

Aesthetics and Education: A Perspective Essay

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Abstract: This essay purposes to convey the aesthetical premises of Educational praxis. It elucidates Platonian and Aristotelian criteria for determining beauty and harmony. It also explains how beauty acts as the foundation of Education by appealing to Educational aspects like curriculum, delivery methods, learning environment and grooming. A crucial fact laid out is that beauty is formal, informal and non-formal, and as such, it pervades all spheres and forms of Education.

I. DEFINITION OF AESTHETICS

The term Aesthetics is derived from the Greek word *Aisthanesthai* (transliterated), which means to perceive. It points to the harmonious relationships that human senses (visual, tactile, olfactory, taste and auditory) build when they grasp nature or art. It is the sum of feelings aroused by the sensual experiences, the character of the experience of the things themselves and the subjective judgment of *desirability* related to perceiving physical entities or actions. Desirability condition of aesthetics is pegged on empiricism, and being such, it can be re-defined as the Philosophical study of beauty.

II. CRITERIA FOR BEAUTY

In daily experiences, humans affirm or deny that an object X of their perception is beautiful otherwise. The question is, which criteria do they use? Are these criteria objective or subjective? Plato and Aristotle attempted some answers to the foregoing questions.

I. Platonian threefold criterion

Plato posits a tripartite criterion for beauty, namely; Proportion, Harmony and Unity:

Mathematical proportionality as a determinant of Beauty: What is beautiful is thus mathematically proportional in its constituent elements. The more significant the difference in ratios the uglier an entity, the smaller the ratio equivalence the more beautiful an entity. Consider, for instance, the rational differences between the head and the general body of a person; Anatomists have what they mathematically consider as a normal head side to body ratio outside of which they would attribute abnormality. If let us say they consider the ration to be $x: y$ (head to trunk taken as an example), the geometric progression of the ratio like $2x: 2y$ would be admissible while non-geometric progression like $x: 7y$ would be considered as ugly. While designing structures, architects and Engineers use much mathematical proportionality to bring out the beauty in building design as in the case of the relationship between length and width, length and height, and width and height. *Disproportionality* is therefore is an

indicator of ugliness will *proportionality* is an indicator of beauty.

Harmony as a determinant of beauty: In regards to harmony, the different parts of an entity must necessarily function together for that entity to be perceived as beautiful. The Platonian concept of harmony is based on co-functionality of the parts in a whole. Co-functional parts are parts that cannot work in isolation. As such they are ordered in such a way that their elements cohere with the elements of other parts. An engine moves because the wheel and the axle fit into each other; the wheel provides space (container) for the axle; the axle fills the wheel (as is the case in the content). The oscillations between the container and the content can only work well if both the container (wheel) and the content (axle) are made up of common material otherwise, the possibility of collapse is rife. A beautiful song is one in with there is harmony, in which different voices synchronize to produce a choir. A complete has four dominant voices: Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Base. These voices can only produce a choir because they share an ordered co-functionality, that of vibration of vocal cords ('*vocality*'). If one of them does not produce a vibration, then the choir may be termed as incomplete or lacking in harmony.

Unity as a determinant of beauty: While the concept of unity sounds concomitant with that of harmony, it is different. The concept of unity is more ontological and existential than functional. Ontology posits three transcendental properties of **being** namely **truth**, **goodness** and **unity**. Unity infers the existential oneness of a being characterized by 'integratedness' already inherent in every entity. It can, therefore, be deduced that every reality is beautiful by the simple virtue of being a Being, because Being is one and indivisible. The simpler and singular a being is, the more beautiful it is. The simplest and the most singular being (also known as God) is thus the most beautiful of all entity, and all that proceeds from this being are thus by default beautiful even before extraneous manipulations.

II. Aristotelian conception of beauty

Like Plato, Aristotle propounds a tripartite criterion for evaluating beauty. These are Order, Symmetry and 'Determinateness'. Each of them is briefly expounded.

Order as a premise of Beauty: Order of things that exist according to Aristotle's *supreme genera* includes quantity, quality, place, time relation, condition, action, receptivity, position and substance. The supreme genera in which Aristotle ordered reality is a significant criterion for determining what is beautiful because everything beautiful

should be placed or conceived to be placed in its correct category. In this case, confusing time with space, or a thing X being located in a wrong place or acting at a wrong time, constitute ugliness. Beauty constitutes that which is in its right place and being present there at the right time with the right condition, performing the correct action proper to its nature.

Symmetry as a premise of Beauty: Aristotle envisions two aspects of symmetry as a foundation of Beauty: The mathematical symmetry and the ontological symmetry. From mathematical perspective, Aristotle considers the circle to be the perfect form; the heavenly bodies must, therefore, all orbit the earth in perfect, circular uniform motion. The symmetry of circularity is determined by the equivalence of the semicircles which must of necessity be equal or appear to be equal to each other. The central line or diameter in an Aristotelian circle is, therefore, a determinant factor in beauty. Further, the beauty of a circle is based on its continuity. It has neither beginning nor end. The infiniteness of circle explains the infiniteness of beauty and goodness. From an ontological perspective, Act and Potency determine the beauty of an entity, in that, the being-ness of any entity is a circularity between transitions from act to potency and from potency to act.

