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Moral Estimation of the Art: Beauty and Goodness as Free Educators

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Abstract

This paper aims to present a concise description of the great impact which art can exercise in upbringing and educating morally good students. Both morality and art are viewed as free educators. The manuscript is devoted to elucidating a close relationship between morality and arts that has to be further developed and utilized in the everyday school's schedule. Subjects as drawing and music is insufficient. The school program is of great need for including dancing and regular movie-going events. The more artistic the school program is, the better creative, free, and talented, as well as more moral students will be raised.

Keywords: art, morality, students, school program.

1. Introduction

I will devote this article to a presentation of the thesis stipulation that the free creative act in art is an influential moral educator. The notion of mass education in the form of IQ exams is no longer valid[2] and necessary due to the high speed technology growth. We are in great need to modify the education according to the exigencies of our time, make it more relevant, as well as adjust to it. Therefore, the focus of the educational program should be placed on creativity through arts. The more artistic the school program is, the better creative, free, and talented, as well as more moral students will be raised. In overall, this paper aims to prove the validity of arts education as a primary and positive influencer to bringing up moral, talented, and creative children.

So, I will begin with a brief historical review of the main ethical and aesthetical concepts that provide a solid background to account on. It will be followed by a comparative presentation to the prevailing contemporary notion of education citing leading experts on education, such as Sir Ken Robinson, Leslie Loble, and others. And finally, I will end this piece of

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[1] PhD student.

[2] See Jun, P. (2013). Understanding the birth of mass education, the IQ system, and why creativity will save our future. *Motivated Mastery*. Seen on 23 March 2019 at: http://motivatedmastery.com/understanding-the-birth-of-mass-education-the-iq-system-and-why-creativity-will-save-our-future/ and Sir Ken Robinson (a master of creativity propagating for change and innovation in education), his bestseller *Out of our minds*. Learning to be creative, 2011, 2nd ed. UK: Capstone Publishing Ltd. Seen at: http://www.fredkemp.com/5365su12/robinsonchpt123.pdf.

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writing by providing my personal in-depth reflection and understanding on the relation of art, morality, and education as a philosophical discussion.

2. A concise historical review of the good and the beautiful

The concept of *beauty* is considered to be a major aesthetic category, which stands in a close connection to the various forms of art like music, dancing, and/or acting. Aesthetically, the understanding of beauty is regarded a sensitive perception via the medium of the human ear and eye. One of the first notions for a perceptual model is seen in Plato's dialogue *The Hippias Major*. According to the model, beauty employs a subjective pattern of perception, which is widely applicable in different arts. Therefore, the concept of beauty is perceived primarily as a form of visual mode, which is based on the perception of the visual *form* per se. At the same time, beauty is accepted as something that brings pleasant experience (pleasure) and thus, beauty leads to an aesthetic experience. Plato in *The Hippias Major* presents the idea of the beautiful, wherein he makes an inquisitive attempt to give a logical definition of the idea of the beautiful. For every reader of the dialogue it becomes clear that Plato's idea of the beautiful is not an easy matter. He makes total of six attempts in order to define the beautiful and at the end of the dialogue he concludes in an evident *aporia* – that it is difficult to say what the beautiful is. Socrates ends the dialogue stating: "So I think, Hippias, that I have been benefited by conversation with both of you"; for I think I know the meaning of the proverb "beautiful things are difficult" (Plato: *The Dialogues of Plato*: 408). Meanwhile, before Plato even begins to discuss the idea of the beautiful, he tries to explain what it is to be a "good citizen". The notion of the *good citizen* is a moral concept. Consequently, it becomes evident that in order to become a good citizen, a man should be a moral person who follows the law and rules in the Greek *city-polis*. Therefore, Plato presents his idea of the beautiful linking it to the area of morality. The beautiful Plato connects it to the eternal idea of the good as the highest good. Hence, the *beauty* and the *good* interact in a mutual relationship.

Another significant achievement of the Greek philosopher is the idea that poetry and the musical art in particular contribute greatly to the education of young people[3]. The Greek philosopher disapproves the imitation in arts, that is, in poetry and painting. He says in *The Republic* (Book 10): "— I'm sure you won't denounce me to the writers of tragedy and all the other imitative poets – everything of that sort seems to me to be a destructive influence on the minds of those who hear it. Unless of course they have the antidote, the knowledge of what it really is" (Plato, 2003: 313/595b). Although Plato's aesthetics is not a well-constructed system, nevertheless he envisions a close bond between the arts, education, and the moral upbringing of young people in his perfect state-republic. He also contributes significantly to developing the art of the beautiful speech, that is, the art of Rhetoric. The Russian philosopher Losev says the following in regards to Plato: "In the art of his eloquence, Plato was a perfect virtuoso"[4] (Losev, 1974: 104). Plato himself was considered by Cicero and other ancient scholars as a "good orator" (*Ibid*.).

