

## **Is the Casting of Utilitarian as Discordant with Arts Education Philosophy Justified?<sup>1</sup>**

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### **Introduction**

The term “utilitarian” has a negative connotation in arts education, especially among those who justify the arts’ inclusion in the general curriculum as aesthetic education. Those who support the notion that the arts are valuable in the general curriculum say it is so because of the arts’ connection to aesthetics. Supporters of aesthetic education assert that the arts promote uniquely artistic ideals instead of mere utilitarian goals. That is, the arts are not a handmaiden for the promotion of extra-artistic ends. This particular view of the term *utilitarian* has led to arguments in the field resulting in persistent partisan divisions. One group sees the arts as something distinctive, separate, and worthy of study for its own sake, while another believes the arts ought to be integrated throughout the curriculum or taught as a way to facilitate higher order thinking in another discipline. Is there any hope for reconciliation? There might be. If reconciliation is possible, altering the way in which arts educators generally, and aesthetic educators specifically, understand and use the term *utilitarian* is necessary. To begin the process of reconciliation I first offer a brief conceptual analysis of how the term has been used in arts education discourse. This analysis simultaneously reveals how the casting of the term by many arts educators has limited the scope of discussion about it in the arts.

In the late 1950s arts educators looked to aesthetics to further justify inclusion in the general public school curriculum. The attempt to justify

the arts by emphasizing aesthetics in arts education meant undermining what scholars considered to be the previous theoretical underpinning. *Utilitarian* was the descriptive label of prior arts education justification given by arts educators espousing aesthetic education who sought to justify the arts as part of the general school curriculum on a new footing. The vocabulary used has had a particularly important role in framing the debate around aesthetic education. Scholars such as Elliot Eisner, Maxine Greene, Charles Leonhard, Robert House, Bennett Reimer, and Michael Mark<sup>2</sup> assert that arts education from the mid-twentieth century ought to have an emphasis on developing aesthetic experiences, aesthetic attitudes, and aesthetic responsiveness. They used vocabulary that cast the previous justification as inconsistent with what they saw as the principles and values of the arts. In their discourse on arts education, aesthetic doctrines were bifurcated with utilitarian ones.

Although it may be a false dichotomy, what is more problematic to me is how both terms have been used in the scholarship. In particular, and more important for this article, *utilitarian* is a term that has been disparaged to such an extent that one dare not say it in certain circles, especially among proponents of arts education. Because of the attempt to supplant so-called utilitarian justification with aesthetic education, the former term was looked upon with scorn, and in the field of arts education *utilitarian* is a term that has continued to be spurned. The purpose of this paper is not to give a definition of aesthetic education or identify the ways in which it is understood in arts education.

Instead, in the first part of this paper I elaborate on the ways in which views and explanations of “utilitarian” cloud the discourse of educators. The crux of the problem lies in the ways in which the terms *utilitarian*, *utility*, and *utilitarianism* are described, used, and understood to characterize how arts education has traditionally been justified in public education in the United States. I do not purport to have the definitive and final word on the topic of utilitarian views in relation to arts education, nor do I advance an ironclad definition of what “utilitarian” ought to mean. My task is much simpler. The first aim of this paper is to show how scholars have applied the term utilitarian in such a way that renders it problematic for readers and the field of arts education, and to intimate why it might have been applied this way. Concurrent with and following the overview of the literature is an analysis of the term’s use. Finally, I suggest, very briefly, that there may be hope for recasting the term “utilitarian” in arts education in a new and perhaps unexpected light.

### How Is Utilitarian Used in the Literature?

As applied to education generally, the term “utilitarian” has been explained as having to do with practical matters and social usefulness. There is an emphasis on useful ends determined primarily by an industrialized market-based economy. For example, Herbert Kliebard, writing about education during the progressive era, asserts that

. . . modern foreign languages were more useful than classical ones, and subjects like surveying and navigation needed a place alongside masterpieces of literature and formal grammar. Modest successes were achieved here and there in changing the curriculum along utilitarian lines. In the nineteenth century, the academy, a popular...form of secondary education that included practical subjects, became the dominant form of secondary education in the country.<sup>3</sup>

Not too far removed from the same period of time mentioned in Kliebard’s work, noted music educator Will Earhart lamented that

. . . shall we continue to believe that utilitarian thought and labor, if only spurred more feverishly so as to produce more tonnage, will bring about the millennium it so long has promised? Do we not know that self-interest breeds self-interest, that utilitarianism breeds utilitarianism, even as war breeds war?<sup>4</sup>

Also focusing on the same period of time, the music education philosopher Reimer argues that during the progressive education movement “social and recreational activities became an important part of schooling, as did vocational and utilitarian training.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, music education historian Mark argues in “The Evolution of Music Education Philosophy from Utilitarian to Aesthetic” that “*Basic Concepts* was the philosophical culmination, in the United States at least, of thousands of years of utilitarian philosophy. Several authors discussed music education philosophy in utilitarian terms.”<sup>6</sup> At least since the progressive era the term utilitarian (in both general education and music education) is connected with socially and economically practical interests. It is during this era and later into the century that some in arts education connote the term as anathema to the goals and values of the arts.

