# Freedom of Expression
# in Creative Writing:
# Scope and Limits
# for
# Secondary School
# Students

by

# Marlowe Irvine

B. Ed. Simon Fraser University, 1980

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts

in the

Faculty of Education

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Simon Fraser University
August, 2003

# APPROVAL

**NAME**       Marlowe Graham Irvine

**DEGREE**     Master of Arts

**TITLE**      Freedom of Expression in Creative Writing:  Scope and Limits for Secondary School Students

## EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

**Chair**      Allan MacKinnon

_____

Sharon Bailin, Professor
Senior Supervisor

_____

Geoff Madoc-Jones, Assistant Professor
Member

_____

Stuart Richmond, Professor, Faculty of Education
Examiner

**Date:**    August 25, 2003

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the limits of freedom of expression for student writers in secondary schools. It consists of both a survey of the educational, philosophical, social and aesthetic concerns around freedom of expression generally, and a proposal which seeks to address the application of these ideas in secondary creative writing assignments, particularly those which might be called literary writing assignments. The paper begins with an anecdotal report on some of the ways in which students can be touched by both free speech and self-censorship. It next establishes a guiding principle by attempting to delineate the aims of education and the goals of schools in a democratic and pluralist society. Using these aims and goals for direction, the thesis examines theoretical arguments for and against free expression and the points of contact between these arguments and the role of schools as educational and socializing institutions. The paper concludes with a suggestion for creating a classroom atmosphere in which a student writer might feel free to express a controversial, unpopular, or untested idea while preserving the classroom as a place free of a tainted atmosphere and where all students can feel valued.

# DEDICATION

To Tatiana


Whose Dad

is not going to let "them"

tell her what to read

or what to say

It [*Shylock* by Mark leiren-Young] is also about a particular kind of censorship that I believe can be most insidious — self-censorship. For any artist in any discipline to feel he or she must inhibit the creative impulse to avoid social disgrace is deplorable. The thought that one might not produce a play, exhibit a canvas, broadcast a work or publish a novel on the grounds that it might be "perceived as offensive" is in danger of becoming a disturbing commonplace of our cultural universe. In this age of heightened awareness and virtually instant global communication, there is, to be sure, a greater degree of responsibility to be borne by artists when approaching "sensitive" material. But there is a dangerously thin line between respecting and accommodating the comfort threshold of "minority groups" and strangling the principle of freedom of speech.

—John Juliani, Director of *Shylock*, 1996

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My daughter once penned a very short piece for a grade 12 course. The teacher refused to allow it and told my daughter that as a result she would fail the entire course; she dropped the course rather than take the failing grade. Although she did lose the credit for the course, she will not lose credit for the idea that I will steal from that piece: I wish to leave the names of those students, teachers, colleagues, cohorts, friends, and relatives who deserve acknowledgement for their support, and ideas, safely stowed in my head. They know who they are; if they don't, telling them here would not make any difference.

One, however, must be named: Dr. Sharon Bailin. When admiration, indebtedness, and gratitude reach such size a few words on an "acknowledgment" page seem inadequate. Thank you Sharon; you helped me to make a fundamental change in my understanding of myself and my world. I am better for it.

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# Opening:

My interest in students' freedom of expression began early in my teaching career. In fact, it was the result of an activity of the first hour of the first day of my first full-time teaching position. Fresh from Simon Fraser University's innovative Professional Development Program, I walked into a ninth grade classroom with an activity specifically designed to enhance creative writing. It went by the acronym U.S.S.W. (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Writing), likely a theft from the highly successful U.S.S.R. (Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading) program introduced by *Hooked on Books*[1] and adopted by many British Columbia schools. Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Writing had many parameters in common with its namesake. Students were to spend a set period of time, say ten minutes, writing: writing anything they pleased, exploring any ideas that came to them, writing for the sake of writing. The content, like the selection of reading material in U.S.S.R., was at the discretion of the student. The idea was to generate ideas, unsorted, unexamined, and most of all unevaluated by the teacher. The hope was that students would use this freedom and move, eventually, beyond the ideas they had garnered from other sources and begin to generate their own.

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[1] Daniel Fader and Morton H. Shaevitz, *Hooked on Books* (New York: Berkeley Publishing Corporation, 1966).

It seemed to me at the time, as, indeed, it still does, that a principal benefit of such an exercise lies precisely in the complete freedom of expression that it affords. Students in secondary schools are restricted in many ways. Their lives are governed by buzzers and bells, timetables and timed tests, correct answers and corrected responses. To provide a single activity in which they are permitted absolute leeway in the subject matter might be to allow a level of freedom of speech rarely enjoyed by any. A momentary break from possible censure may not necessarily be something to be supplied by the school. After all, they can write anything they wish on their own time and burn it at will, but if we are to force them to produce something, might it not be incumbent on us to permit them absolute freedom to convince them that the activity of writing is important in and of itself?

I introduced the activity to my students and included, as dictated by my exposure to the program to that date, a cheerful: "You can write anything you want. I won't be reading it." One student asked if they were "allowed" to write "swear words." I repeated that I would not be reading their material and so, "how would I know, if you wrote swear words." Clearly, in the light of what was to happen, this was not the answer that some of the community wanted. They wanted me to "pre-censor" my students' work or better yet, have the students self-censor.

The following morning the school principal called me in to his office. This was not, I supposed, how a teaching career was supposed to begin. It seemed that a parent, angered either over my actual instructions, or over their own or a student's interpretation of my instructions, had phoned the district superintendent, at home, who had, in turn, phoned the principal, at home. He was kind enough, I suppose, to wait until I came to work. The message, though, was clear. Students were neither to be encouraged, nor to be allowed, to write "swear words" while in school. I only wish in hindsight that I had had the quick-wittedness and gall to ask for the list of these "unacceptable" words, in writing, so that I might distribute it to my students, or post them for quick reference during U.S.S.W.

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I did not. In the twenty years since that occurrence, I have waged a constant internal struggle between my felt need to provide students with the absolute freedom of expression I feel must be their right and the need to expose them to and educate them in the bounds and restrictions that society imposes. How do I, I wondered, allow them freedom and still allow them to explore restrictions that are often, whether reasonable or unreasonable, a part of harmonious social relationships? Are there ever times where I, as a teacher, should encourage them to rebel against externally imposed limits on their expression? Are there ever times when I should encourage them to self-censor?

Now, particularly as a number of school districts, including mine, publish and redistribute, for use in schools, the writings of students in district anthologies, I am presented with an additional problem. If I choose to censor certain pieces of the work my students submit for such an anthology, that is, not submit it for possible publication, what will I be saying to that student? Will they see the legitimacy of my decision as protection of them, or will they feel personally rejected despite my protestations? If I select others for publication, how am I to be certain that the work that I do submit will not anger yet another parent, not evoke another call to another school superintendent, not offend another innocent adolescent in another school? These student writers see themselves as "artists." Already some identify themselves with the greater body of writers whose books decorate the library showcases during "Freedom to Read" week. It would not be surprising, either, to find that students see their writing as personal, as their creations. Why should they not, then, be unwilling to send them off for a faceless "editor" to manipulate, mangle, or murder? Without a list of "unacceptable" words, or better yet a list of unacceptable words, unapproved representations, and restricted ideas, how could I ever guide them in producing work that will not be challenged by others? My school district now also includes a "warning" to students that the district reserves the right to edit their work for publication. Since the inclusion of this warning, not a single student in contact with me regarding the district writing anthology has wanted to submit work. The more important question is why they should ever want to.

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The attitude of the public school as an institution toward acceptable and unacceptable writing by students is not new, nor surprising. Although I can remember no specific incidents in my own school career, I would be willing to speculate that I knew that there were unspoken rules about what could and could not be addressed in writing exercises. I do, however, remember with fondness and respect an English 12 teacher who allowed a close friend and me to read aloud a joint writing exercise that would have likely been unacceptable in many school classrooms. As a parent, I saw the effects of strictures on both writing and reading in my daughter's contact with the school system. From a fifth grade story that was too violent and explicit (although a true account of her experiences on the playground) to a five sentence self-portrait which had to be withdrawn so that she would not face failure for a grade twelve course.

I have not spent more than twenty years in the public schools without also becoming aware of the power of adolescents to hurt one another with words. As much as I believed that unrestricted opportunities to write were important, I was not about to allow unrestricted opportunities to publish work for consumption in the classroom. The bathroom graffiti, scrawling on desktops and vicious notes that can be found in most high schools are likely to be as harmful to individual students who are their victims as any written attacks they encounter in their lives. Allowing, and indeed supporting, those insidious attacks on other persons, their sensibilities, their ideas, their family, their culture, or their faith through posting the work of another student on the wall would be completely unacceptable to me as a teacher, parent, citizen, or moral human being.

On the contrary, my teaching seems, at least to me, to be informed principally by a call for understanding, tolerance, and acceptance of others. What I want, as much as I may want anything else to be inculcated into the minds of my students, is the respect for the persons around them and all that entails: respect for their desire to be in a place that they find comfortable; respect for their desire to believe differently; respect for their desire to be a different person. I may not be able to make material progress in the

ability of my students to appreciate *Hamlet*, but I feel that I have constructed a classroom atmosphere where they can know that it is okay to find Hamlet, and all his whining, difficult, boring, and uninformed by a belief system that would really help him out.

However, as much as I might like to think that I teach values that contain no seeds of discomfort for my students, I also know that education always means some sort of dissonance between what a student knows, understands and appreciates and what a teacher would have them know, understand, or appreciate. I demand, for example, that my students learn to persuade others, in discussion that a particular interpretation of a piece of literature is valid. In doing so I insist that they use rationally formed arguments. Rationality is, therefore, a part of the classroom atmosphere, at least on some days. This means, however, that some students will be subject to having an idea that they have formed, unaware of its rational roots, if indeed it had any, argued vociferously in the "public" forum of the classroom. I know from the red faces and wet eyes during some class discussions that my posted admonitions to "discuss the idea, not the person" are not enough to protect the feelings of my students. I do not think my frequent statement that "it is okay to be offended" helps much either.

So what am I to do? Is there a way to allow students to explore words, ideas, images, and beliefs that may cause genuine discomfort to others yet still protect those others from the hurt they may feel when those ideas are expressed? Ideally, of course, the students of the public system would understand both the basis and the consequences of each idea and those ideas truly hurtful or repugnant to others would not be a part of their worldview. Censorship would be unnecessary. There would not be self-censorship but rather a process of selection that would consist of finding the right terms in which to discuss issues because no truly negative ideas about others would be a part of any student's worldview. However, this is an idealized end-product and I also entertain a suspicion that the act of fighting through the decision to self-

censor or to offend is valuable. The fight against censorship does seem to have had a role in the creation of today's society.

The difficulties for society as a whole in the reasonable application of freedom of expression are complicated and although they provide a model for the problems that a classroom teacher will encounter, they provide very little in the way of guidance for solving the problem. A country can wrestle with the problem through generations of citizens. Court battles, public protests, lawsuits, legislation and charters are part of a continual process of looking for a workable balance between the need to express and the need to protect.

I do not have that kind of time. This thesis is my attempt to wrestle with this difficult issue: to examine the case for freedom of expression and to find some means by which freedom of expression might be adopted and encouraged within a public, pluralist school system that must also respond to the concerns of others as to what is and is not acceptable in student writing. What I want it to provide is some guidance in allowing students to explore ideas which may, at times, be repugnant and hurtful to others but not allowing that exploration to poison the atmosphere of my classroom.

# The Argument:

Finding a solution to the problem of allowing freedom of expression in the face of its very real possible negative consequences is, of course, a dilemma faced by society as a whole. There are many who see freedom of expression as an unalienable right. There are also those well-intentioned and thoughtful people in society at large who see serious negative consequences when expression is unrestrained. In education, not surprisingly, both of these views are represented. There are those in the realm of education who see the negative consequences as all the more serious and all the more potentially damaging. Although I believe sincerely that I would defend, in the spirit of Voltaire, "your right to say," I see that the consequences of the unfettered right to say and write and publish is not one to be exercised frivolously or without understanding and knowledge of the responsibilities that are part and parcel of freedom of expression. Those in education and society as a whole who look for limits to freedom of expression for the protection of the disenfranchised, or for the prevention of an atmosphere in which groups or individuals feel their beliefs are threatened, or to prevent a "poisoned atmosphere" in which some feel certain they are not welcome, must not be dismissed. I am certain that they and I have the same goal: a comfortable, respectful and friendly place to learn and to live. The differences between their stance and mine may lie in the relative weight we assign to the educational and social goals of schools. The differences

may lie in fundamental beliefs about what each of us sees as the correct methods of education. The difference may lie in something as basic as the extent to which they or I find things offensive, or our willingness to be offended. I will attempt to deal with all of these issues.

A clearer understanding of the issue and consequences of freedom of expression might best be attained by examining the larger problem of freedom of expression philosophically, socially, psychologically, and aesthetically and taking what can be gleaned from that discussion and examining the extent to which it may or may not be applicable in the public schools. In the end, the problem within the public school will undoubtedly be just as thorny as that in the greater society with the complicating factors of the ages and diverse maturity levels of the students, the nature of the captive audience, and the aims of education. What I am hoping for within this thesis is an examination of the issues that makes the solution I would like to suggest seem reasonable.

I will begin, then, with an examination of the aims of education and the purposes for schools. My hope will be to construct a clear statement about education against which the balance of freedom of expression and the rights of the recipients of the expression may be evaluated. In particular, the ideas of critical thought and the role of education in bringing students into the dialogue of human interaction need to be examined. As institutions entrusted with the education of the young, schools bear a substantial responsibility to ensure that the activities that occur within them are educationally supportable. Whatever else happens in schools must not interfere materially with this central function.

But schools are also expected to aid students in coming to grips with their roles in society. Schools are the surrogate trainers for an entity too large and too diverse to actively train by "itself." It has as a result, created these mini-societies, public schools. Schools must not be allowed to avoid their responsibilities as socializers. Public schools

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accept everyone, and, as such, they must be accepting of everyone. Part of that very heavy responsibility means creating a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere for all who are willing to participate.

In searching for proper limits to freedom for students in the public secondary school, I will examine the concept of freedom of expression in a philosophic sense, looking at the arguments of Mill and then Kant, and at utilitarian ideas that seem relevant in the discussion of freedom of expression. I see no reason to be bound by a single meta-ethical idea. My reason for this is the incredible importance of the ethical considerations of teaching. Instead I will adopt a multifaceted view of ethics and attempt to show that systems as diverse in approach as Kant's "respect for persons" and Bentham's utilitarianism have ideas to contribute to education. Those ideas, I believe, lead us to similar moral places. In a school respect for persons

> involves no more than the demand that, while being the final
> arbiter the teacher should remain open to alternative viewpoints
> and in particular should listen to those of the children he teaches
> and should remember that they have feelings and ideals that are
> their own.[2]

This need to respect that individual student as an end and not just a means is mirrored, in at least some senses by utilitarianism's reminder that the happiness of the individual is not just a personal concern for him. Happiness of social beings extends equally to his peers and the society of which he is a part. Students are far too important to be left to incomplete, misunderstood, or incorrectly applied understandings of ethical issues. By examining both rules-based and consequentialist ideas of ethics I hope to make fewer errors.

I will also look at some sociological aspects of the censorship argument in the ideas of Plato and those who argue against him, particularly Karl Popper. The schools, in their social role, play a part in developing in students an understanding of the

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[2] Robin Barrow, *Moral Philosophy for Education* (London: Georg Allen and Unwin Limited, 1975) p. 129.

political nature of human institutions. They also reflect, in the power structures within them, society's understandings of the use of control and freedom. The extent to which students need to be controlled is central to the limits of freedom of expression and I hope to give perspective to the scope and limits of this control in the context of creative writing assignments.

Creative writing is an aesthetic exercise as much as it is a part of a good liberal education. The aesthetic arguments for and against freedom of expression revolve largely around the perceived purposes of literary works. I will attempt to show that at least one of the purposes often attributed to literature, the presentation of "truth," is not necessarily a reason to restrict freedom of expression. Literary writing is an art form, most often called creative writing in schools, that like theatre or music has both a production and a performance aspect. As artificial as the distinction between the two may be, it is in this two-part existence that creative writing allows teachers leeway for increased interaction with students and allows students to explore ideas which may never be "produced." Because of this, neither the "truth" of a student's statement, nor her "error" need ever be subject to possible censorship.

My focus is only on creative writing, in the sense of the types of literary writing done in schools. There are many other types of expression in classrooms, of course, but it is the censorship of the imaginative works of fiction that is the subject of this thesis. Like Phillip Thody,

> What does concern me is the homage which law continues to
> pay to imaginary literature by deeming it alone worthy of
> censorship in an otherwise free society. For neither *Mein Kampf*
> nor the *Protocols of Zion*[sic]was pursued in the courts of law
> which permitted the banning of James Joyce's *Ulysses* or D.H.
> Lawrence's *Lady Chatterly's Lover.*[3]

Teachers often see an essay which advances an unpopular view as a legitimate form of intellectual dialogue; this is rarely the case with creative writing.

Having attempted to deal with the background to freedom of expression in the larger sense, I would then like to turn to the application of the issues discussed to the classroom. Applying the theoretical arguments stemming from the works of Aristotle or Kant is never easy. Nevertheless, philosophical treatments of ideas do lend clarity and rationality to the often highly emotional issues which arise when freedom of expression is discussed. In the end, I believe I can suggest a means by which freedom of expression can be adapted to the school setting.

[3] Philip M. Thody, *Four Cases of Literary Censorship* (Leeds: Leeds University Press, 1968) pp. 3-4.

# The Aims of Education
# and the Goals of Schools:

The role of the school as an educational institution and the role of the school as a social institution are distinct but intertwined. Both roles are vitally important; they are also symbiotic. If schools attempted to educate without awareness of and attention to their roles as social and socializing institutions or if schools were to ignore their educational mandate in favour of social responsibility, the result would likely be so far from the current conception of "school" as to be unrecognizable.

The two roles are, however, separate in some senses. There is no educational reason to have students associate with one another in classes. It might well be possible to "educate" a person without her ever having encountered another close to her own age. A number of children are home-schooled or privately tutored without losing out in any strictly educational sense. John Stuart Mill was certainly "educated" in the usual sense of the world but he was never part of a class of students.[4] On the other hand, there is no social reason to teach students particular disciplines. A fully "socialized," cooperative, caring, and empathetic person may well be the product of a school system that never included geology. This person would not, in the usual sense of the word, be

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[4] Jane O'Grady, introduction to *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women*, (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd, 1996) p. viii.

thought of as having received a liberal education, however. Many writers on education also make the distinction between things such as classroom discipline and classroom learning. Ivan Illich calls the non-educational or socializing roles of schools the "hidden curriculum."[5] Most often, however, the distinctions are far more subtle, often little more than semantic, but this does not mean that they are unimportant.

It could be argued, also, that the school as "socializer" and the school as educator are sometimes incompatible, or at least, uneasy bedfellows. When a school tries to reflect, in the social and cultural values propagated, the local community, it may find itself having to inculcate in students beliefs, notions, or attitudes, which are difficult to reconcile with the aims of education. It might be, for example, that a community has a strong regard for the nuclear family to the point of dismissing the idea that any other arrangement could be labelled a "family." It might, however, be seen from an educational stance that the concept of family is expanding in scope and that failing to teach students to "identify a variety of family groupings"[6] is failing to provide students with a liberal education. It could, of course, be just as easily argued that teaching children about different possible family arrangements is a part of the school's social role in expanding the understandings of students beyond their local community. Very often, apparent discrepancies between social and educational roles of schools are at once incompatible, in some sense, and interdependent in some other sense. Creative writing is one area in which this dichotomy of purpose is noticeable.

A central idea in this examination of freedom of expression in schools is that the production of creative writing for submission to a teacher is of educational value and is distinct from the social values and cautions of publication of that same material. Largely, the value of creative writing comes out of its provision of an opportunity for conversation between teacher and pupil:

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[5] Ivan D. Illich, *De-Schooling Society* (New York : Harper and Row, 1972) p. 2.
[6] British Columbia Ministry of Education, "Appendix A: Personal Planning K to 7" *Prescribed Learning Outcomes* found at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/pp/ppapa.htm, accessed June 7, 2003.

> Education, properly speaking, is an initiation into the skill and
> partnership of this conversation in which we learn to recognize
> the voices, to distinguish the proper occasions of utterance, and
> in which we acquire the intellectual and moral habits
> appropriate to conversation. And it is this conversation which,
> in the end, gives place and character to every human activity
> and utterance.[7]

It is in this aspect of education – as conversation – that the solution to the limits of freedom of expression will be grounded. However, creative writing and education are also more than conversation. Because of this, the aims of education and the goals of schools in our society need to be carefully examined. It is in their points of contact, and their apparent incompatibility, that expressive freedom issues are most problematic.

The educational role of schools, it might rather unoriginally be suggested, is to produce educated people. That is, that the end-product of a school system, by whatever means it is successful, is a person who would generally be described as educated. This person would not necessarily then have specific training, nor would they be indoctrinated in a specific dogma. Instead, they would have a number of characteristics: knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and outlooks considered valuable by other educated people. John Dewey, Paul Hirst, R. S. Peters, and many other philosophers working and writing in the field of education have refined our understanding of both the process and outcomes of education. Although the end-product of an education is an educated person, the end-product is not actually a finished one:

> To be educated is not to have arrived at a destination; it is to
> travel with a different view. What is required is not feverish
> preparation for something that lies ahead, but to work with
> precision, passion, and taste at worthwhile things that lie to
> hand.[8]

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[7] Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics: And Other Essays* (New York: Basic Books Publishing Company, 1962) p. 199.
[8] R.S. Peters, *Authority, Responsibility and Education* (London: George Allen & Unwin Limited, 1973) p.107.

The first characteristic of an educated person must certainly be a body of knowledge. We would be very reluctant to call an obviously capable problem solver, critical thinker and quick-witted individual "educated" if he had no knowledge of his own from which to draw. "[T]here is at least one thing that he should have got from his education, and that is knowledge."[9] And it is not good enough merely to possess knowledge; the knowledge must be of a certain type, or types. A thorough knowledge of the entire contents of a large city phone book would not be a necessary part of the standard idea of the knowledge an educated person must have. The knowledge that an educated person has comes from a variety of fields and disciplines.

If someone says, "John is an educated person," we normally make the assumption that he knows at least a little of mathematics, science, literature, history, the arts, etc., not just a very little about each of those areas, but some significant aspects of each area. If John did not know how to do more than count in mathematics, or did not know more than the name of a single element, we would not likely see him as educated. Over several years, Paul Hirst, in his work in educational philosophy, revisited and revised his work on the forms of knowledge. Hirst sees seven forms of knowledge, mathematics, physical sciences, human sciences, history, religion, literature and the fine arts, and philosophy, as being distinguished by "logically distinct types of true propositions."[10] These, with the addition of "the category of moral knowledge," "constitute the range of unique ways we have of understanding experience."[11] Knowledge is also necessary for education because it leads to the development of the mind.[12]

Although an educated person is not necessarily expected to have a great depth of knowledge in each area of knowledge, he is expected to have some breadth of knowledge. John does not have to know the modern proof of Fermat's Last Theorem,

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[9] D. I. Lloyd, "Knowledge and Education," in *Philosophy and the Teacher*, edited by D. I. Lloyd (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) p. 54.
[10] Paul Hirst, *Knowledge and the Curriculum* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) p. 85.
[11] P. Hirst, p. 46.

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but if he did know that and did know equally complex and esoteric things in two or three other disciplines but knew nothing of the geography of his country or of the literature of his language, many would hesitate to call him an educated person. An educated person has a developed mind. Hirst's position that each of the forms of knowledge is a unique way of holding and demonstrating a truth might suggest that the full development of the mind requires "the study of at least paradigm examples of all the various forms of knowledge."[13] Hirst's views are not universally accepted. However, his work does make an important contribution to the concept of education.

What knowledge is considered valuable must, at least to some degree, be relative to the particular culture. Knowledge of the contents of the Koran may or may not be part of an educated Canadian's body of knowledge but few would think of an Iranian Muslim as educated if he knew nothing of the Koran and its effects on Iranian legal and social structures. There is likely some body of knowledge that would be part of the educational process in every modern country, such as mathematics and geography, but other equally important aspects of an educated person's ideas such as particular ethical principles might vary. We may not wish to define education strictly by what is known, rather we may only wish to say that much is known.

The educated person also understands knowledge in a sense that means more than just the retention of facts. An educated person has gone through a process in which "more than a minimum of comprehension must be involved."[14] It might be said, more casually, that the educated person has understanding. John knows the facts and John sees interconnections, similarities, differences, applications and syntheses. John exercises rationality in dealing with the facts that make up his body of knowledge and "to characterise the objectives of education in relation to the development of rationality,

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[12] P. Hirst, p. 41.
[13] P. Hirst, p. 48.
[14] R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London: George, Allen and Unwin, Limited, 1966) p. 42.

is certainly to put at the very centre of what is pursued those forms of knowledge and belief in which we make sense of our experience."[15]

We also expect the educated person to value this knowledge beyond its practical purposes.[16] The knowledge that the educated person has leads the person to a "cognitive perspective"[17] "which informs and affects his understanding of all aspects of his life."[18] Thus the educated person is fundamentally changed. He is not just different from the trained specialist in that his knowledge comes from a wider variety of areas; he is not just a polymath. The educated person is an individual who uses the knowledge that he has, the skills which he has developed in acquiring that knowledge, and the rationality that he exercises in applying that knowledge to live a different sort of life.

Part of that cognitive perspective may also be demonstrated in self-reliance and the accompanying self-confidence of someone considered educated. Being educated seems to assume that John, as an educated individual, will be able and willing to explore new areas of knowledge without being forced or told to do so. Nor would we expect John to accept, as unchallengeable, all that he is told, at all times.

> Rousseau was surely right to advocate discovery methods in
> education precisely in the hope that such methods would
> encourage pupils to place a cautious reliance on their own
> judgement rather than placidly accept authority.[19]

Independence and willingness to question are precisely what make educated citizens valuable members of an open society and threatening to those seeking authoritarian rule. But they are also crucially important if education is to reach its highest standards.

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[15] Paul H. Hirst, p. 22.

[16] R.S. Peters, J. Woods, and W. H. Dray, "Aims of Education - A Conceptual Inquiry," *The Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978) p. 18.

[17] R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 46.

[18] P. J. Higginbotham, "Aims of Education," *Philosophy and the Teacher*, edited by D. I. Lloyd (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) p. 46.

[19] M. A. B. Degenhardt, "Indoctrination," *Philosophy and the Teacher*, edited by D. I. Lloyd (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1976) p. 28.

"The secret of intellectual excellence is the spirit of criticism; it is intellectual independence."[20]

The approach to education being advocated here involves thinking and learning of the type most often labelled "critical thinking." "Critical thinking is relevant to, and has implications for, the ethics of education as well as for the epistemology of education. It touches the manner as well as the content of education."[21] The usual idea of critical thinking with an emphasis on learner independence and rational challenge of ideas is an important part of developing knowledge *with* understanding in pupils. It is also an important part of the "attitude of reasonableness"[22] that is crucial to the citizens of an open society, because it develops in them "principles [which] are needed to determine the relevance of reasons."[23] Thus, critical thinking has a role in a school's educational as well as socializing role in a democratic society.

Being a critical thinker is a principle aspect of being an educated person. In arguing for critical thinking in education, Harvey Siegel presents three justifications. The first is that of treating students "as persons." Although Kant's concept of "respect for persons" will be examined in more depth later, Siegel's belief that this idea is central to the ethical treatment of students is appropriate here. "This first consideration is simply that we are morally obliged to treat students (and everyone else) with respect ... This includes the recognition that other persons are of equal moral worth."[24] Treating other persons with respect, Siegel argues, means that they must also be allowed the right to hold a different opinion than our own and to challenge our opinions with their own. And this is true whether we act as teachers or as any other members of society. A solid education in the "critical manner" will, if it is successful, allow the educated

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[20] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: Volume 1 – The Spell of Plato* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) p. 134.

[21] Harvey Siegel, *Educating Reason* (New York: Routledge, 1988) p. 42.

[22] Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies: Volume 2 – The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962) p. 225.

[23] R. S. Peters, *Moral Development and Moral Education* (London: George Allen and Unwin, Limited, 1966) p. 248.

[24] H. Siegel, p. 56.

student to make this sort of challenge whether they face a teacher, another student, or only their own ideas.

