

## Aesthetica and eudaimonia

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## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Aesthetica and *eudaimonia*: Education for flourishing must include the arts

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## Abstract

The point of education is to support students to be able to live meaningful, autonomous lives, filled with rich experiences. The arts and aesthetic education are vital to such flourishing lives in that they afford bold, beautiful, moving experiences of awe, wonder and the sublime that are connected to the central human functional capability Nussbaum labels *senses*, *imagination* and *thought*. Everyone ought to have the opportunity to learn about art, to appreciate and create art, to critique art and to understand how we are connected to the culture of our society. A life without art is unimaginable, and to the extent that people lack aesthetic experiences, their lives are impoverished, not 'fully human'. Given that the distinctive value of art objects is that they afford aesthetic experience, it is upon this foundation that an argument ought to be mounted as to why schooling needs the arts, specialised teachers, and all students deserve aesthetic education. Therefore, in this paper, I offer a defence of compulsory aesthetic education across the curriculum on the basis of the aesthetic experiences the arts afford, and the central role such experiences play in *eudaimonia*—the flourishing life.

## KEYWORDS

Aesthetic education, aesthetic experience, art education, arts, *eudaimonia*, flourishing

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## INTRODUCTION

'Aesthetic Education', then, is an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. When this happens, new connections are made in experience: new patterns are formed, new vistas are opened. Persons see differently. (Maxine Greene, 2001: 6)

Life is impoverished to the degree that a person fails to gain aesthetic experiences. If one never enjoys music, a feeling of artistic movement, design, the texture of an object, or singing a song, then this is an experience in the flourishing life that is unfortunately and regrettably closed off. Such enjoyment of aesthetic experiences ought to be an option available to those who wish to partake, and this option is made more readily available if one is inducted into it. There are many forms such aesthetic experiences may take, given the multitude of artworks and media through which such creative expression is formed, along with the natural beauty that surrounds us. Some people are particularly attracted to the visual arts, whereas others are enchanted by dance or music. Still others find delight in poetry, whereas film or novels may be the preferred choice of others. Such choices may be connected to individual taste as well as one's capacity for sensual perception that is both biological and socialised, as I will explain further in the next section. Of course, people will likely stumble upon a feeling of awe, the sublime or being moved by the aesthetic features of an object, particularly in nature or when some music suddenly uplifts their spirit. I do not hold that such 'aesthetic emotions' are uniquely tied to art, but instead follow Dewey (1934) in claiming that feelings and emotions of wonder, the sublime, awe, joy, etc., may be felt in relation to artworks, nature and are an extension of human experience.<sup>1</sup> On my account, aesthetic experiences contain both emotional and cognitive components (D'Olimpio, 2021, p. 2). Yet I do argue that such aesthetic experiences are more likely to be made present to people in subtle and dynamic ways if they are taught it is an option, particularly afforded by artworks, and if they are educated in an open, receptive attitude that affords them the understanding that art may be experienced in such a manner.

The point of education is to support students to be in the best possible position to be able to live meaningful, autonomous lives, filled with rich experiences. The arts and aesthetic education are vital to such lives and to such bold, beautiful, moving experiences. Everyone ought to have the opportunity to learn about art, to appreciate and create art, to critique art and to understand its role in society, historically and theoretically. A life without art is impoverished. In this paper, I will offer a defence of compulsory aesthetic education across the curriculum on the basis of the aesthetic experiences the arts afford and the central role such experiences play in the flourishing life.

I use the Aristotelian word *eudaimonia* to capture the richness of the flourishing life, a life that human beings may aspire to as social, political and ethical animals who live in communities and tell stories about our lives and the world around us (MacIntyre, 1981). As defended in the third section of this paper, I particularly draw upon Martha Nussbaum's neo-Aristotelian account of the capabilities to account for what is needed for human beings to flourish. The capabilities refer to human capacities, but we must always account for the fact that not all human bodies work in the same way, and not all sociocultural contexts manifest similarly. Nevertheless, normative claims may be made to seek justice and happiness based on the kinds of beings we are (social, moral) and the needs we have (what rights-theorists would call human rights). The flourishing life is broader than simply meeting our 'human rights', and Nussbaum includes 'senses, imagination, and thought' as a central capability: to which aesthetic experiences most obviously connect.

I will focus on the distinctive value of artworks, which is their capacity to generate aesthetic experiences. Having said that, art may do many things, including supporting self-expression and moral formation through the cultivation of a sympathetic attitude. And it may very well be that it is in these multiple ways that the arts are understood to contribute to the flourishing life. Indeed, on national curricula across the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada, education in the arts is valued and often justified in terms of the technical skills associated with arts making, and

the cultivation of personal attributes such as self-expression, creativity and imagination, alongside the historical and cultural appreciation afforded by art appreciation and critique. Unfortunately, such positive rhetoric is not accompanied by adequate resourcing, and arts subjects are often elective, particularly in senior (high) school, with diminishing student numbers and generalist rather than specialised teachers. As political and societal trends see an increased focus on science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects and associated careers, the arts and humanities are being squeezed and suffer as a result of attempting to defend their value in narrowly utilitarian terms that increasingly correlate to test scores and achievement in other subjects, particularly literacy and numeracy.

