective stratagems, requiring us to see and to respond to many things that may be difficult to confront – and they make this process palatable by giving us pleasure in the very act of confrontation. (Nussbaum, 1995, pp. 5-6)

In the telling of a story, she reasons that the novel involves its readers with the personages and the perplexities of their lives. By association with their possibilities for existence and choice that “are in certain respects (the reader's) own to seize, though concrete circumstances may differ greatly,” their interpretation is both moral and critical. In the imaginary life of the novel, things that do not really exist help readers acknowledge their own world and “choose more reflectively in it” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 31).

The wisdom and sympathetic experience of the aesthetic engagement that one may come to appreciate in a course such as this may remediate a law student's moral perspective and bring about a more generous outlook on the world. But to habituate an

inward turning, moral eye adequate to the intellectual deliverance that Arnold preaches would require far greater institutional commitment. The hope in Nussbaum's project is that the message is trumpeted at the university and through the professional network to focus attention on more radical reform.

The Power for Good

Reviewing *Culture and Anarchy* for a new edition of the original text of 1869, Steve Marcus (1994) considers whether Arnold's educational principles may just be obsolete.

The question is how does one make a claim for standards of excellence and judgments or differential quality in a social and cultural world that is epistemologically unmoored, socially and ethnically diverse, temperamentally relativistic and that is, moreover, driven in the main by the politics of identity, group thought, and the hegemony of representativeness? The major presuppositions of this world – especially as they obtain in contemporary American schools and universities – is that there are no plausible, convincing, or intersubjective standards to which anyone can appeal in the effort to establish judgments of quality. (p. 184)

Arnold insists that lights brighter than reason alone must guide us forward. Marcus interprets Arnold correctly when he observes that reform will come about only by way of indirect means precisely because culture rejects machinery and politics as ends. Reform depends on a prioritization in education of an “inward working” culture as the means by which larger aims will be brought closer to us (p. 170). He interprets Arnold's message in *Culture and Anarchy* in language that speaks to Nussbaum's Law and Literature:

Culture seeks to humanize knowledge – that is, to make it general and nonprofessional and nonexclusive – to make it available without condescension to everyone. And the means of doing so are to be found in education, not politics What is needed, (Arnold argues with conviction), is ‘a principle of authority,’ that is to say, some idea or entity that can stand for right reason, for judgments of value,

for judgments that take precedence over the interest-begotten prejudices of class or group – judgments that today we would call something like regulative norms. (Marcus, 1994, p. 175 and pp. 177-178)

His argument stands precariously against concerns about teaching any cultural tradition in modernity: that notions such as truth or knowledge and distinctions of epistemological or aesthetic merit are discredited as elements of systems of social control and cultural oppression. While his reflections on this text cause us to seriously question the “effectiveness and powers for good” of educational institutions, Marcus concludes with a mixture of omen and hope recommending the radical Arnoldian ideal of “what may be thinkable if not possible for modern humanity” (p.183). He continues:

To lose belief in education, to cease to hope that education is the means to light, would be to admit that the cause of light is itself lost. I do not think that we are ready yet to break the connection between our historical past and the perennially embattled present. And as long as we have not severed that connection, *Culture and Anarchy* will remain as one of the sources to which we resort with the prospect of finding strength to continue, reserves of argument, phrases and language to shore up our spirits, and courage to face the darker prospects of our later, indeed perhaps our late, modern world. (1994, p. 185)

Professing Literature

In the same new edition of *Culture and Anarchy*, Graff (1994) focuses on the issue of a common culture that is responsible for Arnold’s regular invocation in the much-ballyhooed debates in the culture wars. Newer conceptions of pluralism and multiculturalism have common culture proponents on the defensive today, precisely where Graff intends to keep them. While acknowledging that “unchecked critical rationality ... can lead to relativism, nihilism and the dissolution of traditional certainties” (p. 187), Graff challenges the notion of universality championed by conservatives with whom, as I argue

in Chapter Three, he mistakenly associates Arnold. Regrettably Graff's read of Arnold obscures a broader interpretation of 'culture' and the clear perspective of the individual as the proper object of education. Thus in his institutional history of literary studies, *Professing Literature* (2007), Arnold's view of literature fails to effectively inform Graff's proposals for change in how we profess literature. Graff's cogent and sometimes amusing analysis argues for a new direction for literature in academia today that could benefit from a more developed understanding of Arnoldian ideals.