Siegel also sees training in critical thinking as an important part of the social role of schools, one that he calls "education's generally recognized task of preparing students to become competent with respect to those abilities necessary for the successful management of adult life."[25] In particular, Siegel is referring to the self-sufficiency that he sees as an outcome of the type of rational thought that characterizes critical thinking in education. The student, he feels, will become an independent judge of alternatives. Respect for that student as a person will not stop a teacher from also judging her alternatives, but will make it incumbent on the teacher to respect the student's right to hold them. It will later be argued, following John Stuart Mill, that this includes at least some right to express them.

Critical thinking in education is also justified by Siegel on the grounds that it is the proper training for our society's tradition of rationality. Historically, Western society has valued the weighing of reasons and causes. Because it is likely to continue to do so, even as standards of rationality are re-examined, students must be educated in this important ideal if they are to join in the intellectual pursuit of understanding and evaluation of the reasons why. Clearly, this is a point at which the aims of education and the goals of schools as social institutions are parallel, if not identical.

Siegel's fourth justification for critical thinking in education is that it prepares the young for an active life in a democratic society. "It is a truism that the properly functioning democracy requires an educated citizenry."[26] An educated citizenry has many characteristics but the crucial ones "that democracy wants" are "the skills, attitudes, abilities and traits of the critical thinker."[27] Once again, a parallel between John Stuart Mill's call for freedom of expression and Siegel's argument for critical

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[25] H. Siegel, p. 57.
[26] H. Siegel, p. 60.
[27] H. Siegel, p. 60.

thinking is evident. Although Mill saw problems with democratic government as it existed, he saw the solution to the problem in the right of the populace to all of the information that was available. Critical thinking, too, demands this "enlightened" state.

> The function of the school is to teach students how to think, how to distinguish between valid and invalid ideas. You simply cannot teach people to distinguish between two opposing points of view if one point of view is completely and systematically excluded.[28]

The different sort of life lived by the educated person carries with it some positive aspects that seem to fit well within the concept of education. When John is called an educated person, some positive value is placed on him with the words. If he were called an indoctrinated person, not only would aspersions be cast on his decision-making, he would also be seen negatively. This is because of the link between society and education referred to earlier. The knowledge, understanding, skills, and attitudes that come with being educated in any society must also be considered valuable by that society. If a society values tolerance and respect for the beliefs of others, then we would not expect to say, "John is an educated man and a racial bigot."

Therefore, the aim of teachers in a public school system is, at least in part, to contribute to the production of an educated person. The teachers will have other more immediate objectives and may be more or less successful with individual students in contributions to their education, but they should at least attempt, as conscientious teachers, to contribute to the education of the student. But the teacher makes her contribution in the same way that a bricklayer makes her contribution to a neighbourhood. The teacher is a part of a process and the process, as a whole, needs to be understood and honoured by her if she is to contribute successfully.

The educated person is the result of an education. What separates education from the related terms of teaching, instructing, training or indoctrinating? It is not as

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[28] Lee Burress and Edward Jenkinson, *The Student's Right to Know* (Urbana: National Council of Teachers of English, 1982) p. 3.

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easy to define the process of education as it is to say what education is not or can not include. The process of educating clearly should not include methods which deny the learner a role in what is being learned. "'[E]ducation' at least rules out some procedures of transmission on the grounds that they lack wittingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner."[29] There is a sense in which education is about the exchange of ideas in a way that seems intuitively contrary to using physical torture to obtain correct responses or denying the student the right to a viewpoint of her own that may not be discussed.

However, if education is to take place in school there may be times when apparently "non-educational" methods must be used in order to maintain the social roles of schools. Coercion may not seem an acceptable educational method but there are times when students are forced to do things that they do not see as valuable or worthwhile in order to achieve some perfectly acceptable educational objective. More germane to the argument here, freedom of expression has a time and place in schools and the screaming of graphic descriptions of torture and murder may simply not be conducive to learning. Part of the problem is in the methods used in education but methods are not the whole story.

There are times when the content of an educational program is considered solely in terms of its educational value. It is easy to say that children in country X are not educated but instead indoctrinated into a particular belief system. Normally this is said when the person making the statement disagrees with the belief system being passed on to the children of country X and is suspicious of the methods used in country X. The methods themselves are usually not the reason for denying the use of the term educational, unless they are particularly egregious, but the knowledge being passed on to the children is what makes an outsider think of the process as indoctrination. Tasos Kazepides has argued that indoctrination is not in the method, nor the intention of the indoctrinator, which he may share with a teacher or trainer, but in the content being passed on. The knowledge passed on in the educational process, as has been said, must

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[29] R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 45.

be generally seen as socially valuable, and must be subject to rational verification. The indoctrinator passes on "unfalsifiable beliefs about the existence of beings, state of affairs or relationships ... [that] are outside the rational tradition."[30] This helps us to distinguish between education and indoctrination which may go on in schools on the basis of the material being taught. That which is subject to the "critical manner" of educational epistemology is all that is to be considered educational.

This may not be the whole story. In the sense that it is normally used indoctrination may actually involve both method and content. A person cannot indoctrinate another in mathematical understanding because the skill of doing mathematics requires flexible understanding. Applying the addition axiom does not involve simply memorizing every possible addition question and its solution. However, a person cannot be "educated" into a non-questioning, uncritical knowledge of a dogma or doctrine because the critical method of education would require that he also be taught to challenge and question it. Because the doctrine is unfalsifiable, the critical method would quickly reveal its lack of rational support.

However, it might be possible to use those methods associated with indoctrination for some non-dogmatic concepts by simply treating them as though they were doctrines. These methods might include the repetition of phrases, the creation of slogans, the presentation of only a single side of an argument, and the refusal to allow challenges or questions. Clearly, though, both educators and socializers, even in the most positive applications of these terms, may use some of these techniques at some times, with the exception for educators of the last. There are certainly times when the school, in its social role, will present only one side of an argument around behavioural issues such as tardiness and times when an educator might use a technique like repetition to instil understanding of some simple fact that might become a part of a student's critical thinking base-knowledge. It is arguably not in the techniques used to deal with students that indoctrination is defined.

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[30] Tasos Kazepides, "Indoctrination, Doctrines and the Foundations of Rationality," *Philosophy of Education*, (1987) p. 235.

Kazepides argues that only doctrines can be used for indoctrination, but that does not preclude a teacher from treating some other concepts in the same way. If the teacher adopts the methods of the indoctrinator to create unquestioning belief in a concept, a student may indeed become "indoctrinated." The student, however, might not remain "indoctrinated" if he is later exposed to other explanations or if he acquires a questioning or critical attitude. It may be that some contents require methods of indoctrination, some are completely antithetical to it, and others can go both ways.

M. A. B. Degenhardt also examines the idea that neither content nor method is sufficient because the educator may occasionally use the same content and the same method as the indoctrinator. However, the intentions of each are different. Like Kazepides, Degenhardt rejects this as a basis for distinction, in part because a person intending to educate may inadvertently indoctrinate. "Just as we can insult, embarrass, infuriate, or intimidate other people without having the slightest intention of doing so, we can indoctrinate or otherwise miseducate them unintentionally."[31]

Instead, Degenhardt suggests that just as education produces an educated person, indoctrination produces an indoctrinated person, one who holds "views in a fixed, unquestioning way, such that he cannot be shaken by reason or evidence."[32] Someone is engaged in the process of indoctrination if "he is trying, successfully or unsuccessfully, to implant fixed unquestioning beliefs," or as William Hare puts it, the indoctrinator is successful when students adopt "beliefs in such a way that rational criticisms [are] diffused."[33] This notion of the distinction between indoctrination and education fits with the idea that critical thinking is an answer to eliminating indoctrination as an educational tool or an educational outcome.

Education and the educational process are associated with knowledge, and value. In addition, as R. S. Peters points out in "What is an Educational Process?",

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[31] T. Kazepides, p. 233.
[32] M. Degenhardt, p. 25.

education implies something very important about the relationship between the teacher and the student in the educational process. Peters argues that the teacher makes informed judgements about the process of initiating the student into the world of education. In keeping with the idea of the cognitive perspective, the teacher cares about both the student and the knowledge being passed along and the students appreciate, at least to some extent, the value of the process, of the teacher, and of the knowledge to which they are to have some access. "Education" implies that something worthwhile is being or has been intentionally transmitted using "morally legitimate procedures."[34]

The morally acceptable manner of education is the crux of the issue of freedom of expression. All of the claimed benefits and clear dangers of freedom of expression are firmly located in ethical and moral considerations. The process by which children become educated adults is not and should not be thought of as morally neutral. The examination of the moral aspects of freedom of expression in the schools will form the bulk of this thesis.

Finally, there is the personal connection between teacher and student which is a part both of educational experiences and of schools as social institutions.

> What is advocated is that the teacher should not discharge his functions all the time in a way which is strictly dictated by his role and by general moral principles; he should, at the same time, allow glimpses of himself as a human being to slip out and be receptive to this dimension of his pupils.[35]

The view of education presented in this chapter will anchor this thesis and be the final test for the positions advocated and the arguments offered.

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[33] William Hare, "Limiting the Freedom of Expression: The Keegstra Case," *Attitudes in Teaching and Education* (Calgary, Detselig Enterprises, 1993) p. 80.

[34] R. S. Peters, "What is an Educational Process?" *The Concept of Education*, edited by R. S. Peters (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1967) p. 3.

[35] P. Hirst and R.S. Peters, *The Logic of Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970) p. 100.

# Mill and Liberty:

It would be irresponsible to attempt a discussion of the concept of freedom of thought and expression without a close review of the ideas of John Stuart Mill and his critics. Although Mill's appeal for liberty of expression depends most heavily on "political" ideas, it is in his exploration of the idea that universal liberty should hold that one sees the clearest reasons why students should be allowed freedom of expression and speech. It is in Mill's critics that we see the most powerful arguments against exposing others to unrestricted expression. Many of Mill's ideas are consistent with the aims of education and the goals of schools; so, for that matter, are the ideas of some of his opponents.

In his examination of "the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual,"[36] Mill carefully lays out his case for the freedom of the individual to do anything that does not harm another. "Because human beings differ in their tastes, aspirations, and aptitudes they should be allowed and encouraged to follow pursuits of their own choosing."[37]

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[36] John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty* (Chatham: Wordsworth Editions, Ltd. 1996) p. 5.
[37] John Rees, *John Stuart Mill's On Liberty*, edited by G.L. Willams (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) p. 119.

Mill begins with a historical examination of the reasons that liberty has been sought. Under the tyrannies of monarchs and emperors, people sought freedom from control in order to pursue interests that they did not share with their ruler and to protect themselves from arbitrary restrictions. A share in the power of decision making, as in some form of democracy, was the result. It did not prove to be the solution. Mill sees that although people originally fought for liberty in order to curb the powers of dictatorial rulers, they might well have replaced the tyranny of a single person with the tyranny of mass opinion.

> What is called the opinion of society is a phantom power, yet as is often the case with phantoms, of more force over the minds of the unthinking than all the flesh and blood arguments which can be brought to bear against it.[38]

Mill sees this new curb to freedom as more desperate. Because of "the tendency (especially marked in a democracy, Mill believed) to be intolerant of attitudes and behaviour which are dissident, eccentric, or merely different,"[39] social pressure to conform replaced the censorship by government as the greatest curb to freedom. Modern writers, such as Nadine Gordimer, have reflected the same idea in discussion of their own writing.[40] This is Mill's real reason for calling for liberty even in a country where government means shared control of power.

The silenced minority, Mill suggests, loses the opportunity to participate in the dialogue that defines a just and open society, just as they had under a dictator. Mill assumes the political idea that participation in decision-making is a good. Mill also believes that a participatory government requires a populace with access to all of the relevant ideas which might make their decisions more informed. Modern democracies such as ours also see participation by the populace as a positive. We also, then, must

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[38] Harriet Taylor, "An Early Essay on Toleration," *On Liberty*, edited by D. Spitz (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, Incorporated, 1975) p. 115.

[39] Stefan Collini, introduction to *On Liberty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. xii.

[40] Nadine Gordimer, "A Writer's Freedom," *They Shoot Writers, Don't They*, edited by George Theiner (London: Faber and Faber, 1984) pp. 134-140.

want a populace both informed and able to distinguish relevant ideas which might contribute to informed political decisions.

Freedom of expression as an aim of a democratic society, as Mill sees it, may be paralleled in the aims of schools as educational institutions. The search for knowledge and understanding using the ideal of critical thinking requires that students are free to question the knowledge that is a part of education and to challenge the values that deem that knowledge important. It seems difficult to imagine that this is possible without the ability to freely form thoughts and express them. If students are to be given the right to critically examine the subject matter of schools, then must they not also be allowed to think in ways that are not merely reflective of the status quo? A principal task of the teacher must surely be to see that the opportunity to develop cognitive perspective is available to all students equally. Thus, students must be taught skills to accompany the ability to speak and write freely that guide them in doing so in a socially responsible manner.

What are the repercussions for our schools as social institutions of the idea of freedom of expression? If one goal of our schools is to produce a citizen who will be capable of critical participation in the power structures of society, we must give her the skills and allow her to practice and refine them. The free exchange of ideas, because it is a part of a democratic society, has social value. There have been a number of instances where this value has been subject to close examination. In one such instance, the ruling on *R. v Keegstra* delineated three rationales for freedom of expression in schools: the political process rationale, the self-realization rationale, and the search for truth rationale:

> [Freedom of expression] is instrumental in promoting the free
> flow of ideas essential to political democracy and the
> functioning of democratic institutions.
>
> [Freedom of expression rises] from the widely accepted premise
> of Western thought that the proper end of man is the realization
> of his character and potentiality as a human being. It follows

from this premise that all persons have the right to form their own beliefs and opinions and to express them.

[Freedom of expression] is seen as a means of promoting a marketplace of ideas in which competing ideas vie for supremacy to the end of attaining truth.[41]

The schools, as socializing institutions, have some obligation to teach children about the power and problems of that exchange of thoughts that goes on as part of democratic decision-making. Practice in the responsible use of free expression may be a school's greatest contribution to the education of a citizen in a democratic society.

In addition, Mill suggests that those censored may have the right idea, or at least part of the right idea, and "we can never be sure that the opinion we are endeavouring to stifle is a false opinion; and if we were sure, stifling it would be an evil still."[42] His reasons are that the majority may be blinded by its own prejudices and not even be able to see the validity of the dissenting opinion, and that the majority also loses in two important ways; first, in that a quashed opinion may have been better than the one held by the majority, and, second, if it is not, the majority opinion may have gained "clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."[43] Again, a value Mill sees for society parallels the educational idea of the role of discourse in thinking and learning. Mill saw society as involving something of a Socratic dialogue where even the most knowledgeable might well benefit from assuming the role of one who knows nothing. Mill, it seems, valued and practiced something akin to critical thinking.

Critics of Mill see the idea of "as yet unattained truth" as a flaw in his argument. Certainly, they say, some truths are known, not just the clear and simple truths of science or mathematics, but also the more complex truths of ethics or sociology. This may well be true, although much debate could still be generated in the delineation of

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[41] Quoted by Paul Clark in " Public School Teachers and Racist Speech ," *Education and the Law Journal* Volume 6, 1994-95. p. 4.
[42] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 20.

these "existing" truths. Even if we find a generally accepted social truth such as "people should not be treated differently because of their racial heritage," do we do students any favours if we give them only the finished "truth product" without encouraging them in the active pursuit of the truth through the kind of social debate that allowed our society to come to this position? There may be value in reliving the historical changes, rather than just studying the results. Students involved in a "re-enactment" may be able to exercise critical thinking in solving the problem and come to better understand the reasons for the current positions.

It may be, too, that the conflict of ideas, as Mill suggests, is a way of strengthening society's great "truths." Educational theorists such as Siegel, in advocating a critical approach, remind readers of a direct tie between rational approaches to knowledge and the examination of the evidence for them. "[W]e want students not simply to apply criteria blindly, but to understand their point, the justification of claims that they offer, and the higher-order justifications of them as legitimate criteria of assessment and evaluation."[44] To do so requires that students examine an argument for a value, whether one of theirs or one of society's, as though it has two sides. If alternate views are to be allowed to form a point of contrast for the formation of argument, why should they not be those developed and presented by the student?

Mill extended this idea of liberty from the conforming influence of society to include action, as long as the consequences of that action, or at least the negative consequences, only affected that person. This, Mill's most problematic claim, will be examined shortly. Mill's plea will be reflected in the final chapter of this thesis. It will be a plea for students to be allowed to explore their ideas as freely as possible with minimum impact on their peers.

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[43] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 19.
[44] H. Siegel, p. 45.

Mill makes the historical case that many of the actions of governments now considered infringements of liberty were once held as minority dissenting opinions. Because governments, particularly democratic governments, function with rules widely held to be true, they are all the more subject to the mistaken view that the rules must also be right for everyone. Classrooms are little different. Many current educational practices such as cooperative learning or peer editing, are not thought of as a part of the traditional approach to teaching. However, they have earned a place. It will be argued that freedom of expression in the context of creative writing assignments assigned to secondary students deserves a similar opportunity. It may be that the idea of freedom of expression for students, although it is not now current practice, may earn a place in educational practice if it is permitted and then assessed for educational effectiveness and social responsibility.

Mill does not reject, however, the individual's obligation to the society that is to allow him freedom of expression and action. Society and its rules offer protection to the individual and he owes, in return, consideration for the feelings of its members and their well-being. Society owes the individual in return. In particular, society owes to the children and adolescents a proper grounding in rational thought and an education diverse "in opinions and modes of conduct."[45] A society which refuses to educate citizens to become the type of critical and independent thinkers that the term "education" seems to imply will have to blame itself for its failure.

Mill states that the desires of the individual are not to be curtailed merely on the whim of the majority but should be encouraged and explored because it is individuality and spontaneity that are humanity's greatest assets. The achievements in thought of men of great wisdom and insight are the product, Mill believes, of their non-standard thought. If society restrains these people by means of legal or social limits, it risks its own survival as a vibrant entity. "Whoever thinks that individuality of desires and

[45] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 105.

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impulses should not be encouraged to unfold itself, must maintain that society has no need of strong natures."[46]

As an agent of socialization, the school will face some of its greatest challenges in this region of curtailing assertive individuality. Assuming for a moment that Mill is correct, schools would find themselves attempting to encourage, or at least not to discourage, individuality and a strong will. Those who work in schools know how difficult this could, potentially, make learning and teaching. The school would have to find and walk a very fine line between "strong natures" and wilful disobedience. The school system, however, is and has been faced with this difficulty before. The challenge will remain. It might be suggested that allowing freedom of expression within the classroom setting may be a useful starting place for the students' learning of the appropriate methods, occasions and purposes for demonstrating this particular variety of individuality.

At some point, however, after having "attained the capacity of being guided to their own improvements by conviction or persuasion ... compulsion ... is no longer admissible."[47] The conclusion of adolescence is the time when people in our society are usually seen to have attained that capacity. We stop dressing our children and allow adolescents to choose fashions; we stop driving children to school and allow adolescents to drive themselves; we stop voting to protect the interests of children and finally let them vote themselves. Adolescence is very often a time of guided practice for adult life. This may also be the proper time to guide students in the of use of their adult right to free speech.

The most forceful criticisms of Mill, beginning with the contemporary press and continuing to this day, center around the very real difficulty of separating the effects of our behaviour on ourselves from its effects on others. Mill anticipated that others

[46] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 61.
[47] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 14.

would respond with "no man is an island"; that the actions of an individual do have an effect on his fellow man. However,

> the frankness with which Mill stated the objections to his own thesis did not disarm his critics and nowhere was he less successful in concealing the weakness of his case than in the attempt to reconcile the self-protection principle with his moving pleas for freedom of expression.[48]

The difficulty is still in drawing "the line between acts that concern only the agent (self-regarding acts) and those that concern other members of society (other-regarding acts.)"[49] Work by libertarians and other supporters of Mill's ideas has not resolved this most central issue. There have been attempts to demonstrate that "clear and present danger" forms the dividing line; that those actions of an individual, which constitute an immediate and otherwise unavoidable injury, are the ones to be restricted, but "this merely restates the question."[50] Others, such as John Rees, have attempted to show that Mill was making a distinction between actions that have an effect on others and actions that have an effect on the interests of others. As Rees admits, he makes a distinction in the use of the word "interests" that Mill has not consistently applied.[51] In addition, it seems difficult to see how this has advanced Mill's case. Actions that have an effect on a person's interests, rather than the person directly, are not necessarily less damaging to him personally or emotionally.

In the world of an adolescent, it may certainly be that this tie between one's interests and oneself is even closer. Those with experience in the secondary classroom know only too well that students often take issues and ideas very personally. As they learn who they will be as adults and incorporate values and ideas into that picture, the line between the idea and the self becomes understandably obscured. The distinction is not truly one which our society demands adults make, either. Dividing self-regarding

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[48] J. Rees, p. 92.
[49] Henry M. Magid, "Problems of Freedom of Thought," *Social Research* Volume 21 (1954) p. 43.
[50] H. Magid, p. 45.
[51] J. Rees, p. 149.

expression from other-regarding expression may simply not be possible in the classroom. The solution, it will be suggested later, does not lie in making the distinction. Rather it is in the control of the nature and context of the expression.

Mill knows how important society is to an individual, but sees the need for independence of decision-making as being so important that its infringement should only be allowed when the risk of real harm to others is clear and pronounced. Mill feels that unless this is the case, a society benefits far more from personal liberty than it might from restrictions. Mill sees liberty as both a means and an end in itself. It is of such value that, despite the problems in defining its limits, it should have an honoured position.

This seems a legitimate stand in the schools. Just as we do not restrict the student who wishes to support an unflattering hairstyle, we should not seek to restrict the freedom of expression until the expression reaches the point of negatively affecting others. The line will, of course, be exceedingly difficult to draw. However, to use the complexity of the problem of application as a reason to abandon the attempt is to abdicate responsibility in the face of difficulty. Although this is sometimes the logical response, it may not always be the ethical one.

Certainly, in the social arena beyond schools our society seems to agree with Mill. Naturally, there arise many points of contention over what constitutes harm, whether harm to individuals engaged in an activity which impacts solely themselves does indeed impact others, whether individuals must sometimes be protected from harming themselves, and where lines may be drawn between perceived harm and measurable harm. None of these, however, argues against Mill's basic point and a large portion of social behaviour is governed by the idea that "my business is my business." As socializing institutions, schools need to find ways to prepare students for a world which may, at least at times, exchange their individual need to be surrounded by positive images for another's need to express himself. The need of one individual to be

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sheltered from unpleasant expression may conflict with society's belief that another may have the right to that expression.

There is yet another set of objections to Mill's view. Mill begins *On Liberty* by pointing out that tyrannical rulers must limit the liberty of their subjects in order to exercise control over those subjects. It is clear that regardless of how well intentioned the majority, in order to maintain control, there must be times when liberty is curtailed. Mill calls for the minimum of restriction that can protect society, and for justifications for even the most seeming minor restriction.

Mill's "principle puts the burden of proof on those who propose to restrict others."[52] James Fitzjames Stephen took up the challenge of Mill in *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity.* In addition to calling attention to the difficulty in separating self-regarding from other-regarding behaviour, Stephen claims that restriction is necessary for the advancement of society. He refers to fear as the principal motivating factor in much of humanity's behaviour.[53] He argues, then, that because liberty does not come when a person acts out of fear, the majority of mankind's actions are not done freely, in the sense that Mill means it, anyway. His assumption is clearly that if a person is compelled to act in a way that has a positive end, the compulsion is always justified.

To accept Stephen's argument that humankind is not, in fact, free is to agree with his idea that humanity acts out of fear more than out of any other emotion. This seems very difficult to accept. Stephen would suggest that in the whole gamut of emotions out of which people might act, fear is principal. Even if this were true in some sense, why would society find it acceptable to extend fear as motivator to our children in schools? Teachers might wish to use knowledge of consequences as a factor for controlling behaviour that harms others, but this is not the same thing as fear. The concept of education, as R. S. Peters has pointed out, rules out the use of fear. Even if

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[52] S. Collini, p. xviii.
[53] James Fitzjames Stephen, *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity,* edited by R.J. White (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967) p. 57.

their parents are cowed into conforming, at least their children should have the type of liberty that Mill suggests.

Stephen refers to social history to reinforce the assertion that much good comes out of the restraint of liberty. After all, "has a community no right to defend its truth from error?"[54] Those who have incorrect moral or ethical beliefs, Stephen says, have long been coerced through sanctions or fear of consequences into expressing and eventually holding correct beliefs.[55] In this, he seems correct. Society has progressed and it has often done so in the face of great restriction, perhaps, even, because of it. In the schools, much is also accomplished through the type of widely defined coercion Stephen describes. Many would suggest, however, that coercive practices in schools are most often in place to insure a certain type of atmosphere needed by the school in order to allow education to take place. Increasingly, too, we have seen the replacement of these coercive practices with others that involve the student in the school in a way that removes the need for coercion. The ends of education cannot justify coercion as the means.

If we were to imagine schools as institutions for the maintenance of dictatorships of some form, the argument could stop here. If we believe, as Thomas Carlyle did, that it was acceptable to "coerce into better methods, human swine in any way"[56] we could also stop. The argument could well have stopped with Plato.

Plato saw a close relationship between the single-handed power of the philosopher king and censorship. Ideas that might be suggested by the poet in his exploration of the material world may have been bad in the sense that they were imitations of imitations, but they were far worse in that they introduced ideas that were not a part of the acceptable range of thought for the people. Plato's long-standing

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[54] David Spitz, introduction to *On Liberty* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company Incorporated, 1975) p. ix.
[55] J. Stephen, p. 61.
[56] Thomas Carlyle quoted in preface to *On Liberty*, edited by David Spitz, (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1975) p. vii.

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argument in favour of censorship, and accompanying self-censorship for the philosophers of the republic, is also, clearly, an argument for a non-pluralist society.

Our educational system is pluralist both in make up and in intention. The B.C. Ministry of Education states among its primary goals that schools are to develop "a tolerance and respect for the ideas and beliefs of others."[57] In the classroom, that diversity may also have its own consequences. "One reason why intellectual freedom is necessary grows out of the diversity of the multicultural society."[58] Plato was not, it would appear, constructing a blueprint for British Columbia schools.

Perhaps Plato is arguing against "liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological."[59] If it can be accepted that Robin Waterfield is correct in his proposition that *Republic* is a metaphor for the mind of the individual more than a suggestion for the construction of a state,[60] it would seem that Plato is arguing for a restriction to thought as well as action. Certain base thoughts or those that do not contribute to the good of the mind must be avoided in order to have a healthier republic/mind. However, this leads to a problem with deciding on a distinction between "base" and "non-base" thoughts.

In order to have thoughts one must be free to think something. If one is to avoid "base" thoughts, one must be able to distinguish them from "good" thoughts. How is one to make the distinction without the ability to see "base" thoughts for what they are, and how is one to know what they are without thinking them. Plato would seem to solve this problem by allowing the controlling group to have the thoughts but prevent them in the lower classes by restricting their education to the point that such thoughts are not possible. If one wishes to hold the opinion that freedom of thought be restricted,

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[57] "B. C. Ministry of Education Mission Statement" found at
    http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/resourcedocs/k12educationplan/mission.htm, May 29, 2003.
[58] L. Burress and E. Jenkinson, p. 3.
[59] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 15.

it may follow, as Plato would have it, that education must also be restricted. Can one reasonably fulfill the aims of education if one restricts access to some thoughts? Without exposure to "base" and "non-base" thoughts, will a student learn to distinguish thoughts for their quality or appropriateness? Surely one thing that we wish students to understand is that thoughts have qualities on a number of scales. Could we be in danger of persuading students that any thought is acceptable if all that they are ever exposed to are acceptable thoughts? An aim of education is to produce students with a cognitive perspective. This implies that they must know the difference between these types of thoughts and must, therefore, know both, provided, of course, one believes that such divisions in thoughts exist.

And who will form the thought police or thought legislators who sort thought into the acceptable and unacceptable? Will it be the extreme Libertarian who, like de Sade, sees all thought as acceptable, or some imaginary restrictor who, as censors everywhere, argues against thought outside a single viewpoint? Particularly in a pluralist society like ours, neither seems a reasonable or desirable alternative. In searching for a compromise, though, it could certainly be argued that the further we get from a single acceptable point of view, the more likely we are to fulfill central ideas of education around tolerance and respect for others, critical examination of thought, and the avoidance of indoctrination.

Choosing to restrict another's freedom to think certain thoughts is problematic from the point of view of educating a person and only slightly less so from a practical point of view. How would the person pleading for restriction ever hope to delineate all of the thoughts which others would not think? Saying "don't think about puppies" requires the person receiving the message to think about puppies at least enough to understand the admonition. The restrictor is defeated even before she begins. The same is true for the thought police in a practical sense. In order to avoid mentioning

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[60] Robin Waterfield, in introduction to *Republic*, translated by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. xvi.