While there may be many positive ways in which the arts and art objects may be used in society (i.e. art therapy, art-works as investments, music and drama to improve spatial awareness, or art events as opportunities to gather socially and drink wine and eat cheese), the distinctive value of art objects is that they afford aesthetic experience. And it is upon this foundation that an argument ought to be mounted as to why schooling needs the arts, specialised teachers, and all students deserve aesthetic education. This paper is divided into three sections. In the first section, I defend a universal claim that all humans have a capacity to enjoy aesthetic experiences due to the kinds of beings we are: our physiological and cognitive capacities account for human beings' natural instinct for art. The second section further elaborates upon what an aesthetic experience is and why they are universal, even if they may be experienced in individual and contextual ways. This section argues that such experiences are significantly connected to artworks and that aesthetic education may play a central role in teaching people to glean aesthetic experiences from (particularly art) objects they encounter or create. The third section connects such aesthetic experiences to *eudaimonia*, defends flourishing as the aim of education, and therefore concludes that aesthetic education is necessary to educate for *eudaimonia*, given that aesthetic experiences are an important part of a flourishing life.

## AN ART INSTINCT

Human beings are naturally predisposed to appreciate and enjoy beauty, form, shape, texture, colour, line, movement, sound and other aesthetic features of our environment. By virtue of our capacity for perception and cognition, to experience emotion, receive sensations and use our imagination, we have an instinct for aesthetic experiences that supports profound feelings, insight and personal meaning making (Schindler et al., 2017). By tapping into an instinct or capacity children and young people have, and then encouraging and educating it, aesthetic education affords more opportunities for children to have aesthetic experiences. It does this by teaching them to appreciate art for its form and value the skills and techniques of the artist, as well as encouraging students to adopt an open and receptive attitude that is conducive to such experiences. These skills, of learning to appreciate art and being open to the beauty and transformative new perspectives offered by artworks, are more likely to be effective when they are taught, practised and encouraged. And while it may be that someone may be overwhelmed by awe and wonder when they stop to observe a sunset, this is simply not always the case or true of everyone, and many artworks are more likely to require a form of education prior to their being able to be fully appreciated or enjoyed. Art is intentionally and purposefully created to offer its receiver an aesthetic experience; it is this that makes it valuable for its own sake and not for its economic or other value, and why artworks are ideal as the objects with which we should teach students to engage in an open and receptive manner. Furthermore, art is ubiquitous. While nature may be all around us, not all urban schools have ready access to sublime natural landscapes.<sup>2</sup>

A connection is being made here between natural (human) perception and experience and aesthetic appreciation and experiences. In *The Art Instinct*, Denis Dutton (2009) defends the connection between human beings, art and aesthetic enjoyment as natural and instinctive. He examines historical arguments, theories and practices in support of this claim, commencing with the Ancient Greek philosophers. From the time of Aristotle, we see an argument made for the instinct of human beings, witnessed from childhood, to copy what they see. Aristotle names this 'mimesis' and Dutton (2009, p. 33) confirms:

Human beings are born image-makers and image enjoyers. Evidence for Aristotle can be seen in children's imitative play: everywhere children play in imitation of grown-ups, of each other, of animals, and even of machines. Imitation is a natural component of the enculturation of individuals. That is from the creative side: from the experiential side, human beings enjoy experiencing imitations, whether pictures, carvings, stories or play-acting.

It is our capacity for perceiving the world around us that affords us the ability to appreciate the aesthetic qualities and features of our environment. Once we receive the sensations from our senses of sight, touch and hearing, our mind interprets and responds to these stimuli. Our perceptions activate our mental and physiological responses, which include cognitive and emotional responses, which interpret what we have seen, heard and felt. In this way, our mind brings concepts, memories, categories and ideas to bear on what we are experiencing, and our imagination starts to play with these impressions and sensations, from which we derive meaning.

In this way, our aesthetic responses are partly natural and instinctive, but also partly socially influenced via systems of meaning making through which we learn to interpret and respond to the world. For instance, these contextual, social influences will include social mores, language, culture, etiquette, assumptions and ideas about gender, sex, class, race, ability, etc. And what is so fascinating is how art can draw upon and then challenge such ideas and concepts and their associated values. As Marcia Eaton (2001, p. 5) explains:

Aesthetic response is a basic element of humanity. There are probably biological reasons for this. Some evolutionist theorists believe that aesthetic preferences for certain landscapes (such as savannahs or those with running water) developed from and contributed to survival advantages. Nonetheless, there is also a social determinant to the way in which persons react aesthetically to objects or events.