Graff asserts a lost pedagogical potential inherent in controversies regarding how to teach literature and why, which have long engaged the faculties of literary studies and university administrations but have largely remained hidden from students' experience of literature. He is right in concluding that reading literary works without appreciating these controversies seriously diminishes the intellectual coherence of the academic experience.

Graff's research began with an assumption that there was an original shared agreement about the social value of a literary tradition that has been lost over time, amidst academic turf wars and newer critical theories of literature. As is often the case, discussions on these matters evoke the concept of humanism Matthew Arnold espoused. But as Graff explains, despite vague assumptions of some tacit belief in a guiding humanist hand that pervades literature departments, which he dubs "The Humanist Myth," more recent concepts of literature and literary scholarship have eclipsed Arnoldian humanism and consequently, controversy abounds.

Graff points to the failure of Arnoldian humanist conceptions of tradition and values to provide an effective academic umbrella to reconcile newer literary studies in

synergistic relationship to each other. Instead, competing views of literature, scholarship, and culture have divided literature departments along the lines of theorists and humanists, and foundationalists and anti-foundationalists. The initial crux of the great divide, he shows, was the institutionalization of “philological and historical literary scholarship that ... qualified literary studies for departmental status in the new research university” (2007, p. 3). The continuing trend of departmental specialization now undermines Arnold’s ideal of literature as a coherent criticism of life. And as long as the turf wars continue within literature departments, no unified model for literary studies stands for *Literature* in relation to other university programs and the general curriculum.

Returning to Arnold can be a productive starting point for discussions about mending academic divides and bringing the wisdom of competing interests into greater and more productive congruence. In the light of newer scholarship his teaching on “true science” suggests progressive interdisciplinary possibilities which I consider below. As Graff suggests, there is great pedagogical value to exposing the controversies. But his answer to the turf wars is to push literature to evolve into another new form of literary theory that ends at uncovering the ideological assumptions upon which the controversies arose. He overlooks another, more productive alternative: reconsider reading literature as a practice of self-cultivation. Drawing back the curtain on all the controversy, students may more fully consider the place of literature in the tradition of philosophy as a way of life by reading the “best” work together. Discussing it in that context can introduce the real possibility of experiencing profoundly more animating potentials in literature.

As part of a teach-the-controversy reform, a rehabilitated Arnoldian point of view on literature can expand the insights of good scholarship that reside amid the controversy on the concept of general education, such as Hutchins' recommendations in 1936, which call for

a course of study consisting of the greatest books of the western world and the arts of reading, writing, thinking and speaking, together with mathematics, the best exemplar of the processes of human reason. The idea was 'to frame a curriculum which educes the elements of our common human nature,' which would teach 'what has been done in the past, and what the greatest men have thought.' (as cited in Graff, 2007, p. 164)

Pursuing the controversies pedagogically would lead to critical responses to that traditionalist view of general education. Does Hutchins' view surrender to social pressures of vocationalism and material interest if they withdraw in aloofness from the social affairs of the time? (Graff, 2007, p. 166). Graff's interpretation of the contemporary reception to the early proponents of general education rests on Dewey's insights but would expand with Arnoldian ideals.

To divorce education from the immediate vocational world ... was merely to leave the world of business and power to flourish unexamined. Dewey ... wondered why 'the facts stated about the evil effects of our love of money' should not legitimately invite attention from 'institutions devoted to love of truth for its own sake,' attention, that is, 'to the economic institutions that have produced this overweening love, and to their social consequences in other matters than the temper of educational institutions; and attention to the means available for changing this state of things' (as cited in Graff, 2007, p. 166)

Arnold's opposition to insularity is instructive. "To know how others stand, that we may know how we ourselves stand"(CPW I, p. 21) offers a penetrating modern perspective. And the *problem*, "to know how we ourselves stand, that we may correct our mistakes," suggests that exclusively outward turning education is part of the controversy. It beckons a

clear focus on the true object and purpose of education and the vision to see existing conditions in a new light.

Reconsidering the idea that literature teaches us how to live offers no panacea to the institutional fragmentation brought about by “professionalization” and “academicization” that Graff reports. His work reveals that coherence is as absent in the curriculum as it is in the culture. But if there is progress to be made in the restoration of unity it may be achieved by drawing the community of educators together to seriously inquire into Arnold’s dictum of literature as criticism of life.

Interdisciplinarity

In *The Marketplace of Ideas*, Louis Menand (2010) also reflects on the current state of affairs in the American university. He suggests that we have lost our way within a system that is caught in an obsolete mind-set. While he disputes Graff’s teach-the-controversy resolution to the problem of conflicting approaches to inquiry in literature and the humanities, his answer is to get on with education without a consensus paradigm for the humanities. He commends the leadership of the humanities in awakening the rest of the academic world to issues surrounding objectivity, interpretation, and the significance of cultural differences. And he is not uncomfortable leaving eclecticism to define humanist studies.