"banned" thoughts, a possibility might be to create a list of allowed thoughts. This list would either have to be very specific, and thus likely too large to be manageable by those being restricted, or so vague as to be useless as a guide. Saying "think only positive thoughts" for example, requires the thinker to define for himself what positive thoughts are. This requires him to realize that the thoughts he has thought of as needing to be left out are negative (and thus he has broken the rule) or allows him to think things are positive which others may think are negative or worthy of restriction for some other reason.

I have a colleague who will not read certain books or attend certain movies because "she does not want those ideas in her head." I can understand, and certainly sympathise with that idea, as there are images that I might not want to carry around with me, the torture scene from *Reservoir Dogs*, for instance. I also know of teachers who refuse to teach certain aspects of the curriculum because they do not wish to have to deal with material that is not in agreement with their beliefs, such as evolution or toleration of certain groups. However, for this acquaintance, just as for others, to accomplish this goal, she has had to restrict her exposure to materials based on little or no evidence as to their content. How will she know whether a book is going to contain a thought that she would prefer not to have? My recommendation may mean little as I may have a different, or less developed sense of "offense." Moreover, are there not disturbing thoughts and images that have a positive impact? The molestation of the young Maya Angelou, described in her autobiographical *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, is indeed disturbing but her ability to deal with it seems, to me, ennobling to the reader. Yet it is a book that I am not permitted to purchase with district funds for use with grade 12 students. Those who argue that students must be taught to restrict their thoughts would prefer that students in my school district not entertain such thoughts.

So a restriction to thought is problematic and the plight of my acquaintance, unable to be certain whether a thought is worthy of restriction without having the thought, is unanswerable. Are we ever likely to reach a point where, desirable or not,

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we could actually control the thoughts of our students?  There are far more influences

on their thoughts than merely their school day.  And even within that day, control over

ideas that are disseminated would rarely lie in the hands of a single controlling body.

Instead, then, there are those who would argue for the separation of freedom of thought

from freedom to express those thoughts.

> The liberty of expressing and publishing opinions may seem to
> fall under a different principle ... but, being almost of as much
> importance as the liberty of thought itself...is practically
> inseparable from it.[61]

Is the expression of an idea, as Mill suggests, inseparable from its thought?[62]

While it is clear that one could not possibly express a thought one does not have,

one might be persuaded not to express a thought merely because one has it.  Certainly,

this is an essential part of social life and part of a school's role is to help students decide

on the appropriateness of expressing certain thoughts at certain times.  However,

should a student desire to express a thought, are there thoughts that must not be

expressed?

Many would say "yes."  Surely, thoughts that will create an atmosphere in the

schools where children will feel uncomfortable, angry, negatively singled out, or

disenfranchised should not be communicated to those children or to the peers of those

children who might then create that atmosphere.  Any experienced teacher has seen the

impact of this type of "expression" often enough to understand its devastating impact.

But I am not arguing, as Mill did, for that freedom of public expression.  Rather, I would

suggest that private expression may be the compromise that allows one student

expressive liberty and protects all other students.

Perhaps, too, Mill is right in insisting that the discussion of the idea is in itself a

part of the formation of the idea.[63]  If one experiences a thought but is denied a

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[61] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 15.
[62] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 17.

discourse in which to examine, modify, challenge, and defend the idea, will they ever come to a good understanding of the idea? Surely, it is the examination and understanding of ideas that schools should be encouraging whether or not the school system or society generally sees the idea as valuable. The hope in education must always be that proper and complete understanding of ideas will allow students to understand society's values and their own. It is an old argument, but a difficult one to contradict, that given thorough understanding, the most valuable ideas will persist and gain precedence.

Stephen seems to have been convinced that the opposite is true. He dismisses Mill's general argument about truth and the pursuit of truth in favour of a "case by case" examination of issues in order to determine the amount of liberty to be allowed in search for the truth.[64] He makes the point that some moral and ethical truths are already and firmly established and that others can simply be established by imposition. Interestingly, he uses examples from the past where a truth has been established and is now accepted.

There are two major difficulties with Stephen's argument. The first is that some of the truths that he feels are accepted were, at one time, subject to suppression because the liberty of those already persuaded of those truths was curtailed. He cites the truth of Protestantism during the reign of Elizabeth I as a case when the acceptance of the truth had to be imposed on the country in order to assure stability.[65] He ignores the persecution of the Protestant message which occurred previously, apparently failing completely to see that liberty of expression for the early holders of this "truth," might have saved a great deal of bloodshed.

His second difficulty is that, like Plato, he sees no room, nor need, for a pluralist society. His example of Protestantism makes this abundantly clear. The actions of the

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[63] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 24.
[64] J. Stephen, p. 78.
[65] J. Stephen, p. 78.

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British in India, which Stephen sees as a glowing example of the right use of restriction, would be considered by many to be a heinous example of colonialist thought at its most egregious. His justification for the outlawing of the practices of "Mahommedans and Hindoos" is that the Imperial government must assert "steady and powerful pressure upon their Indian subjects in the direction of those moral and religious changes which are incidental to, and form a part of what we understand by, civilization."[66] He is simply arguing that liberty for the expression of a dissenting religious view is never to be allowed, because he sees himself, as do many censors, as holder of the only correct view.

There are few things less likely to be acceptable socially or more unpalatable to a great many than denying others the right to believe as their faith dictates. Stephen's attitude is that of the imperialist dictator who sees only his own views as acceptable. He even sees the American separation of church and state as a "fatal defect in the arrangement, which must sooner or later break it up."[67] Like Plato, his view is supportable only in a single view society. This paternalistic attitude is more than a little misplaced in the educating of young people.

As discussed in chapter three, those teachers who are unwilling to entertain ideas outside their own world views are confronted with a difficult situation in pre-sorting the thoughts that they will allow in from those that they will not. This highlights Mill's strongest argument against such sorting. "All silencing of discussion" he says, "is an assumption of infallibility."[68] If it is not possible to decide with finite certainty, which ideas are "true" and which ideas are not, we can never decide that some ideas are fit and others unfit.[69] As Mill has pointed out, it is unacceptable to suppress even those ideas that we are certain are unfit.[70]

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[66] J. Stephen, p. 89.
[67] J. Stephen, p. 95.
[68] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 20.
[69] The issue of whether truth is even a necessary concern in the production of literature will be dealt with in chapter nine.
[70] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 20.

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Again, Mill was attacked on this score by Stephen who did not see so progressive a leader as Henry VIII as believing himself infallible. Instead, he viciously persecuted Catholics, and other dissenters for the good of all. I am not certain that Henry did not see himself as infallible but certainly his is not the type of ruler we would want in the public school system's creative writing classes. With such an autocratic and restrictive teacher, Sir Thomas More might well have failed Latin for submitting *Utopia*.

Even if we assume that a teacher's ideas about what is correct and what is not is more highly developed and more informed than a student's, are we making an educationally sound decision in preventing the student from expressing his idea? If students are merely given a list of thoughts that are unacceptable, are students going to benefit? They might well lose a valuable learning experience. "If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error."[71] The student might benefit considerably from the debate over an idea, if allowed to express it in the first place. How hypocritical might seem an educator who says, "I have been thinking about these things and deemed them unworthy of thought."

What of the justice of restricting a person's freedom of expression and introducing self-censorship? Mill's answer is eloquent: "If all mankind minus one, were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind."[72] There is a considerable difference between believing ourselves to be correct and imposing our beliefs on others to the extreme point of not allowing them to even express other ideas.

Finally, it is clear that Mill and his supporters see complete freedom of expression, and the greatest possible liberty in expression and action, as intrinsic,

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[71] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 19.

arguably even "natural," goods, in direct contrast to Plato. Those such as Himmelfarb who argue that Mill is inconsistent seem to have a point. Mill seems to be extending a Utilitarian argument, but he also sees liberty as having intrinsic value. He sees that the greatest happiness must include freedom in the areas of expression and action and that the expression itself, must necessarily make the individual happy. Freedom to act is a natural "good" in a world where everyone should be free to choose her own goods.

> Mill's insistence that all human beings need the maximum
> possible freedom of expression for their long-range happiness is
> the result of reading his own desires and interests as the desires
> and interests of mankind in general.[73]

Again, the critics have a point. However, so did Mill. If I wish to do as I wish, even if it means self-restraint, I wish to be allowed to do so. If I believe that fetters will make me happy then I am free to seek them out. If Mill did read his own desires into others, he may have just been paying close attention to an aspect of being human that he shared with many others.

Few groups in society would seem to need the protection of the fundamental right to express themselves without externally or internally exposed censorship, more than adolescents in schools. They are the most likely to feel powerless as they approach issues for which they will soon share responsibility. Increased awareness of social issues is a central goal of most school curricula, yet students are often confronted with their own glaring inability to effect any changes within the spheres of these issues. To then deny them the ability to discuss these ideas openly and without fear of teacher-based reprisal, is to add insult to injury. To guarantee them the freedom of expression guaranteed to their somewhat more powerful adult counterparts, at least in communication with the teacher, is to, at a minimum, give them an opportunity to explore those issues with a member of the adult world they are soon to join.

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[72] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 19.
[73] H. Magid, p. 49.

What is being argued for, then, is that same level of freedom of expression for students preparing creative writing for evaluation by teachers that Mill saw such need for in society as a whole. Although Mill would have denied this freedom to children in the sense of societal discourse, there is no reason to suppose that he might have denied it to them in a more personal encounter.

Mill did see that there were times when expression should not be free. Although it is sometimes referred to as a denial of the right for "shouting fire in a theatre"[74] this is not precisely what he said.

> Even opinions lose their immunity, when the circumstances in which they are expressed are such as to constitute their expression a positive instigation to some mischievous act. An opinion that corn-dealers are starvers of the poor ... ought to be unmolested when simply circulated through the press, but may justly incur punishment when delivered orally to an excited mob assembled before the house of a corn-dealer, or when handed about among the same mob in the form of a placard.[75]

This is not, of course, inconsistent with the rest of Mill's argument. He does say, as a utilitarian, that harm to the happiness of others is the test that must be applied to ensure legitimacy. However, there is another aspect to this statement, which will be dealt with later, and as for the current argument regarding statements made to teachers, the angry mob idea is not relevant. In the context, the statement regarding corn-dealers may well be an expression of the genuine feeling of one member of the mob. The shout, however, would not, likely, be an expression of the feeling but a deliberate incitement to riot. In all likelihood, the excited mob already believes the corn merchant to be engaged in activities intended to starve them to death. Few, however, would argue that the mob does not have the right to hold that opinion, although had the power to restrict that thought been in the hands of another so inclined, the mob certainly would have been kept from the merchant's door.

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[74] Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Shenck v. United States quoted in Alan M. Dershowitz, *Shouting "Fire!"* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2002) p. 143.

[75] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 56.

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It is interesting that the statement about shouting fire was used to restrict freedom of expression in an atmosphere far less charged than Mill's mob scene. Alan Dershowitz claims that Justice Holmes was, in fact, in error when the oft-quoted opinion was written. The man being tried had in fact passed out pamphlets to young draftees during World War I, urging them to think about the message in the pamphlet and "if they so chose – to act on it in a lawful and non-violent way."[76] Mill's example was a far more appropriate example of a time when freedom of expression needed to be approached cautiously.

It may be, too, that there are types of expression that a teacher might well take as seriously as the cry at the corn-merchant's door. It is likely that self-censorship about physical abuse by a student could be seen as a symptom or extension of abuse. Surely, no teacher would wish to see evidence of some form of abuse as anything other than a call to action. What of a restrictive atmosphere for the submission of assignments? What if a teacher was to say that "mentions of physical violence are not acceptable" and a student in an effort to avoid censure avoided describing his own victimization? It is difficult to believe that any teacher would not wish to be provided with an opportunity to help a young person in distress rather than have set up, beforehand, a circumstance in which the student would self-censor in order to avoid offending the teacher from whom the student should legitimately expect some helpful action.

The teacher, too, in the nature of the exercise to be suggested in this thesis, will have a chance to see and deal with the cry of "corn merchants are starvers of the poor" before the mob is incited. It may be that the teacher will have the opportunity to create an open exchange of ideas among the mob, the shouter, and the corn merchant before mob or merchant are aware there is a problem. Certainly, if this is possible, it would serve far more good than suppressed feelings and feelings of frustration.

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[76] A. Dershowitz, p. 145.

Mill, too, is in many ways more concerned with "self-censorship" than external censorship for "[t]he murder of liberty he feared was less tha[n] by political oppression than by the social pressure to conform."[77] It is within this pressure to conform that students find the most compelling motivation for self-censorship. The apparent widespread need for adolescents to conform to peer-group norms is not subject to changes through mere educational theorizing. In contrast, the norms imposed by the school system via the teacher and other authorities, are. Rarely are the limits of the "acceptable" and "unacceptable" published in a student handbook. Rather, students look to perceptions developed over their time dealing with the school system for guidance as to what is, or is not, going to cause censure, and then subsequently avoid those words, images, or ideas.

Students may be the most vulnerable members of our society. They are charged with assimilating the norms of our society in terms of behaviour, ideas, attitudes, and knowledge. Schooling is one of society's most powerful institutions of assimilation. We teach the rules and regulations of so many aspects of social life in schools while also demanding that students make a critical evaluation of the ideas to which they are exposed. I would like to argue, with Mill, for "protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to...fetter the development and if possible prevent the formation of any individuality not in harmony with its ways."[78] And I would like to argue that the proper place for this protection is in the schools, where the prevailing opinion often has its strongest proponents, and where there are "fewer means of escape."[79]

In schools, although they most often function as reasonably accurate mirrors of social constructs, the same points of contention that are matters for debate in society often become the reasons for decision-making. There is very rarely preliminary debate around these issues and little opportunity for some of the stakeholders to argue for their

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[77] J. O'Grady, p. xii.
[78] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 8.

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own liberty. Students may be told that certain words, subjects, and methods of writing are forbidden to them. They may be told, "school is not a place for 'that' word," that a teacher or a group in the school may find certain ideas offensive, or even something as apparently trivial as "verse is inappropriate for the expression of ideas."[80] Some statements made by students in schools that might clearly be seen as legitimate subjects for restriction – those which are violent, racist, sexist, fear mongering – are sometimes as forbidden as matters for discussion as they are as weapons for injury.

Schools may very well fail in their roles as educational and social institutions if they do not deal effectively and open-mindedly with the problems caused by these types of expressions. It may not be a simple matter; it may not even be possible, to move these issues from the realm of threatening notes, graffiti, and playground sneers but these types of expression are too powerful when used among students to allow them their unchallenged right to be hidden from school authority. I would like to argue that within the relationship that exists between student and teacher, the student's liberty must take precedence and that, to the largest extent possible, that liberty should be extended into all aspects of student life in schools. Students should feel free to express all of their ideas to a teacher without any need to self-censor.

The central difficulty is, of course, the harm that may be done when someone else is exposed to our opinion when it contradicts some aspect of his cherished belief or even of his identity. This will be the subject of a later section where the role of self-censorship in publication will be explored.

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[79] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 8.

[80] This is a possible interpretation, I would suggest, of the B.C. Ministry of Education's performance Scale for English 12 Essay writing "Scoring Guide" which states that a zero must be given to a response written in verse. That serious ideas cannot be expressed in verse would have come as some surprise to Chaucer.

# Kant - Duty, Universalizability and Respect for Persons:

"Of particular importance are wide-ranging moral principles, which are not confined to [the teacher's] role, such as benevolence, fairness, and freedom."[81] The discussion of ethical issues teaches us both that there are considerable similarities in the outcomes that logically follow from various ethical systems and that the weaknesses of each in determining our best moral choices are considerable. As I have stated earlier, I would like to examine a number of meta-ethical ideas in my search for the limits of freedom of expression in the creative writing of secondary students. The aims of education and the social roles of schools are necessarily bound up in moral issues and ethical values.

Like Mill, Kant was concerned that people be allowed the freedom to express ideas without fear of retribution. In *Critique of Pure Reason* he adds to the freedom of being allowed to behave in ways that do not infringe on the common good, a freedom very much like that which might be sought by an adolescent writer:

> To this freedom, then, there also belongs the freedom to exhibit
> the thoughts and doubts which one cannot resolve oneself for

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[81] P. Hirst and R. S. Peters, p. 90.

public judgments without thereupon being decried as a malcontent and a dangerous citizen. This lies already in the original right of human reason itself, in which everyone has a voice...[82]

Here, Kant seems to be supporting the right of the individual to challenge social norms, as a "natural" right of all reasoning beings. This apparent support of a critical-thinking approach to schools as educational and social institutions is not Kant's intention. It might be argued, however, that Kant at least allows the idea that social challenge, because it is a right, might be claimed by adolescents in schools. Kant has particular suggestions for the education of the young, particularly in regard to censorship of what they are exposed to which are not compatible with this view. I will deal with that idea in the context of more specifically educational ideas regarding student freedom of expression.

More generally, Kant, in attempting to demonstrate a logic to ethical questions, explored the ideas of duty and of universalizability, and the concept of respect for persons as conditions of what constitutes moral, non-moral, and immoral actions or statements. Although there are certainly problems with Kant's approach,[83] it can be used to demonstrate that statements like, "students in a public school, writing for their teacher, should be allowed complete freedom of expression" fall within the domain of morality. This may, then, allow the statement's moral goodness to be assessed by means of Kant's idea of "respect for persons."

Kant's idea was to formulate a clear philosophically supportable distinction between the moral and the non-moral. He wanted to classify statements as either being about moral issues or not about moral issues. Unlike some other writers about the moral, Kant did not wish to begin with statements that were generally regarded as moral and compare other statements to these in an effort to classify the new statements

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[82] Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 650.
[83] R. Barrow, (1975) pp. 122-125.

as moral or not. He was not seeking a comparative morality. As Mill pointed out, most other moral philosophers had used this approach[84] and were less than successful. Nor was Kant concerned, through this initial argument, with separating the moral from the immoral. He was not seeking to define what was "good" or "bad" but to define what was meant when something was referred to as "good" or "bad." As Robin Barrow points out in *Moral Philosophy for Education*, Kant's success is one of categorization; his failure, as Barrow sees it, is in being unable to separate the moral from the immoral in any practically applicable way.

To arrive at a distinction between moral and non-moral statements, Kant sought a sort of "absolute truth" about morality. Part of this absolute truth is the idea that a moral act is distinguished from other acts because it is done from a sense of duty.[85] If a student hands in a written assignment on time, one may decide that the act was a moral one if, and only if, in Kant's view, the student freely makes the decision to hand in the assignment before the required deadline because she feels some obligation to fulfill this particular duty of a student. A student who hands in an assignment in a timely manner and does so because he wishes to please the teacher, or wishes to avoid a penalty, or wishes to escape censure is not, in Kant's view, acting morally. This is not to say that the student is acting immorally in the latter circumstances but merely that "moral" cannot be applied to this action of timely submission of assignments because it does not arise out of a sense of duty.

Kant suggests that only actions done from a sense of duty can be morally good.[86] Duty, in and of itself, however, is not a sufficient condition of a moral act. If we were to consider only this single aspect of Kant's ethics, a student who chooses to steal an item from the classroom out of a sense of duty to a group of friends may still be thought to be acting morally. Kant certainly had not intended that this, then, be viewed as morally

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[84] John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2000) p. 9.
[85] Immanuel Kant, *The Moral Law: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, translated by H.J. Paton (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) p. 65.

"good." If this student feels a sense of duty to the group of friends, then freely makes the decision to steal the item without regard to the reaction of the group, possible rewards from the group, or how they, themselves, will react emotionally to their act, then the action does come from a sense of duty. Therefore, the theft can be considered an act that falls within the realm of the moral. Kant was saying that this duty is a necessary condition, not a sufficient one, as such an example clearly shows. A great many actions that almost no one would wish to be considered morally good might well arise from a sense of duty.

> ...when [Kant] begins to deduce from this precept any of the
> actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show
> that there would be any contradiction, and logical (not to say
> physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of
> the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows
> is that the *consequences* of their universal adoption would be
> such as no one would choose to incur.[87]

Basing a morality strictly on the sense of duty might, therefore, lead to a set of moral beliefs that would be abhorrent to virtually all people.

Having determined that some actions lie within the realm of morality and others may not be considered in light of morality at all, Kant attempted to distinguish between those statements and actions which could be considered morally good, and those that could not. His idea was to distinguish between moral statements that, although they may come from a sense of duty, are not supportable within themselves and those that are. The principle he comes up with has been described as the idea of universalizability.

Statements of duty, for Kant, may refer to actions which are morally "good" if they are such that any rational person would wish them to apply universally to all, including himself.[88] Those statements that cannot be made universalizable cannot indicate morally "good" actions. One can see how this might work if one considers a

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[86] H. J. Paton, introduction to *The Moral Law: Kant's Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967) p. 21.

[87] J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 10.

student about to make a statement to a teacher. Imagine for a moment that this student has a choice about what she will say to the teacher at a given moment. If she acts from a sense of duty, and tells the truth, she has fulfilled the first of Kant's criteria for a moral statement and the truth-telling is at least within the realm of morality, and has the potential to be morally good. If it can be agreed that any rational person would want to have the truth told in any circumstance like the one in which the student finds herself, the statement "Tell the truth in this circumstance" would also be universalizable and therefore the truth telling would be morally good. To go even further, Kant would suggest that the statement, "Tell the truth in any circumstances," provided that the telling of the truth came out of a sense of duty, would be morally good because its opposite could not be supported reasonably by a rational person.[89]

Kant continues this line of reasoning to his "Categorical Imperative." It is a statement of a sort of universal moral precept with which all actions must completely agree if they even hope to be morally good. It has been translated as "Act only on that moral statement which you can, as a rational being, at the same time, desire to be made a universal law." So a statement like "Tell the truth, in any circumstances" because it is one which one may act on out of a sense of duty and one which one could not rationally wish to have apply otherwise fits the Categorical Imperative. Kant's famous example of the pursuing murderer shows both his belief in the Categorical Imperative and the reason for its rejection as a moral principle. Kant suggests that it would be wrong to lie to a murderer in order to mislead him about the location of his intended victim. Because this seems so difficult to reconcile with our usual ideas about what is right, we can see the difficulty of Kant's idea and a possible solution. More of this later.

This does not, however, stop the teacher who wishes to curb expression from formulating his own universalizable duty statement such as "students in a public school, writing for their teacher, should only express those ideas and feelings which are

[88] I. Kant, *The Moral Law*, p. 84.
[89] I. Kant, *The Moral Law*, p. 102.

appropriate for a public school." Certainly, it could be argued that rational people might see this as a statement that should apply to all, including themselves as students. This is a second weakness in Kant's entire formulation of universalizable moral statements. It allows for a great many statements to be made which might deny some alternate moral ideas from being considered acceptable. If the statement "suicide is wrong, regardless of the reason" were held by rational people in good health, we might be inclined to look on as "immoral" terminally ill patients seeking an escape from pain. Another of Kant's ideas might be more definitive in addressing the issue of student freedom of expression.

Principally, it is in Kant's idea of "Respect for Persons" that the most powerful support for unfettered freedom of expression may be found. Kant wished that each person "treat himself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves."[90] An "end" has characteristics; Kant implies that a "means" simply does not. A "means" only has value relative to our desires, but an "end" has a value independent of our desire, or awareness of it.[91]

People are not "means" because they have an existence outside the intentions, beliefs, desires, or ownership of others. Although at a particular time one individual might be a "means to an end" for another person, Kant stresses that the treatment of another should take into consideration that that relationship is a small, and far less important aspect of each of the people than the recognition of the other's independence as a rational being. People are "ends" principally because they are conscious and rational beings,[92] capable of making decisions, setting personal goals and guiding their own conduct through reason.

This recognition of the intrinsic and special value of other rational minds is central to the ideal of critical thinking in education. It is because we have a respect for

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[90] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) p. 41.
[91] I. Kant, *The Moral Law*, p. 90.
[92] I. Kant, *The Moral Law*, p. 91.

students as persons that we treat them in a manner which "honors students' demand for reasons and explanations, deals with students honestly, and recognizes the need to confront students' independent judgement."[93] The purpose of education is to create a being which is an "end" and the means by which we do so must not violate the principle that the student is at all times a being with moral worth.

In order to treat people as ends, then, we must, as far as possible, help and not harm them. We must endeavour, whenever it is within our power, to further their ends. We must also respect their rationality and, as a result, allow them to pursue ends to which we are not adherents, provided, of course, that their ends do not also involve treating others as "means" only. We must not judge others strictly from out of our own point of view, but must allow and respect their rationality in choosing their own path.

An "end" has a value apart from the valuer. A student in a classroom is a separate and recognizably independent entity from the teacher. The student therefore is an "end" and not a "means" because "means" have values only in relation to an "end." Although a student is a means to a particular end for the teacher - the teacher would not have the means to be a teacher if there were no students - the teacher must never lose sight of the idea that the value of the student lies outside of that role as "means."

To argue that respect for persons has a place in education is to argue that students are in fact, or become at some point, "ends." For many, it may be easier to see that "student" is a "means" to achieve "educated adult" or some related concept. If a student is, in fact, a "means" there is less need to treat her as one would an adult who is clearly an "end." An analogy might be seen in the idea of borrowing some precious item from a friend in order to complete some task. One would certainly treat the item with respect, care for it, and make every effort to return it to the friend in the best condition that one could. If a friend allowed the use of her house, for example, so that the borrower might have a place to live for a time, the borrower would treat the

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[93] H. Siegel, p. 56.

"means" by which he might live more comfortably with all the care he could muster. If someone lends a school system a child so that it might fulfill its role as educator and socializer and teach that child some valuable attitudes, knowledge, or understanding, the school would certainly not treat it with less respect than the house loaned to the house-sitter. But should the teacher treat the child with more respect? If all that the teacher wanted to do with the child is to be a teacher, if the teacher wanted to see the value of the child only in relation to herself, then she has no obligation beyond treating the child as a "means." But many who teach see students as much more.

What many of those who interpret Kant's statement in the context of educational philosophy, such as Hirst and Peters, are saying is that students have legitimate points of view and that we are to take these points of view as matters of serious examination and subjects of respect.[94] We should not merely impose our own, differing or similar, points of view on students. Instead, we should treat their points of view "with a measure of seriousness sufficient to entertain the possibility of changing one's own opinions or plans in the light of it."[95]

Treating a person as an end has tremendous implication for the subject of freedom of expression. The ideas, notions, beliefs, and words of a student become expressions worthy of serious and considered attention if we treat them as "ends." Mill's argument regarding the fallibility of ideas takes on a new and far more emphatic importance in the schools. Students are to be seen not as those with inferior, unlearned, unprincipled, or unconsidered ideas but equals with ideas deserving and worthy of equal consideration. Clearly some of their ideas may be erroneous, based on inaccurate or poorly understood information, or not held by many others, but this is not a reason for dismissal or censorship. A teacher's job in many cases may be to point out to the student why an idea they hold to be true may not be considered so by others, but the

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[94] P. Hirst and R. S. Peters, p. 53.
[95] P. Hirst and R. S. Peters, p. 54.

judicious teacher, out of respect for persons, does so in a manner consistent with dialogue and discourse rather than dictatorship and despotism.

> To feel respect for persons . . . is to be moved by the thought that another, is, after all, a person like oneself (i.e. a centre of consciousness) and that as such he is to be accorded certain rights and to be treated with consideration.[96]

And further:

> Insofar as we think of an individual as having a point of view, and insofar as this is not a matter of indifference to us, we respect him as a person. To show lack of respect for persons, is, for instance, to ignore his point of view when we use him purely for our own purposes or to settle his destiny for him without taking account of his views about it.[97]

There are limitations to this idea, which Barrow points out in *Moral Philosophy for Education*. Children may well hold points of view that, although we must respect their right to hold, we, as teachers, must also realize are not to drive "what behaviour is going to be permitted in schools."[98]  A child might have the view, for example, that she is not to be denied another's property if she asks for it politely.  Barrow points out that this does not mean that a teacher must let her take another's property out of "respect for her as a person."  As a result, Barrow says, respect for persons, although necessarily supportable is, "of limited significance"[99] and that from it "one cannot derive any significant observations about what the teacher should in practice do."[100]

But is the concept so vague as to give no guides as to behaviour?  Children within the public schools might well find that it is simpler to use the concept of respect for persons as a guiding tenant for their own behaviour rather than the perhaps philosophically more supportable, but more conceptually difficult definition of rules based on utilitarianism that Barrow suggests.  Such students would be less likely to

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[96] P. Hirst and R. S. Peters, p. 91.
[97] P. Hirst and R. S. Peters, p. 92.
[98] R. Barrow, (1975) p. 129.
[99] R. Barrow, (1975) p. 129.

commit some of the acts which Barrow has used to argue against the importance of "respect for persons." The student who bullies another because he is black is not respecting the other as a person. Arguments about greatest happiness stemming from the utilitarian ideas, which are the subject of the following chapter, may have little relevance to the bully, particularly in a school or community culture where a majority of persons with whom that student has contact may feel that blacks are to be bullied. If the bully, though, acts in a way that respects his fellow student as a person, rather than in a way that shows displeasure at the presence of blacks, the bullying behaviour should not happen.