If aesthetic responses are partly learned, then education plays a central role in approaches to art and accounts of aesthetic experience. Like our emotions, Eaton (2001, pp. 12–18) claims that aesthetic responses are learned, culturally bound and socially prescribed and proscribed. This is relevant to educational concerns because it demonstrates that people have a natural capacity to experience the aesthetic features of the world and of art objects, and that they may be educated in ways that refine and support the experience of these to allow for deeper, nuanced and subtle emotional and cognitive responses, which in turn afford meaning making and enrich our lives. Furthermore, there is a metacognitive element whereby education (and aesthetic education in particular) will also allow for critical reflection not only on the artwork that prompted a particular response but also on the response itself.

On this view, the arts may be included in the curriculum as something *everyone* can enjoy and engage in, even if not everyone is likely to consider themselves as an artist or an art connoisseur. And just because we may enjoy aesthetic experiences *naturally* is not to say we should not educate and nurture this capacity such that people can experience it more often and in a more informed way. Most obviously, while it may be fairly easy to enjoy a beautiful waterfall, appreciating or gleaning an aesthetic experience from artworks requires some tutelage.<sup>3</sup> The learning involved may simply be that one needs to be able to read in order to enjoy a story, but when it comes to poetry or Shakespeare, one must also learn *how* to read and understand the narrative or cadence in question. Understanding the structure of a symphony and being able to appreciate its complexity and significance is likely to further enhance the enjoyment and associated emotional experience to be gained from that musical composition (it is difficult to imagine someone understanding, let alone gleaning an aesthetic experience from John Cage's 4'33" without some context). And for some genres, such as opera, for instance, learning about them may then open the door to students being able to gain experiences of passion, awe and shock from an otherwise less accessible artform. I'll never forget being taught Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in high school: My year 11 (15-year-olds) music class learnt about the time period, the structure of the work, the composer and the story, and then we sat and listened to it, reading along with the score (note that our first language was English and the songs are sung in Italian). There was complete silence, and by the end, a few of us had tears running down our faces, completely unexpectedly. I might add that our state (not private) school was in a socio-economic area in which

many families would be unlikely to play classical or operatic music in their homes. Furthermore, one student went on to become a professional opera singer.

For disabled pupils who may have certain requirements when it comes to their ability to perceive various objects, there needs to be an adaptation or deliberate choices made in order to support their engagement with art objects and performances such that they may perceive them and thereby also glean an aesthetic experience from such engagement. Such perception, engagement and resulting aesthetic experience may not occur without consideration and attention paid to their specific needs and requirements.

Given that there are particular and specific skills and techniques involved in creating art, displaying artworks as well as receiving artworks in an open yet informed manner, it makes sense that the novice would be well guided by the artist, the art lover or the art critic—the educator—who has experience with and knowledge about artworks, art forms and various media. Active engagement with arts making ensures students have the opportunity to practice creative engagement with media in purposeful and meaningful ways. And, with various media, there are certain techniques that are difficult to mimic or almost impossible to refine on one's own. Technical skills such as those central to ballet dancing, oil painting, firing ceramics or film editing need instruction and expertise as well as passion, dedication, commitment and practice. There is a vital role for artists in teaching the arts, and arts education further ensures students have the chance to understand the value of artworks.

Therefore, there is a natural art instinct in human beings: a predisposition to create and enjoy art, and a human capacity for aesthetic experiences. However, this is very much more likely to be included as a regular feature of one's life if one is taught that it is a viable option. Making aesthetic experiences more accessible to people involves education. This includes learning about art and how to make, receive and critique artworks. While this claim does not deny that untutored aesthetic experiences may spontaneously occur and that these may be wonderful, valuable and significant, it is to say that such experiences are more readily available in relation to a much wider scope of objects and stimuli if aesthetic education, particularly in relation to the arts, has taken place. This is also a reason why broadening the scope of aesthetic education as much as possible is desirable: using as many art media, artworks, techniques and forms as possible so as to engage and stimulate the imagination and enjoyment of students as we do not know what will be particularly arresting for each individual. In the next section, I will focus more on explaining the nature of aesthetic experience and defending the connection of such experiences to the arts and the well-lived life before considering a potential objection to my claim that aesthetic education is a necessity.

## AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE

An aesthetic experience arises from engaging in a particular way—a way that is open and receptive to what is there to be experienced—with *something*—for instance, an art object or art performance or one's surroundings, in nature or a church for example. An aesthetic experience is an extension of *experience*, yet, as John Dewey argues in *Art as Experience* (1934), we must distinguish *an* experience from continuous experience, and aesthetic experience constitutes *an* experience. An experience is both integrated with and demarcated from the rest of the experience (Collinson, 1992, p. 151; Dewey, 1934, p. 36), and aesthetic experiences may vary widely (Schindler et al., 2017, pp. 2–3). The imagination has a central role to play in such experiences, and all conscious experience has some imaginative quality for Dewey, through which meaning is gleaned (Collinson, 1992, p. 153). Significantly, aesthetic experience is connected to the 'something' (an art object, say) and the mode of perception the viewer uses to engage with or contemplate it. As soon as the spectator attends to the art object in question, they invoke mental activity, which includes images, concepts and emotions, all of which are connected to the art object, and it is the aesthetic experience that is emergent, transcendent and valuable.

Aesthetic experiences are dynamic and complex and therefore notoriously difficult to pin down. They involve the intellect as well as the emotions and may be experiences of beauty, the sublime, being moved, feeling wonder or a sense of harmony and delight. Such aesthetic experiences are emotive as well as cognitive; they involve the intellect

as well as an emotional response to what it is we are perceiving and interpreting. Take, for instance, our intellectually engaged response to a piece of conceptual art, or our being swept up in a beautiful melody, or hiking up to a magnificent vista that offers us stunning panoramic views of natural beauty. All of these examples involve aesthetic experiences, but they may feel qualitatively different from one another, or from person to person. Often when we try to describe the experience associated with a certain object (a painting, a dance performance or a beautiful sunset), we quickly find ourselves describing the object itself. So in order to define aesthetic experience, I follow Beardsley (1982, p. 81) in claiming that a person is having an aesthetic experience 'if and only if the greater part of [their] mental activity during that time is united and made pleasurable by being tied to the form and qualities of a sensuously presented or imaginatively intended object on which [their] primary attention is concentrated'. Not all art objects (or indeed, all objects) may potentially produce an aesthetic experience, but neither does my account rule this out, and not all aesthetic experiences are necessarily 'pleasant', but they may still be pleasurable even when they are shocking.<sup>4</sup> This account of aesthetic experience may be termed to be 'empirical' and follows in the Deweyan tradition of what has come to be known as 'everyday aesthetics' (Saito, 2007, 2015).

The aesthetic experience can create a moment of focus and stillness as one's attention is absorbed by the object in question and one is expectant as to what will be revealed or felt; in this way, the person is open to experiencing what is there to be experienced and receptive to what meaning may be made as a result of the feelings and thoughts that arise in relation to that which provokes this experience. It is this kind of attentiveness that is being referred to when aestheticians say that the artwork is being valued or appreciated for its own sake. Dewey notes that aesthetic experiences are most definitely tied to that which affords the experience, and the experience is valuable in and of itself. He says an object:

is peculiarly and dominantly aesthetic, yielding the enjoyment characteristic of esthetic perception, when the factors that determine anything which can be called an experience are lifted high above the threshold of perception and are made manifest for their own sake. (Dewey, 1934: 57)

This quotation highlights the connection between the object perceived and the experience that arises from this imaginative engagement, as well as the value of the experience as being for its own sake rather than being used in an instrumental manner to gain some other good or goal. Aesthetic experiences possess a phenomenological quality that includes being absorbed, focussed and open and receptive to the object under contemplation, with a curiosity and excited expectation as to what may be revealed through one's engagement with (and perception of) the object. Collinson (1992, p. 133) notes that 'aesthetic contemplation... has both passive and active aspects and C. S. Lewis was surely right when he observed that "The first demand any work of art makes on us is surrender" (Lewis, 1961, p. 19). But contemplation maintains a dialogue with what is perceived'. Aesthetic experiences may come upon us when we are not expecting them, but they may also emerge and result when we are engaging with art objects in a particular, open, contemplative and imaginative manner.

Art enriches our lives by being a catalyst and conduit for experiences that bring us joy and beauty, moments of revelation and understanding, and feelings of gratitude and awe. As Eaton (2001, pp. 3–4) argues:

A work of art is an artifact that is treated in aesthetically relevant ways, at least when it is being considered as a work of art, not as a doorstop or an alarm. Things are art when they are treated in such a way that someone who is fluent in a culture directs attention to an artifact's intrinsic properties that are considered worthy of attention (perception and/or reflection) within that culture. Furthermore, the person who attends to the artifact and has what he or she would describe as an aesthetic experience realizes that the experience is caused, at least in large part, because he or she is attending to intrinsic properties of the artifact considered worthy of attention in his or her community.



Thus, in terms of our engagement with artworks, our aesthetic experiences result from the connection between art and perception, and, as such are partly biological and partly socialised. It is a specific kind of seeing that the arts encourage. The vision adopted is one that truly *looks and sees*, sympathetically,<sup>5</sup> with an open respect for that which is being received. Art is often associated with a feeling of the sublime or of wonder, which brings with it the 'expansion of cognition' and 'intensity of perception' (Hepburn, 1980, p. 16). Again, while this is a natural ability we have, it is enhanced and supported through education, not solely to enhance our experiences and make us more receptive to encountering and embracing aesthetic experiences, but also to help us realise that it is artworks that may afford such experiences due to their intrinsic function or distinctive value.