Plato's Academy was known for implementing a dual system of education to its students. On the one hand, Plato's students were supposed to undergo physical education focused on bodily exercises and gymnastics. On the other hand, he placed great emphasis on nurturing the cognitive capacity and knowledge of each student. Aside from that, in the core of Plato's aesthetic theory stands the *musical art* per se, which aims at educating the young people in his perfect state-republic. The musical art originates from the Greek idea of dancing and singing hymns in praise and honor of the ancient gods, Dionysius in particular[5]. The music in those days incorporated not

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[3] See Plato, *The Republic*, Book 10.

[4] Translation from Russian to English, Raina Iossifova.

[5] See Losev, A. (1974). *History of ancient aesthetics*. High classics, vol. 3, in Russian, Moscow: Iskusstvo, pp. 54-55.

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only music as such, but also other kinds of arts like dancing and singing. It is also known from Plato's *Republic* Book 10 that he disapproved of poets who use the *word* to gain fame, lie, and present false concepts and ideas. At the same time, he was not against those poets and artists who use the catalyst of the *word* to urge and incline youngsters toward the good[6]. The Greek philosopher is trying to say that the implementation of arts is important only when they are directed toward building moral disposition within each student. Thus, it becomes clear that Plato was in favor for the application of arts education, where the aesthetic and morality meet in order to create a productive bond of cooperation. In that manner, art and morality in ancient Greece are dominant factors for educating and bringing up good citizens. It is also well-known the Socratic philosophical concept of identifying *arête* with *gnosis*, that is to say, the combination of virtue and knowledge. For him, a knowledgeable person is subject to moral education by acquiring virtues, so that he/she be able to enhance one's urge for perfection. The four cardinal virtues in that epoch (justice, temperance, prudence, and courage) were in the center of the Socratic and Platonic moral doctrine. To sum all up, it becomes evident that even in the days of the early philosophy the education of young people was based not only on gaining knowledge, but also on arts and morals. Therefore, we can assume that a triple paradigm of educational system was prevalent in the time of the ancient Greece, namely knowledge, arts, and morals. In short, we can call it *arts moral education*.

Aristotle placed great importance on the genre of tragedy accentuating on its structure, as well as on the stage presentation of the drama. He likewise his teacher Plato accepted the notion that tragedy is imitation (mimesis). In his *Poetics* he asserts that "Epic poetry and Tragedy, Comedy also and Dithyrambic: poetry, and the music of the flute and of the lyre in most of their forms, are all in their general conception modes of imitation" (Aristotle, 2000: 4). Although he elaborated extensively on the genesis and make of the drama identifying the phenomena of *fabula* (action) and *catharsis* (purifying), where the idea of catharsis was used in the drama art to represent the act of cleansing and purification of one's character; and in that manner, make him/her a better person *per se*. Morality and art meet once again in an interactive play in order to produce a better person.

The Medieval philosophy was known for the dual system[7] of education where the Christian moral dogma and stories from the Bible were used, based on the God's Ten Commandments in combination with the Greco-Roman pagan legacy. The moral education in that epoch was guided and regulated by the authority of the Roman Catholic Church (Havilidis, 2015), St. Augustine, and Thomas Aquinas. Art was shaped to modulate its inferior stand to morality and thus it became a servant to the *theocentric morality* in the very same manner as reason was to the faith. Nevertheless, the medieval educational system aimed to incorporate both art and morality in the good and faithful Christians which was widely present. Music and painting dogmatically followed the canons of the church and were exclusively used in religious service and worship to the one God. "The earliest music of Catholic Christianity was **chant**, that is, monophonic *a cappella* music, most often sung in worship" (Kramer, 2018). The cultural life in the medieval period was largely concentrated in the cathedrals, churches, and/or monasteries. The *gothic* brand of architecture was established in contrast to the antique Roman architecture. In reference to that, the Associate Dean and Associate Professor of Music History at the University of West Virginia – Dr. Elizabeth Kramer, explicates: "Many of the important historical developments of the Middle Ages arose from either in the church or the court. One such important development stemming from the Catholic Church would be the developments of architecture. During this period, architects built increasingly tall and imposing cathedrals for worship through the

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[6] See Plato, *The Republic*, Book 10.