Teachers, too, might find the idea of respect for persons easier to apply as well as easier to teach with. It may be easy to explain to the girl who wishes to have another person's property that this does not consider the property owner's individual right to have the property simply by pointing out how the girl feels herself about her property. This does not mean that the teacher would prevent the girl expressing her originally held belief that she desires to own the property. The concept of respect for persons comes as close to Mill's reasons for freedom of expression as does a strictly utilitarian argument. In a practical sense, the teacher will understand the girl's behaviour better if she knows what the child is thinking. The teacher will know what the child is thinking if the child feels free to express herself whatever the popularly held view of possession of objects is.

As a socializing institution, a school would do well to instil a respect for persons in students. In a democratic and pluralist society, guiding principles arising from intuitive or cultural explanations of ethics may be contradictory or useless in guiding children. Two students from different cultural backgrounds may find themselves contending about the correctness of a moral decision if the values they hold are based solely on cultural heritage or intuitive judgements. Because they are each functioning with the belief that their point of view is right, they will have no way of resolving the

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[100] R. Barrow, (1975) p. 129.

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discrepancies in their ethical view. However, if they have come to understand and adopt the idea of respect for persons, it may be that they will be able to respect the right of the other to hold that belief provided it does not infringe on the rights of others to hold their own beliefs. The moral conundrum may not be solvable but it will, at least, be a matter for dialogue and not one for animosity.

Mill argues that, in the realm of expression and action, a utilitarian view such as the one to be examined in the next chapter should hold, provided that it does not lead to a dictatorship by the majority. But what if one person held a view so outrageous as to really cause the unhappiness, through its expression, of every other human being? It would be difficult to imagine a utilitarian argument that the expression must still be allowed. Kant's respect for persons, though, could support the freedom to express that idea without regard for its ultimate effect on others. The person with the unpopular view would be as restricted, and freed, by his respect for all others as the others should be both restricted and freed by their respect for him. The expression of the very unpopular idea, provided everyone continues to respect persons, would be a gateway to discourse around and about the idea. Perhaps the majority would be able to convince the one idea holder of his error in the idea. Perhaps he would see that holding and expressing the idea did not respect the others. Perhaps, too, the majority might be convinced that the idea that caused them so much unhappiness to hear was of merit and might even need to be adopted. Respecting persons is, above all else, a recognition of the contribution to discourse that all may make, and that all should be able to make unfettered.

For the teacher in the public school classroom, then, the guidance of Kant's "respect for persons" seems clear. Students must be regarded by their teachers as persons with ideas that are worthy of being held and expressed. Students should be allowed the freedom to make their ideas known, at least in the dialogue that happens directly with the teacher. This freedom allows the ideas to enter into the greater discourse of the exchange of ideas and it is there that they may be reinforced, re-

examined, and rejected as the student hears and engages with the ideas of others who have been given the same right to express themselves as persons worthy of respect. Without this freedom, students will not be a part of the educational dialogue. They will have one less opportunity to understand and participate in Oakeshott's conversation-that-is-civilisation. Without freedom to express their ideas, students will be denied a central educational aim of the critical thinking ideal.

# Rule-Based Utilitarianism:

There is, however, ample reason to consider a utilitarian argument for freedom of expression, to accompany the idea of respect for persons. At some level, respect for persons becomes a grey area in which the respect for one person's need for free expression comes into conflict with another's need for security and a nurturing atmosphere free of "poisoning" and harmful statements. Philosophically, it seems, utilitarianism, in the barest form suggested by Bentham, may be the most supportable basis for ethical decision making. It does, in many cases, not provide a conclusion different in any large material sense from reliance on respect for persons, but it may help to solve the problem of freedom of expression for students without introducing the thorny problem of respect for teachers as persons leading to student self-censorship. It does, of course, create a new set of problems, inherent in utilitarianism and complicated by application to the public schools. Combined with respect for persons, however, it provides clarity and perhaps even guidance to educators.

Although utilitarianism is a philosophical approach to the idea of freedom of expression, in the end its application depends on psychological statements. Perhaps a central problem with ethical issues in philosophy is their conflict with, or support by, the psychology of those who wish to apply them or who are affected by them. Kant speaks of "reasonable people" and their desires, Mill makes value judgments on the

quality of pleasure, and even this call for freedom of expression for students is based partly on a fundamental belief that restriction of expression will lead to negative psychological consequences. However, utilitarianism, at its heart, uses the most simple of psychological ideas: pleasure is better than pain.

Practically speaking, utilitarianism solves the problem of universalizable statements such as "Each person should act in their own selfish interests" which are also morally distasteful to most of us, by giving us an alternative way of examining the issue and evaluating the results. It solves them by depending on a belief that rational people are likely to have the same notions of happiness, enough so that the consequences of any particular action can be foreseen and that an accurate idea about the reaction of "the greatest number" is possible. Its presupposition, that normal persons are made generally unhappy by physical or psychological injury and made generally happy by its absence, seems as completely a general psychological and physiological statement of truth as is possible to make. The biological idea of homeostasis supports this apparently strictly emotional idea. Organisms avoid harm in order to maintain a viable and healthy inner state. It should not require a great leap to claim that a healthy interior psychological state would contribute to, or be as necessary as, the healthy physical inner state.

There must be, though, in a real world, some compromises between "healthy states" and the requirements of achieving them. In order to acquire nourishment an organism must expend some energy. The organism is in a healthier state if the expended energy does not exceed the energy taken in. Emotionally or psychologically too, people must put forth some energy in order to take in psychological benefit. Relationships with others, society, in fact, is something of a compromise which demands effort and restraint in order for an individual to obtain the benefit of being in the society. Utilitarianism is particularly conscious of this idea as it demands, in at least some of its applications, a consideration of the happiness of the group, as a group of individuals, over the happiness of the individual.

One difficulty in the distillation of utilitarian arguments is the gradation of pleasure into a hierarchy. Mill discusses the idea that some pleasures are "better" than others and makes the point that those "completely acquainted" with one pleasure will chose it over another to the point of accepting some discomfort that arises out of this choice.[101] It is not difficult to imagine such a person. A teacher, for example, may find such pleasure in his career that he will willingly accept the salary, benefits, and long hours necessary to do the job as he sees it. Others, though, clearly have other priorities and the derivation of universal moral laws from non-universal psychological ideas may be problematic. Mill is certain that only the most unhappy human would chose a life of physical pleasure over one of intellectual pleasure and he may well have hit upon a psychological truth. Perhaps only the unhappiest society would imagine that the contentment of a permanent Club Med life would be more satisfying than a permanent life of graduate studies for all. Or perhaps not. Mill defines the more capable society as the one which thinks as he does, the more foolish society as one which does not. How can one argue with that?

Perhaps there is no need. The aims of education presented in the third chapter of this thesis lend support to Mill's ideas. Certainly a principal goal of schools as educators is to promote critical thought, to ensure that in addition to the knowledge and understanding considered valuable by rational people, that the student also demonstrate an attitude which values the skills and information that they are receiving. If the goal of a schooling system is, in effect, to convince its charges that they should value intellectual pleasure, it would be self-contradictory for that same education system to argue, against Mill and others like him, that higher thought does not lead to happiness. The existence of a public school system is, at least in part, a reflection of the value placed on the intellectual desires of humans over their physical ones. There may also be another, more logically supportable reason for seeing no need to sort pleasures into more and less pleasurable which does not rely on intellectual snobbery.

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[101] J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 16.

Mill dismisses those critics who claim that a utilitarian ethic is too cumbersome to use on a case by case basis by pointing out the simple logic that humankind knows enough after centuries of civilization. Society, he feels, understands the benefits to many of formulating a number of basic rules of behaviour. It is not difficult to examine the consequences of theft, extend the observations, by extrapolation, to the whole of humanity, and formulate a rule that is based on the idea that theft is morally wrong because it leads to a diminishment of happiness and an increase in discomfort. Examining the consequences of the withholding of freedom of expression within social and aesthetic contexts and in historical examples demonstrates that it, too, leads to greater unhappiness in a large number of cases. There have certainly been glaring examples of "free speech run rampant" where the consequences of the rights of some to speak their minds seemed to do more harm than good. However, this may be the result of those who acted on what was said, ignoring the very reasons, such as respect for persons and greater happiness, that allowed the case to be stated in the first place. If students see their freedom of expression as naturally arising out of the teacher's respect for them as persons and the greater happiness achieved for all as a result of the unencumbered exchange of ideas, they may also see the connection between what they say and their right to say it. It would certainly be a goal of the teacher to show them this connection. Once the student had had the opportunity to express the idea freely to the teacher, the sharing of that idea with the community would rest on other ideas also used as guidelines in the classroom such as respect for persons and greater happiness.

Why should students not be given this basic equality of freedom of expression? We wish them to be active contributors to society and

> society between human beings...is manifestly impossible on any
> other footing than that the interests of all are to be consulted.
> Society between equals can only exist on the understanding that
> the interests of all are to be regarded equally...In this way

people grow up unable to conceive as possible to them a state of
total disregard of other people's interests.[102]

There is an inherent contradiction in attempting to inculcate the value of treating others as equals in students while refusing to treat them so. Teachers are well aware that students have neither their depth nor their breadth of experience and that the wisdom of restraint in action and of consideration of consequences may be underdeveloped in the younger student. This does not imply that the student should be treated as inferior in value, and respect for students as "ends" rather than means might indicate that they should not.

It may not be possible to separate Kant's idea of respect for persons and the utilitarian idea of greatest happiness on the basis of outcome. Both will likely lead to the same sorts of behaviour when applied in this context. It may be that allowing students freedom of expression in the context to be suggested in chapter twelve will respect them as persons and create greater happiness through the promotion of the feeling that one has been heard. This similarity in outcome might well be seen as a reason to accept the call for freedom of expression for students because two separate and supportable moral precepts lead to the same conclusion.

Mill makes one point which, it seems to me, is of relevance to all arguments within ethics. Responding to those who would claim that utilitarianism sets too high a standard, Mill points out that moral philosophy is the argument for the ideal and that a difficulty in achieving that ideal is not, in itself, a reason to reject the argument. This is equally true for a call for freedom of expression for students. It is both difficult to achieve and something that will create problems within the student-teacher relationship and within other relationships within the school. This does not mean, however, that this is not what we should do if freedom of expression is right, and if it is one of Mill's "higher goods."

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[102] J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 42.

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Another utilitarian, Alburey Castell, saw the need for freedom of thought and expression as central to moral good:

> one of the most important ways for society to ensure that its members will be able to contribute their maximum to creating, preserving and increasing the greatest happiness to the greatest number is to extend to them the right to think and act for themselves.[103]

A primary goal of schools, it has been argued previously, must surely be to produce students who contribute to the society. If we accept the utilitarian idea that the way to assess the value of that contribution is to assess its contribution to greater happiness, Castell's statement is a powerful one.

Strict utilitarianism, on a case-by-case basis, would be virtually impossible to apply. There is simply no realistic way in which one can foresee or evaluate all of the consequences of a single action. Even more difficult would be to assess the happiness that results from that action. The notion of making general rules to make moral judgements that are based on utilitarian ideas answers some of these problems.

Rule-based utilitarianism is an idea that suggests that in the light of the difficulty of examining all possible consequences of an individual action, the outcomes of a type of action in general might be determined and a rule of moral decision making be drafted. The rule might not encompass all possible permutations of an action in all possible conditions of application, but it would provide practical guidance and be a morally correct decision in the overwhelming majority of cases. Society might, then, examine the consequences, in general, and for the majority, of free expression and conclude that free expression far more often than not, leads to a greater happiness. The result might invariably be that some people, are, at some times, made unhappy, but consistent application would, over time, insure greater happiness for the greatest number.

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[103] Alburey Castell, in introduction to *On Liberty*, (New York, Appelton-Century-Crofts, 1947) p. vii.

Rule-based utilitarian arguments for freedom of expression are equally difficult to apply in the smaller realm of the public school classroom. It is not difficult to imagine that a rule such as "students should be free to express any idea in any way" would be extremely unlikely to promote greater happiness. Adolescents, in particular, seem too prone to being caused great distress by the comments of others, as well as prone to making such comments in order to cause distress in others. However, it is equally clear, it seems, that given the right to express themselves freely without the ability to impact others, students might well attain the greatest levels of happiness for the greatest number.

The feeling of being recognized as a contributing member of society, the feeling of being recognized as an individual worthy of consideration, the feeling that one's inner thoughts are acceptable by another would certainly make one feel happy. It might also reduce the pain felt by an adolescent caught in between childhood restriction and adult freedom. If this could be accomplished without causing pain to other students, it would indeed satisfy a utilitarian argument. A rule such as "students should feel free to say anything that they wish in creative writing assignments provided that it does not impact other students in any way" could be a utilitarian ideal. Provided the rule were applied consistently, it might answer both ethical and practical problems in the secondary creative writing classroom.

# Consistent Application
# of Ideas in Ethics:

Consistency in the formulation and application of statements of morality was a central concern of Kant. This type of consistency is an important part of any philosophical argument, particularly rule-based utilitarianism. Consistency in allowing freedom of expression for students in creative writing assignments in the secondary classroom and a corresponding inconsistency in its denial must be demonstrable. That is, can a kind of illogicality be demonstrated in the idea that a person should be able to express himself by denying another the ability to express herself?

First, we must decide that there is a reason to be consistent. It is not difficult to see that logic demands consistency for itself. A=B and B=C must mean that A=C or the conventions of logic and the language we use to express it, regardless of its ultimate meaning and source, do not hold. If we hope to be rational in the application of our ethical ideas, such as "students should be allowed freedom of expression provided that there is no impact on other students" we must insure that this statement, when applied, will have an outcome that is rationally supportable with the aims of making the statement. If our aims and our application are consistent in this meta-ethical sense, then they must also be worthy of consideration in the normative sense.

Consistency in ethical statements does not guarantee truth. As Hume has pointed out, there is a considerable difference between A is B and A ought to B. However, the idea of consistency must be a necessary, although not a sufficient condition of ethical statements. Rational people might or might not accept that A ought to B but should never accept A ought to B and C if C is equal to "not B." Thus, we may agree that a person should not lie but could not agree that a person should lie and not lie if we hope to be rationally consistent.

This consistency is important from most of the moral perspectives on which ethical schemes can be built.[104] We also expect consistency in our application of moral rules. If A ought to B, A had always ought to B. Most would not consider a person to be speaking rationally who said that a moral rule applied a certain way in one circumstance but not in exactly the same circumstance. If one says that a person should not lie on a college application when asked one's age, it would not be consistent to say that it is acceptable to do so if one fills out the same application when one discovers a mistake and destroys the first.

As one strays from the ideal of exactly the same circumstances, difficulties may well arise, of course. Certainly, there are never cases that are exactly alike, but there will be cases where all of the relevant aspects are similar. There are also cases where some pertinent circumstance would interfere. Thus it is acceptable for A to B, but it may not be acceptable for A to B if X. This is not consistent, but it is the way of the world. One should not lie on a college application but it might be acceptable to lie to prevent a murder, although it would still be lying to do so. Although Kant would have disagreed that there was ever an excuse for lying, it is difficult for most of us to believe that telling the truth to a pursuing murderer is the only correct moral choice. The problem will always lie in establishing the limits of the acceptability.

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[104] Harry Gensler, *Ethics*, (New York: Routledge, 1998) p. 98.

We also expect consistency in the sense that we expect conscientiousness in the application of principles that people say that they hold. If we say during a discussion that A ought to B then A ought also to B when push comes to shove. Whether one bases one's ethical statements on intuitionist, emotivist, prescriptivist, naturalist, or supernaturalist foundation statements, at the root of each general category of approach to ethical problems is the idea that the foundational statements are good for both theoretical and practical application. We do not expect that a person who believes that murder is wrong will still be acting morally if they move to a better seat in a movie theatre by murdering the person sitting in it and pushing the body to the floor. Provided that they see the act as murder, they would be behaving inconsistently.

Most ethical arguments also demand impartiality in their theoretical construction and practical application to insure complete consistency. If A ought to B, then C ought to B as well. No one person should be expected to adhere to a principal if a person, similar to them in all relevant aspects, is not required to adhere to that principal in relevantly similar circumstances. If lying on a college application and murdering another theatre patron to sit in a better seat are wrong for her, they must also be wrong for him. If freedom of expression is right for her, it must also be right for him.

How do consistency and impartiality ensure freedom of expression? They cannot, of course, but they do suggest that a person wishing to express themselves freely must grant that freedom to another. Suppose that A professes a belief in freedom of expression under some circumstance. Then A may not also profess a belief in the restriction of expression under that same circumstance, and remain consistent. And must A not also say that any statement that they express is as free to be made as any other statement? Is it to be "freedom of expression if..." or freedom of expression? In order to be consistent, A should express herself freely and move her theoretical stand into the practical world. If it is to be "freedom of expression if..." as it is in our rule-based statement from the previous chapter, then the practical application of the rule is clearly delineated.

Again, however, the real world and the world of ethical pondering are not always happy neighbours. We might wish to adopt Kant's "hard line" application of moral duty and maintain that free expression must be free regardless of the consequences. We might wish to follow Bentham, instead, and examine the consequences of expression, or go even further and attempt to examine each utterance's outcomes on a case by case basis. We may wish to apply our rule, based on utilitarian considerations because we see it as compatible with "respect for persons." Certainly, there will be times when there are significant differences in one statement a person is free to make and another.

There is also the matter of impartiality in the application of ethical considerations. If A wishes to be free to say B then impartiality demands that A must also wish that C be free to say B, provided that they can see no relevant differences between themselves and C. If A were to claim that C should not say B but A should, then A is not being impartial in application of freedom of expression, provided that the relevant circumstances are the same.

One could expect, of course, to encounter the argument that the age of C might be a relevant consideration. It is easily as relevant as differences in the contents of the expression. We are then confronted with the problem of deciding when the difference between the ages of a person allowed free expression and the one not allowed it becomes insignificant. Is a line, such as that drawn by the law at a birthday, a legitimate one for schools? Might a sixteen-year-old or an eighteen-year-old suddenly gain the right to free expression while his classmates are restrained? This seems a difficult idea to accept. If school attendance is to be the deciding factor between free expression and its denial, are schools shirking the responsibility of training students in their social rights and responsibilities, leaving them to graduate with a right and no guided experience in using it?

Like Mill, some would argue that our job is first and foremost to describe the ideal. In order to come as close as possible to true freedom, we should err, since we must, in the direction of allowing the greatest freedom of expression. We must first know that this choice is consistent with the ethical underpinnings of our decisions, based on respect for persons, a rule based in utilitarian argument, or out of a belief in the intrinsic value of liberty. If it also does not violate those principles in other applications such as the protection of the classroom atmosphere, we should be able to allow free expression while protecting the sensibilities of all students.

What types of expression, then, are so markedly different from others that they demand restriction, particularly in the public schools? Dealing with the extremes, of course, will be easier, and the overwhelming number of all possible statements must surely fall into the realm of expressions that would not be restricted. Statements of mathematical fact, for example, could rarely be uttered in a context which would make them harmful to others. There are still, however, a significant number of statements that have larger or smaller impact on others and must be examined in relation to their possible outcomes.

Direct personal insult for no reason other than to cause injury lies at the extreme of the spectrum of possible expressions. Surely, no school system, nor any gathering of people, for that matter, could long tolerate the use of personal invective. Schools must necessarily teach the skills of self-censorship, of self-restraint, to students in order to prevent the type of disharmony that would result in the unlimited casting of insults. The controlling of such behaviour is part of the teacher's role as socializer and the attitudes of critical thinking tie it closely to her role as educator. Teachers will seek to help students to establish realistic limits on their own expression dictated by harmonious interpersonal relationships but will not assign "schoolwork" which demands insult, or even provides structured opportunity for personal insult. Since the solution to problems of student freedom of expression presented here lies in separating

the "assignment" from the "performance," limitations on freedom of expression in the form of communication between students will not be as problematic or inconsistent.

This also applies to the less clearly inappropriate expressions that students might feel the need to make or might, indeed, be harmed by. Statements based on cultural or racial differences, on gender, on differences in preference or which come out of graphic violent or sexual descriptions are subject to exactly the same reasons for restriction as statements of personal insult. If such statements are made solely with the intention to insult, segregate, or harm in some ways, they will so poison the atmosphere of a school that they must necessarily be subject to restriction, or better yet, become the subject of self-restriction if we are to maintain a healthy environment for members of the school community.

Students must even be encouraged to examine the consequences of even their "good faith" statements and taught to apply ethical ideals consistently. A primary role of the school as an educational institution as well as a central aim of education must be to help students to see in an empathetic manner, the consequences of their public statements regardless of the context of those statements. Consistent application of the ethical ideals of respect for person or a rule-based utilitarian argument will demand consideration of the well-being and feelings of others.

One powerful tool in that effort is the open communication of those ideas that a student has with her teacher. If she finds no one in the safe atmosphere of the school with whom she can openly express her ideas, how is she to learn to sort those that are harmful to the good feeling and mental well-being of others from those that are not? If the teacher sees his role as going further, as being an individual who will guide the student in becoming more tolerant, and respectful, of both actuality and other people, he must know where the student sits in terms of her understanding. In treating the student as an end, rather than a means, the teacher must respect those ideas which the

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student holds and, should he find them wanting, use rationality, as well as those tools of the good teacher everywhere to help her to see the ideas for what they are.

None of this demands, however, that the teacher must restrict the private exchange of ideas between herself and her students. It would seem to suggest, instead, that the teacher encourage a completely free utterance of ideas by each student to the teacher herself. This is not age dependent as young students are every bit as likely to have ideas as an adult. The precise nature of the suggestions to be made here for handling the matter of private communication versus public utterance will be dealt with in the final chapter.

# Sociological Aspects of Censorship:

It has long been argued by anti-censorship writers and activists that the principal motivation behind censorship is the establishment and maintenance of a position of superior power. "When there is only *one* [idea] ... there is no public criticism or speculation, or widely disseminated dissent."[105] Totalitarian regimes have always sought to suppress the expression of ideas that do not reinforce their right to exercise control. When successful at censoring, such regimes have maintained the power that they sought. This success, though, comes at a price. It can be argued that it is only in a society with free and open discourse around issues, that progress can be made. The flowering of philosophy in ancient Greece came in the somewhat more open society of Athens, rather than in the totalitarian Spartan regime.

The attempt to censor a people who have seen the benefits of free expression is as likely to lead to a weakening of those in power. In the formulation of the American Constitution it was a reaction against the power imposed by the British Crown in its control of the press that led to the first amendment. The ability of the colonial anti-crown activists to use government censorship as a rallying cry was at least a part of their reason for eventual success and the reason for the entrenchment of this right in the

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[105] Wyndham Lewis, *The Writer and the Absolute* (London: Methuen and Company, 1952) p. 31.

fabric of the country's laws. Most other Western democracies have similar guarantees, not only because they see those guarantees of freedom of expression as a way of circumventing the seizure of unreasonable power by a government, but also because open discourse is an important part of the sharing of power that democratic governments are based on. Schools, in as much as they are training future citizens, must have some obligation to confront the rights and responsibilities of freedom of expression.

It might seem that classroom power structures are based on a totalitarian, rather than a democratic model. Teacher control is one aspect of what might be called the "non-educational" aspects of the classroom. Certainly, a teacher attempting to maintain a strict control over the hearts and minds of her students is likely to see tight control over the expression of her students, or at least strict self-censorship by those students, as an important tool in dictatorial control of the classroom. As pointed out in the discussion of the aims of education, however, this model is not one which is consistent with producing educated people. Nor is it likely that many teachers truly wish to inhibit student thoughts as much as they may often need to inhibit student behaviour.

In *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Karl Popper explores some historical and philosophical precedents for restricted societies. A number of useful parallels can be drawn between the formation of open societies and the institutions charged with creating or maintaining societies. The comparison is not, of course, a perfect one but it does suggest that teachers are best to err on the side of increased freedom of expression.

Popper sees the "'open society' which sets free the critical powers of man"[106] as mankind's greatest social institution. If he is correct in his belief that it is the open society which empowers a person's critical faculties, his exploration may cast light on an educational system designed to enhance an open society and to encourage the "critical powers" of students. Popper begins his list of the "enemies" of the open

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[106] K. Popper, *Volume I*, p. i.

society quite naturally with Plato. Whether a description of a Utopian society or a metaphor for a healthy mind, the *Republic* is a call for a rigidly controlled and closed society which rejects all variation and all change.

Plato sees "all social change [as] corruption or decay or degeneration."[107] The critical examination of societal ideas or institutions which might lead to change acts against the state by opening it to reasons for change. Plato touches on this as he describes the formation of a society from the individual through to the republic. Change, at least in terms of the growth of the society and the specialization of individuals within it, causes no problems. However, once the republic is attained, Plato's "Principle of Specialization" becomes the preferred norm. Each individual must conform to and only to, his own special role in the society, and must do "the one thing for which he is naturally suited."[108] Being morally good is now to contribute to the welfare of the community without interfering with others. Since a person is to maintain the single way of contributing to society all of his life, he cannot also act as an instrument of change.

This is not the type of education we normally see as part of a pluralistic and democratic society. As was argued in chapter three, an educated person is one who critically examines his knowledge, beliefs, understandings, and roles in society as an ongoing process of being a member of a social community. The individual indoctrinated into accepting a passive single role, for life, has neither the inclination nor the tools to become a part of a society which seeks improvements in itself and its members. It is our educational system that is charged with providing at least some of the skills of critical analysis of society.

Popper sees the close connection between Plato's view of society and the educational system in a particularly damning light. Popper is clear in his condemnation of Plato's effects on education:

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[107] Plato quoted in K. Popper, *Volume I*, p. 19.

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It has been said, only too truly, that Plato was the inventor of both our secondary school and our universities. I do not know a better argument for an optimistic view of mankind, no better proof of their indestructible love for truth and decency, of their originality and stubbornness and health, than the fact that this devastating system of education has not utterly ruined them.[109]

By extension one can also see that the educational system, itself populated by those who refused to be devastated by it, must also have some resilience of the type suggested for mankind in general.

Plato's demand for an education that prevents innovation is in direct contradiction to the stated aims of education as practiced in much of the world. In fact, it seems to be impossible to reconcile the idea of education and Plato's call for the indoctrination of guardians of the republic. His chapter "Primary Education for the Guardians"[110] describes the systematic withholding of any ideas which are not "proper," if for no other reason than that they provide "a distorted image of the nature of the gods and heroes, just as a painter might produce a portrait which completely fails to capture the likeness of the original."[111]

In seeking complete stability for the republic, Plato must necessarily call for the complete end to creative or non-guided thought in the creation of poetry and drama. In doing so he also condemns to banishment from the Republic those who might well be "inherently suitable" for such creative endeavours. His famous condemnation of representational poetry's "total unacceptability" and its role of "deform[er] of audience's minds"[112] might well condemn a significant portion of our society as well as a vibrant part of current education. His principle objection was, of course, their desire to imitate at "twice remove" the real forms of things. This will be dealt with shortly. However, his rejection of art and artists as those who appeal to the baser part of the

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[108] Plato, *Republic*, translated by Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) p. 60.
[109] K. Popper, *Volume I*, p. 136.
[110] Plato, pp. 70 - 114.
[111] Plato, p. 72.
[112] Plato, p. 344.

human mind, stands very much in contrast with a more commonly held modern view that creative work and creative works enhance the mind.

Plato was not willing to stop at banishment of poetry. His ultimate aim was that any person "should teach his soul, by long habit, never to dream of activity independently, and to become utterly incapable of it."[113] Self-censorship is not enough. Thought control must become as complete as it is for Winston Smith in the closing lines of *1984*. The controlling state benefits most when the populace no longer sees anything "outside the box."