Eisner is one prominent example of an arts educator who applies an unfavorable emotive meaning to “utilitarian.” In espousing the aesthetic dimension in arts education, he criticizes the utilitarian perspective as something that causes students to miss out on or not fully understand the aesthetic experience. For him an aesthetic attitude “frees them from the unrelenting demands of practicality.”<sup>7</sup> Gail Burnaford, Arnold Aprill, and Cynthia Weiss also disparage so-called

utilitarian approaches to arts education. Pushing the sentiments of Eisner further, they argue that

... using arts activities, such as graphic organizers or movement activities, no matter how charming or useful, is not the same thing as seriously engaging in the process of art. When a utilitarian approach is taken, the other academic areas are often given short shrift as well. Yes, music uses half notes and quarter notes, but pointing out the existence of fractions in music doesn't make a lesson meaningful math instruction.<sup>8</sup>

The casting of aesthetics in a positive light while applying an unfavorable emotive meaning to "utilitarian" is seen, again, in Mark's work. He speaks of the movement toward aesthetic education, specifically music education as aesthetic education, as something that is liberating arts education from the rigid views of social efficiency experts and administrative progressives. In doing so, Mark claims aesthetic education invited "much deeper introspection" than did the preceding utilitarian justification.<sup>9</sup> In reference to utilitarian notions of education he goes on to assert that "policymakers lost sight of the fact that such skills are simply tools that open the gate to education, they are not an education in themselves."<sup>10</sup>

Leann Logsdon also echoes these sentiments by asserting that utilitarian goals are more extreme than instrumental ones because the discourse among arts advocates "is shifting in an explicitly utilitarian direction, with arts education increasingly placed in the service of realizing material economic goals."<sup>11</sup> I use the term in much the same way.<sup>12</sup>

These are just a few examples that show, in varying degrees, the term utilitarian as having a negative connotation. For these arts educators and scholars the utilitarian is a view that places the arts in a subservient position for the assistance they may provide to extra-artistic and practical human endeavors. These endeavors range from purporting to help students improve in mathematics to developing productive citizens.<sup>13</sup> Simply put, the utilitarian is incompatible with what arts advocates say the arts are supposed to teach; at best it assumes the arts only have instrumental value. Philosophically speaking, these scholars appear to have imposed their reaction to the term for the purpose of eliciting an emotional appeal, which has resulted in a view of utilitarian that deviates from a mere description.

### **Why Has Utilitarian Been Used This Way?**

The emotive meaning applied by arts educators to the term is important because this unfavorable connotation of its meaning, as argued by Wittgenstein in his later work *Philosophical Investigations*, has come

about through its use, its ostensive definition.<sup>14</sup> Arts educators have made attempts to demonstrate the meaning of utility by coupling it with extra-artistic and practical endeavors. These ostensive descriptions are problematic in two ways. First, *utilitarian* is an abstract term, so trying to show what it means is difficult. Second, as has been shown, its use in the literature limits its application, a problem inherent with ostensive definitions. These problems have resulted in an understanding among arts educators that is troublesome. It is because of the term's ostensive definition in the literature that understanding is restricted. Connotation and ostensive definition are key determinants in the narrow conception of *utilitarian* among arts educators.

Arts educators use *utilitarian* in such a way that correlates it to a view that supporters of aesthetic education see as taking place in, through, and to arts education. That is, opponents who argue against a utilitarian framework in the arts are concerned that outside entities are thrusting upon arts education notions of art and its place in schools that, to the former group, are problematic. The view of groups outside of arts education determining the role and status of the arts in the schools is criticized because, according to those espousing aesthetic education, it is imposed by those who do not fully understand the nature of the arts. To me, it is really a question of power. Regardless, the response by arts educators to the external influence is bound up in the use of the term *utilitarian*.

One example of an ostensive definition is given by Burnaford, Aprill, and Weiss. For them the meaning of utilitarian is shown by suggesting that "music uses half notes and quarter notes, but pointing out the existence of fractions in music doesn't make a lesson meaningful math instruction."<sup>15</sup> The term's connotation is seen in the work of Logsdon who asserts the field is moving "in an explicitly utilitarian direction, with arts education increasingly placed in the service of realizing material economic goals."<sup>16</sup> These arts educators are obsessed with the practical and the extra-artistic aspects of the term. This negative connotation of utilitarian has contributed to a view that the autonomy of the arts is limited and the agency of arts educators is undermined.<sup>17</sup> A consequence of this is that arts educators understand the term only as it is used in the arts education literature, and other ways of understanding the term are obscured. As such, its use is reinforced by confirmation biases, perpetuating the same unfavorable emotive reaction. The conscious, and recurring subconscious, uses of the word are viewed as an affront to the arts.

The tone with which proponents of arts education disparage utilitarian claims and distance themselves from the idea that the arts must have practical and immediate social functions is unfortunate. It is unfortunate because it unnecessarily limits the possibilities of how the word

*utilitarian* can be mentioned, used, and understood in arts education discourse. In other words, by framing the term the way arts educators have, these scholars have boxed it in so that it can be understood only condescendingly.