Most of the shocks to the philosophical foundations of teaching and scholarship in the humanities, from the interpretive turn in the sixties and seventies to the diversity turn in the eighties and nineties, arose from challenges to prevailing understandings of what counts. Legitimacy – is this really knowledge or is it something else? – was precisely what was at stake in (the institutional equivalent of) a revolution that the humanities experienced between 1970 and 1980). It is

probably impossible, after the revolution, to put the toothpaste back in the tube. Eclecticism seems to be the fate of the academic humanities. But there is no reason why that cannot in itself constitute a claim to legitimacy. (p., 92)

Menand's work argues for less formal disciplinarity; and he should be commended for his broad insights on the problems that specialization and professionalization bring to education. However since his analysis makes little substantive distinction between humanities programs and any other non-professional program, it overlooks the potential for remedy inherent in the humanities.

To allow eclecticism to define the mission of studies in humanities may be simply too easy an answer to the problem. It precludes the opportunity to introduce real coherence to the students' academic experience and real coherence among the variety of objects of study and methods of inquiry associated with the liberal arts and sciences. And while there can be no triumphant, all-inclusive concept of knowledge, Arnold's argument for the value of a unifying premise that connects all knowledge is important to consider. To settle for eclecticism implies an alignment between relativism and the idea of truth. It breeds competition and opposition among the sub-disciplines and thus produces fragmented, competing perspectives on the question of legitimacy of knowledge.

Menand's research also observes a general fragility in the constitution of humanities programs in academia today that stems from a utilitarian perspective among academic stakeholders looking for return on investment which more professional studies have little difficulty in demonstrating. "There was anxiety that behind the problem of public justification was another problem, ... there was no clear agreement of a definition of what humanists do" (2010, p. 63). His point in *Marketplace* is that a divorce between

liberalism and professionalism as educational missions rests on a superstition: that the practical is the enemy of the true (p. 57).

Menand would like to change the way producers of knowledge (professors) are produced and make academic inquiry more porous and holistic (p. 158). His historical analysis underscores the evolution (and legitimacy and professionalization) of literary criticism as a form of knowledge in its own right, as “a discovery about the nature of literature or of literary language.” But these developments overlook the origins of literary criticism and its conception in ancient tradition that could be useful to his ideas of reform. He describes the rationale to which literary criticism is subjected by the professionalization of literary studies.

To the extent that literary criticism is thought of as the possibly idiosyncratic interpretation and appreciation of works of literature and the drawing of moral and other non-aesthetic conclusions from those activities, the university literature department is not especially well suited to the business of producing either interesting literary criticism or interesting literary critics. But to the degree that literary criticism is thought of as a discovery about the nature of literature or of literary language by the application of philosophically grounded methods of inquiry, then the modern academy becomes a relatively congenial place in which to practice criticism. (p. 110)

Menand looks at how universities have gotten into the business of credentialing professionals whose success is measured in journal articles produced to fill the marketplace of ideas. If colleges and universities were only knowledge factories, there should be no objection to what his analysis exposes. But when the current of professionalization subordinates the study of literature that animates moral consciousness, that shift undermines the idea that academia is more than a set of knowledge factories. The professionalization of literary studies develops at the expense of the liberal value of

literature for human flourishing. His work highlights examples of successful research from collaborative efforts between disciplines that creates new bodies of knowledge. These are indicative of the potential of interdisciplinarity and “true science.”

The most important intellectual development in the academy in the twenty-first century has to do with the relationship between the life sciences – particularly neurobiology, genetics, and psychology – to fields outside the natural sciences, such as philosophy, economics, and literary studies. So far, contention and collaboration in this area seem robust. The system is doing what it was designed to do. It is helping people think better by helping them think together. (p. 19)

The familiar echo of Menand’s answer to what liberal studies depend on indicates the road reform should take: “*the disinterested pursuit of knowledge, without regard to political, economic, or practical benefit*” (p. 55). The promise of interdisciplinarity, he believes, will “smooth out the differences between the empirical and the hermeneutic, the hard and the soft, disciplines” (p. 118).