[7] Please refer to Richard Russel's visual graphic of the medieval education at the following link: https://www.freewebs.com/richardarussell/HoE_medieval.pdf.

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technological innovations of pointed arches, flying buttresses, and large cut glass windows. This new architectural style was referred to as "gothic," which vastly contrast the Romanesque style, with its rounded arches and smaller windows" (*Ibid*.).

The following epoch of the Renaissance on the contrary raised the ideal of the individual dignity of man in pedestal as laying the foundation of the fundamental ideas and beliefs of the newly emerging movement of humanism. "During this period of rebirth, one of the main focuses was on humanistic thought along with classical learning values" (Balsamo, 2017). On the other hand, art during the Renaissance achieved its highest peak and triumph with the genial art works of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, and Raffaelo. Ficino's so called Florentinian *Academia* tried to revive the fame of Plato's school. Education itself enhanced enormously due to the multiplication of ancient Greek's classical texts and their renewed Latin translation. Marsilio Ficino said in 1492: "This century, like a golden age, has restored to light the liberal arts, which were almost extinct: grammar, poetry, rhetoric, painting, sculpture, architecture, music … this century appears to have perfected astrology" (Shau, 2018). Ficino and the humanists contributed greatly to the distribution of classic works with the purpose of educating morally a vast group of young people who come from rich families. Education in that manner became elite and erudite, and the emergence of the first universities in Bologna and Paris were established that followed strictly the scholastic tradition. In addition, Leonardo da Vinci was the genius who made possible the synthesis of art and science[8]. Their mutual relationship according to his standpoint was not something to ignore or overlook. Therefore, it can be said that education during the Renaissance provides a three-dimensional paradigm, namely science, art, and morality in relation to the view and ideology of humanism and Neoplatonic expression of the arts. The Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical traditions were used in their upgraded version of Neoplatonism and Neoaristotelism. Once again their philosophical systems were dedicated to upbringing knowledgeable, artistic, and moral people.

The German classical philosophy inaugurated the movement of the transcendental idealism, which again placed a great emphasis on education despite of employing the most rationalistic philosophical approach. With Kant's three *Critiques*[9] following the *Copernican upturn* led to the emergence of the autonomic philosophy relying primarily on the subject. All three *Critiques* construed the speculative, moral, and aesthetic types of judgments within man, all of which built Kant's critical philosophy. It upgraded to exclusive rationalistic education of the 18th and 19th centuries shaped by its theoretical, moral, and aesthetic foundations. The man of the Enlightenment was now capable of making his own critical judgments in various areas of art and philosophy. The German tradition was also famous for its great education, which was supported by the philosophical doctrines of the well-known German philosophers – Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. All of them gave precedence of the rational education based on art. In that respect, it is worth mentioning Fichte's pedagogical view of visual art in assistance to students' learning through the medium of imagination (Heumann, 2009: 113). The Schelling's *Philosophy of the Art*[10] presents a remarkable accomplishment in his attempt to unify the transcendence with nature, the absolute with the real, the single with the whole, freedom with necessity.

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[8] More on the topic of art and science in Leonardo da Vinci's works see: Kenneth Clark, Leonardo da Vinci: A note on the relation between his science and his art. *History Today*, vol. 2, issue 5, May 1952, at: https://www.historytoday.com/archive/leonardo-da-vinci-note-relation-between-his-science-and-his-art.

[9] The trilogy of Kant's philosophy comprises of *The Critique of the Pure Reason*, *The Critique of the Practical Reason*, and *The Critique of the capacity of judgement*.

[10] Schelling write a noteworthy treatise – *The philosophy of art*, where he presents his system of the arts, making a synthesis of nature and the transcendence, freedom and necessity. He is the German philosopher who makes an attempt to reconcile the sensitive and rational knowledge and unify them in one.

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3. The education today

There is increased published material in recent years online in regards to the incapability of the contemporary educational system in various counties in the world, including Bulgaria, to raise capable, knowledgeable, and moral students. The overall opinion is that the educational system all over the world proves to be inadequate to address the problems of the contemporary world and in that way, the students graduating from school become incapable to cope with the issues of the day.