> The law, including the law of censorship, has a dream. In this dream, the daily round of identifying and punishing malefactors will wither away; the law and its constraints will be so deeply engraved on the citizenry that individuals will police themselves. Censorship looks forward to the day when writers will censor themselves and the censor himself can retire.[114]

Many, even those who are uncomfortable with censorship might look forward idealistically to a time when there is less need to seek out malefactors. However, they see this coming, not out of extreme self-censorship, but out of fulfillment of the aims of education: educated people exploring thoughts, their moral and intellectual dimensions, their social and personal characteristics and making decisions about their public performance rather than their private restraint. When combined with considered and consistently applied ethics, an education may provide a path to a police-less state.

Creative or innovative thought is far more socially valuable today than Plato would have had it. Few governments feel the need to "guard against innovations"[115] in education. Clearly this is a reflection of our more participatory system of government which demands citizens capable of flexible and critical thought.

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[113] Plato quoted in K. Popper *Volume I*, p. 7.
[114] J. M. Coetzee, *Giving Offence: Essays on Censorship*, edited by (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) p. 10.
[115] Plato, p. 128.

Plato's own student, Aristotle, was far more willing to see the value in poets. While Plato condemns Homer, Aristotle praises him. In particular, Aristotle praises Homer's innovations in verse, in metaphor, and in subject matter throughout *Poetics*. The contrast between the roles of truth, as seen by Plato and Aristotle is still relevant to the discussion of censorship and the education of the young. This contrast will be examined in the following chapter.

But neither Plato nor Aristotle saw a need for an open society. Popper defines an open society as "a society based on the idea of not merely tolerating dissenting opinions but respecting them."[116] Aristotle and Plato both call for a state that controls, or at the very least sets the limits for the moral lives of the citizens. And the Socratic ideas of educational and political activity "can easily be used for a dangerously convincing proof that all democratic control is vicious. For how can those whose task it is to educate, be judged by the uneducated."[117] Popper, however, refuses to believe that this centralized control could ever have been Socrates' idea:

> But this argument is, of course, entirely un-Socratic. It assumes
> an authority of the wise and learned man, and goes far beyond
> Socrates' modest idea of the teacher's authority as founded
> solely on his consciousness of his own limitations.[118]

Popper goes further in specifically defining a democratic society as an open society. He calls democracy "a form of government devoted to the protection of an open society."[119] Both Plato and Aristotle saw what we might call benevolent dictatorship as the ideal form of government. With this in mind, the authoritarian form of education sought by Plato is a supportable and logical choice.

The Athens of Plato and Aristotle was a far more homogenous body than our more pluralistic societies of today. While both Plato and Aristotle see people as biologically unequal, modern Western societies, though they recognize biological

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[116] K. Popper, *Volume I*, p. 110.
[117] K. Popper, *Volume I*, p. 130.
[118] K. Popper, *Volume I*, p. 130.

differences, do not profess to maintain inequality of people based on inherited characteristics. This belief in basic equality was a driving force behind the gradual democratization of world governments and may serve as a model for a movement toward greater intellectual freedom in the classroom. The classroom is not solely a place to practice slavish obedience but one in which to learn the skills of participant.

At all other levels, too, it is the relative power positions and attitudes toward the possession of power that often determine censorship issues. Teachers in search of control, whether temporarily or in a more permanent sense, may have to exercise increased censorship as a part of an overall strategy to establish or restore a power relationship. In this area, the practical necessities of schools as a microcosm of society might well conflict with its strictly educational aims.

However, the aims of education as well as the goals of schools as socializing institutions seem antithetical to a permanent state of authoritarian teacher control. If we are to truly aspire to the aims of education, we must at some point, put aside censorship for control in favour of freedom of expression for growth. If a goal of schools is to prepare students for some form of participatory democracy, students must learn the skills of effective and considerate expression. What is true for societies is true for schools.

[119] K. Popper, *Volume 1*, p. 110.

# Aesthetic Issues and Censorship:

The arts are an important part of a liberal education. "[W]e educate people by teaching them the humanities, the sciences, and the arts."[120] We would be reluctant to describe a person as educated if he were unfamiliar with at least some aspects of the visual, performing and literary arts. Because a key idea in the aims of education is to pass on to students some knowledge and understanding of the arts, issues in aesthetics become a part of our considerations for the educational roles of schools. This has some important implications for the idea of freedom of expression, particularly in an examination of the production of art in the form of creative writing by students.

Issues in art are also a part of the social aspect of schooling. The arts are an important part of our society, and the arts and artists are also experienced with the power of art to enlighten as well as to isolate individuals. Censorship and self-censorship have seemingly a long history in the arts. There may be a great deal to be gained in the examination of the aesthetic issues and their implications for schools. In this chapter one important aspect of the arts, the role of "truth," will be considered because some moves to censor are based on certain ideas about the nature of art. Most often, it is a belief about the connection between art and truth that motivates censorship.

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[120] T. Kazepides, p. 230.

By examining this aesthetic issue, this thesis hopes to demonstrate justification for greater freedom of student expression through the consideration of the role of truth in artistic production.

One of Plato's central ideas in his pro-censorship argument is around art as imitation. The artist, because he seeks to imitate the natural object, which is, in its turn, the imitation of an ideal, contributes nothing to society, and in fact, damages the minds of the populace. Plato's view of art as *mimesis* forms an interesting contrast with Mill's ideas on the appropriateness of freedom of expression in the pursuit of the truth. While Plato argues that art can never reveal truth and must, therefore, be curtailed, Mill argues that the truth may only be discovered, reinforced, or kept active through unlimited freedom of expression.

A number of writers have dealt with the role of truth in literature. Some, such as Colin Lyas, are like Plato in seeing the attempt to portray objective reality as a significant and in fact necessary aspect of literature. While Plato feels that poets could never attain truth, Lyas merely maintains that "true" literature is better that "false" literature. Other writers, such as Anne Sheppard and Arnold Isenberg, in a more Aristotelian view of literature, do not see truth as a legitimate part of the discussion of the structure or function of literature. Isenberg and Sheppard have the stronger case; the attitude that literature is somehow discovering or portraying the truth is more often used as a justification for censorship than as a real tool in the study of literature or its creation. This is true in the schools and in the societies that they reflect.

It might be said that students should be encouraged to self-censor when their ideas are generally accepted as wrong. That is, that untruths are not acceptable in student writing. Given this, students should be encouraged not to say that women are inferior, intellectually, to men, that Scots are miserly, or that postal workers are mentally unstable. Certainly in the realm of intellectual pursuit and academic writing around historical, geographical, sociological, anthropological, or psychological fact

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these kinds of statements would have no place, particularly if shown to be erroneous, mistaken, or deliberate falsehoods. If our aims for education include the idea of knowledge and understanding, we would have no reason to want students to repeat such statements, unfounded as they are in objective reality. We pursue "truth" in education. However, in the realm of literary production, the pursuit of "truth" may often come through avoiding direct contact with objective reality and using fiction to suggest less obvious "truths."

This is not to say that student writing can never function as a communication medium, carrying some message from the student to the teacher. Frequently writing assignments are used and interpreted in this way. This has value both for the student, hoping to make a teacher aware of something important to the student, as well as for the teacher in getting to know her student better. Student writing can also be an "artkind instance"; something created to be, or appreciated as, an aesthetic experience. This sense of student writing will also be explored.

Is it necessary that a piece of literature conveys, presents, or expresses some truth in order that it be considered aesthetically valuable? Need we believe the ideas that form the world created in a piece of literature to be convinced of the aesthetic merits of the text? Some would suggest that truth and belief are no more parts of the aesthetic experience for literature than is the weather. Coleridge's "willing suspension of disbelief"[121] should extend beyond an acceptance of fantasy into a willingness to embrace ideas quite different from our own notions of truth. If we can allow students that freedom within classroom pursuits of literature, we will teach them much about the nature of literary arts as well as about themselves and their relationship to their community. This comes both in the production of works and in the appreciation of literature more generally.

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[121] Samuel T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1876) p. 145.

The examination of the role of truth in literature has a number of important implications for the production of creative writing in the classroom. Students often confuse or misinterpret the distinction between real life and literature in the appreciation of literature. They frequently seem unable to see a work as valuable if they do not find a character familiar or if they do not "believe" a premise. They often confuse the need for consistency within a work for truth, or value literature for its truth without an understanding of its aesthetic characteristics. Often, too, literature for children is chosen based on its perceived truth, or withheld from them because of its perceived falsehoods. Careful examination of philosophical work on art distinguishes between truth and the evaluation of art and may encourage a re-examination of the need for students to write "truth" as seen by the teacher.

It can be acknowledged that there is a discrepancy between the truth of a statement and the content of the statement. A statement

> is to be distinguished from the fact that it is made. It cannot
> even be derived from the fact [that the statement was made]; for
> that would mean that we can validly deduce "Napoleon died on
> St. Helena" from "Mr. A. stated that Napoleon died on St.
> Helena," which obviously we cannot.[122]

This is an important distinction which often escapes the attention of those anxious to censor writing. Mark Twain's repeated use of the word "nigger" in *Huckleberry Finn* does not reflect his attitude toward blacks in the same way that his use of the word on the street might have. Authors are not always communicating their own ideas directly through characters. If they did, all of their characters would have exactly the same attitudes. What dull books they would write.

The nature and scope of "truth" as applied to literary works must also be examined. Truth, in logic, is not a difficult concept: a true statement is one that corresponds to reality.[123] The contradiction of a true statement must, therefore, be false.

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[122] K. Popper, *Volume I*, p. 64.
[123] D. M. Armstrong, *Belief Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973) p. 113.

In order that a belief be considered true it must be perceived as true by the believer and thus correspond to reality as seen by the believer.[124] Although the correspondence theory of truth in philosophy has more to offer, and significant weaknesses, this notion is enough for the purposes of examining truth in literature.

The difficulty lies, though, in the particular nature of literature in its relation to truth, since, almost by necessity, literature is composed solely of lies. There never was a young boy named Oliver Twist, he never had a mother (who never died) and he never grew up in an orphanage that never existed. Even non-fiction literature is a truer reflection of the imagination of the writer as regards an actual event, than it is a reflection of the event itself. Thus, literature can never be expected to be true in that it never expects to correspond to objective reality. Nor do we expect it to correspond to a more subjective reality. We do not really believe that Dorian Gray would continue his life of debauch after realizing what was happening, but it makes a good story if he does. Student writing is no different in this respect than that of Dickens or Wilde. Students need to be made aware that their writing of something does not make it true, and must also be content in the thought that it will not always be taken as true.

Plato saw poetry as a great evil. "Why this hostility to poetry? Why is it the enemy? Because the poets were the educators of Greece."[125] Plato saw the power and persuasiveness of the Greek poets as a threat to his imaginary Republic. He saw that imitation is not necessarily the ultimate end in writing. A writer like Homer "assumes someone else's voice to make a speech … to represent that person."[126] Plato sees this as an "intention to deceive."[127] For Plato, the writer as teacher, by pretending speaks to the base part of the audience's mind and moves them further away from reason and their intended role in life. He puts the poet in the position of liar and therefore in the position of corrupter.

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[124] D. M. Armstrong, p. 130.
[125] R. Waterfield, p. xxx.
[126] Plato, p. 88.
[127] R. Waterfield, p. xxxi.

Plato does not seem to see that he is acting as the poet he condemns. His script of the conversations of Socrates is imaginary and therefore represents things of which he can have no knowledge. He creates an imitation that is not even an imitation of the ideal, but the imitation of a lie. If he is successful, he proves his own point about the power of the poet-propagandist. If he is not, he need not have made the argument.

Few would disagree with the idea that Plato has a point, particularly those who do write with the intention of shaping the minds of others. The power of the written word, and of the ability of the writer to educate, to shape a mind, is at once a great potential good and a great potential evil. The power of the propagandist exists regardless of his intentions. In educating students to take a role in a democracy, a critical stance to the written word may be more important than the ability to solve algebraic equations. Students must understand the power of language and they must also be taught that written statements are not simply to be accepted unchallenged.

The student artist is as caught in this bind as Plato. Adolescent writing is often an attempt to persuade. Anyone reading the creative work of secondary students will have noticed how often their frustration at having what they see as a minority opinion comes out in an effort, through writing, to have their opinions known. In my career, young people of almost every political, social, religious, or philosophic persuasion have told me, through their writing, something about who they are. I am rarely worried, for myself, about their power as propagandists for their idea. I am often far more worried, for them, that their ideas might have had no opportunity to be explored except in this private communication. I am, however, like Plato, worried that the student's "idea of truth" might end up persuading others.

The poet's work, to Plato, is an attempt to persuade through clever disregard of actuality. Those involved in literature as art often believe that disregard of actuality is a positive, rather than a negative. Literature does not have to be "true" in the same way that science or mathematics have to be true.

While Plato rejects literature precisely because it is not sufficiently close to objective reality, Aristotle insists that literature must not imitate.

> It is also clear from what has been said that the function of the poet is not to say what *has* happened but to say the kind of thing that *would* happen, i.e. what is possible in accordance with probability or necessity.[128]

While stressing plausibility in structure and character, Aristotle sees the poet's principle job as winnowing out, from a story, that which teaches the best moral lessons.

Historical writing, that which Plato sees as more valuable and less threatening than poetry, Aristotle sees as a more mundane pursuit:

> For this reason poetry is more philosophical and more serious than history. Poetry tends to express universals, and history particulars. The universal is the kind of speech or action which is consonant with a person of a given kind in accordance with probability or necessity; this is what poetry aims at, even though it applies individual names.[129]

"It follows," Aristotle concludes when he examines the moral values of the characters in literature, "that we must represent men either as better than in real life ... or worse."[130] Aristotle sees the value in creating the lie that ennobles the audience by revealing some greater moral truth. Like Plato, Aristotle sees the writer as persuader as well as entertainer. Unlike Plato, Aristotle sees the writer as useful. Those like Plato who insist that literature is concerned with unreality alone, have missed one of its most important aspects. It is far more than the objects portrayed.

Literature is rarely subjected to the type of criticism sculpture is, as when Henry Moore's reclining nude was dismissed because it had three breasts and a hip like a merry thought. Fantasy and imagination are accepted and integral parts of literature. Nor is "truth as sincerity" a part of the discussion within this thesis. "[I]t is one thing to

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[128] Aristotle, *Poetics*, translated by Malcolm Heath (London: Penguin Books, 1996) p. 16.
[129] Aristotle, p. 16.
[130] Aristotle, p. 5.

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ask whether a statement is true and another to ask whether a speaker made it sincerely, believing it to be true."[131] It is necessary to narrow the discussion to aspects of literature which are subject to an aesthetic experience, that is style, form, content, and not literal meaning. The truths that many expect, and some, such as Lyas,[132] insist must occur in literature, are those "greater truths" about the nature of the human condition, those that come as a result of implications and inferences taken from the lies of which the literature is composed. As Liotard said of painting: "[she] can persuade through the most evident falsehoods that she is pure truth,"[133] and this holds particularly true for literature. It is the "ringing true" of an insight in the literature as it corresponds to the audience's views of the world that is at issue. Some claim that this is a part, even a necessary part of what makes a text aesthetically pleasing; others see it as irrelevant. Where it lies on this continuum is of central importance to the understanding of freedom of expression for students.

The aesthetic experience, too, needs to be defined for the purposes of this discussion. Monroe Beardsley, who also looked at truth in art, has done considerable clear, and easily applicable work, on the aesthetic experience. His five criteria defining the aesthetic experience: *object directedness, felt freedom, detached affect, active discovery,* and *wholeness*[134] are useful in this discussion. They help to eliminate from the arena those aspects of creative writing peripheral to it as an art form. Acceptance of Beardsley's definition has clear implications for the roles of truth and belief in literature. By extension, these ideas also have implication for arts education.

In his chapter, "Helen's Beethoven: Truth and Morality" in *Aesthetics*, Colin Lyas argues that the beliefs of a person evaluating art, particularly narrative fiction, are a relevant and important part of their aesthetic valuing of the text. He follows Beardsley

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[131] Anne Sheppard, *Aesthetics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 117.
[132] Colin Lyas, *Aesthetics* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997) p. 193.
[133] Liotard quoted by Mark Roskill and David Carrier, *Truth and Falsehood in Visual Images* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1983) p. vii.
[134] M. Beardsley, "Aesthetic Experience," *Aesthetics and Arts Education,* edited by Ralph Smith and Alan Simpson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) p. 73.

in distinguishing first between report statements, which occur within a work, and reflection statements, made by a work. Report statements such as "Shylock is a Jew" made by Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice* are not at issue here, since they are a part of the fictional element of literature, the fantasy and lies which compose literature. Since Shylock never existed we cannot evaluate the truthfulness of this report statement. It must be assumed to be true within the context of the work just as it must be assumed that characters, settings, plot, and dialogue are "accurately" reported. Plato would disagree, certainly.

However, in reviewing the role of report statements in literature, Lyas makes a notable point about plausibility. He argues that our ability to see the events of a work as plausible can affect our aesthetic appreciation of a work. If a report statement in a work violates some belief held by a reader, they may have difficulty in entering "imaginatively into the world of the work."[135] Unable to do so, the evaluator may not appreciate the text. Someone unable to accept the coincidence of Oliver being rejoined with his "family" does not experience *Oliver Twist* as fully as it was intended to be experienced. As Beardsley points out, the involvement with the work is a foundational part of the aesthetic experience and one unable to enter it fully may not be said to be having an aesthetic experience at all. A work, which a reader sees as implausible, may never be experienced aesthetically, or will be valued differently, but not necessarily less. Beardsley argues that the aesthetic experience is separate from the truth or falsehood of the report statements in the literature and even separate from the reflection statements.

Reflection statements are what is really at issue in the evaluation of the role of truth in literature. A possible reflection statement of *The Merchant of Venice* is that Jews are villains. This is much more the type of statement that puts literature so much in the spotlight of censors and sensitive audience members. It is also a central reason for the play being struck from the repertoire of so many production companies. Reflection statements are Aristotle's primary reason for seeing the value in literature. It is the pity

and pain we feel for Oedipus that burns off our excess emotions and leaves us better people. If we are to honour the aims of education and the goals of schools as socializers, this important aspect of art must be explored with students.

Colin Lyas discusses reflection statements by presenting, and then rejecting seven reasons why others do not wish to make truth a test of the value of a piece of literature. It is important to examine each of the reasons Lyas has for dismissing arguments against the inclusion of truth in literature. In doing so it is possible to see more certainly why truth is not a necessary component of literature and to diffuse many of the pro-censorship and self-censorship arguments.

The first of the reasons that Lyas rejects for including truth in the valuation of literature is that historical figures, for tyrannical reasons, have dismissed claims of truth in literature. Truth, these figures would suggest, must be rejected as a part of art. Soviet art might be an example. The ennobled worker may not have reflected objective reality but she was a useful reflection statement about workers as well as an artistic tool. Lyas considers this argument irrelevant, because, as he points out, morally reprehensible acts may be done for any number of reasons, truth being but one. Both those who made the original claim and Lyas in rejecting the claim confer, on these historical figures, a relevance in a philosophical discussion they may not warrant. The tyrannical leaders were not discussing literature as aesthetics but as a means to an end. This point is important for the educational impact of the "truth" of literature to be examined later.

The second reason that others have given for leaving the concept of truth out of discussions of the aesthetic merit of truthful reflection statements, Lyas rejects as "feeble." He feels that the acceptance of an argument that "since things other than works of art possess truth, truth is not relevant to judgements about art, would severely

135 C. Lyas, p. 193.

attenuate aesthetic discourse."[136] Lyas is responding to those who feel that because

biology demands truth to be valued, art must not also demand it. Lyas's point is a good

one; the necessity for truth in science is not sufficient reason to reject truth as a value in

literature. But is his reason for rejection – the attenuation of the discussion – a

supportable reason for insisting on the inclusion of truth value in the discussion of

literature? Does the "attenuation" of a discussion make it irrelevant? If the

philosophical discussion of mathematics rejects as irrelevant the philosophical

discussion of ethics, it is "attenuated," but is this a reason not to explore a mathematical

theory? Conversely, if truth is actually irrelevant to literature, must it be included, just

to "flesh out" the discussion?

A third reason that Lyas rejects in his argument that consideration of truth in art

is not relevant is that an assertion in art must be identifiable as an assertion. Reflection

statements, others have claimed, are not asserted by a work of art. Lyas agrees that the

presence of assertive content in painting and music is debatable, but feels that with

examination and knowledge it may be found. After all, Lyas reminds us, Stalin's

government persecuted Shostakovich for the attitudes expressed by his music, so it

must have been asserting something. Literature is different in that reflective statements

are often much more clearly asserted. Does this mean, however, as Lyas claims, that

since we must reject the notion that art does not contain "an assertion that says

something about something"[137] that we must see truth as a central value in art?

Particularly when it follows so hard upon the assertion that morally reprehensible acts

may be done for a number of reasons, and seems to imply that Stalin's Soviet was

comprised of sophisticated, unnamed, philosophers of aesthetics. The Soviet's belief

that Shostakovitch's work contained some "truth" that was not Stalin's "truth" is not an

adequate reason to conclude that art must be valued based on the truth it contains.

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[136] C. Lyas, p. 195.
[137] C. Lyas, p. 194.

A fourth reason Lyas questions is the idea, inferred from the works of Beardsley and Isenberg, that truth must be rejected as a value because ideas outside the scope of the work must be examined to determine the truth of the reflection statements. Lyas feels that Beardsley's work insists that "in order to determine whether an assertion is true or false something other has to be investigated than the fact that an assertion has been made."[138] Beardsley dislikes the idea of looking outside the aesthetic experience in order to value the experience and, as stated, Lyas' objection has merit. It seems, however, that he oversimplifies Beardsley's contentions. Although Beardsley might see the valuation of a work as being dependent on the aspects of that work integral to it, he does not state that the value comes only from within the work. To assume that Beardsley's criteria do not allow any awareness of forms, functions, or contents previously encountered by the viewer of a piece of art is to deny to the viewer any existence outside a viewing. Beardsley's criterion of *detached affect* then would be impossible to avoid, rather than a criterion to be fulfilled. A rejection of all meanings which arise outside a work would render literature, in particular, nonsensical, as it requires a carrying of the meanings of words into a work. Beardsley was, in no way, proposing this. His contention, rather, seemed to be that the report and reflection statements of a piece of art were to be taken as a part of the aesthetic experience for what they brought to the experience and not for their nearness of approach to objective reality.

Fifth, Lyas rejects Beardsley's claim that a work of art does not contain genuine assertions as he argues for the relevance of "truth-value to the judgements about art."[139] Pretending, Lyas responds, can have serious intentions. The reflection statements associated with a work, must be serious if the work is to be valued or rejected. However, is the pretending a part of the art, or a part of the intention of the artist? That Dickens intended to show as horrific the conditions in some orphanages of early Victorian England seems beyond argument. Does this mean that Dickens's art was

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[138] C. Lyas, p. 194.

shaped by his desire to make a real assertion? Or was his intention to make a pretence assertion that mirrored reality? Does a reader who believes that early Victorian orphanages such as those characterized by young Oliver's experience were exemplary models for the treatment of their young charges have less of an aesthetic experience than someone who believes the opposite? Lyas would argue that he does; Isenberg, would argue that this consideration is irrelevant. But Dickens's desire to produce socially relevant statements is not a part of his art. A modern audience can receive and evaluate, albeit differently from his original audience, Dickens's statements without any first hand knowledge of or concern about these orphanages. Both modern critics and Dickens's contemporaries saw no realism in his creations. It is not literature as possible instruction on the real world, but as art that is the matter for discussion here.

Lyas follows J. L. Austin in suggesting that "true" as used in the evaluation of literature is a word of appraisal, in his rejection of a sixth reason for the exclusion of truth in the evaluation of literature. Others have claimed that the tests for truth seem not to be applicable to reflection statements in art. Lyas agrees that standard methods of determining truth do not apply, but suggests that "usable analogues" to concepts such as truth might yet be found. A work may be gloomy, and if it set out to be gloomy, this might be praise indeed. A work that does not set out to make a true statement about the human condition should not be condemned for its lack of truth. This is not the same, though, as demonstrating that truth must be a criterion for determining the value of an aesthetic experience.

A seventh reason Lyas mentions, then rejects, for seeking truth in the valuing of aesthetic works is the notion that some "bad" works contain true messages and some good ones false messages. "But the bad might have been worse if false" he says, "and the good better if true rather than false."[140] Possibly, however, the good may have been even better if the ideas presented in it were even further from the reader's ideas of truth.

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[139] C. Lyas, p. 196.
[140] C. Lyas, p. 196.

Lyas has done nothing to further his argument. Rather he has ignored his own statements about plausibility. He has stated, quite clearly, that a work need not be plausible to be experienced aesthetically, although this allows a greater involvement, and yet claims that the reflective statements of a work must be plausible in order that the work be seen as valuable.

Lyas continues to review the case that truth can, and must, be considered in the evaluation of art with experiences of "epiphany" among the viewers of art. These viewers, as evaluators, see the truth of reflection statements they recognize as one they already hold and thus see a high value in the work. Lyas can only use these experiences as a part of evaluation because he does not see the aesthetic experience as a distinct experience. Instead, he sees, as Croce did, "a continuum of cases running from expressions that we have little inclination to think of as art ... up to those cases ... we undoubtedly think of as great works of expressive art."[141] Whether one accepts Beardsley's criteria of the unique aesthetic experience or rejects Croce's idea of art as expression, one may reject Lyas's contention that truth is a principal consideration in the evaluation of art.

Lyas has answered those like Beardsley and Isenberg who claim that truth is not a part of art seven times but each of those seven rejections has serious difficulties. In exploring the inclusion of the truth of reflection statements in student writing it may be necessary to give students the benefit of the doubt cast on Lyas' argument. Since a central aim of education must surely be to allow the development of ideas, how can we say that truth must be a part of a student's work from the beginning? Can we say that the teacher's idea of truth is all that may be reflected in a student's statements in his writing?

Anne Sheppard, in her *Aesthetics*, rejects the contention that there is no aesthetic experience. Again, as a writer of a primer on the philosophy of art, she reviews a great

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[141] C. Lyas, p. 198.

deal of the existing work on truth-value statements in art, which do not come within the scope of this thesis. Such report statements, she says "about fictional persons, or objects, or places, or events, [are] not relevant to the question of the truth of literary works as a whole."[142] However, she builds on arguments that the relationship of meaning in language and meaning in metaphor, and by extension meaning in literature, is directly related to the question of "larger" truths in literature. Truth-value statements serve as her introduction to her statement that "the language of truth is better not applied to literature."[143] They also come with the reminder that it is possible to "accept that [a] story shows how things might be but deny that it shows how things really are."[144]

Sheppard is led to her statement that truth in literature is not a criterion for value as she attempts to retain a theory of the nature of the aesthetic that denies a reliance on imitation and expression. If art is not imitation, the "truth" criterion cannot be used. Truth is not used in the evaluation of natural beauty. Is this sunset full of colours more "true" than tomorrow's gray one? The "correspondence" of each sunset to reality is complete. Any theory of the aesthetic experience, which attempts to incorporate the experience of the natural world, renders the necessary inclusion of the notion of truth in assessing the aesthetic nonsensical. If one tries to argue that the truth comes from the ability of the art examined to objectify the natural world, all fantasy must be rejected as untrue and therefore not aesthetically valuable.

Nor is art limited to imitation. The presentation of a truth must allow for a contradiction that must arise when a "true" literary text is set next to a "false" one. The difficulty would come in locating those false literary works, not works that are merely poorly written but works that actually present, as true assertions about the human condition, statements that contradict statements made by works that are valued by the literary and popular world, "good" works. It is likely possible, as Lyas hinted, to find a

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[142] A. Sheppard, p. 119.
[143] A. Sheppard, p. 127.

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work considered "good" which contains any "bad" idea about the world that we would care to find. Therefore, we might very well have two works, widely regarded as "good" art which have directly contradictory ideas as their central "truths".

In her chapter "Meaning and Truth," Sheppard establishes the difficulty in determining both meaning and truth in literature. She sees the problem as brought on primarily out of literature's medium: language. Statements in language are true, or false, and many see no reason to distinguish short statements in language such as "a cat has four legs" from longer statements such as *Oliver Twist*. However, "a cat has four legs" is clearly an assertion and as such can be true or false; *Oliver Twist* is not so clearly an assertion. "We usually say that works of art convey or express or even reveal truth rather than that they are true, and this suggests that artistic truth and linguistic truth may not be of the same kind."[145] This is not to say that Sheppard sees literary works such as *Oliver Twist* as lacking meaning, merely that their meaning is less accessible to straightforward examination within the rules of logic.