The way in which the aforementioned scholars' vocabulary and tone are used to describe utilitarian leaves little wonder as to why arts education advocates continue to cast it as discordant with arts education. But how did this negative view emerge? Is it possible to recast it? How might arts educators be more precise in the language they use? Why is *utilitarian* associated only with the practical and useful in arts education discourse?

In the spirit of the later Wittgenstein, the role of this conceptual and philosophical analysis is to dispel confusion.<sup>18</sup> In order to dispel confusion regarding the application of the terms *utility*, *utilitarian*, and *utilitarianism* by some scholars in arts education, at the very least I propose arts educators use more precise language or thoroughly and explicitly explain what is meant when using problematic terms. Therefore, instead of using *utilitarian*, the more appropriate terms, *useful*, *extra-artistic*, *practical* or *instrumental* should be used for describing what arts educators lament.<sup>19</sup> Veering away from the more problematic term of utility requires some awareness of the etymology of the word.

### **How Has Utilitarian Been Used outside of Arts Education?**

Negative views among arts educators regarding the term utilitarian are in part linked with its etymology and context. The Latin term *utilitas* roughly translates to "usefulness." Although I am not clear how broadly the term was applied in the ancient world beyond the famous phrase "*Utilitas, Venustas, Firmitas*" of the Roman architect Vitruvius, it is clear that from very early on it was linked with use.<sup>20</sup> The specific kind of use is not apparent. In the eighteenth century utility becomes associated with ethics through the writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Mill, however, was also a classical economist, and it is clear that his ethical theory was associated with his economic thinking. According to John Cassidy, even for a free-market thinker such as Mill there was also a moral component to economics, and governments needed to intervene from time to time for the benefit of the public.<sup>21</sup> Focusing just on economics, utility is seen as the satisfaction or benefit consumers get from a good or service, which is judged by the preferences of consumers. Here, again, we see utility's attachment to use, but now there is also an association with tastes. It is these tastes and preferences that are important in the development of Mill's ethical theory of utilitarianism.

It is through Mill's development of Bentham's notions of *utilitarian* ethical theory in the nineteenth century that utilitarian is revised and popularized. Bentham's original work, and Mill's revision of it, becomes the basis of an important development in ethical theory. Mill calls it "the Utilitarian or Happiness theory."<sup>22</sup> Mill addresses his critics in chapter two by noting that in his time the term has been "misapplied...in disparagement, but occasionally in compliment."<sup>23</sup> Bentham and Mill were similar to other British reformers of the time in that their intent was to improve society. For them, improvement was to be generated by providing a guide for crafting legal and social reforms with the goal of maximizing human happiness and pleasure. Bentham's and Mill's argument (classical utilitarianism) is that laws and actions that promote happiness and pleasure are good whereas those that cause pain are not. Critics of Bentham's work were uncomfortable with the hedonism it appeared to promote, even labeling it "swine morality." Mill addresses these concerns and revises some of Bentham's views by arguing some pleasures are of a higher order. For example, intellectual pleasures were considered better than sensual pleasures. The point of all this is to say that there is another view of the term, and it is to promote happiness.

For me, the shift in the use of the term is what is both promising and problematic for arts education. Few arts educators, if any, explicitly recognize the connection between utility and ethics. One possible exception is again, Logsdon. She uses an element of the ethical theory in her analysis of the work of Mary Ann Stankiewicz, Patricia Amburgy, and Paul Bolin on mid-nineteenth century art education while using the term interchangeably with what is practical. Logsdon asserts, "drawing instruction was viewed as a means to an economic end, [so] the policy philosophically shares more with the 'greater good' thesis espoused by utilitarians than with pragmatism's notion of an individual's considered inquiry into an array of potential life consequences."<sup>24</sup> While she acknowledges the utilitarian idea of "the greatest good for the greatest number," it is not clear whether she understands the connection between the ethical theory in its fullness. That is, has she taken a reductionist view and, thereby, conflated utilitarian ethical theory with economic usefulness? If this is the case, she is surely not alone, and, etymologically and contextually speaking, it is plain to see how arts educators conflate the two. This is where the term is problematic.

In the middle of the nineteenth century when utilitarian ethical theory was being actively promoted by Mill, the term simultaneously retained its connection to practicality and usefulness. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, W. S. Coleman in *Our Woodlands* (1859) writes "turning from the picturesque or romantic, to the utilitarian

view of this tree.”<sup>25</sup> An earlier use and one closer to the connection to economic ends comes from a September 3, 1839, copy of the *Morning Herald*: “The cold ‘philosophy’ of a money-getting utilitarian age.”<sup>26</sup> Lastly is an example from 1862 that supposedly links Mill’s philosophy with practical ends. B. Brodie in *Psychological Inquiry* writes of “the mere utilitarian philosopher, having his views limited to some immediate practical result.”<sup>27</sup> Bentham and Mill were, after all, British reformers who wanted to bring about improvement to society, and no doubt part of how they thought that might happen was rooted in the practical and useful. But to only associate utilitarian with the practical and useful, especially in economic terms, while also stating that the “utilitarian philosopher” limits himself to “immediate practical result” misses the mark of classical utilitarianism.<sup>28</sup> For now, the immediate question is why did this view of utilitarian philosophy emerge?