According to one teacher in a High School in the USA, Bernie Bleske, the contemporary school system is run at an impossible speed to catch for both students and teachers. He asserts: "We are married to a system that has not been properly re-evaluated for 21st-century capabilities and capacities" (Bleske, 2019). He confirms the absurdity of the school program stating out the main issues that both students and teachers face. There are, to mention a few, the six to seven different classes a day, the insufficient time for learning all of them, the demand for high performance from both teachers and students, as well as the enormous pile of information that students are bombarded with, which they are unable to process. Both teachers and students according to Bleske live in an impossible situation daily at school. He criticizes the educational system because it proves to be quite inefficient and out-of-date. For resolving the mentioned issues, he proposes maximum of two classes a day on different subjects, which will allow both students and teachers to focus on the topic of learning, as well as have sufficient time to properly to get to know each other. He emphasizes on the need that students should be learning the "core skills" that are necessary for them to cope with information and situations in the future, like for example writing, language (literature), math skills (*Ibid*.).

Mass education is the keystone that the contemporary educational system is founded on. It aims to produce well-rounded students ready to enter into the world of their long-term careers. In that respect, Paul Jun writes: "Many of us have a belief that education's job is to shape us perfectly so that we may enter our careers prepared and willing — while also being good human beings" (Jun, 2013). A master and leading expert on education, Sir Ken Robinson, confirms the fact that our notion of creativity it outdated and it should be revised. In reference to that he makes the following remark: "Everyone has huge creative capacities. The challenge is to develop them. A culture of creativity has to involve everybody, not just a select few" (Robinson, 2011: Ch. 1).

It is a confirmed fact that the school systems worldwide are incapable to face and address the issues of the day, e.g. the climate change. In this relation, thousands of students worldwide recently marched "against inaction on climate change". CBC *News* posted the news that "…on 15 March 2019, in more than 100 counties, students participated in marches protesting inaction on climate change", which was inspired by a 16-year old Greta Thunberg[11].

The stated examples just give us a glimpse of the reality prevailing in the school systems today. Education is a key area in each country, therefore it needs to be updated and upgraded to the 21st century life requirements. To further fill up the picture, I can state that the enormous flow of information due to the rapid growth of technology, flow of information, and artificial intelligence, are to remind us that education worldwide needs a change. It requires reforms that will make our education more adequate to the 21st high-tech century.

And in order to address the issues of education and make it more authentic and realistic, I envision a school system that is based on art and morality. In my view, *creativity* is a key skill that students should be focusing on while studying in school. On the other hand, the problem-solving capacity is another core area that students need to acquire, as well as presentation and writing skills.

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[11] See more on CBS News. (2019). Students around the world march against inaction on climate change. Seen on 20 March 2019 at: https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/youth-climate-strike-students-march-against-inaction-on-climate-change/?fbclid=IwAR3SHcKTaB-w8j22jvE8jtGDpGvEYtvrO7E0N6SZka7b7mvlHem78n9QNlg.

Leslie Loble[12] in her article "Learning to live in the time of AI" at UNESCO *Courier* presents the three new "pillars" that the education system needs today in addition to the basic ones to be known (reading, writing, arithmetic), which are, namely "empathy, creativity, and critical thinking". Loble confirms the crucial role that both school leaders and teachers play in designing a school system that welcomes the AI (Loble, 2018).

4. The relation of art and morality

And in order to fulfill that we need to work on a school system that incorporates morality and art and gives each area its due. We are all witnesses today how applied arts are incorporated in the schools, such as music, painting, and in some schools – dancing. These, in my opinion, are a necessary paradigm for upbringing moral, well-behaved, and educated young subjects. The fact that art is incorporated in the school as a mere educational and moral section presupposes youth's moral constitution. Art in that aspect adopts a progressive paradigm of primal morality, because it embodies the role of a mighty and creative moderator, who requires moral upbringing and maturation of a free and liberated, but reasonable, agent. In that manner, man seeks his own moral maturation as an individual, who makes a distinction between good and evil, which at the same time presupposes of exercising a definite responsibility. Thus, art plays the role of a moral educational medium that trains good children.

Art in its turn is the strongest and most intensive catalyst for the flow of creative initiatives and activities. The free creative act is a conscious choice for intending and making something good. In that respect, the free creative act lays a ground that needs to be adopted as a fundamental unit of multiple ideas and thoughts that promotes the free right and duty of the growing individual. Art makes people morally responsible and just. It turns into an unconventional act of creative education that lies within his moral and primordial human kindness (goodness). Morality in art becomes a need and necessity in the same way as air is needed for breathing. And in that respect, morality introduces a holistic and healthy line of action adequate to art itself. Morality in art thus becomes an integral part of the legitimate creative act.