More profitable, for Sheppard, is an examination of the meaning and truth of metaphors as they might reflect meaning and truth in literature. Reviewing the work done previously on metaphorical truth, Sheppard is unable to locate a satisfactory theory for the way in which metaphors have meaning, or can be judged true or false. Comparison theories state that the meaning of a metaphor is the same as the literal comparison implied by the metaphor. The truth of a metaphor would depend, therefore, on the truth of the literal comparison. However, comparison theories create an endless search for increasingly specific comparisons between aspects of metaphors and the implications of each literal comparison inferred by the metaphor, and Sheppard deems correspondence theories severely lacking as a result. Interaction theories suggest that a metaphor creates a new meaning for each of the terms used in the metaphor and that the meanings of the terms are altered by the interaction between them. Thus, a

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[144] A. Sheppard, p. 127.
[145] A. Sheppard, p. 117.

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metaphor has a very special type of meaning that "shows how things are" and its truth or falsity cannot be determined. Sheppard eliminates these from the discussion as interaction theories suggest "a change in meaning unlike any other and not readily comprehensible."[146] The idea that metaphors are speech acts is also unsatisfactory in helping to determine meaning and truth in metaphor and thus in literature. Speech acts, such as promises, or apologies, are not true or false. The suggestion that metaphors are particular types of speech acts seems unsupportable, according to Sheppard, since

> the figurative character of metaphorical statements would
> disappear when such statements are transformed into direct
> speech ... 'Shakespeare said that life's but a walking shadow'
> still contains a metaphor; it is not just the report of a
> metaphor.[147]

All three of the theories for the meaning of metaphor that Sheppard examines see the meaning of the metaphor as similar, in some way, to the subject of the metaphor. However, none successfully answers the question as to whether metaphors can be true or false.

For Sheppard, this problem is as thorny for literature as a whole, as it is for the metaphors of which much of literature is composed. But the difficulty in pinning down how literature "means" does not prevent her from seeing that the aesthetic experience of literature is not bounded by the truth of the work or the belief of the evaluator. Rather she sees "effectiveness" as the criterion for evaluation most closely linked to truth in literature, just as metaphors may be more or less effective instead of more or less true.

> Works of literature which present some general theory or view
> of the world do so successfully or effectively rather than truly.
> In considering literature we do not withhold our aesthetic
> appreciation from works which give an effective presentation of

[146] A. Sheppard, p. 122.
[147] A. Sheppard, p. 123.

views we do not ourselves accept ... A work may be successful
and effective not only if it presents a theory which is not in fact
true but also if it presents no theory at all.[148]

Sheppard's examination of allegorical literature serves to illustrate her point. Allegories intend to present a "truth," a reflection of some reality, but this is neither all they do, nor the route to the aesthetic experience of works such as Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Rather, Sheppard suggests, allegories inspire ideas, present possibilities, demonstrate a way of seeing, and suggest, rather than state a truth. In the same way, literature as a whole, is aesthetically appreciated both because of and despite the ideas that it presents to its audience.

Lyas is unable to support his idea that truth must be considered in evaluating art. Sheppard is uncomfortable with it, because of her difficulty in determining how literature "means." Far more satisfactory is Isenberg's contention that truth and falsity have no role in the valuing of literature aesthetically; "belief and aesthetic experience are mutually irrelevant."[149] The motivation for Isenberg's argument is to "draw a sharp line between art and knowledge"[150] so that art may be evaluated on a scale that has already been established for it and so art can be separated from psychological and knowledge theories which have blocked its progress.

Isenberg concentrates in "The Problem of Belief" on the relationship of truth to the evaluation of poetry, but his argument sustains a greater application. Like Lyas and Sheppard, he is not concerned with fantasy, nor the correspondence of literature to the real world, but rather its correspondence to the truth of the nature of the human condition. The central feature of the argument is the idea that literary works, rather than reflecting the real world, create a world through their own constructions. A writer using bits and pieces of the "real world" of the human condition is no different from a

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[148] A. Sheppard, p. 127.

[149] Arnold Isenberg, "The Problem of Belief," *Collected Papers on Aesthetics*, edited by Cyril Barrett (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1966) p.125.

[150] A. Isenberg, p. 142.

painter using colours which may occur in the real world. This removes from the work the obligation to correspond to the perceived reality of each of its readers and removes from the evaluation of the work any necessity to contain a truth external to it. Thus *Oliver Twist*, although it could be said to be set in Victorian England, is actually set in a Dickensian Victorian England and through it, Dickens pursues the "greater truths" of the nature of humanity that he used as a part of his art. This is similar to Sheppard's less rigorous idea of "suggesting possibilities," but leads to the same idea that "effectiveness" rather than truth, is a part of an evaluative scale for literature. Our evaluation of the work, then, must consider the work within the context it creates. "[W]e judge them in the framework of beliefs and values provided...and not by our own serious convictions."[151] "For that a feigned example hath as much force to teach as a true example."[152]

Isenberg has followed Beardsley in calling for the isolation of the experience of the aesthetic object from the experiences of other types of objects. This is not to say, as Lyas suggested Beardsley and Isenberg had said,[153] that there is no relationship between the real world and the world of a literary work. Gravity, Isenberg points out, is assumed in most plays, but this neither makes it a necessary part of the play, nor something which must hold in order that the play be considered valuable. He sees that just as we must separate understanding from an evaluation of truth (one must first understand an assertion before one can evaluate its truth or falsity) we can, and should, separate the perception of the aesthetic from the evaluation of its truth or falsity. We read *Oliver Twist* first as an experience, then may remove ourselves from the work to reflect on its other implications. This is Kant's "disinterested interest" and it removes the evaluation of truth from the discussion. That is, if the reader has to wonder if a work of art reflects any part of objective reality, is she really "disinterested"? "The aesthetic experience is imaginative not in the sense that all its objects are fictitious, but

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[151] A. Isenberg, p. 139.
[152] Sir Phillip Sydney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defense of Poesy* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965) p. 110.
[153] C. Lyas, p. 194.

in the sense that it treats them indifferently, whether they are fictitious or real; its attitude...neither asserts reality, truly or falsely, nor denies it, but merely imagines."[154] Lyas, despite his call for the importance of imagination[155] has lost sight of this.

Isenberg responds to those who would not separate the aesthetic appreciation of literature from other types of understandings of the literature. "To be preoccupied with the aesthetic object implies no disregard of the content of the poem – only a disregard of one function of that content, namely, its relationship to observable fact."[156]

Assertions, or more correctly, "literature as an assertion," Isenberg deals with easily. Literature, he feels, is not, itself, an assertion about the world. As "two" is a symbol for an idea, and not the number itself, literature is an idea about the world, and not the world. "The idea of an assertion is not the assertion of an idea."[157]

Although Isenberg sees that people do respond to works of art in terms of their notions of truth, he feels that this is a matter for psychological research rather than for philosophical pursuit. Further, although he understands the desire of some to include truth in the evaluation of art, he sees this as outside the aesthetic experience:

> [E]ven though we should be unable to say how far the *liking* of a
> poem depended on *agreement* with the poem, we could quite
> intelligibly ask whether the *criticism* of a poem coincided with
> the *verification* of its statements and so, in the end, whether
> beauty depends on truth.[158]

Sheppard feels that much of the difficulty in the assigning of truth-value to literature arises out of its medium, language. Isenberg bases his arguments on our ability to interpret language flexibly. We can see the same cry for an end to cruelty to orphans as a call for donations in one context, and as a part of a literary work in another. We "can identify the 'real truth' of the play even when this 'real truth' is really

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[154] R. G. Collingwood quoted in A. Isenberg "The Problem of Belief," p. 131n.
[155] C. Lyas, p. 193.
[156] A. Isenberg, p. 129.
[157] A. Isenberg, p. 139.
[158] A. Isenberg, p. 128.

false."[159] For Isenberg, this is the solution to the problem of truth-value in literature. Rather than belief, he suggests association of ideas is enough to satisfy the reader's need to anchor understanding in the world of his own experiences and create an understanding of the aesthetic experience of a work sufficient to form an evaluation.

The implications, for education, of the contention that truth need not be a part of the evaluation of literature are clear. Students, as the nature of the aesthetic experience is taught, can be shown that they need not agree with an artist's premise to appreciate and value a work. They may be shown that there are elements within the work, and its tradition of forms, styles, tools, and techniques that operate successfully even when the text does not reflect their consciousness of reality. The value of their experience of the work may, then, become the principle consideration for its appreciation. Students may see the beauty of Dickens's language and the cleverness of his use of irony, even if they cannot accept the abandonment, by a family, of a bastard child.

The same might then be applied in their own production of creative writing. The student writer can be encouraged to explore ideas without the requirement that they be "truth." The student might then also come to know that the teacher will not necessarily see the work of the student as portraying some actual attitude or real-world understanding of the student. Students would be as free as the writers who they seek to join in putting forth ideas for publication.

In addition, the selection of works for students may be made based on the value of the aesthetic experience that a work provides without regard for the "truth" of the ideas presented within the work. Holden Caufield's attitudes and actions may not be those that we wish adolescents to imitate, but we do not normally want our children to steal from the neighbours and yet we may let *Jack and the Beanstalk* into the classroom. Equally, the world view and attitudes toward humanity's characteristics and behaviours in the *Iliad* may not be the "truth" of modern society but the aesthetic value

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[159] A. Isenberg, p. 129.

of the work is such that sharing it with students may be valuable. If literature cannot be judged from the criterion "truth," then how can it be seen as harmful to present the ideas it contains? In the *Republic*, Plato wants a control over artists because they can "dangerously" mislead. They can put forth a false idea as if it were true. In part, he wants this control to prevent the young from being fed dangerous lies by the poets. How much simpler it would be if students, as well as those who read the materials produced by them, saw that the ideas presented by the students' writing are no more true than the events through which they are presented.

There are those who wish to see an appeal to reality in all art. They criticise art when it fails to conform, and censor it when the nature of the reality being presented is one they find distasteful. For Colin Lyas, truth is a part of the aesthetic experience; for Anne Sheppard, truth is better let alone; for Arnold Isenberg, truth and falsity tell us nothing of the value of a work. Philosophical work on art clearly distinguishes between truth and the evaluation of art and justifies Isenberg's claim; it also provides some additional justification for allowing students greater freedom of expression.

# Writers' Perspectives on Censorship

A final discussion of freedom of expression in terms of censorship and self-censorship before directly addressing the more specific application of the idea to schools comes out of the emotional and psychological costs and benefits of self-expression. In the act of creative writing, a student joins the community of writers in all languages and across history who have had something to say, of themselves, through writing. Writers have repeatedly spoken of their need and desire to express feelings and ideas without restraint. Student writers may or may not see themselves as members of the larger community of writers, but there is no reason to suppose that each may not, at some time, seek to express herself through writing in a school setting. When she does so, the reaction of other writers to censorship would be little different from her own. Like published writers, a student must eventually become aware of the reasons for freedom and restraint in the publication of literature. This thesis will suggest that this discussion is an important part of the critical thinking process as applied to creative writing. It will also suggest that the role of the school as socializer cannot afford to ignore the problematic aspects of publication of literature.

The history of the banning, censorship and bowdlerization of writing is long and unbroken. Censorship in the public schools did not receive much written attention itself until the mid 1900s. Prior to that time it is likely that it was self-censorship that

was relied on by school authorities to insure that students "toed the line" of the proper and improper, fitting and unfitting, welcome and unwelcome. This often unspoken effort to have students police their own writing is still the principal means by which public schools control expression. There are few, if any, statements about what may or may not be written, what should or should not be expressed, but it would not be at all surprising to learn that virtually all students would feel that there were some things that would not be accepted by their teacher if written down and handed in.

The experience of other adult writers when faced with the possibility of censure might illustrate the extent to which a denial of the right to free expression impinges on the respect they received as people. "As far as I personally am concerned, I am paralysed the moment I try to write something I do not regard as true."[160] Wyndham Lewis's further statement:

> ...if even a single syllable of his text must be left out for reasons of expediency, the writer should forthwith abandon his project altogether. He should do so because once concessions start there is no end to them[161]

is often mirrored, although without such hyperbole, by other writers. However, writers such as Sir Philip Sidney, John Milton, and Percy Bysshe Shelley often use the same "slippery slope" to a conclusion. Each has written important works outlining the necessity of artistic freedom in writing.

Sir Phillip Sidney is one of the first early-modern English writers to speak out against the role of the censor. *The Defense of Poesie,* and also published in the same year in similar form and content, *An Apology for Poetry*[162] are essays he wrote in reply to an attack made on the art of poetry and drama by Stephen Gosson in his *School of Abuse.* Gosson had attacked such frivolous wastes of human energy as writing verse and attending Shakespearean plays. He called for his readers to

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[160] Wyndham Lewis, *The Writer and the Absolute* (London: Methuen and Company, 1952) p. 3.
[161] W. Lewis, p. 7.
[162] Sir Phillip Sydney, *An Apology for Poetry or The Defense of Poesy* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1965)

shut up our ears to poets, pipers, and players, pull our feet back
from resort to theaters, and turn away our eyes from beholding
of vanity, the greatest storm of abuse will be overblown and a
fair path trodden to amendment of life.[163]

Gosson seems to be primarily campaigning against the behaviour of the English who had, in his opinion, slipped so far from the ideal of Roman behaviour, but Sydney was far more concerned with Gosson's ideas as they applied to writers and the notion of censoring their words and ideas.

Sydney had a similar approach to Plato, the one taken by Karl Popper three hundred years later. He says that Plato's call for a republic without poets is a rejection of what might be called today, a pluralist society. Sydney is "a man [who] might ask out of what commonwealth Plato did banish them."[164] Like Aristotle, Sydney saw that poets had a value in the edification of the people, and his book consists overwhelmingly of praise for those who can invent. Modern society also has a place, and often praise, for writers with imaginations and the ability to put imaginative ideas on paper. We often see a role for writers who can show different points of view to us, and to our children. If critical thinking is to be an ideal of the public education system, we might do well to remember Sydney's cautionary question. Which poet is to be banished from a pluralist society, he who thinks critically about society or he who accepts it? Sydney does point out that the poets Plato is so anxious to banish for ridiculing the Gods may be reflecting current opinion, rather than causing it, for "poets did not induce such opinions, but did imitate those opinions alreadie induced."[165]

Sydney also sees a social role for the poet as one who can open the evildoers' eyes "to find his own actions contemptibly set forth."[166] But these were not people, as those Plato described, who lie. Instead the poet "nothing affirms, and therefore never

[163] Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse* (Nendeln: Krauss Reprint Limited, 1966) p. 34.
[164] P. Sydney, p. 129.
[165] P. Sydney, p. 130.
[166] P. Sydney, p. 117.

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lieth."[167] And Sydney hopes, in telling the lie will lead others to better behaviour. If Sydney is right, of course, a writer can just as easily lead others to unwelcome behaviour. One can, as he points out, use a sword to defend one's home or to kill a parent. But "shall the abuse of a thing make the right use odious?"[168] Here lies the central difficulty for the teacher. The same words that can help one student deal with personal issues may also cause all sorts of welcome, or unwelcome issues in others. More of this in chapter eleven.

Some hundred years later, John Milton, in his sonnet "When I Consider How My Light is Spent" examines his pain at being unable to write the great work which he is sure is within him. This lack of release, "that one talent which is death to hide"[169] is not, in this case, caused by censorship, but Milton encountered oppressive censorship through most of his writing career. Because he knew the anguish of being unable to write his thoughts, he wrote an elegant anti-censorship pamphlet phrased as an oration to an august governing body: *Areopagitica.* In it, Milton argues for freedom of the press and freedom for all to read without external restraint.

His central premise is that one may never have the wisdom to choose correct actions unless one has been exposed to all aspects of the best and worst of ideas. As a Christian scholar, Milton believed that "free will" had been given to man in order that he be free to make choices which would lead him to correct knowledge. He also believed, though, that these choices would be meaningless unless they were made with full knowledge of all aspects of the universe.

> Since therefore the knowledge and survey of vice is in this
> world so necessary to the constituting of human virtue, and the
> scanning of error to the confirmation of truth, how can we more
> safely, and with less danger, scout into the regions of sin and

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[167] P. Sydney, p. 123.
[168] P. Sydney, p. 125.
[169] John Milton, "When I Consider How My Light is Spent (1673)," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature,* edited by M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974) p. 1347.

falsity than by reading all manner of reason? And this is the
benefit which may be had of books promiscuously read.[170]

Milton argues, too, that the worst ideas can be reinforced by the best books and the best

ideas by the worst. "Banish all objects of lust, shut up all youth into the severest

discipline that can be exercised in any hermitage, ye cannot make them chaste that came

not thither so."[171] Milton is making the point that ideas do not in themselves corrupt

and should not be censored internally or externally. Within the free reign of ideas,

those which are best will survive, but only with knowledge of the others.

To some extent, similar psychological views also underlie modern calls for

freedom of expression. Many who support the unfettered right to say and publish ideas

freely, point out that it is not simple exposure to ideas that damages the psyche of the

recipient. It is, rather, as Milton argued that "wise men will make better use of an idle

pamphlet than a fool will do of sacred scripture."[172] Although *Catcher in the Rye* may be

blamed for attempted presidential assassinations and other anti-social behaviour, even

relatively "mild" books can be powerful incitements to anti-social behaviour to certain

minds.

> A report in the July 10 [1996] London Times reveals that a
> disordered mind can be moved to mayhem by even such a sober
> author as Joseph Conrad; "Investigators believe that suspected
> Unabomber, Ted Kacziynski, may have been inspired by the
> 1907 novel *The Secret Agent*."

Milton, too, sees the point to be made later by Mill that we cannot yet be sure

that we have all of the "truth" that exists and to censor an idea now may prevent it from

being discovered in a timely fashion. Causing another to restrain their thoughts may

cause us to miss some new aspect of knowledge. Although it might be argued by some

that teachers in the classroom are unlikely to encounter some new aspect of truth from

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[170] John Milton, "Areopagitica (1644)," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by M. H. Abrams (New York: W.
   W. Norton, 1974) p. 1353.
[171] J. Milton, (1644) p. 1354.
[172] J. Milton, (1644) p. 1353.

an adolescent writer, counter questions are simple. Can we be sure that this is the case? Have no "new truths" ever been suggested by adolescents? Need an idea be "new" to be valuable? As a teacher, my students have exposed me to ideas new to me as they have exposed one another to ideas new to them. Under what circumstances would a teacher ever wish this exchange not to be the case? Certainly the ideal of critical thinking education, as well as respect for persons, would suggest that the student's idea is worthy of a hearing.

Milton gives a special role to the teacher, as well. He devotes time in his pamphlet to the idea "that books cannot pervert men unless they are given force and vitality by a teacher, who, if he is a good teacher, needs no books."[173] The teacher is the one with the power and responsibility to educate and Milton clearly sees that role as an important one. It is not a role in which the teacher is to control the exposure to ideas but one in which the teacher is to give "force and vitality" to the ideas that will most benefit the student. The teacher is not to interfere with the student doing what Hobbes will later call "anything which in his own judgment and reason he shall conceive the aptest means thereto."[174] Milton, it seems, believed in education, rather than indoctrination.

Shelley's *Defense of Poetry* was in answer to the criticism of several Romantic poets by Thomas Love Peacock in his essay "Four Ages of Poetry." Although for the most part Shelley is adding to the Romantic ideal of the poetic imagination as something uniquely experienced by certain gifted individuals, he makes some statements about the effects of writing on the writer that have been echoed by other writers, including some of the youngest. "Poetry" Shelley says "may be defined to be 'the expression of the imagination.'"[175] For the young writer, as for the only slightly

[173] M. H. Abrams, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974 ) p. 1353n.

[174] Thomas Hobbes, "Leviathan," *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, edited by M. H. Abrams (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974) p. 1646.

[175] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Defence of Poetry," *Peacocks' Four Ages of Poetry; Shelley's Defence of Poetry; Browning's Essay on Shelley*, edited by H.F.B. Brett-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1947) p. 23.

older Shelley, it is this desire to express the imagination which most speaks against an environment in which self-censorship should be felt necessary.

If one wishes to express one's innermost feelings, how damaging must it be to feel that certain aspects, ideas or words of that expression must be hidden, changed or withheld in order that the expression be allowed. "Poetry...awakens and enlarges the mind itself by rendering it the receptacle of a thousand unapprehended combinations of thought."[176] And surely this is a principle reason why creative writing, in fact, why all of the creative arts, are maintained in the public school curricula. The exploration of a student's inner world and her responses to the outer world through artistic expression benefits the student as any exploration, whether that of mathematical algorithms or geographical maps, helps the student in gaining a different understanding of their world and their place within it.

It may be that for some students Shelley's further statements would also ring true. An attempt to stem the flow of ideas may lead to an imagination damaged because of the inability to release "pressure" through the act of writing. That mind might even be damaged by the repression of the ideas. Psychoanalysis is based, in part on this very idea, that repression leads to personality malfunctions. Freud saw creative writing as a natural kind of therapy. Shelley saw it in more poetic terms as "a sword of lightening, ever unsheathed, which consumes the scabbard that would contain it."[177] Whether Shelley referred metaphorically to the institution of censorship or the mind of the poet as the scabbard, he makes Freud's point. We cannot treat students as persons deserving of respect if we deny them free reign for their imaginations.

It is not solely the writers of a somehow more repressive past who have spoken out against the pressure of censorship and the felt need to self-censor to avoid it. The close ties of one's artistic works to one's understanding of oneself are what often make censorship most difficult for writers. "When our fingerprints are changed, what

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[176] P. Shelley, p. 33.

becomes of our identity?"[178] is a question posed by a group of film makers who have watched their artistic endeavours repeatedly altered without their consideration and without consultation order to make them more palatable to the ideas of other groups. Students in particular, without larger and longer experiences of the reception of writings by the public, may feel more personally attacked at the censorship of their own work. The importance of the personal fulfillment that comes from speaking one's mind is one of the "core values that underlie the protection of freedom of expression."[179]

Moreover, students will, as many thousands of writers have done throughout history, respond with self-censorship. They will select the ideas and words which they can use "safely" and self-censor any of those that they worry may result in negative consequences. Limits on creative writing are not, in and of themselves necessarily bad. Attempting to write a sonnet, with the limitations and expectations of the form in mind, is both restrictive and difficult. However, the form is a convention, and learning to write within the limits of convention challenges the writer to explore new ideas and words that must be selected to fit the form. Fitting the form of public reception and deliberately challenging that form may be both the challenge and the success of student writing. This challenge, however, is more properly placed in the publication, rather than the production aspects of creative writing assignments, as will be argued in chapter thirteen.

Such selection within limits created by poetic conventions is very different from self-censorship. Writing in iambic pentameter means choosing words that fit rhythmically and sensibly into the verse form. Self-censorship means responding to perceived opinions of audience disapproval before other concerns. Writers sometimes report that their own production is crippled by the expected reaction of censorship. There is no reason to suspect that adolescent writers, perhaps inexperienced enough

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[177] P. Shelley, p. 38.
[178] Advertisement by The Artists Rights Foundation, *In Style Magazine,* August, 1995.
[179] Ailsa Watkinson, *Education, Student Rights, and the Charter* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 1999) p. 77.

with language or ideas to know no substitutes for those that they use daily, will be any more successful in dealing well with bounds imposed from the outside.

When a writer feels that censorship will result from their words, they may very well stop writing:

> Certainly the most paralyzing form of self-censorship ...
> involves a total breakdown of the process of composition – the
> point where as [Heine] says, the author is condemned to
> silence.[180]

Professional writers have sometimes found empowerment in the war with external censors, which is "open and dangerous and thus heroic, while the battle against self-censorship is anonymous, lonely, and unwitnessed - a source of humiliation and shame for the collaborator."[181] Adolescent writers, more vulnerable, out of a lack of experience with the world and with an adolescent need to understand their place, are as much at risk from censorship as their writing predecessors.

"The effects of the censorship may be discerned in the replacement of reprehensible statements by an incomprehensible mumble,"[182] and this is not where we wish students to end up. Lewis in *The Writer and the Absolute* exaggerates the effects of externally exposed censorship but he may touch on the feeling of adolescent writers, who, like him, would rather not write than be censored. They may feel that the message of the schools is, *"Think what you like: but for heaven's sake do not write it down!"*[183] This is certainly not the message that those who believe in critical thinking wish to be the norm.

It may not be possible to determine in advance the effects of censorship and the resulting self-censorship on student writers. It seems clear that just as many writers rail against the censors, many more seem to have done their best work in the face of

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[180] M. Levine, *Writing through Repression: Literature, Censorship, Psychoanalysis* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994) p. 27.

[181] Danilo Kis, *Homo Poeticus: Essays and Interviews* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995) p. 91.

[182] M. Levine, p. 27.

censorship.  This is debatable, of course.  How are we to know what Solzhenitsyn would have accomplished without the publication bans and exile which were his lot as a writer?  If we wish to promote learning, are we not best served by allowing children freedom beyond mere obedience to a standard?

For student writers there may simply be a need to find a way to provide both restriction and freedom in expression.  The critical thinking ideal, as an educational aim, seems to call, as so many writers have, for the freedom "of the writer to speculate, to criticize, to create: such is the ultimate desideratum of the writer."[184]  The right to make statements that challenge ideas is central to such an education.  The restrictions to expression of ideas may be central to the social roles of schools as places where students feel safe and able to participate fully.  It is my contention that this point of conflict is a learning opportunity that secondary teachers of writing should not allow to slip away.

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[183] W. Lewis, p. 9.
[184] W. Lewis, p. 29.

# Censorship versus Selection:

An important aspect of the exercise of determining what, if any, limits should be placed on students as a condition of their production of "creative writing" is the distinction between self-censorship and selection. Within the confines of this thesis, at least, I would like to use selection to mean a choice, made as freely as possible, by the producer of a piece of writing. Selection then would be choosing one word over another, selecting one idea for examination rather than another, and doing so in the expectation of the effect to be realized from such choices without consideration of external restraints. Self-censorship is the selection of a word or idea when that selection is guided most notably, or most strongly, in the student's mind, by the belief that a different idea or word would not be acceptable to the audience for the piece, even though the student believes it is the better choice. The distinction is important in that it will be used to address some cases in which the role of the school as educator and the role of the school as socializer conflict.

A student who chooses to examine a social issue of importance to her in a piece of poetry might, for example, chose the word "rape" over the word "assault" when both might apply equally well, in a literal sense. She may choose to use "rape" though, in order to create a certain emotional impact or reaction to a violation that "assault," in that context, did not have. This would be selection, as the word is used here. If the

same student though, were reluctant to include the word "rape" because of a belief that the word was unacceptable to the teacher as too violent, or too inflammatory, and chose "assault" instead, the student would be self-censoring, not selecting. This is clearly not a line that may be drawn easily. The idea in this chapter will be too argue for as little self-censorship and as much selection as possible, when a student produces material for the teacher's eyes. Publication of the work outside the student/teacher relationship requires far more attention to the idea of self-censorship. That idea will be addressed in the final chapter.

For students, word choice may be the simplest item to self-censor. It may, however, be the most difficult for the imposing censor to justify. Students clearly, too, look to teachers for guidance with word selection. Or perhaps, more correctly, look for guidance as to which words "are not allowed" and will result in some form of punishment or censure. However, students may be far less likely to understand the reasons for these imposed limitations on their work than they are to accept them slavishly.

Clearly, the words that students choose are the tools that they use to present the ideas and emotions within their writing. These can be divided, many would argue, at their extreme ends into "allowable" and "non-allowable" words. Many would assume that the "infamous seven" of *American Federal Communication Commission versus Pacifica Foundation*[185] are to be left out of student writing in public schools. It would probably be difficult to find many classrooms where students did not automatically self-censor these from their writing, and speech. At the other end, "puppy," "flower," and "sky," would likely be allowed. (This is problematic, however, as there are those for whom rainbow, it appears, is a difficult word.)[186] Are these the only words so easily categorized?

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[185] George Carlin's comedy routine entitled "The Seven Deadly Words You Can Never Say on the Public Airwaves" was broadcast on Pacifica, New York's radio station on October 30, 1973. The radio station was censured by the American Federal Communications Commission for the use of "shit, piss, fuck, cunt, motherfucker, cocksucker, and tits" on the air.
[186] Joan DelFattore, *What Johnny Shouldn't Read* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992) p. 171.

Should they be so categorized? It seems that the problem may not come in defining boundaries, but in having the boundaries at all.

Is it practical for a teacher to know the words that a student should and should not use? Adolescent slang is designed to keep the adult world from gaining full access to the language of teenagehood. A word of innocent expression to parents may be one of tittering superior knowledge to their children. An expression such as "to shag" may be indecent in a British classroom and merely seem silly in a Canadian one. Even at the extreme end of acceptable speech, the words that are to be disallowed are merely a matter of fashion. "Spend" would have been considered an obscene reference to male ejaculation, without regard to the context, until the 1920s. "Fuck" fell out of fashion because of the censure of the church. Which words are appropriate for which age groups? Many would see a seven-year-old's use of "crap" as inappropriate while not seeing it as out of place in a seventeen-year-old's poetry. If a teacher cannot be aware of the myriad of words that might be considered offensive for a particular group of students, would he be able to select for the students or censor from the work all offensive language?