The answer to the question of the utilitarian link with practical economic ends comes in two parts. The first has to do with the nature of the period in which these nineteenth century and early twentieth century scholars are writing. In the industrializing market-based North Atlantic world there was and still is a close association among social progress, economic prosperity, and pleasure. Historically the connection with economic prosperity has its roots perhaps more in myth than reality, but because of its pervasiveness in contemporary political discourse it is compelling nonetheless. Horatio Alger, Jr.’s first rags to riches book, *Ragged Dick*, was published in 1867, merely four years after Mill’s work titled *Utilitarianism*. One very recent example is the 2006 movie *The Pursuit of Happiness*, which was inspired by a true story. The actor Will Smith portrays Chris Gardner, a struggling San Francisco salesman. By the end of the movie the hero saves himself and his son from poverty and despair by persisting and working hard to build a lucrative career on Wall Street. Beyond the obvious myth about hard work, the underlying message in both of these examples is that money brings about the good life and happiness.

The second part of the answer to the question of why did the economic usefulness view of utilitarian philosophy emerge comes from Mill himself. He was, after all, a figure who embraced classical economic theory. More fittingly and in regard to utilitarian ethical theory, sometimes called consequentialism, Mill posits that “whatever can be proved to be good, must be shown to be a means to something admitted to be good without proof.”<sup>29</sup> The end good is pleasure. Mill argues that:

Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure,

and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.<sup>30</sup>

He continues,

... according to the Greatest Happiness Principle...the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality.<sup>31</sup>

Mill drives his point home again by arguing that “the utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end.”<sup>32</sup> But how do we determine whether particular means lead to happiness? The answer to this question is where the trouble sets in for the classical utilitarian view and where a link has been implied between economic usefulness and this ethical theory. The so-called utilitarian calculus is the method for determining the consequences of our actions. The units of measurement are hedons (positive units) and dolors (negative units). Hedons and dolors are measured in relation to their duration, fruitfulness, intensity, and likelihood.<sup>33</sup> The utilitarian calculus is clearly a challenge to wrestle with especially when one takes into consideration all the variables involved—a major drawback for utilitarianism. What I want to draw attention to, however, is how the utilitarian calculus is likely to have influenced how the utilitarian is used in common parlance. Due to the ethical theory’s roots in improving society and providing a method for doing so it is naturally latched onto for its concreteness. In other words, the utilitarian calculus, for better or worse, is an effective tool for concrete evaluation. The process of evaluating a consequence in ethical theory is akin to the cost-benefit analysis of computing profit in business. Therefore, it is a relatively simple task to apply utilitarian ethical principles to measuring all sorts of possible ends. Furthermore, money provides a concrete yardstick for measurement, and utilitarian calculus also adds fuel to the argument that utilitarianism is concerned with practical ends.

It is important to note, however, that it has not come to my attention where Mill intends for the connection between money and happiness to be necessitous. I read Mill as saying that money could bring about happiness, but it is only one of any number of means. It seems to me that in our society it has become the most important mean and consequence. I also read Mill as someone who was really concerned with the well being of society as a whole. Although Mill does not list specific means that are justified in pursuing the end of happiness, he does write about what we

generally ought to take into consideration in the pursuit of happiness. He argues that the utilitarian standard “is not the agent’s own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether...Utilitarianism, therefore, could only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character.”<sup>34</sup> He continues by asserting that the “spirit of the ethics of utility [is] to do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>35</sup> For him, this idea is “the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality.”<sup>36</sup> The principles behind Mill’s utilitarianism are much more noble aims than those who seek solely material gain. The label of cold practical utilitarian calculation is incongruent with what Mill asserts is the spirit of utilitarianism. Where does this leave us in relation to the arts and art education?

Whether or not there was/is a conscious divorcing of utilitarian from its connection to ethics, the current use of the term has corrupted our understanding of utilitarianism. What arts educators lament is seen in their discourse. Their descriptions and interpretations of the utilitarian in common parlance ultimately shows arts educator’s displeasure with the commodification of the arts. What I suggest, however, is that arts educators alter the justification discussion, and add a dimension to its current bifurcated structure. Show the commodification of the arts for what it is. In other words, instead of trying to drum up support for the arts by playing the game set up and controlled by neoliberal logic, alter it to show the hidden values within this logic. Instead of asserting either that exposure to Mozart leads to higher IQ scores<sup>37</sup> or that arts funding should continue based on the rationale that the arts opens up ways of uniquely seeing the world not accessible in other subjects (the view of the aesthete and some postmodern thinkers<sup>38</sup>), arts educators should question this dichotomy. Against the current mentality of neoliberalism and art education’s preoccupation with aesthetics, arts educators can take this opportunity to shift the discussion of justification from one about practicality and aesthetic uniqueness to one where axiology plays a lead role.