Art teachers can assist students to see in a particular way—attending to form and specific details and 'reading' the artworks in ways that are required and invited by specific media and texts in order to glean the meaning and experience the affect that is there to be experienced.<sup>6</sup> This 'aesthetic literacy' is a skill set that art teachers can teach their students, enabling them to make meaning from artworks that connect to and draw upon formal, aesthetic, historical and technical knowledge and understanding of artworks, art forms and various media. Art teachers must therefore have specialist knowledge and training themselves in order to be able to support their students to learn about, for instance, art history, aesthetic theory, as well as the technical skills involved in art making.

When students create their own artworks, art teachers can guide them to hone their perception in relation to their own work as well as learn and practise the skills and techniques required to manifest the form they have in mind. This is to say that teachers can role-model and assist students in learning to adopt an open and receptive mode of perception towards artworks that is conducive to perceiving the artwork aesthetically as well as to experiencing a feeling of awe and wonder in relation to the art object. While such a mode of perception and the accompanying aesthetic experiences of the sublime or delight may well come naturally and even frequently to some, this is not to say that there is not also an important role for teachers in supporting such aesthetic literacy. Aesthetic literacy involves practising an open and receptive mode of perception; it includes engaging imaginatively with (art) objects. Such aesthetic literacy as I describe here is conducive to aesthetic experiences. Returning to my earlier example of *Don Giovanni*, my high school music teacher laid the groundwork that enabled me and my classmates to be moved by the opera by teaching us some formal, historical, aesthetic and technical skills and knowledge that ensured we were prepared to receive the work in an open manner, receptive to the aesthetic experience it had to offer us. The aesthetic experience was indeed felt and shared with my classmates, and to this day, I vividly remember that lesson, the music and, most significantly, how moved I was; how we all were.

Such aesthetic experiences are a part (or extension) of our everyday experiences;<sup>7</sup> yet, there is still a vital role for the arts and aesthetic education in the curriculum that sees art educators inducting pupils into the skills, techniques, history, theory, critique and experiences proffered by engaging with the arts. A holistic approach to education must include the arts and aesthetic education. Even if we cannot directly *teach* students *how* to have an aesthetic experience, we may create the conditions conducive to such experiences (of the sublime, wonder and awe), and we may encourage students to adopt an open and receptive mode of perception that is amenable to such experiences. The arts are the ideal vehicle for prompting aesthetic experiences due to the ways in which they present concepts, images and ideas in new and creative ways. Such artistic depiction encourages those engaging with artworks to adopt a certain way of seeing; a mode of perception that is open and receptive and thus likely to result in aesthetic experiences. In many educational spaces, the arts are more accessible than stunning natural landscapes, and artists create art objects that are intended to afford aesthetic experience; this is their distinctive purpose, thereby making them perfectly suited to such an aim.

## AESTHETICA AND EUDAIMONIA

Education for *eudaimonia* (flourishing) is a holistic approach to education that is supported by many national curricula. For example, schools in England are legally required to promote the holistic development of pupils. The UK



Education Act 2002 has a general requirement that the curriculum '(a) promotes the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and (b) prepares pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life' (HM Government, 2002). The good life requires others *as well as myself* to be able to meet their basic human needs, be respected, included in communities, given opportunities to work, care, play, form relationships and be able to find personal meaning and value as they live their lives. With its roots in Ancient Greek philosophy (Aristotle, 1876), *eudaimonia* is an ongoing activity rather than a settled state one reaches, and there is an emphasis on cultivating rational dispositions and habituating appropriate actions and emotional responses.

Many contemporary theorists support the idea of education for flourishing, even if their definitions of flourishing are slightly different from one another (Kristjánsson, 2017). Various, flourishing is seen as autonomous, wholehearted and successful immersion in worthwhile pursuits (activities and relationships) (White, 2011); wholehearted, embodied engagement with life (Snow, 2015); a worthwhile life that contains objective goods and is 'lived from the inside' (Brighouse, 2006, p. 16); and Kristjánsson (2016) adds specific emotional attachments such as 'awe-inspired attractions to transpersonal ideals'. On these accounts, education and schooling is education for the good life, as education prepares students for a successful life as an autonomous adult in society beyond the classroom. Most educators aim at their students thriving, not simply surviving and in so far as this is our goal, flourishing is the aim of education.