In addition to the problem of defining the acceptable, are the implications of doing so for the student artist. A student might wish to arouse, shock, titillate, or amuse with sexual, racist, sexist, violent or scatological references. Should these means of artistic creation be denied him? If our idea is to teach children to select ideas most appropriate to a purpose and audience, are we well advised to force them to censor themselves when a significant reaction to an idea might well be the reason that they chose to write? Art is sometimes intended to step outside the norms of expectation. Should an artist desiring to do so be encouraged to abandon the attempt because he operates within the sphere of the public school?

Art can sometimes fulfill a role as imitation. Should a student be denied the opportunity to imitate something he might consider significant? If "shit" is the word

that the character a student creates would use in a certain setting, should she be told to avoid the authenticity of representation, or, to avoid the creation of the character entirely? Both possibilities satisfy those who feel that the word is inappropriate. Neither satisfies the developing writer's desire to present authentic dialogue. If a character would commit atrocious acts of torture, is leaving out mention of this legitimate? It cannot be that secondary schools wish students to avoid these ideas. The history curriculum includes them. The student's ability to select would be removed in favour of her need to self-censor. This thesis would argue that this is not preferable to other possibilities.

What of art as emotional expression? A student angered over a father's treatment by people of a visually distinguishable ethnic minority might wish to use angry racial epithets, write a story involving the degradation of this group, or scream angry slurs during an oral reading of self-authored work. If schools are to be safe places for adolescents to explore the emotional aspects of society, may we not find a balance between the student's need to express feelings and the reaction of teachers and other members of the educational community to that which we know will be offensive to many? How can we allow selection to be the principal consideration for the adolescent writer? Can we do so and maintain the integrity of the public school as a place devoid of a "poisoned atmosphere" for others?

A writer who wishes to express his feelings and emotions within a piece of writing may select words or ideas that the community has endowed with the power to express feelings at the edge of that community's acceptability. The artist may choose these concepts to bring his audience to an understanding of an emotion. The student artist, particularly when dealing with the deeply felt emotions of childhood and adolescence, may feel the need to truly shock, deeply hurt, or wildly scream the ideas that attract attention to their thoughts. It may be that the statements that his community feels are profane or obscene are actually reflections of the emotions that he feels. A child expressing the feelings of oppression, abuse, or molestation should not

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have to be satisfied with the generic words of polite conversation. Those may do nothing to convey effectively the emotions of the writing.

Some would argue that a student might be better served to choose words and ideas more acceptable in the community. However, "each community and each school ha[ve] specific and distinct characteristics, which may call for the use of differing materials."[187] In addition to the difficulty of understanding which ideas might be acceptable and which not, the student may also be faced with the censorship of innocent ideas. Secondary school students have been suspended for using sexual innuendo.[188] The words themselves are seen as innocent, but their context imbues them with a meaning that teachers, school officials, and parents see as inappropriate. The list of restricted words I so wish I had requested to give my students in my first teaching year, would be of no value if any words can be restricted, depending on their context. Why should a student expect better than the innocent author of *Stroke* (a book about a rowing team) whose selection as "Book of the Month Club" author must have been to some degree dampened by the seizure of the book by Canada Customs, because of its title alone. Students often enter this greyest area of the social reactions to art in school. Like the rest of the art world, they need, and deserve, the same freedom to select the media that they feel best serves their purposes. Like the rest of the art world, though, they also need to be aware of the negative reactions that their work might engender.

In addition to the freedom to select, students, of course, need training in the selection process and the use of language as an artistic medium. The concepts of community acceptance, and teacher censorship, though, are lessons about social realities and are neither necessary nor helpful for the student as artist. The lessons students glean from public treatment of other authors' books might seem confusing. The clearly anti-slavery *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is banned because of two hundred and twenty-one cases of the use of the word "nigger." Perhaps, as Lenny

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[187] Judith Dick, *Not in Our Schools* (Ottawa: Canadian Library Association, 1982) p. 62.

Bruce argued, the power of words to hurt, or offend, can be taken from them through their use, or over use. Perhaps, the power of language to evoke emotion within legitimate artistic usage is instrumental to writing. In either case, students need access to the unrestricted use of ideas in order to explore the expressions that they wish to make. There are other ways to deal with the publication aspects of writing that will be examined in the final chapter.

The selection of artistic representations, like the selection of artistic media, should be at the discretion of the artist. The larger world of art has been subject to storms of protest against representations of the human body, gods, and a variety of other images felt to be obscene, profane, or otherwise unacceptable. The world of literature is as rife with examples. *The Last Temptation of Christ* is challenged, in part, for the image of Christ it creates; *Lady Chatterly's Lover* for its depictions of the sexual act; *The Well of Loneliness* for its "sympathetic portrait of homosexuality."[189] When art acts as representation, even if that act of representation is within the audience's, rather than the creator's mind, it is subject to censorship for what it seems to represent. Some members of the community choose to be offended by images of the human body, sexual acts, violence, the exploitation of animals, their god, and a thousand other items described by hundreds of thousands of pieces of writing. Students, some would seem to argue, should be trained in which of those images are acceptable, and which not, and prevented from using them in their art. Why? Is socialization, or a preservation of the standing social order alone, all that public schools are about? Or do they have a larger mandate to educate, even if this means challenging accepted mores? Even when schools choose to teach children about social standards of morality, is a ban a preferable teaching tool when a dialogue may be available. The aims of education as they have been discussed in chapter three would suggest that dialogue should be used whenever possible.

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[188] Scott Duvall, "Censorship and Language Taboos: The Supreme Court's Flying Circus," *Patterns of Censorship Around the World*, edited by Ilan Peleg (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) p. 22.
[189] Marjorie Heins, *Sex, Sin, and Blasphemy* (New York: The New Press, 1993) p. 29.

As with the selection of the words a student might use, self-censorship of images a student should be able to use faces a problem of definition. Specific examples from student created works are hard to find. They rarely rise to the level of scholarly awareness and find their places in books on censorship. However, it is possible to speculate by extension of public challenges to images presented in other works, just how difficult it might be for a student to avoid offending through the selection of images.

Roald Dahl's novel *Witches* has been subject to several bannings and attempted bannings from school classrooms and school libraries throughout North America. In the district where I teach, even the chairperson of the school board had, in 1995, joined the call to remove *Witches* from schools. The author's indiscretion was the inclusion of the representation of witches in the novel. The book, as my daughter indicated in her interview with the local press,[190] was not frightening to many, but it was removed from school classrooms, although not banned from school libraries in the district.

It would not be surprising to find students including witches or other beings with supernatural powers in their writings. Children may find these subjects interesting. They may find that the selection of such images allows them to explore other aspects of the art of writing more easily. Yet there are clearly those who would object, strenuously and publicly, to a piece of creative writing containing such representations. It might be possible for a teacher who wished, to outline acceptable and unacceptable representations; are all as obvious as "thou shalt not represent supernatural beings"?

"Raymond's Run" by Toni Cade Bambara is a story in which a teenage girl rejects "new white baby-doll shoes" and the dress that accompanies them. The story became part of an American federal textbook lawsuit when it was challenged for its

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[190] Kelly Sinoski, "Book Battles," *The Now.* Wednesday, March 1, 1995, p. 11.

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representation of a girl seeking a non-traditional image for herself.[191] That teachers or students might expect that a supernatural being would be a matter of discomfort for some is within the bounds of reason, but that a student might not be able to describe the person sitting next to him as a part of a piece of writing would be very difficult to predict, indeed. How is a student to even self-censor, when the boundaries may be so subject to individual or social whim?

As it is with word choice, the selection of acceptable images to be presented is difficult, but far more important is the student's ability to present the images that she feels are important to her creation. She should have the freedom to select and include in her writing the images which address the need she feels to write in a certain manner on a certain topic. Some people may live in an environment of baby-doll shoes and have no desire to present images that are not parts of that world. Others, though, do not, or, they wish to explore imaginative worlds in which witches may exist, where girls wear tuxedos, where God is a Puerto Rican janitor, where tigers have prehensile penises and copulate with kangaroos. If students must be limited in the images that they present to only those images of the actual world, which are acceptable to all, they will be unable to explore the themes, theories, and ideas which have for so long been the essential material of literature. This also denies them the ability to question, so necessary to a "critical thinking" approach to education.

Ideas are the "stuff" of art, regardless of its form. Ideas, too, are the "stuff" of self-censorship. In pronouncing a *fatwa* on Salman Rushdie, or in condemning Alexander Sozenhytsyn to exile, the Ayatollah Khomeini and the Soviet Union demonstrated that a powerful military and economic force can be caused to quake with art. It is not the blows of an enemy the censor fears, but the ideas; "names" hurt far more than "sticks and stones." Militarily "lesser" groups, too, seek to censor the artistic works of others out of fear that their positions will be threatened. Governments legislate, groups protest, parents challenge, individuals boycott, all with the intention of

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[191] J. DelFattore, p. 43.

preventing an idea in art from being presented. At times, these events seem ridiculous, harmless tempests in teacups. At other times they are insidious and damaging, wholesale attempts to remove from the sphere of human knowledge the fact that a thought had ever existed. Writers afraid to offend lose the power of selection.

The sorting of ideas into the categories of acceptable for presentation and not acceptable for presentation may be the most difficult area in which to make clear distinctions. A teacher might find pressure from the social and educational community to select or censor. That pressure is also likely to be reflected in the behaviour of the students who are influenced both by their communities and their own internalized senses of appropriate and inappropriate. Just as a word might be offensive to only a few, just as an image might be obscene in one community and acceptable in another, the control of ideas is a path lined with thorns and strewn with boulders. "The underlying illiberal argument of the would-be suppressors: [is that] if you hold a belief passionately enough, it deserves special protection – even from other ideas."[192] It is also a path without any supportable destination in the guiding of children in the production of art. "No one, indeed, acknowledges to himself that his standard of judgement is his own liking ... and if the reasons, when given, are a mere appeal to a similar preference felt by other people, it is still only many people's liking instead of one."[193]

Which ideas will be censored? Jack London's "To Build a Fire" is included in a book challenge because it promotes self-reliance rather than a reliance on God.[194] (In it, a man fails to survive a trip through the Yukon because he is unable to build a fire to warm himself. God is not even mentioned, part of the problem, according to the book challengers.) The *Impressions* book series is singled out because it contains pictures of rainbows which promote "New Age Secular Humanism ... and therefore acceptance of the occult."[195] The *Birth of a Nation* for glorifying Racism,[196] *Hair* for its depiction of the

[192] *The Economist*, 10/11/97, Volume 354, Issue 8083, p. 19.
[193] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 9.
[194] J. DelFattore, p. 45.
[195] J. DelFattore, p. 171.

American Flag,[197] *Maxine's Trees* for an anti-clearcut stand,[198] Plato's *Republic* in Turkey,[199] *The Satanic Verses* in Canada (the only non-Muslim nation to do so),[200] all challenged or banned. The list of reasons to protest against books seems almost endless and all encompassing:

> [Fundamentalist] protests, therefore, target a wide range of subjects, including personal decision making, imagination, conservation, world unity, tolerance for cultural diversity, religious tolerance, negative portrayals of religion, unflattering depictions of the military or the police, empathy toward animals, anti-pollution laws, pacifism, socialism, gun control, non-traditional roles for women, minority issues, and evolution,[201]

and this is the list of only one group. Activists groups and parents have challenged many more ideas not in this list. A teacher seeking to censor for students, or teach self-censorship to students, is faced with a daunting, and likely unsolvable problem of attempting to guess which ideas might be felt threatening to a group in the community.

Again, one must ask why we should attempt to please any of the potential protestors, rather than support selective freedom in the work of students. Ignoring the difficulty of deciding what might be challenged, we are still left with the question of the correctness of selection and self-censorship. Student creative writing must be an area in which students can explore ideas that they see a value in exploring. Indoctrination not education is the result of exposure only to the ideas of a particular group. To be considered "educated" a student must have challenged his own ideas and the ideas of others.

> Are we sending children to school to be educated by the norms of the School Board or are we educating our youth to shed the

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[196] M. Heins, p. 40.
[197] M. Heins, p. 178.
[198] "Chronicle of Freedom of Expression in Canada," http://insight.mcmaster.ca/org/efc/pages/chronicle/chronicle.html, accessed August, 14, 2002.
[199] Ilan Peleg, "Freedom of Expression in the Third World: The Human Rights of Writers in Developing Countries," *Patterns of Censorship Around the World,* edited by Ilan Peleg (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993) p. 128.
[200] "Chronicle of Freedom of Expression in Canada," p. 4.
[201] J. DelFattore, p. 4.

prejudices of the past, to explore all forms of thought, and to find solutions to our world's problems?[202]

Creative writing activities, in their role as encouragers of the explorations of knowledge, skills and attitudes, may function to help students to educate themselves about themselves, and others. To be respected as a person a student must be allowed his own ideas.

> As ... educators of children, we must encourage a search for the truth of life,...take an honourable approach to children and young people in appreciating the pure and lovely, ... applaud excellence...calmly.[203]

If freedom from self-censorship of words, images, and ideas within a student's writing can be defended, what is left for those who wish to challenge? Not surprisingly, creative writing itself is challenged: "At its extreme, fundamentalist textbook activism is based on the premise that the act of creative thinking is evil in itself, regardless of content."[204] If there are some willing to deny the very essence of artistic production, the fight with them may be lost before it has begun. Without an assumption that the arts and the creation, by students, of artistic work, are legitimate and important, all that remains is a battle between the opposing sides to make a final decision about what our public schools will do. This removes itself from educational discourse and becomes a solely social and political debate. Which side will prove stronger in wresting control of the schools from the other? At least with those believing that creative writing is legitimate, but with concerns about how "creative" the writing is to be, there is a meeting place, and educational benefits and problems can be the impetus for debate. When creation is removed from schools, there simply is no debate. If education is seen to come at least in part from critical thinking, there must be.

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[202] William Douglas quoted in Edward Jenkinson, *Censors in the Classroom: the Mind Benders* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1979) p. 150.

[203] J. Dick, p. 64.

[204] J. DelFattore, p. 6.

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Censorship need not take the form of the outright banning of unapproved expression. As in other areas of written production, failure to support publication is an easily applied form of censorship. Publishers may simply refuse to print a book with which they disagree. Teachers may refuse to post on the bulletin board, duplicate for class use, or print in an anthology or year book, words, ideas and expressions that they feel are inappropriate, hurtful, or which they simply do not like. The administration at Kentucky State University seized two thousand copies of the student edited yearbook because they "objected to the colour of the cover; its theme (Kentucky State: Destination Unknown); and the inclusion of pictures of current events and public figures unrelated to the university."[205] Although I will later argue that this is, in fact, closer to the correct place for restrictive teacher input into creative writing (and not during the initial steps in the writing process), there is a distinction which must be made between refusing to publish a student's work out of a teacher's own beliefs and a refusal to post or publish out of a respect for other students, as audience, in the class.

A more subtle form of censorship with much in common with refusal to accept material for publication is the withholding of funding for publication. The Canadian government has tried several times to impose regulations on artists for material for which the artists are granted monies. Having faced controversies over funding art received negatively by the public, many governments have also attempted to set parameters for the material to be produced. One such attempt was an effort to systematize self-censorship. In return for a promise to avoid certain types of production, artists become eligible for grants. In 1989, the American National Endowment for the Arts Established an "obscenity pledge" which artists needed to sign to get funding. It simply said that government refuses to promote materials which could be considered obscene. The pledge was overturned in a court challenge as was a later "decency clause."

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[205] Leo Reisberg, "Student Press at Black College Faces a New Wave of Censorship" *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Volume 46, Issue 26, March 3, 2000, p. 147.

Many schools are far more successful with this type of rule as they are less likely to face powerful groups objecting on constitutional grounds to their rules. In a typical example

> the student editors shy away from controversy, she [assistant
> editor of student newspaper] says because the administration
> stripped the newspaper's financial support three years ago, after
> it had published an unflattering piece about toxic materials
> being used in art classes.[206]

Rarely are such decisions to withhold money of concern outside those directly affected but it would be silly to suggest that a withdrawal of funding, or its imagined withdrawal, is not a concern for students working in school sponsored publications. My own school district has a policy that states that the district will not publish student work considered profane or obscene. As one teacher explains in justification: "It is their money they should get to decide how it is spent."

These policies, though, often are antithetical to the purposes of education in a democratic society.

> One of the tenets of a democratic society is that men be allowed
> to think and express themselves freely on any subject . . .To the
> extent that our schools are instruments of such a society they
> must develop in the young not only an awareness of this
> freedom but a will to exercise it.[207]

If it is the role of the schools, at least in part, to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of the system which created and supports it, then the values of that system will best be shown by the system itself. If society values freedom of expression for its citizens, how can its citizens in training benefit from being denied that freedom? "The *Hazelton* court said that censorship is justified only when school sponsored expression is at odds with the pedagogical goals of the school."[208] Can pedagogy and censorship ever

[206] L. Reisberg, p. 147.
[207] Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1969) p. 1.
[208] Thomas Eveslage, "Stifling Student Expression: A Lesson Taught, A Lesson Learned," *Contemporary Education,.*
   Volume 66, number 2, Winter, 1995, p. 78.

be reconciled in a public school system designed to promote healthy democratic involvement in citizens?

An attempt to promote student self-censorship can also take the form of disciplinary action in an effort to prevent either the particular author, or future authors from submitting materials that might cause offence. The Ministry of Education, via a statement about a "sense of audience," will not accept government exam papers that offend the marker's sense of propriety. These students do not have their papers marked. Doubtless, throughout the province, teachers caution students about to write government exams that their papers must not offend. I certainly do, and, although my conscience suffers when I promote this type of blind self-censorship, my students will not suffer for lack of a warning. Whether or not the student feels that the creative work they submit is powerful, insightful, or heartfelt, it must also be free from offending statements.

The assumption that creation is good for students and society, that art plays a crucial, even critical role in the development of the individual and of society are at the very heart of arts education. Creative writing is, indeed, an important part of a student's language instruction. In poetry, novels, plays, essays, and short stories students take on the tremendous and rewarding tasks of exploring their beliefs, ideas, emotions, and attitudes. Denying them such access denies the wisdom of centuries of development in arts education. It denies them opportunities to explore their humanity. Art, freely developed and presented, has been the goal of the artistic community for generations.

Selection and self-censorship are frequently parts of the making of art, and it is not, therefore surprising that students, like all other artists, are likely to face censorship. Allowing the students the opportunity to create, may leave them vulnerable to the same criticisms that D.H. Lawrence, Roald Dahl, Mark Twain, and others, have had to face. As such, it puts them in fine company. It may even give to their writing a sense of

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historical and social context. Perhaps, until attitudes toward selection and censorship change, we may be able to comfort a student faced with having her own work challenged with knowledge of her august company. It also, however, exposes them to the same dangers, dangers one publisher calls the most serious consequence of censorship:

> All too often...writers and illustrators are making decisions in anticipation of objections from some unknown and vaguely threatening other. Because of this, there are certain subjects, themes, actions, and words that are being screened out of books. Sometimes it is a conscious decision, but just as often it is made subconsciously. Whatever the case, the result is the same: controversial material is being watered down.[209]

My daughter's experiences, beginning with a fifth grade story, lead her to agree. It isn't safe to say "shit" in a school, even if you have a mouth full of it.

However, it is difficult to believe that a protest against the work of one's innermost thoughts is a "life lesson." Rather, it is an unfortunate outcome of censorship and selection practices which are based on assumptions of causal relations between exposure to art and changes in behaviour, a squeamishness about the human body, holdovers of Norman-French conquerors declaring Anglo-Saxon words to be unacceptable, interpretations of religious dogma, and an unwillingness to examine practices that have previously been established.

There is one area, though, where teachers may feel both an obligation to assist as well as an obligation to guide that is not so clearly a part of creative writing instruction. Teachers may see it as a part of their role to insure that students do not present art in which they have represented material that would be unacceptable to their peers or the larger community. A teacher may censor, or encourage "self-censorship." They might declare that certain words not be used, insist that certain images not be described, suggest that some ideas are appropriate to school work, and others are not, or even

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[209] Stephen Roxburg, quoted in Mark I. West, *Trust Your Children* (New York: Neal Schuman, 1988) p. 122.

attempt to protect the feelings of some students from the themes explored by others. But, is it necessary, advisable or desirable to set censorship style limits on the artistic efforts of our students?

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the difficult issue of the censorship of student writing. It will argue in the next two chapters against the automatic imposition of censorship on ideas, concepts, language, images, and structures in students' creative endeavours, either by the school, teacher, or through encouragement of the student to censor her own work. In doing so a large number of difficulties shall arise which cannot be answered easily; many which cannot be answered at all. Most are the same as those faced by the art community as a whole; others such as the reaction of the school community, legal rights and responsibilities, and "age appropriateness" are further complicated by the nature of the public school system. These gain further importance when it is remembered that the artist being challenged may lack the world experience to put the "criticism" of his work in perspective. In the end it will be clear that an "uncensored" art production within present society is all but impossible, but may be educationally "necessary."

As in all art making, one purpose of arts education is to allow students to explore the ways of knowing that are a part of artistry and to allow the expression of emotion and idea. The value of education and opportunities for creative writing as a type of art making will be addressed in the following chapter, but it is in the assumption of the value of making art that the answer to the question of censorship lies. In producing writing as art, students join a world and historical community of vast size, importance, and value. They also join a world where selection and censorship likely have equal breadth and history. By joining this oft attacked realm, they become vulnerable to its attackers, but they also gain the strength and power of one of humanity's most empowering endeavours. They are faced with the same responsibilities as the artist in the larger world, and their exploration of new areas of thought and technique may be looked on in the same way. They do not join this world,

though, with the intent to be censored, rather, as the playwrights/actors in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*:

> If we offend, it is with our good will.
> That you should think, we come not to offend,
> but with good will. To show our simple skill,
> That is the true beginning of our end.[210]

This thesis deals with creative writing in a wide-ranging sense in order to include a large part of the creative and imaginative work that students may produce in secondary schools. Since, within this production of "artkind instances," students are faced with decisions about the material, techniques and ideas they will use, they are also subject to selection of the materials, or censorship by others. "Selection" has been used in this chapter to indicate any choice made when another choice is available, from the decision to describe one scene rather than another, to the choice of one word over another. Censorship has been used to indicate the removal of the selection process completely, that is the exclusion of the material, method, or thought from the work. The more delicate problems of what is art and what is not, of what is hate mongering, and what is legitimate expression, cannot be dealt with in so short a space. Perhaps, though, the argument can survive the assumptions that the writing being produced by students to which selection and censorship are applied are legitimate art, even if "only" art in transition toward art.

Selection and censorship in the public schools may have been taken to the point that a student's work is prevented from saying what that student most wanted to say. The school does not have to be a lesson in the real world, and the "sticks and stones" hitting our children when their artwork is attacked may, indeed hurt as badly as the names in the schoolyard do.

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[210] William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (London : Methuen, 1979.) Act V, scene i, lines 108-111.

# Practical Applications - The Problem of Publication:

Education does not occur in a social vacuum. Decisions that arise primarily from educational ideals will inevitably encounter social ideals. Very often, of course, the two mesh without incident. Good practice in the teaching of mathematics, history, or reading and writing would only very rarely conflict with social mores. The other areas of knowledge are more susceptible to challenge in a society, particularly one that hopes to be as acceptingly pluralistic as Canada's. One of Hirst's areas of knowledge, religion, is left out of the equation in the public schools precisely, it would seem, to allow greater pluralism. Others, such as the physical and human sciences, philosophy, and the fine arts are often on safe ground but sometimes find themselves embroiled in controversy over a conflict between subject matter and the ideals of some members of society. When there is conflict between social and educational ideals, a number of considerations should be addressed in seeking to resolve the issues.

Clearly, a central aspect of the dialogue should be in defining the educational goals that a particular problematic application seeks to address. Is the decision to pursue this application, in fact a useful and educationally driven one? Are there other, more generally socially acceptable ways to achieve this same goal? Are the social ideals

apparently in conflict with it actually opposed to it, or is the conflict caused by a misunderstanding of the social goals of schools and the society they reflect? If the educational goal is truly in opposition to social standards, which is more beneficial to students in the end? Can and should the social goals of schools be altered in an effort to cause a change in society? Are such conflicts resolvable, or are they in fact necessary for the proper functioning of schools as educational and social institutions? The concept of freedom of expression for student writers is one educational ideal that may provide illuminating discussion of these questions.

Is the ideal of freedom of expression for secondary creative writing students educationally viable? Does it provide something to students that cannot be provided in some other way? Creative writing can be seen in two distinct ways. In one sense, it may be a tool to develop basic reading and writing skills in students. In another, it may be a part of an examination of the fine arts. As such, is it a part of the school's role as educator? If the fine arts are, as Hirst suggests, "an area in which we have knowledge of the unique form,"[211] schools that hope to honour the commitment to educate must include them, or at least paradigm examples of the fine arts. Literature, as one of the fine arts would be included in a liberal arts education, both because of its place as an art form and because its study illuminates some other aspects of the other forms of knowledge, including history and sociology.

However, is creative writing instruction necessarily a part of the fine arts in education? This thesis maintains that it is, just as studio work in the visual arts is a part of fine arts education. I echo Gilbert Clark, Michael Day and W. Duane Greer in calling for a

> ... contemporary orientation to art education that presents a
> broad view of art and emphasizes art in the general education of
> all students from kindergarten through high school. This

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[211] P. Hirst, p. 152.

approach integrates content from four disciplines namely aesthetics, art criticism, art history, and art production.[212]

Just as students are encouraged to participate in the production of drawings, paintings, sculptures, and dramas, production of creative writing is a viable, and arguably necessary aspect of education in the literary arts.

We expect that students engaged in worthwhile production of art are learning something about art production but also acquiring some of the knowledge and skills of the artist. Students can learn about form by studying existing art, but they can also learn, and Dewey would argue, learn better, by doing. Literature is no different. We can teach poetic, dramatic, or prose styles and forms by examining existing models, but we can, and often do, have students participate in the production of these types of literary endeavours as a part of their education. Everything, from haiku to the novel, has been written by students in the hope that this unique experience will add to their overall understanding of literary works. It seems unlikely that any exercise, other than creative writing, could achieve this type of understanding.

Creative writing may also be seen as a critical thinking endeavour if that emphasis on a creative writing assignment is introduced. Students may reflect critically on experiences in a journal, or may use the exercise of wrestling with a literary form to make a critical examination of how thought and feeling are demonstrated in the production of a sonnet. It may be that students will encounter other ways to engage in these types of critical thinking exercises, but if the arts are indeed a unique way of knowing and literature is one of those arts, it seems difficult to believe that other exercises will be as effective.

Setting limits, in advance, for students in creative writing exercises may interfere with the critical thinking aspects of student work. Often these limits are communicated

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[212] Gilbert A. Clark, Michael D. Day, and W. Duane Greer, "Discipline-based Art Education: Becoming Students of Art," *Aesthetics and Arts Education,* edited by Ralph A. Smith and Alan Simpson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) p. 235.

to students in an all-or-nothing approval process known as "prior review." Students submit work for possible publication and a person, or persons, in authority determines whether or not the material will be seen by others. The idea of "prior review" for publications is frequently seen as negative both by student writers and by some educators.

> Even the threat of prior review can lead to self-censorship by students - the most permitted pervasive form of censorship in schools which is eliminating the educational goals of critical thinking, decision-making, analysis and respect for the opinions of others.[213]

But prior review does have the considerable advantage of preventing the publication of clearly harmful, or even questionable material. It can protect others, particularly other students, from the destruction of the classroom's welcoming and accepting atmosphere. The suggestion that will be made in this thesis is that prior review be replaced with a pre-publication dialogue.

At the secondary level, students choose the areas of knowledge in which they will attempt to go beyond a more basic understanding. In many schools, despite the efforts of many educators, students no longer opt for classes in any of the fine arts beyond the eighth grade. For many, creative writing assignments in English classes are the only opportunity to explore production in the fine arts. For this reason, creative writing is one area, perhaps the principal area, where a student's creative and imaginative characteristics may be developed in mid to late adolescence.