### **What Are the Problems and Possibilities of Rethinking Utilitarian?**

The idea of examining the relationship between the arts and ethics is not new. Combining utilitarian ethics with arts education is, however, an area where more work can be undertaken. The lack of research regarding utilitarian ethics and arts education is due in part to what was argued above in earlier sections of this paper. *Utilitarian* is a term that has been unnecessarily limited in arts education scholarship. Moving away from the current limited view of *utilitarian* can open up new dimensions

for research. Many questions emerge at this point. For example, is it truly possible to link the arts and ethics? What avenues of philosophical analysis emerge to shed light on the possibility of intertwining the two? What are the objections and obstacles to establishing a philosophy based on utilitarianism in arts education? Is utilitarianism a worthy ethical philosophy for arts education? What might arts education incorporating elements of utilitarianism look like?

Arts and ethics have been related at least as far back as the Greeks, and this association extends to the present in works by such writers as Maxine Greene and Noël Carroll.<sup>39</sup> Both Plato and Aristotle commented on the value of the arts in relation to morality. Curiously enough Mark draws from this ancient connection and labels it “utilitarian” along the lines of mere usefulness.<sup>40</sup> That is, he conflates utilitarian with the practical, so music is a means for developing citizens of more noble character. He does not however, thoroughly probe the component of ethical theory that was the basis of these ancients’ analysis. Aristotle’s virtue ethics, for example, is a topic left unexplored in arts education scholarship. The association made by Mark and other scholars regarding the arts and morals is mainly alluded to in a very broad sense. Ideas are mentioned, but labels are rarely applied. Perhaps this is an accidental oversight. It does, however, leave open to question the extent to which arts education scholars mean to examine ethical connections in any other way than as a way to critique the big ideas against a backdrop of their perception of endeavors that are viewed as extra-artistic.

In modern times Kant and Schiller connect aesthetic education with ethics. For Kant and Schiller “aesthetics and ethics are intertwined.”<sup>41</sup> It is with these modern thinkers that boundaries between ethics and aesthetics begin to be thoroughly probed. Their work in the area of axiology is a good starting point for establishing how one might go about making like connections using a more robust utilitarianism. While their arguments on ethics are deontological, not consequentialist, it is their insight into the problems of seeing a connection between art and ethics that could be helpful in further research. For the purpose of the later sections of this paper a possible path for reconciliation brings us back to the progressive era, which is where criticisms of utilitarian by arts educators come to the fore.

Dewey’s ideas offer hope at reconciling some of the differences between art and ethics. For Dewey, experience is central. And it is in this experience that the artist and percipient are linked in an integrated whole which includes numerous dimensions, of which two are the ethical and the aesthetic. Dewey’s experience is an active unified process of “doing and undergoing,” which combines “outgoing and incoming

energy” where there is “perception organically, sensory satisfaction, external embodiment, and dynamic organization.”<sup>42</sup> According to Dewey, the “moral function of art itself is to remove prejudice, do away with the scales that keep the eye from seeing, tear away the veils due to wont and custom, perfect the power to perceive.”<sup>43</sup> It is this connection between art and morality that is bound up in the perceptual experience. In this type of experience the arts are a way of seeing that is akin to top-down perception.<sup>44</sup> It is through this kind of top-down recognition that the participant in the arts can begin to actively bring to the fore possible connections between seeing how we look at and understand morals and how we see art in particular contexts. The more varied associations one can make, the greater the potential to go beyond what we expect to see to seeing something else that might have been previously overlooked. A participant in the arts may be able to see something that could be missed by a non-participant. Consider the painting *The Forest Has Eyes* by Bev Doolittle, for example. I am not suggesting that seeing the hidden faces in this painting brings about a heightened degree of morality in the percipient. What I am suggesting is that it is through the arts that an additional kind of perceptual experience opens up new and different experiences to the percipient that someone not involved in the arts may not be able to incorporate in their top-down processing. This additionally perceptual dimension may in turn lead to a more comprehensive understanding of morality and art. Along this line of thought, Dewey points to the importance of reconciling art and ethics in his description of an active and cultivated sense of appreciation.<sup>45</sup> Development of this active and cultivated sense is “the chief matter wherever values enter in, whether intellectual, esthetic or moral.”<sup>46</sup> He goes on to assert that “what is esthetically admirable, intellectually acceptable and morally approvable is the supreme task set to human beings by the incidents of experience.”<sup>47</sup> For Dewey, “in life that is truly life, everything overlaps and merges.”<sup>48</sup> Art is not in the service of morality, nor is morality indebted to art. So, while Dewey gives art a moral function, he does not limit art to this. Instead, I read Dewey as someone who sees aesthetics and ethics contributing to an integrated whole. It is an experience as part of an integrated whole that holds much promise for reconciling arts education and utilitarianism.