In fleshing out what it might mean to educate for flourishing whereby the aim of education is closer to *eudaimonia* than a hedonic calculus of 'happiness', I find it useful to draw upon neo-Aristotelian Martha Nussbaum's list of central human capabilities (2006: pp. 76–77). This excellent list of criteria required for a flourishing life includes:

1. Life.
2. Bodily health.
3. Bodily integrity—freedom of movement and freedom against violent assault, including sexual assault.
4. Senses, imagination and thought.
5. Emotions—being able to have attachments to things and people outside ourselves.
6. Practical reason—being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life (includes freedom of religion).
7. Affiliation.
  - A. Being able to live with and towards others, to recognise and show concern for other human beings, to engage in various forms of social interaction, to be able to imagine the situation of another.
  - B. Having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation; being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others (includes non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion and national origin).
8. Other species. Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants and the world of nature.
9. Play—being able to laugh, play and enjoy recreational activities.
10. Control over one's environment.
  - A. Political.
  - B. Material.

The room for aesthetic experiences is most obviously present in capability number 4, *senses, imagination and thought*, which Nussbaum (2006, p. 76) details as follows:

Being able to use the senses, to imagine, think, and reason— and to do these things in a 'truly human' way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training. Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth. Being able to use one's mind in ways protected by guarantees of freedom

of expression with respect to both political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to have pleasurable experiences and to avoid nonbeneficial pain.

Note that Nussbaum connects the fully human (as opposed to merely animalistic) use of our senses, including our capacity for imagination, thought and reason, to education: In order to be able to think well and truly interpret, appreciate and express ourselves in various ways (including artistically), these must be 'informed and cultivated', which occurs via education (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 72). Society should create and support healthy, inclusive policies and institutions—including educational—conducive to flourishing that will allow for *eudaimonia*. It is in supporting the capabilities outlined here that society may encourage 'fully human' lives to be led by its citizens, whereby 'the human being as a dignified free being who shapes his or her own life in cooperation and reciprocity with others, rather than being passively shaped or pushed around by the world' (ibid.).

In order to form young people's capabilities, educators must introduce them to those things that are required to develop and habituate their capacities such that they may then *choose* them in adulthood.<sup>8</sup> As Nussbaum (2011, p. 152) explains, 'This formation is valuable in itself and a source of lifelong satisfaction'. Such an account defends a liberal arts tradition whereby education requires the arts and humanities to support society and individuals within societies to flourish (Nussbaum, 2012).

The reason the flourishing life includes artistic expression and aesthetic experiences is that this is what elevates our lives from simple existence and the meeting of our basic needs to having available to us the option of the fully human life, a life that is connected to our culture and creative history. This includes understanding that art exists, can be created and enjoyed, and it also includes aesthetic experiences as we have a capacity for a certain type of experience that is truly human. As I have explained, aesthetic experience is connected to our senses, to our ability to perceive aesthetic qualities, and to interpret these, applying our cognition and emotions, and make meaning that is personal and sociocultural as a result. The aesthetic experiences that arise when we do this are intrinsically valued and are a distinct component of a flourishing life.

In a significant way, the arts are ubiquitous, and it is very difficult to completely avoid them. We are surrounded by music (every time we walk into a shop, buskers on the streets, the radio or TV playing in the background), architecture, drawings and paintings (including street art, advertisements and decorations) and technological art (social media is replete with selfies and shared images as well as tunes: we are image makers as well as consumers). We may instinctively like or dislike some of these, but there is room for education to assist us in discerning what we like (or dislike) and why and to consciously choose to seek out or surround ourselves with certain artforms. The various arts bring pleasure and meaning to people—with ample room for subjective taste and individual preferences. If education is to prepare students for a flourishing life, it must expose students to art making and appreciation and teach them that the enjoyment the arts have to offer is an option available for them to choose to include in their lives. Pedagogically, it may be well worth commencing with the art forms the students are already enjoying (popular films and television series, manga and anime, or hip hop music) in order to then introduce them to techniques of art criticism and then other artforms and diverse media. In order to make aesthetic experiences a readily accessible component of their lives, students must be taught how to *experience* art—and some artworks take more effort than others to truly appreciate—and this involves valuing art for its own sake: for the purpose for which it is created; namely, to evoke an aesthetic experience in the receiver of the artwork.

I will now consider one possible objection to my defence of the necessity of aesthetic education. This objection is to do with individual preferences and choices involved in what the flourishing or fulfilled life should look like. If indeed there is a lot of subjectivity involved in which hobbies and forms of entertainment upon which one spends one's time, energy and resources, why must this include the arts? This objection asks why the mad keen sports fan who doesn't spend any time engaging with art cannot be equally satisfied with a life filled with enjoying, watching, playing and critiquing football, tennis or car racing? Some people may simply not be very bothered by art or gain much pleasure from the arts, and certainly have no aptitude for or desire to create art, so why is their life any less full of aesthetic experiences, or even if it is, any less flourishing as a result?