The schools, as socializing institutions also have some mandate to provide arts education, and arguably, for the reasons just stated, to extend arts education into the realm of creative writing. A society is, at least in part, the art that it produces. Examinations of historical societies as well as modern ones, pay attention to those times when something is "made special." Few would disagree that studying the canon of

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[213] John Bowen, "Fighting Prior Review," *Communication Journalism Education Today*. Fall 1990 Volume 24:1. p. 6.

great art, or studying the artistic works left out of the canon would tell us something about society.

Although support, at least in terms of funding, waxes and wanes, it seems clear that education in the arts is also considered educationally and socially supportable by Canadian society. In those periods when support is less forthcoming, Harry Broudy calls on us

> to remind ourselves that education perhaps more than any other institution is concerned with *all* aspects of human life, not only as it exists, but as it might and ought to be.[214]

Whether or not all that an educational system ought to be includes freedom of expression for students is another question, but surely one that deserves to be explored.

The idea of free expression does seem supportable in the educational context. The critical thinking ideal, as an aim of education, suggests that students must be allowed to examine within the context of their education, the ideas that they wish to examine. "The critical thinker must be autonomous – that is, free to act and judge independently of external constraint, on the basis of her own reasoned appraisal of the matter at hand."[215] Ethically, free expression seems intrinsically valuable; it is respectful of the person making the statement; it seems to have the consequence of greater happiness. When we decide what is right and what is wrong in the classroom the rights of each individual must be of central importance. "Morality is always based on the rights of the individual because the individual as generic is central to all moral themes."[216] Therefore, the individual may have a greater right to free expression than a group that may feel offended. Even still, there are reasons why it makes us uncomfortable.

[214] Harry S. Broudy, "The Arts as Basic Education," *Aesthetics and Arts Education*, edited by Ralph A. Smith and Alan Simpson (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) p. 125.
[215] H. Siegel, p. 54.
[216] Robin Barrow, *Injustice, Inequality, and Ethics* (Brighton: Wheatsheaf Books, 1982) p. 46.

As students begin to form their ideas, explore the ideas of others, and come to understand the relationships between their ideas and the reception of those ideas by others, there may come a time for each student when an idea that they believe to be worthy of expression will be in conflict with what they know to be the understood limits of expression in the schools. Is there a way to reconcile the felt need to express an idea and the knowledge that an unfriendly, unhappy, or hostile reaction will occur? Will schools be honoring their commitment to provide social training for students if free expression is curbed?

Is the student's right to free expression in creative writing assignments truly in conflict with the social goals of schools? The public school classroom, whatever else it might do, is expected to be, for the most part, a place in which normative ethics are the basis for decisions about good and bad, right and wrong. The reason for the existence of public schools and elected school boards is to insure the continuation of that which the public community believes is valuable, both educationally and socially. It is impossible to separate the knowledge, which the community might see as important, from the moral values that it holds. A number of legal decisions have defined, very closely, the rights and responsibilities of teachers who "by their conduct must be perceived to uphold the values, beliefs and knowledge sought to be transmitted by the public school system."[217] Further, actual control, by the government, of expression is upheld by the courts who "must weigh the interest of the individual in expressing himself where there are listeners (in this case a very young and captive audience) and the interests of the government in controlling that expression."[218] The cases supporting the restriction of expression in the schools, have for the most part, involved the statements of teachers. The conflict between the freedom of expression such as that guaranteed by the UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child and restrictions to that expression in schools have only occasionally been debated publicly.

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[217] Shaheen Shariff, *Managing the Dilemma of Competing Rights: The Case of the Three Books* (Thesis (M.A. (Ed.)) - Simon Fraser University, 1999) pp. 131-132.
[218] S. Shariff, p. 135.

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Very clearly, there must be times when a thought, which a student wishes to express, will cause real social discord in the classroom if it is indeed expressed. A student wishing to write a story, which will realistically portray a white supremacist view and make that view appear acceptable and positive could do real harm to the classroom atmosphere. This idea of the "poisoned atmosphere" has been the basis for a large number of the legal decisions about free expression that have set limits for teachers. Although powerful, teachers do not set the atmosphere of the classroom alone. To students, peers, particularly an adolescent student's peers, are an important part of their concept of a classroom. A group of racist students, writing clearly racist statements in their short stories or poetry, which are then read or posted in the classroom, could have as great an impact on the comfort of students in the classroom as a teacher's comment, sometimes more.

Students in that classroom, particularly, of course, those in the racial groups targeted, are going to be impacted in both educational and social ways. We would not expect these students to learn as well, to feel socially enabled, or even to wish to return. "If students are to learn, there must be freedom from fear of ridicule or constraint."[219] The need to create a learning atmosphere that is as positive as possible for as many students as possible means that the ideas of some of the students will almost necessarily have to be denied publication. The greater need to respect those students who will be offended as persons, means, too, that the ideas of some students must not be given the same sort of equal treatment than less poisonous statements are. If those writers wish to express their views, and if they have a legitimate expectation of being treated as persons with ideas that they have the right to hold, they will be confronted with a problem. Should they express their idea or not?

It might be easiest simply to censor those works. At some levels of education, this may be the only choice as students may be incapable of making other selections, of

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[219] L. Burress and E. Jenkinson, p. 6.

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self-censoring or be unwilling to do either. But censorship is not the panacea in schools any more than it has been in the larger society.

> Censorship...is offered to the public as an elixir of safety. Like the traveling salesman whose tonics would cure 'what ails ya,' proponents of book banning...suggest their cure will bring an improvement in life; rid yourselves of pornography, ... and life will be safer, happier, more secure. Get rid of bad pictures and one is rid of bad acts.[220]

But the censor has been at work for thousands of years and seems no farther ahead. The Canadian Judiciary, in assessing whether censorship may be upheld, often applies the "Oakes" test. The "Oakes" test applies proportionality in three areas: first the censorship must be designed to do what is claimed - it must not be arbitrary, unfair or irrational; the censorship must infringe on the right of freedom of expression as little as possible; there must be a proportional balance – the entirety of a person's work is not to be censored if only a portion of it deserves censorship.[221] Educators, however, have no such tests. They might use these ideas as guidance, but their application in the classroom is no easier than it is in the courts. Despite the difficulty, teachers seem to have made considerable headway in convincing students, as members of our society, that toleration and respect for the beliefs of others is more acceptable than outright banning.

The poisoned atmosphere concept works both ways. Those who defend freedom of expression should not have to worry that they, too, will find the classroom an unpleasant place simply because of their beliefs. "But you ought to be able to defend ...on the ground of artistic liberty without being accused of promoting immoral acts or blasphemy – let alone heinous crimes."[222]

[220] Marcia Pally from *After Sex and Sensibility* quoted by Brenda Cossman, *Censorship and the Arts: Law, Controversy, Debate, Facts* (Toronto, Ontario Association of Art Galleries, 1995) p. 43.

[221] P. Clark, p. 5.

[222] *The Economist*, 10/11/97, Volume 354, Issue 8083, p. 19

This is no less the dilemma confronted by writers in other contexts. Does one express an idea and face censure or does one censor oneself and not express an idea one feels worthy of or necessary to express? Increasingly around the world, Mill's idea of "liberty of thought and feeling; absolute freedom of opinion and sentiment on all subjects, practical or speculative, scientific, moral, or theological"[223] has been drafted into legislation and defended in courts as the right of each person. Children, too, have been given some assurance that their expression will be guaranteed through the *United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child: Article 13:*

> The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this
> right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart
> information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either
> orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any
> other media of the child's choice.[224]

This fundamental freedom to express oneself is not simply a legal nicety. Although open public debate within the political realm is, to a large extent, what Mill was concerned with; there are other reasons for freedom of expression of more immediate impact in the public school classroom.

Foremost of these is, of course, respect for persons. Kant's idea that each person should be treated as an end and not a means to an end would suggest that the student's expression should not be denied by the authority represented in the school by teacher, administrator, board or ministry. If we respect the right of a person to have an opinion, regardless of the relation of that opinion to our own, we also recognize that their right to engage in discourse with us includes the right to express that opinion.

At the same time the student, it is hoped, is learning "respect for persons" as well. Is it possible to reconcile the student's need to be treated as an end with the

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[223] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 15.

[224] United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, *International Instruments of the United Nations* edited by Irving Sarnoff (New York: United Nations, 1997) p. 234. This right is subject to legal restriction but only with respect to the rights of others and for reasons of national security. As a signatory to the Charter, Canada has agreed to pass no laws or regulations that violate the charter.

teacher's need not to be a means only? It may be impossible to create a classroom in which both are the case. If the teacher allows completely free expression there will almost certainly come a time when he will be offended by something said. Students, either deliberately or not, for a wide variety of reasons may elect to see the teacher as a means to some end. Although one of the goals of the school is to minimize this, there may be times when the students defy this idea or have need to defy it for other purposes. Students, too, are learners at this and mistakes are inevitable.

Neither is the answer to fail to allow students free expression and fail to treat them as persons. Perhaps the only solution is for teachers to take on the role which they seem to have almost within the definition of their occupation. Teachers must willingly become a means to support their student's ends even when that entails having students fail to respect them as persons. Teachers willing to make this sacrifice, I will argue in the next chapter, will do students a great service in opening a dialogue around the publication of materials that will add another dimension to the educational aims of creative writing assignments.

A simple rule-based utilitarian view, too, would suggest that "liberty of thought: from which it is impossible to separate the cognate liberty of speaking and writing,"[225] must be allowed to insure the greatest happiness for the greatest number. It is exceedingly difficult to imagine a statement made by a student in a secondary classroom that could engender more unhappiness than the inability of all of the children in the classroom to speak freely, without fear of reprisal. There does not seem to be clear and consistent application of students' rights to free speech in the courts. At times courts have upheld the rights of the administration or teachers within a school to control or stop the publication of material by students. "But the U.S. Supreme Court decades ago cautioned educators not to sacrifice the lessons of active citizenship when weighing the merits of comfort and conformity."[226]

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[225] J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*, p. 17.
[226] T. Eveslage, p. 77.

If adolescents are likely to be hurt by a negative reaction of an audience to their written work, they are no less likely to be hurt by the work of another. All anti-censorship arguments must at some point face this idea that unrestricted freedom of expression may lead to the offending of others. In the public school classroom hurting others with words is a very real outcome of expression. If adolescence is a time of sensitivity, it is also a time of the use of that sensitivity by others to delineate power relationships, to reward, to cudgel and to isolate.

In the larger world outside the schools, it may be worth arguing that censorship should not be imposed. "If words are a danger, spoken as much as written," Lewis sarcastically states, "it would be better to refrain from speech, to become a silent people, a people of mutes."[227] However, in the schools, even among students who are encouraged to treat others as persons *a la* Kant, there needs to be room for learning to respect others both as writers and as audience. On the one hand "youths [and teachers, administrators, etc.] must be trained to recognize that evil words or evil deeds produced by evil characters in literature are not necessarily those"[228] of the writer and on the other that one's publication of a piece of writing can have a negative impact on one's audience.

The task, then, is to educate students about free expression, and then allow them to select or self-censor and to feel respected and empowered in doing so.

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[227] W. Lewis, p. 5.
[228] W. B. Stanford, *Enemies of Poetry* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980) p. 79.

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# A Possible Solution - Multi-Part Assignments:

The freedom to think and express oneself freely which is all but promised to secondary students as members of a pluralistic democracy, as human beings, and as developing world citizens should not be completely denied to them. Whether it is to avoid offence or controversy, no reason for limiting freedom of expression can be offered without coming into direct conflict with the aims of education, the role of schools as social trainers, and the respect for persons. What is more, freedom of creative self-expression is necessary for the development of one of the basic goals of universal, free, public education: literacy.

> What is basic to the development of literacy…is…the
> empowerment of individuals to speak freely in such voices as
> they have about matters that concern them.[229]

Equally necessary is the need to create and protect a classroom and school community which is not made uncomfortable for any of the individuals within it because of a chilled or poisoned atmosphere created by the words and deeds of others.

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[229] Robinson from *Conversations on the Written Word*, quoted by Carole King in "Can Teachers Empower Pupils as Writers," *Issues in English Teaching*, edited by John Davison and John Moss (London: Routledge, 2000) p. 264.

One way to establish this sense of community [one of order and
respect for others], some believe, is to curtail expression that
upsets someone, embarrasses or insults a person, and perhaps
would prompt an angry response.[230]

Can this be reconciled with the feelings of the writer who does not see the creative act as
a moral issue at all? "I suspect that the aim of creation cannot be ethical at all...These
visions, delicious or poignant, are a moral end in themselves."[231]

How then is it ever going to be possible to honour a commitment to critical
thinking as an educational ideal, to fulfil the school's oft implied promise to prepare
students to be participants in a democratic state, to develop schools in which every
individual feels respected as a person and to do these things for each student without
failing to do them for every student? If we are going to value independence, and
develop creativity, what restrictions will be allowed? "In reflecting on [our concept of
creativity] from an educational point of view we relate freedom, founding, innovation,
progress and autonomy to education."[232] The solution, I would suggest, lies in allowing
both free expression and self-censorship to exist as teaching tools.

Freedom of thought, per se, is not the problem. Likely very few teachers who
understand and respect their role as educators would really wish to control the
thoughts of children. The task, as most of them would see it is to shape patterns of
thought and behaviour through direct instruction and modelling, not to attempt to force
thought into, or out of, students. Teachers who respect the educational aim of being
involved in the development of educated and therefore independently thinking adults
respect students as persons.

The Kantian principle of respect for persons requires that we
treat students in a certain manner – one which honors students'
demand for reasons and explanations, deals with students
honestly, and recognizes the need to confront students'

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[230] T. Eveslage, p. 77.
[231] Joseph Conrad, quoted in "Can Literature Kill?" Alberta Report/Western Report, 7/22/96, Volume 23, p. 221.
[232] R. K. Elliot, "Versions of Creativity," *Aesthetics and Arts Education,* edited by Ralph A. Smith and Alan Simpson
(Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991) p. 70.

independent judgement. ...it means recognizing and honouring the student's right to question, to challenge, and to demand reasons and justifications.[233]

The independence of a student's thought is even more crucial to the narrower band of the educational endeavour that is arts education. Education in visual, performing, and literary arts emphasizes imagination and creation. Students, like those involved in any creative endeavour, need to develop the "rules, skills, and knowledge [that] are indispensable to creative achievement."[234] As they acquire these, students in creative writing classes need to be allowed to practice with them. They need to explore the knowledge of literature that is a part of the creative endeavor in which they are engaged. They need to practice and experiment with the skills of the writer. They need opportunities to apply the rules, but also some opportunities to see the consequences of breaking them.

Students who break, bend, or manipulate the existing ideas of creative writing are not failing in the task of being educated any more than they would be in any other field.

> [I]f a student, after critical examination, rejects a scientific claim
> we do not say that the teacher has failed as an educator -- in fact,
> if the student's rejection is based on clear understanding of what
> he or she was being taught, we might even conclude that this
> episode was a paradigm case of educative teaching.[235]

The freedom to think is central to education.

Freedom of expression is not. The two are almost inseparable but there is a very real difference and this difference must be carefully exploited by the teacher hoping to maintain an untainted classroom atmosphere despite a real desire to allow students to think as they will. There are a number of ways in which free expression can be abused in the school. Curbing these abuses is not necessarily an infringement on a student's

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[233] H. Siegel, p. 56.
[234] S. Bailin, (1994) p. 106.

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ability to express herself freely in a creative writing assignment. A student who chooses to directly address a peer with a derogatory name, an insulting epithet or with racial slurs, does so with the intention to hurt, control, or intimidate. This type of expression, universally and sanely discouraged in the schools, can still be seen within the limitations and freedoms discussed here. Such a statement may well be the result of free thought, but when it is said or written, it becomes a published work. That which is published, particularly to the more captive audience of the school, may carry with it different responsibilities than the thought which engendered it.

First, it is not, necessarily an expression of the student's actual thought. "You are stupid" might really mean "I want you to feel bad," and as such, a student aware of and operating from the concepts of respect for persons and of the rights and responsibilities incumbent on those who publish might well reconsider the statement before it is made. From the student's point of view, scrawling "I want to hurt your feelings" and holding it up for a rival to read may not be particularly effective, but it certainly will be more honest.

Secondly, teaching responsible social behaviour to the young must also mean teaching the distinctions between freedom of thought and freedom of publication. That freedom of thought must be guaranteed in the school setting is part and parcel of the notion of respect for persons, a utilitarian view, logically supported, and practically dictated. Freedom to publish is a more difficult right to isolate from all of the other rights and responsibilities of students in the public schools. As Mill said, the right to think and the right to express are intertwined to the point that separating them may lead to the death of both. This chapter will, however, within the context of creative writing in the schools, attempt to do just that while leaving both alive and well.

The power of words to hurt is not confined solely to direct address. In writing on social situations the concept of "chilled atmosphere" is one which must be

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[235] T. Kazepides, p. 231.

considered carefully. Again, in the public schools, where freedom to escape stimuli that one does not like is hindered or removed, it is particularly important that students not be subject to an environment where they feel that they are not as welcome as all others because of an atmosphere of distaste, dislike or hatred for a group to which they belong, to which they have sympathies or with whom they have empathy. If the teacher and students fail to take into consideration the very real idea of the chilled atmosphere, any benefits gained from free expression will be at the cost of the basic human rights of the students.

We must at all times be acutely aware of the consequences of our decisions in teaching.

> Just as we can insult, embarrass, infuriate, or intimidate other people without having the slightest intention of doing so, we can indoctrinate or otherwise miseducate them unintentionally. Surely, educational (or social) planning that disregards the unintended consequences of our actions, programs, policies, institutional arrangements, etc., must be considered narrow, unrealistic and impoverished. It concentrates exclusively on the elusive intentions of teachers and overlooks the actual consequences of our interventions in the lives of the young.[236]

We must, therefore, curb the freedom to express, to publish, in the secondary school system. Better still, we must educate the student writer about the consequences of publication and allow them the opportunity to self-censor their work without denying them the ability to express ideas in the first place.

But this is not accomplished simply by telling them not to say anything. "The claim that being offended or shocked is ground enough for someone else to shut up has already done real damage to academic freedom in the West,"[237] and students are in need of that freedom. As they encounter the restraints, censures, and freedoms that are a part of adult responsibility within society, they need the freedom to explore these ideas.

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[236] T. Kazepides, p. 232.
[237] *The Economist*, 10/11/97, Volume 354, Issue 8083, p. 19.

If an open forum for discussion is appropriate at any level, then progressively there must be anticipation of the practice during early stages of education. A rigid division between different levels is arbitrary. The "not yet fully-fledged minds" [of secondary classrooms] include 18 year-old adults in grade XII, or equivalent, who will be university students within three months. We might label the error here the fallacy of the magic transition.[238]

It is frequently the case that in order to teach a concept in school, students are led through the history of the development of the idea. Would it be so different in the case of a social restriction to have students learn the value of the social restriction by experiencing its lack? For example, we may wish to teach students the power and problems of various governmental forms. We could demonstrate this by allowing students to lead themselves through the historical development of a political system at a certain point in time. A political tyranny might be set up in the classroom and when students "revolt" the idea might be allowed to move through stages similar to those that have happened in the historical past. The form of "government" which students finally arrive at may well be better understood because of the errors and successes they encountered as the ideas developed.

In the same way, students may wish to explore the history of free expression. The teacher might set up an exercise in which students are restricted from discussing certain ideas but in which they must discuss many ideas peripheral to those. By acting as an autocratic dictator, the teacher would encourage students to stretch their abilities in trying to work around the rules of the censor while still making their message understood. The students might gain some understanding of the challenges, and successes of writers throughout history who found it necessary to convey ideas despite a censoring authority. This would certainly stimulate critical thought.

Students might also be encouraged to develop a sense of audience. This is the most frequent current method for encouraging self-censorship among students.

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[238] W. Hare, p. 79.

Government exams in British Columbia begin with an instruction to this effect. It is intended, it would seem, to insure that those hired to mark government exams need not read insulting or degrading comments by malicious or uncaring students. There must be times at least when students hesitate to follow an idea they have because they are unsure of the reception the audience will give it. As has been seen, the actual reaction of the audience may be outside the realm of the expected. It seems unlikely that Theodore Geissel could have expected some parents to react to his *Cat in the Hat* with demands for its banning as a promoter of incautious behaviour with regards to strangers.[239] Although a young Theodore may not have failed the English 12 government exam with his story, he might very well change the nature of his future stories out of a sense of audience. As an exercise, awareness of a sense of audience is very close to what a working writer might do in order to be popular or at least saleable. A series of exercises in which students write similar material for many audiences could give students a very clear idea of the flexibility of form and style. This assignment would be consistent with the aims of education, particularly the aims of an arts education.

But in the end we are not training students to be writers under censoring governments or published authors seeking a bestseller. Our intention ought to be to educate students. We educate students when we honor the aims of education and at some point this must mean teaching creative writing which is not intended to manipulate students in a particular direction. We are teaching creative writing in order to stimulate students in critical thought and to allow them use of their imaginations.

The imagination is the central problem for some who would censor or encourage self-censorship and may even be incompatible with it. Can we allow a student to develop his imagination and to engage in imaginative thought if we demand pre-censorship of his ideas? If we give an assignment in which we tell students to generate

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[239] Steven Layne, "Censorship: the Best Defense is a Strong Offense," *Contemporary Education,* Volume 66, Issue 2 pp. 103-105.

ideas, but to steer clear of those ideas which we feel, no matter how legitimately, would be problematic in the classroom are we truly encouraging critical thinking? Are we respecting that student as a person? The answer to these questions is not necessarily a "no." I would argue, however, that they are, at least occasionally, a "no" and this is reason enough to find some opportunities for students to generate ideas without pre-imposed limits.

My suggestion for the solution to the difficult problem of allowing freedom of expression while preventing expression from poisoning the atmosphere of the classroom is that the teacher attempt to create an atmosphere in which each exercise within the set of assignments called creative writing assignments be divided into two parts. The teacher should divide all such assignments into production and publication. This suggestion proceeds under the belief that "production" is the student's task and should be uncensored; "publication" is visible and involves a discourse between the writer and an audience. "Production" is free thought; "publication" is self-censored expression.

The assignments given could arise quite easily out of material previously taught, discussed, or read as a part of class activities. This would allow the teacher some measure of control over the appropriateness of the material produced to levels of understanding and sophistication shown by the members of the class, without materially affecting the free expression of the students. Because the teacher would have already acted judiciously in the selection of the material which spawn the creative writing assignments, the likelihood that a student would begin to explore ideas far beyond his own understanding and ability to deal with effectively, would be reduced. Students could, without fear of teacher disapproval, bring in the ideas that came to them out of classroom activities.

In a creative writing assignment, production could include all aspects of the work which are individual, and therefore as private and unrestricted as thought. The

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student could be made aware that all of the ideas she generates in the production of the assignment are not subject to restriction. She could entertain her socially unacceptable, socially embarrassing, intellectually invalid, and mean-spirited ideas in the understanding that these were not to be shared in any way with other members of the class or the school community. If the student then wished to move from this basic idea of production into some form of expression or publication, she would be expected to engage in a dialogue with the teacher about the acceptability and wisdom of publishing these types of ideas, about the consequences for herself, for other students, and for members of the school community.

The student, therefore, would feel free to bring uncensored ideas to the teacher throughout the writing process, secure in the knowledge that the teacher will accept these ideas and value them just as the teacher respects and values the students who generated them. This is not substantially different from current practice for most secondary language arts teachers. A great deal of what is written by students goes no further than the teacher. The difference would come in a statement by the teacher preceding the assignment of the creative writing exercise in which he made it clear that students should feel free to explore any ideas which they feel of value to them personally. This would bring students into the conversation that is society:

> As civilized human beings, we are the inheritors, neither of an inquiry about ourselves and the world, nor of an accumulating body of information, but of a conversation, begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries. It is a conversation which goes on both in public and within each of ourselves. Of course there is argument and inquiry and information, but wherever these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation, and perhaps they are not the most captivating of the passages.[240]

The understanding between students and teacher should be that the student's achievement and the teacher's evaluation of them as a person will not be affected in any

way by what was said in the assignment. Students will need to be aware that a teacher has a moral as well as legal obligation to respond in an active way to any statement which might indicate that the student is in some danger.

Evaluation and assessment of such an assignment could proceed according to whichever criteria and performance standards the teacher felt were most useful, in accordance with the practices of sound writing instruction. Provided that the teacher does not, in at least some assignments, evaluate students for their sense of audience, the use of language, the form and the style, as well as the impact of the writing could be considered in the assignment of a grade.

The second step, which need not even be proceeded to in all assignments would be to prepare the paper for publication. The idea then would be to engage with the student in an open dialogue about the ideas included in the piece of creative writing. This dialogue would include, in addition to editorial suggestions, discussion of the ethical, moral, and social implications of the student's work. If the teacher had previously discussed a concept such as respect for persons, the dialogue could incorporate this, or other ethical issues in helping the student make choices about his writing. The publishing of that piece of writing by the student as an oral presentation to the class, a posted sample on the wall, or an inclusion in a student anthology would be a separate assignment. If successful, the dialogue would aid the student in developing his own criteria for self-censorship. The involvement with a teacher in a dialogue about acceptable publication might well avoid the "sense of failure and shame"[241] that comes with isolated self-censorship. This idea will be explored shortly.

Given the wide variety of adolescents and teachers and the large numbers of ideas which any of us might feel are offensive, this suggestion brings with it the very real risk that teaches will at least some of the time find themselves reading material that they are not comfortable with. It has probably happened to most experienced teachers

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[240] M. Oakeshott, (1962) p. 199.

in the secondary classroom. Often, of course, it is because an adolescent has deliberately wanted to offend. At other times, however, students have offended me in ways in which they could not possibly have foreseen. I could not reasonably have sought redress for this offense. It has been my experience that presenting an air of "above or beyond offense," of appearing willing to entertain any idea, has discouraged at least those deliberate attempts to provoke reaction. I would also suggest that empowering the student to act without self-censorship allows the student to act in a way that shows the utmost respect for the teacher as a person, and as an equal.

At some point, each teacher who would read the creative effort of adolescents must simply choose, in the best interests of the child, to be offended. The teacher's choice to accept offence need not be foisted on other students, or other members of the school community. Just as the teacher has respected the student as a person by allowing the expression, she must also respect the others within the school community by educating the student in the rights and responsibilities inherent in publishing that expression. Freedom to express in private and freedom to publish in public are not one in the same within the schools. The difference between freedom to publish in the schools and in society outside of schools lies in the captive nature of the audience in schools. If a person chooses to create a billboard advancing an idea which some might find offensive, he also knows that members of his community may agree, may choose to be offended and express that sense of disagreement, or may choose to ignore the message entirely. This is less easy in a classroom or school.

Preparation of a creative writing assignment for viewing or listening by members of the school community other than the teacher will involve a separate process from its production. This would help students to understand the right and responsibility of joining in human conversation that is a part of being educated, part of

> . . . an education in imagination, an initiation into the art of this
> conversation in which we learn to recognize the voices; to

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[241] D. Kis, p. 91.

distinguish their different modes of utterance, to acquire the
intellectual and moral habits appropriate to this conversational
relationship and thus to make our debut *dans la vie humaine*.[242]

This process should involve the teacher and the student working together to understand the impact of the piece of writing on the school as audience. There is an educational value in this dialogue around self-censorship. The student will need to exercise critical thinking skills, imagination, personal reflection, respect for persons, and awareness of the consequences of an action that contains moral elements. By helping the student to see such things, the teacher engages in an educationally viable and socially responsible exercise.

There is also an aesthetic value arising from the dialogue that precedes publication as well as in the publication itself. Written work, such as those exercises done in creative writing assignments, belongs to those arts which are interpreted. The performance of the piece, whether aloud, through a reading, or visually, through posting, or publication in a classroom or school anthology becomes a new piece of art, just as a musician's interpretation of a score, or an actor's interpretation of a script are in some sense fresh pieces of art in and of themselves. The teacher's role is to help the student see both the work, as it exists, and himself as he joins in a dialogue with his audience. In this way he comes closest to professional artists and writers whom he emulates.

In the end, the student should be given the freedom to alter contents of the assignment in the awareness of its potential impact on others or to withdraw it from publication in a good-faith recognition of the rights of others to come to a school in which the atmosphere is untainted. In this way, the student will have had the opportunity to express freely and the opportunity to select and self-censor in an informed matter. If the resulting assignment, in the teacher's view, still does not have a

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[242] Michael Oakeshott, *The Voice of Liberal Learning: Michael Oakeshott on Education*, edited by Timothy Fuller (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) p. 89.

place in the school community, the teacher will withhold "publication rights."

However, the teacher has still respected the student as a person and has still fulfilled the

aims of education by allowing the original expression.

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