Dewey asserts that “consequences issue from every experience, and they are the source of our interest in what is present.”<sup>49</sup> In a similar vein, Dewey states that “mind is capacity to refer present conditions to future results, and future consequences to present conditions.”<sup>50</sup> A Deweyan experience that takes into account consequences is also capable of bringing together individual preferences. What we should be asking is how

we can engender these types of experiences, in their pluralistic richness, in schools. What I am asserting here is that Dewey does not ask us to ignore Mill. That is, the experientialist view and the consequentialist perspective possess a degree of complementarity in an integrated whole. There are points of compatibility in the two views. Critics, however, may disagree with the claim that Deweyan notions of an experience can be used to support consequentialist ethical thought. How can it be that arts education has as its consequence happiness while simultaneously being concerned with the means to any number of possible ends, they may say. Much more needs to be systematically worked out on this idea, but before the inevitable criticism arrives, it might be helpful to ruminate on this proposal that is a prompt for consideration as a way out of the current impasse. That is, Dewey's ideas on the educative experience can, in some cases, be compatible with consequentialism. It is clear that, for Dewey, the means matter, but he moves beyond this take by suggesting the ends matter too. He writes "since we do not anticipate results as mere intellectual onlookers, but as persons concerned in the outcome, we are partakers in the process which produces the result. We intervene to bring about this result or that."<sup>51</sup> Means and ends are important in arts education, and means need not necessarily be limited to the immediately practical.

From my perspective, the hope for advancing arts education discourse incorporating elements of utilitarianism is to synthesize aspects of Deweyan experientialism with it. Pure utilitarianism as a lone framework for arts education, however, is problematic. Accounting for each and every hedon and dolor associated with the production of a school play, let alone doing this on a national scale, would be unwieldy. Utilitarianism also has the problem of trying to overcome the fact that some unsavory means can be justified as long as the end is achieved. Yet it is hard to imagine schools without formal instruction in the arts not having an effect on the happiness and wellbeing of many. One could make the argument that removing arts from the schools might result in greater happiness for society as a whole, but proving it would be as difficult as its opposite. Undoubtedly the former argument should rely on some material economic concerns, but reliance on such statements would not genuinely be in the spirit of Mill. Neither would it be in the spirit of humanity, which has been participating in experiences with art since prehistory.

What arts educators have chafed at is what they interpret as the overly rational elements of utilitarianism which, to them, drown out the emotional aspects of life, key components of artistic creation and perception. What is missed, however, is that the utilitarian view is not coldly rational. It is very much inspired by one of approximately five or

six basic emotions of humans, happiness. What I am suggesting, then, is that broad experiences that include the arts and ethics, where happiness is a result, are central to learning in the arts. This is not to say that happiness is the only worthy emotion in the arts but, thinking more broadly, if students have the opportunity to explore the arts and to come into contact with a range of human emotions, the consequence of these experiences is an “active and cultivated” pleasure. Furthermore, artistic experiences, both in the perceiving and the creating, can also induce a state of “flow” as proposed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. For him, happiness is achieved when someone is completely absorbed in a particular activity that is both challenging and requires a degree of skill.<sup>52</sup> In this way happiness is both central and important in the short term as a component part in an arts experience while simultaneously existing as an extra-artistic end for a democratic society as well as a worthy part of the artistic experience in the long run. Union of an educative experience and the arts, where happiness is both means and an end of learning and is also ethically desirable, is possible.

Utilitarianism in the arts class is not having students paint pictures of the country’s flag in order to instill a sense of pride in the nation-state. First, this is an idea foisted on the student from the teacher, and, second, it is a leap to think that nationalism necessarily promotes happiness. Finally, this narrow conception of utilitarian is one that advances the view the arts are in the service of a socially practical goal such as patriotism. Furthermore, the tastes and preferences of the students are extremely restricted, and it is difficult to find how questions about morality can be worked through with a project such as this. A better example of incorporating utilitarian ethical ideas in the arts curriculum, and specific to secondary education, might be beginning the year with allowing students in the drama class, better yet the school, to create a production of their own making, perhaps one that wrestles with notions of happiness and morality. The students would have the responsibilities of writing the screenplay (and doing the research that comes along with developing the topic, creating characters, and advancing a storyline, etc.), casting, set design and construction, directing, managing, and promoting. While there is not a guarantee that happiness, the common good, or determining right from wrong for all participants involved in this experience is the consequence, it might be possible to reflect on what constitutes happiness over the course of the project and at its termination. Happiness and flow surveys that currently exist could be modified for the students participating in the project as well as for those who attend the performance. Tastes and preferences could be qualitatively discussed, as well as attempts made to employ utilitarian calculus to

measure the intensity, duration, and generative qualities of the happiness. Regardless, we ought to keep in mind that happiness has an influence on each of us. David Meyers cites research to this effect that establishes the importance of happiness to our existence. He references “The Influence of Positive Affect on Decision-Making Strategies” by Alice Isen and Barbara Means, who argue that “people who are happy...make decisions more easily,” and in “Mood, Misattribution, and Judgments of Well-Being: Informative and Directive Functions of Affective States,” Norbert Schwarz and Gerald Clore show that those who are happy “report greater satisfaction with their whole lives.”<sup>53</sup> While it may be difficult to go so far as Mill by asserting happiness is the only intrinsic good, working toward happiness and wellbeing is a worthy goal.