Determinateness as Premise of Beauty: The concept of determinateness as a criterion of aesthetics is premised on the nature of the relation between Genus and Species. Genus and differentia are best viewed in terms of determinable and determinate, yet a determinate is neither conjunction of its determinable. Neither is it something else distinct from its determinable. The beauty of an entity is thus the associative relation between the Genus and the species of entities which are commutatively determinate and determinable.

III. AESTHETICS IN EDUCATION

Curriculum: For the aesthetical precepts and sense of order to be transmitted and assimilated by learners, there must be deliberate and volitional efforts in making it part of the curriculum. Such kind of curriculum emphasizes knowing by perceiving and rational assessment of beauty. Beauty is perceived first as an empirical predicate then assessed as a mental object. As such curriculum should not miss content in the physical sciences, which are simply an expression of the beauty of the natural world. It should also include cosmetics, and creative arts and crafts to sooth the visual percept, performing arts and music as extensions of language- to entertain the acoustic percept, domestic and catering sciences to evoke the power of taste. *Thigmo* sciences and arts like acupressure, acupuncture, massage and spa to activate the power of the touch. Children at their earlier years need to be exposed to adequate play and play objects to sharpen their aesthetic acuity. Older children and adults need sports and physical fitness exercises. In a nutshell, an aesthetic curriculum must be a fivefold curriculum with the following areas: Auditory-based curriculum, Visual curriculum, Thigmo curriculum, 'Taste-based' curriculum and Olfactory

curriculum. Examples under each version can vary beyond the examples given above.

Instruction: Apart from content itself, how the content is delivered can either be aesthetic or otherwise. A teacher is good not by how much he knows but also by how well he delivers what he knows. An excellent delivery involves using diverse and creative approaches; monotony leads to aesthetic lethargy and disinterest in learning. Tonal variations, for instance, are not just used in music festivals but also in classroom delivery. An aesthetic teacher pats his student on the back, greets them, and maintains respectful physical contact with the learners, appreciates them and even smile at them. Teaching aids should appeal to most or all the five senses and should have aspects of proportionality. During instruction, an appeal must be made to all or most senses through maximum use of teaching aids.

Environment: Learning environment is a space expressly set aside for the specific reason of learning and instruction. Its comporment, structure, content and divisions affect the learning process. It is directly an aesthetical space and being, so it influences the efficacy of learning through the perception the learners attribute to it. In Educational set up, for instance, an ugly classroom might be one in which there is a disproportionate arrangement of lockers and chairs, absence of rows, or most of the chairs being heaped on one side while leaving an empty, unused space. A dirty and disorderly learning environment activates a feeling of disgust. The stronger the feeling of disgust, the more the concentration on resolving the disgust rather than on learning. A neat classroom appeals to the senses and promotes a sense of belonging and learning. The learners would typically want to be in a smart classroom than to be at home. The school compound is also subject to beauty; neat hays, demarcations, cute lawns, flowers, among others make a school to be a popular venue.

Grooming for Educational ends: A teacher or a learner whose dress code is ugly would be considered as one whose ratio of clothes does not match, or whose colours are not harmonious with each other. A neatly clad teacher or learner exudes confidence- a necessary recipe for effective learning. Indecent dress codes are not just *unethical* but also *unaesthetic* because they invoke *perceptive* disgust. While it is good that teachers dress aesthetically, it is worth noting that the teaching profession for pedagogical reasons does not call for an exaggerated portrait of beauty. Flamboyancy, too bright and focal dress code is as much a disservice to the learners as is the case with a bad or ugly dress code. This is because teaching is not just formal, it is also informal and when there is a clash a between content delivery and admiration towards the teacher's dress code, the focus for learning shifts towards the teacher. The teacher becomes the centre of focus as opposed to content. Worse is the case when the teacher clads exorbitantly in a school where learners cannot afford decent school uniforms or are in a school where learners are in tattered clothes. It only serves to intimidate the learners. While it is valid that the learners may be made to anticipate to

dress like the teacher as a reward to their educational efforts, it is not philosophical to convey this message in a manner that creates a big social chasm. Should the teacher dress in tatters? Not at all. However, neither should the teacher dress like some exotic King or Queen. In a nutshell, a teacher's dress code is a teaching aid. It should be neat but simple.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the above observations and expositions, it can be validly inferred that Education is an aesthetically laden activity. While it may not be appreciated, beauty pervades everyday activities in school, yet it requires a philosophical mindset to be aware of its impact. Expression and interpretation of beauty should thus be enforced, guided, moderated and channelled towards educational ends amongst all stakeholders and in all areas of Education.

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