This objection asks why defend the centrality of aesthetic experience to the flourishing life and connect that to the arts? For those theorists who do defend the inclusion of the arts in the curriculum as a component of the flourishing life, most of them defend it as an option for students to choose rather than as a compulsory subject. When listing specific educational goods and capacities, for instance, Brighouse et al. (2018, p. 27) identify capacity for economic productivity, capacity for personal autonomy, capacity for democratic competence, capacity for healthy personal relationships, capacity to treat others as equals and the capacity for personal fulfilment. While all six capacities contribute to flourishing lives, the space for arts education is within the capacity for personal fulfilment. The authors write:

Healthy personal relationships are important for flourishing, but so too are complex and satisfying labor and projects that engage one's physical, aesthetic, intellectual, and spiritual faculties. People find great satisfaction in music, literature, and the arts; games and sports; mathematics and science; and religious practice. In these and other activities, they exercise and develop their talents and meet challenges ... School is a place in which children's horizons can be broadened. They can be exposed to—and can develop enthusiasms for and competence in—activities that they would never have encountered through familial and communal networks and that sometimes suit them better than any they would have encountered in those ways. The capacity to find joy and fulfillment from experiences and activities is at the heart of a flourishing life. (Brighouse et al., 2018, pp. 26–27)

Similarly, Reiss and White (2013) see the importance of offering students various, diverse experiences that they may or may not stumble across elsewhere, so that individuals may ascertain whether they have the skill, passion, talent or enjoyment of that activity that could lead to personal meaning making and fulfilment.<sup>9</sup> These defences suffice to justify the inclusion of the arts on the curriculum as an option that students can try and select more of if they enjoy and/or possess the requisite talent. But, as is noticeable in Brighouse et al.'s account of personal fulfilment, if someone prefers to play sport or enjoy nature or solve maths equations, these activities could suffice for their flourishing lives without the requirement that they also engage in art making and reception.

I seek to go further in my defence of aesthetic education than solely accepting that some people will include the arts in their flourishing lives and others will not. The arguments offered by Brighouse et al. and Reiss and White certainly support my case in favour of aesthetic education, yet I wish to further justify and substantiate the claim that *all* school-aged students should be taught the skills and techniques of art making, appreciation and art theory due to its distinctive aesthetic value. Meaningful activities, from which individuals choose what they wish to do, of which painting, dancing, writing or acting may be one option, only suggests students should be exposed to these things in case they wish to choose the activity in question. Yet every student will benefit from being exposed to and taught how to appreciate aesthetic experiences. This defends aesthetic education, of which art making and creating is one aspect, and learning to engage with artworks is another; the latter of which includes a theoretical element alongside the practical skill of learning artistic techniques. Of the mad keen sports fan who is not interested in any arts, I want to ask whether they have ever been properly introduced to the arts in their younger years? They may very well be enjoying aesthetic elements of the 'beautiful game' as well as the competition, comradery and feeling a sense of belonging to a team. They sing songs and chant and drum, they dress up in their team colours and decorate themselves and their surroundings to match, they appreciate the movement and skill of the players and so on. It does not seem unlikely that they would also find enjoyment in music, dance and theatre!

Where one only has a narrow set of aesthetic experiences, they could be widened to include more, and those who stick to only one kind of entertainment are missing out on others. For the person whose cultural diet consists solely of sports, they are missing out on artforms whose artistic expressions could give rise to wonderful, moving and meaningful aesthetic experiences. It may be a good idea to start with more accessible artforms and then scaffold to include more canonical or contemporary works, but it is even more important to start young and commence compulsory aesthetic education at the very start of schooling. The flourishing life includes experiences that delight the senses and activate an aesthetic experience, and compulsory aesthetic education is required to introduce and cultivate the

capacity for accessing the aesthetic experiences associated with diverse artforms, particularly the artforms that are not immediately accessible on first engagement. In this way, the use of various art media and artworks is vital in aesthetic education. I acknowledge there will be practical limitations on how many artworks and media art teachers will be able to introduce and teach in sufficient detail in the classroom, based on their expertise, knowledge, resources and the accessibility of such works of art and media (raw materials, resources, space, equipment, etc.). But I maintain that 'more' is better particularly given we do not know exactly which media or artworks will most resonate with individuals. Yet, inducting students into such aesthetic experiences in relation to art is significant. The importance of educating every student in the arts such that they may be open to and access more aesthetic experiences as a result is precisely so that the student may develop capacities required in the flourishing life and they may then, in later years, choose to fulfil those capacities in ways that nourish and nurture *eudaimonia*.