### Conclusion

If an ethical theory such as utilitarianism/consequentialism is to have any promise in arts education, many problems and questions must be overcome and answered using sound reasoning and systematic analysis. While this is not a task for arts advocates to take on lightly, it has the potential to generate meaningful dialogue. In addition to using classical utilitarianism as a basis for evaluation and analysis, the consequentialist work of G. E. Moore, for example, may extend the conversation even further. In any case, it is high time to move the justification conversation in the arts from its dichotomous discussion between practicality and aesthetics to one that includes an ethical dimension using a specific model. There is a need to break free from the postmodern aestheticist thought about the arts where art is set apart as a unique domain unto itself. Finally, are arts educators justified in casting utilitarian as discordant with the arts? Perhaps, but maybe in only one use of the term. More to the point, arts educators are responsible for framing the conversation about utility in such a manner that it unnecessarily limits potential conversations such as the relation of the arts and ethics. I hope the views presented here begin to alter the current view of the term utilitarian and reveal possible new directions in research and understanding.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is a version of my paper that was part of a panel discussion at the Southeast Philosophy of Education Society, Birmingham, AL, February 10-11, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> See Charles Leonhard and Robert House, *Foundations and Principles of Music Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1959); Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970);

Elliott W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (New York: Macmillan, 1979); Michael Mark, "A Historical Interpretation of Aesthetic Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 33(4), Winter 1999, 7-15; and Maxine Greene, *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Herbart M. Kliebard, "What Happened to American Schooling in the First Part of the Twentieth Century?" in *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing: Part II of the 84th Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education* (Chicago: the National Society for the Study of Education, 1985), 1-22, 4.

<sup>4</sup> Will Earhart, "Fundamentals in Music Values," in *Journal of Proceedings of the Music Supervisors National Conference, Twentieth Year*, ed. Paul J. Weaver (Privately printed, 1927), 35-39, 37.

<sup>5</sup> Bennett Reimer, *A Philosophy of Music Education* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), 7.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Mark, "The Evolution of Music Education Philosophy from Utilitarian to Aesthetic," *Journal of Research in Music Education*, 30(1), Spring 1982, 15-21, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Elliot Eisner, "What Do Children Learn When They Paint," in *Reimagining Schools: The Selected Work of Elliot Eisner* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 60-67, 66.

<sup>8</sup> Gail Burnaford, Arnold Aprill, and Cynthia Weiss, eds. "Arts Integration: What Is It and Why Do It?" in *Renaissance in the Classroom: Arts Integration and Meaningful Learning* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1-21, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Michael Mark, "Historical Interpretation," 9.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Leann Logsdon, "Re-imagining Arts-centered Inquiry as Pragmatic Instrumentalism" (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 2011), 34. Logsdon argues that Lois Hetland conflates instrumentalism and utilitarianism. I agree. I also think that many people use the two terms synonymously.

<sup>12</sup> Jeremy Kopkas, "Soundings: Musical Aesthetics in Music Education Discourse from 1907 to 1958" (Ph.D. diss., Georgia State University, 2011), *passim*.

<sup>13</sup> In her testimony before a congressional subcommittee, June M. Hinckley, a former president of the MENC, the National Association for Music Education, stated that "we have a growing body of research that tells us that these experiences of making music and playing music stimulates more than just their musical talent, it stimulates their intellect as well. Dr. Francis Rauscher and Gordon Shaw at the University of California at Irvine, have done a variety of studies that show the impact of making music in an organized, concrete, sequential learning manner, and the impact on spatial, temporal learning ability which relates to math skills." Congress, House of Representatives, Committee on Education and the Workforce, *Elementary and Secondary Education Act—Educating Diverse Populations: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families*, 106<sup>th</sup> Cong., 1<sup>st</sup> sess., 15 July 1999. Edward Bailey Birge, whose work is widely quoted in music education literature, asserted that music education is necessary for, and related to, democracy in the United States: its public sanction being given in Boston in 1838, and, according to him, music is able to sustain

a democratic society because “through vocal music you set in motion a mighty power which silently, but surely, in the end, will harmonize, refine, and elevate a whole community.” The idea of music becoming part of the school day was discussed by the Boston School Committee in 1838. Edward Bailey Birge, *History of Public School Music in the United States* (New York: Oliver Ditson Co. 1928; reprint Washinton D.C.: Music Educators National Conference, 1966), 47.

<sup>14</sup> Kenny, Anthony, ed., *The Wittgenstein Reader* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 55. The examples given by Wittgenstein are concrete terms because more abstract terms like utility reveal the problems that ostensive, or demonstrable, definitions have.

<sup>15</sup> Burnaford, Aprill, and Weiss, *Renaissance in the Classroom*, 16.

<sup>16</sup> Logsdon, “Re-imagining Arts-centered Inquiry,” 34

<sup>17</sup> In the case of music education this argument is given by Michael Mark in Michael Mark, “Historical Interpretation,” 7-15.

<sup>18</sup> “Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it.” Kenny, *The Wittgenstein Reader*, 269.