Creativity itself is inseparable from freedom. Art works morally only under the condition of freedom. If art is deprived of its creative capacity of the morally conscious rational subject, it will degrade. In that case, art will become disgraced and give birth to evil. *Art with no morality becomes anti-art.* Art that lacks morality loses its own ground impairing its prestige of a legitimate creative representative and bearer of both beauty and goodness. Separated from the moral ingredient art exists in a permanent state of depression, thus living in nothingness and non-being. Art becomes nihilism, ignorance, illiteracy. It transforms into artistic nothingness, non-being, and in that sense, it becomes anti-freedom. With no morality, art becomes meaningless. It finds no reason for creativity and in that respect it sees no reason to exist. Art stops to exist. It not only turns into a destructive force, but art also becomes aggressive and in that manner has a malicious and inhumane impact. Art thus degrades man to his inhumanity and leads him to his inferior form of existence, that is, his animalistic nature. Lack of creativity speaks of unconscious, dormant, and ignorant human potential. Thus, the human capacity gradually evaporates, dies, and destructs itself adopting the form of enstrangement and alienation. Lack of creativity thus becomes the most apparent form of human alienation as man existing in a foreign and anti-human

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[12] Leslie Loble is a Deputy Secretary in the New South Wales Department of Education (Australia) has led strategy, reform and innovative delivery in Australia's largest and most diverse education sector for nearly two decades. She was awarded the *Australian Financial Review*/Westpac Top 100 Women of Influence in 2013 for her positive impact on Australian public affairs and in recognition of her role in education reform. See: https://en.unesco.org/courier/2018-3/learning-live-time-ai.

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environment of non-existence. In that sense, art experiences the acute need to identify itself as a moral and rational human creative activity that reminds man of his primordial good construction.

The beauty and the good in that order live in peaceful relation of harmony, but this is impossible without the free creative act. Both beauty and goodness level up onto a higher dimension and become sublime. The highest peak of human existence is represented in the beautiful and good upbringing of noble and aesthetic citizens following God's image and decree. If man is viewed as the freely created artistic subject, God himself is seen as the highest possible creative artistic object. They both become partners in resemblance to the "small" and "big" university doctors. The free and noble creative human being seeks his identity by plunging himself into an understanding of his aesthetic and moral constitution. The *small* subject strives to identify and equate himself with the untouchable *big* object. Yet, they co-exist in a close relationship of mutual and determined correlation. The beauty and goodness in their reasonable way become the main human right and duty for living as a privileged, reasonable and proud existence. In that aspect, morality gives art a signed and sealed declaration of art responsible independence of its primal right for living as a legitimate free agent. With the assistance of morality, art becomes prestigious and elite (aristocratic). Morality and art in that manner could be seen as the two sides of a same coin. The human subject is modulated according to the creative freedom of the beautiful and the good. Thus, they co-exist in an everlasting realm of eternity.

5. The needs of arts in the schools

In the background of the all said above, I would like to stress the importance of nurturing creativity in schools. All types of art exercise beneficial influence on students. Music is one of them and nobody will deny its healing and pleasant effect on the listener. Movies is another type of art that bring visual picture to the viewers and in that respect is a mighty educational tool that provides a lively picture of everything that is read from the books. Moreover, movies overrule the reading of books and this is all a result of the high-tech growth and AI. They are also a means for providing an adequate picture of reality. In that relation, the construction of the sky scrapper *Burj Al-Arab* in Dubai created quite a sensation as nothing like that have had ever been built before. There is a documentary available in *the National Geographic* on its construction that provides a quite good visual presentation[13]. The film could be used for informative purposes in schools. Dancing, on the other hand, is one more art that is beneficial for upraising artistic and morally good children. The rhythm and melody provide a pleasant aesthetic experience that charge with positive energy and effect well the body. So, it is something that in my view should be included in the school systems worldwide.

To sum it all, the above-given examples and reflections are directed toward creating an open mind set in both educators and students, flexibility, and the understanding that education is crucial for providing more-artistic oriented school curricula, which helps create better, free, and talented, as well as more moral students.

6. Conclusion

The text above explored the idea of the mutual relationship between arts and morality in the system of education.