Therefore, my argument in defence of compulsory aesthetic education on the basis of the aesthetic experiences the arts provide prioritises the distinctive value of engagement (creation and reception) with art in light of the place for aesthetic experience in the flourishing life. I have supported this argument with reference to the human capabilities model where I have connected the human instinct for art and aesthetic experience to the capacity for sensing, imagination and thought. Such experiences are personally fulfilling and meaningful, they may be emotive and/or cognitive, possibly awe-filled and sublime, and the flourishing life includes such dynamic experiences. Obviously, children and young people may be enjoying arts and crafts in imaginative and creative ways in their everyday lives outside of school, and we have already noted that it is impossible to entirely avoid aesthetic experiences given they may be experienced in nature or on the street. Yet there is much to be gained by supporting young people to have informed encounters with the multiple arts such that they may experience a wide range of aesthetic experiences and be open to those which truly resonate with them.

## CONCLUSION

Education in the arts and art theory is vital. Arts education must be supported by good educational and governmental policy, quality resourcing and teacher training so as to be practically effective. Currently, there is an inequitable distribution of access to good quality arts education with students in lower socio-economic demographics and ethnic minorities most obviously lacking the same opportunities as elsewhere. Additionally, the decreased attention given to arts subjects and the declining number of student enrolments in specialist arts subjects can be directly linked to which subjects are (and are not) tested. Schools—and students along with their parents and guardians—are likely to focus on subjects that governments focus on, namely, those which are tested and measured in order to rank schools. Such a selection immediately narrows the focus of schools, students and parents, and works against the aim of education for flourishing. If schooling is to prepare students for life, then the good life—*eudaimonia*—includes more than reading, writing and counting.

I have argued that aesthetic education is necessary due to its ability to offer, invite and invoke aesthetic experience. Such meaningful experiences, of flow, harmony, beauty, the sublime, wonder, etcetera, are integral to a flourishing life, and, therefore, educators have a responsibility to teach students that they may participate in such experiences and aim for *eudaimonia*. The arts affect everyone; they are an unavoidable part of contemporary society and have always been a part of human society from the earliest days of sharing stories, songs and crafts. This universal claim defends a natural art instinct all human beings have and explains our capacity for aesthetic experiences. While the arts have many roles and effects, they are uniquely created to evoke feelings (of wonder, shock, awe, the sublime and other emotions) and encourage perceivers to adopt various perspectives on an image, idea or concept. The ability to engage with the arts, particularly with high art, avant-garde art, and historical art, in order to glean such experiences is more likely to succeed and be rendered more vibrant and authentic if one has been inducted into them through good quality aesthetic education. The aesthetic experiences that are then available to a person are unlimited. No one should be denied the opportunity to make an informed choice as to whether or not they include the multiple arts in various ways

in their lives, and everyone should be aware that they have the capability for aesthetic experience. The flourishing life includes aesthetic experiences as a source of joy, meaning making and a constructive use of one's imagination and senses. If education does indeed aim at *eudaimonia*, then it is for these reasons that aesthetic education should be compulsory.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Note that the sublime, awe and wonder are closely related concepts that have been used slightly differently by various philosophers and artists over the years. See Genevieve Lloyd (2018) for a useful analysis, and my discussion (D'Olimpio, 2020) where I apply this analysis to art.
- <sup>2</sup> Currently, 55% of the world's population lives in cities, with the United Nations estimating that by the 2050s more than two thirds of us will live in urban rather than in country environments.
- <sup>3</sup> Some more than others. Mass art (such as blockbuster movies from Hollywood or Bollywood) notoriously aims at the largest possible untutored audience as it is accessible and easy to understand usually on first viewing (Carroll, 1998; D'Olimpio, 2018).
- <sup>4</sup> As an example, consider enjoying a thriller (a film or novel or play). The spectator may not find it relaxing or pleasant but still gains enjoyment and an aesthetic experience that results from engaging both intellectually and emotionally with the artwork: its media and content.
- <sup>5</sup> Note that Dickie (1964) and Kemp (1999, p. 393) deny or ignore that the form of attention in question be 'sympathetic'.
- <sup>6</sup> This is not to deny that receivers of artworks will also respond subjectively to artworks and sometimes feel what is not intended by the artist or necessarily depicted in the formal features of the work. I shall set aside the debate about 'ideal' readings of artworks and the 'intentional fallacy' (Wimsatt & Beardsley, 1946) for now.
- <sup>7</sup> Movements such as 'everyday aesthetics' (Saito, 2007, 2015) have emerged from Dewey's (1934) pragmatic conception of the arts and see aesthetic experience as an important extension of ordinary experience.
- <sup>8</sup> Autonomous adults may choose a lifestyle that lacks fulfilment or functioning of some of the central human capabilities and to this extent they may not experience *eudaimonia*. Whether or not a life is deemed to have been flourishing may be determined upon consideration of the whole life lived.
- <sup>9</sup> Elsewhere White (2011, p. 24) defends the arts as offering a universal source of enjoyment and personal fulfilment, and Reiss and White (2013, p. 18) justify the inclusion of good literature on the curriculum for its educational qualities as well as affording everyone an intrinsically valuable activity. I engage in more detail with Reiss and White's arguments in D'Olimpio (2021).

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