<sup>19</sup> Regarding the term instrumental there is also a potential problem, which is identified by John Dewey in *Art as Experience*. In arts education literature instrumental may be applied in the narrow sense, which aligns with how utilitarian is understood, and in broad sense. Dewey explains the narrow sense as “the process of contributing to some narrow, if not base, office of efficacy.” In the broad sense the instrumental carries with it the idea that continual contemplation of a work of art is a process of renewal and “re-education of vision.” At the risk of becoming mired in an identical problem it is simply enough to understand that if the term instrumental is adopted by music educators’ their use of it in these instances would be in the limited sense rather than the broad idea proposed by John Dewey. John Dewey, *Art as Experience* (New York: The Berkley Publishing Group, 1934/2005), 145.

<sup>20</sup> This Latin phrase roughly translates architecturally to function, beauty, and structure.

<sup>21</sup> John Cassidy, *How Markets Fail: The Logic of Economic Calamities* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009), 34.

<sup>22</sup> John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism and On Liberty: Including Mill’s ‘Essay on Bentham’ and Selections from the Writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Austin*, 2d ed. ed. Mary Warnock (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing 1861/2003), 183.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* In the second chapter he addresses a number of misinterpretations of the term. In one spot he means that it was disparaged because of the contemporary view by religious leaders and other scholars that it was a hedonistic philosophy, but this is not always the case.

<sup>24</sup> Logsdon, “Re-imagining Arts-centered Inquiry,” 2011.

<sup>25</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, electronic edition, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> I disagree with Brodie’s assessment of utilitarianism but it is not the point here to delve into why. My views as to why Brodie is off the mark emerge later in the article.

<sup>29</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 184.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

<sup>33</sup> For a decent explanation of each of these ideas see Barbara MacKinnon, *Ethics: Theory and Contemporary Issues*, 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 189-190.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Francis Rauscher, Gordon Shaw, and Katherine Ky, "Music and Spatial Task Performance," *Nature*, 365 (October 1993): 611. This is the study June Hinckley cited in her testimony before the Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Youth and Families *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> From the perspective of the aesthete Monroe Beardsley asserts that the arts are a so-called "function class." That is, "there is something that aesthetic objects can do that other things cannot do, or do as completely or fully." Monroe Beardsley, *Aesthetics: Problems in the Philosophy of Criticism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1958), 526. Regarding the postmodern viewpoint, Fredric Jameson summarizes some of Antoine Compagnon's *Les Cinq Paradoxes de la Modernité* (Paris, 1990) by stating that "mass culture (let us say, pop art) amounts simply to the coming to consciousness and awakening of a profoundly inauthentic art to its own deep complicity with the market system as such and to the commodity form... the post modern has thus for Compagnon and others at least one imaginably positive function: to cleanse the modern tradition of its anti- or trans-aesthetic motives, to purify it of whatever was prototypical or historical, or even collective, in it, to return artistic production to the disinterested aesthetic activity that a certain bourgeois tradition (but not that of the artists themselves) always attributed to it." Fredric Jameson, *The Cultural Turn: Selected Writings on the Postmodern, 1983-1998* (New York: Verso, 1998), 118, 120.

<sup>39</sup> See Maxine Greene, *Variations on a Blue Guitar: The Lincoln Center Institute Lectures on Aesthetic Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001). Greene also founded The Maxine Greene Center for Aesthetic Education, the purpose of which is "to generate inquiry, imagination, and the creation of art works by diverse people. It has to do so with a sense of the deficiencies in our world and a desire to repair, wherever possible. Justice, equality, freedom—these are as important to us as the arts, and we believe they can infuse each other, perhaps making some difference at a troubled time." Maxine Greene, <http://www.maxinegreene.org/index.html>. Carroll addresses some of the challenges of linking art and aesthetics in Noël Carroll, "Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research," *Ethics* 110, no. 2 (January 2000): 350-387. See also Noël Carroll, "At the Crossroads of Ethics and Aesthetics," *Philosophy and Literature*, 34(1), April 2010, 248-259.

<sup>40</sup> Michael Mark, "The Evolution of Music Education Philosophy from Utilitarian to Aesthetic," 15-21.

<sup>41</sup> Zvi Tauber, "Aesthetic Education for Morality: Schiller and Kant." *Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 40(3), Fall 2006, 22-47, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 50-53, 57.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>44</sup> Psychology's notion of top-down perception is the cognitive processes involved in sorting out the physiological stimulus (bottom-up) from our environment which relies on memory, expectation, and thought.

<sup>45</sup> Jo Ann Boydson, ed., *John Dewey The Later Works, 1925-1953*, vol. 4: 1929, *The Quest for Certainty: A Study of the Relation of Knowledge and Action*, by John Dewey, with an introduction by Stephen Toulmin (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press 1929/1988), 209.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> Boydson, *John Dewey The Later Works*, 203.

<sup>50</sup> John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916/1997), 103.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>52</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1990), and *Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement With Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> Alice Isen and Barbara Means, "The Influence of Positive Affect on Decision Making Strategy," *Social Cognition*, 2(1), March 1983, 18-31; referenced in David G. Meyers, *Psychology*, 5th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 1998), 406, and Norbert Schwarz and Gerald Clore "Mood, Misattribution, and Judgments of Well-Being: Informative and Directive Functions of Affective States," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 45(3), September 1983, 513-523; referenced in Meyers, *Psychology*, 406.

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