In the *Concise Historical Review of the Good and the Beautiful* section, there was presented the view of the Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle who in the examples given prove the necessity of linking morality and arts for the purposes of education. This can be seen in the Plato's Academia, Aristotle's Poethics, where the morality and art interact. The

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[13] See the documentary at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hoaMzUJRrg.

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Medieval philosophy incorporates the Christian moral concepts of the Bible in combination with the use of arts in the act of worshiping God (e.g. Church chanting, Cathedral architecture, etc.). The Age of Renaissance presents a bond between the arts of the genial works of Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci, Raffaelo, and the moral plot of the ideas from the Bible, Greek mythology, and humanism prevalent in their artworks. Thus, polytheism, monotheism, and anthropology are seen as one in close relation. Ficino's Florentinian Academia follows the idea of the Plato's Academia but in the Renaissance form of erudite and elite education. The Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical doctrines were given in their upgraded version of Neoplatonism and Neoaristotelism. In overall, their philosophical systems were dedicated to upbringing knowledgeable, artistic, and moral people. The German transcendental philosophy places an enormous emphasis on education based on the human reason. Kant's Copernican upturn brings revolution to philosophy, which is now seen as autonomic philosophy relying on the subject. Kant's three *Critiques* construed the speculative, moral, and aesthetic types of judgements within man, all of which built his critical philosophy. The philosophy during the Enlightenment was upgraded to the exclusive rationalistic education of the 18th and 19th centuries shaped by its theoretical, moral, and aesthetic foundations. Fichte, Schelling, and Hegel. Give further precedence of the rational education based on art. Fichte's pedagogical view is known for the assistance of visual arts in students' learning through the medium of imagination. The Schelling's *Philosophy of the Art* is a remarkable accomplishment in his attempt to unify the transcendence with nature, the ideal with the real, the single with the whole, being with thinking, freedom with necessity. This section proves the thesis that the incorporation of arts and morality in education was not something foreign, and that is gradually shaped up in the different historic epochs.

In the section of *Education Today*, it is stressed on the notion that the contemporary school system is no longer capable of addressing the needs of today due to the high development of technology. Education requires reforms that meet the student needs for knowledge, which is based not only on intellectual enhancement, but also on developing students' artistic side (e.g. artistic expression through singing, dancing, acting), that requires creativity. Problems in the world (e.g. climate change, bullying, and violence) need new approach of resolution that is based on morally raised students with open mindset achieved through the various forms of arts.

The following section – *The Relation of Art and Morality*, provides a discussion of the close relationship between arts and morality viewed as free educators. Freedom is the key to create moral and artistic students. Creativity is deemed inseparable from freedom. Artworks teach students morals only under the condition of freedom. Thus, if morality is regarded as the foundation for upbringing good students, so is with arts that via the activity of imagination enhances students' skills, knowledge, and capabilities. Harmony between Ethics and Aesthetics is essential.

The last section of the manuscript (*The Need of Arts in the Schools*) places emphasis on the importance of nurturing creativity of students in schools. All types of art exercise beneficial influence on students (music, dancing, movie watching, etc.). Arts bring about flexibility for both students and educators that plays an essential role in raising up talented, artistic, knowledgeable and successful students.

The manuscript thus stresses the importance of raising morally good students using arts in the school system.

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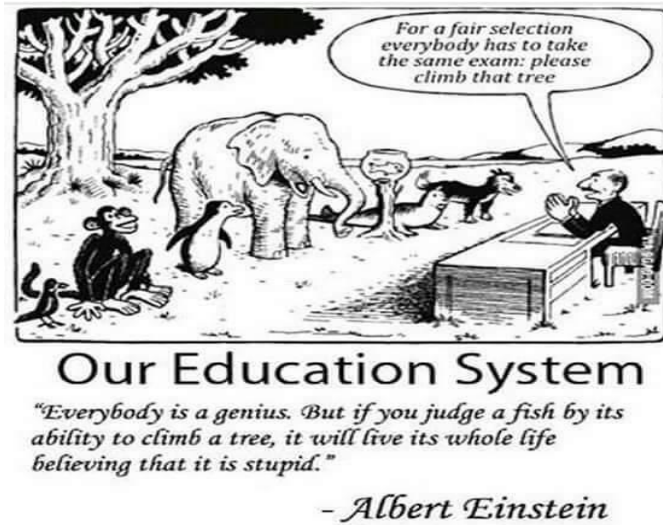
Figure 1. Illustration of the contemporary mass education school system (Jun, 2013)