A Better Future

To the extent that students of Arnold see a utopian vision in his project for education, Jacoby amplifies the urgency of Arnold’s call to culture to restrain the human degradation perpetrated by market forces. His views on the ways that the modern notion of culture subsumes economic and political visions, and defeats utopian ideals are compelling. He asserts that an elastic notion of culture that initially undermined prejudice and ethnocentrism now obscures profoundly deeper forces of social and economic reality and its meaningful imperatives. Diverse cultures rest on the same unexamined infrastructures, he argues, but this does not enter the discourse on pluralism and equal opportunity. Jacoby regards this as an impoverished picture of culture. In its disregard for

the totalizing effects of market forces it is a threat to the progress of civilization. Arnold made the point in *Culture and Anarchy*.

Culture begets a dissatisfaction which is of the highest possible value in stemming the common tide of men's thoughts in a wealthy and industrial community, and which saves the future, as one may hope, from being vulgarized, even if it cannot save the present. (CPW V, p. 98)

Marcus (1994) emphasizes the urgency of Arnold's message for us today. Even radical opposition to the monopoly of official public discourse, he says, "seems to be fatally infected by [its totalizing force] and so speaks in virtually the same shamefully uncritical terms about power and wealth, as if these necessary means were somehow magical, self-justifying, and absolute ends in themselves" (p. 173).

Jacoby has faith in Arnold's project to excavate the infrastructure with a critique of mass culture that can reignite a utopian impulse.

Arnold serves as a symbol in the culture wars, but he deserves better; he offered an approach to mass culture that should be resuscitated. Along with John Stuart Mill and Alexis de Tocqueville, Arnold endorsed democracy and equality. At the same time the great nineteenth-century liberal thinkers did not fetishize these categories; they remained alert to outcomes and contexts, assailing "leveling," the "tyranny of the majority" or "uniformity." They understood that supporting equality and democracy did not entail approving all its configurations. On the contrary, they often protested what in today's idiom might be called mass culture. They were democrats and egalitarians willing to criticize everyday culture and opinions no matter how entrenched or popular. (Jacoby, 1999, 68)

As I have been writing this, historic democratic revolutions are taking place in the Middle East. People who have never had a say in how they should be governed or what constitutes justice have become newly enfranchised in self-government. How those populations form a conception of the good, and the meaning and purpose of life will have everything to do with free, available democratic education. But already at work in those

fledgling democracies is the silent hand of capitalism and the forces of market manipulation which, if not exposed, can sublimate democracy's ideal to narrow utilitarian aims. One can only hope that the egalitarian and democratic thrust of Arnoldian themes enlighten a philosophy of education aimed at true equality, self knowledge and critical moral consciousness as the bedrock for increasing the general standard of human welfare and the prospects of world peace.

Closer to home, the corruption of misguided capitalism has created an historic gulf between an elite, wealthy few and the rest of society that defies the principles of equality upon which our Western democracies were founded. What is as disconcerting as the problem is the apparent apathy of the general public which I interpret as symptomatic of a more pervasive malaise of society. Thus I read Arnold with an eye to conditions currently.

Arnold rests the prospects for the progress of civilization upon an intellectual deliverance of our society from degrading forces of modernity. The answer to his concerns about standards of human conduct and the possibilities for really fruitful reforms he believes lie in enlarged knowledge that comes to us from the best ideas that prevail, if not in philosophy and religion, in literature. With heightened powers of reason to penetrate dominant or hegemonic convention, an inward working culture can develop the interests of the individual. He calls us to consider how we may learn to behold our own existential possibilities in the aesthetic experience. When religion and philosophy fail to adequately interpret the good in life, literature can fill a metaphysical void with a rich inheritance of ideas from the long march of civilization

that preceded us. Each age may rely on its own interpretation of the epistemic good that comes to us from other ages.

Arnold's work calls especially those who profess literature and all stakeholders in education to seriously reconsider literature's pedagogical potential and consider how the art of living can enhance working knowledge. Menand's outlook on academic interdisciplinarity amplifies the message of *Literature and Science*. Arnold does not call for a paradigm change in our global economic system. But through education on an individual basis, he wants us to find the moral authority of principled reason and the interconnections of all knowledge. Then collectively the spirit of the system can be elevated. And thus its stewards may govern more humanely and share its goods more equally.

As Pratt maintains, Arnold's idea of culture "is intended to displace what he sees emerging as a self-righteous but narrow-minded materialist national culture" (2000, p. 5). Prophetic in his own time, Arnold's ideas have never been more relevant nor the need for culture more urgent. Arnold's literary criticism responds to the question of what literature can *do* for the individual and society. Literature as pedagogy can reanimate the spiritual life of society. By its capacity to edify, it can defeat the miscarriage of nihilism and carry mankind to a new age and a better future.

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