CHAPTER

2

Education for flourishing and flourishing in education

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This chapter aims to elucidate theoretical meanings of flourishing and education, and the relation between them. Throughout history a variety of ideas about the nature and purpose of these activities has been developed. This chapter considers the purpose and aims of education. It will explicate what viewing this purpose or ultimate aim may mean in terms of human flourishing and how ideas about human flourishing influence thinking about the practice of education and vice versa, given they are perceived as being in a dialectical relationship.

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INTRODUCTION

This chapter aims to elucidate theoretical meanings of flourishing, education and the relation between them. Throughout history a variety of ideas about the nature and purpose of these activities has been developed. This chapter deals with the purpose and aims of education. It will explicate what viewing this purpose or ultimate aim in terms of human flourishing could mean and how ideas about human flourishing influence ideas about the practice of education and vice versa (they are perceived in a dialectical relationship).

The chapter begins with an exploration and explication of various interpretations of 'flourishing' (conceptual and theoretical) as well as the normative claims that substantiate interpretations of flourishing. These are lenses through which one can describe flourishing. We propose a formal description of human flourishing that is both general and comprehensive and explains all parts of them extensively:

Human flourishing is both the optimal continuing development of human beings' potentials and living well as a human being. It means being engaged in relationships and activities that are meaningful, that is, aligned with both an individual's own values and humanistic values, in a way that is satisfying to them. Flourishing is conditional on the contribution of individuals and requires an enabling environment.

Section 2.2 provides a justification for interpreting education as a necessary condition for flourishing, and **section 2.3** discusses how interpretations of flourishing and education influence one another. The chapter ends with a few recommendations about the use of the concepts in policy documents.

2.1

Meaning(s) of human flourishing

Human flourishing as a concept is envisaged and analysed in many ways. Thomas Kuhn **(1970)** alerted us to the influence of paradigms of thinking or theoretical goggles (lenses) in the examination of concepts – a paradigm or theoretical framework determines meanings that make up concepts. Theorists use different lenses to make judgements about particular understandings of concepts; for instance, prominent thinkers such as Ludwig Wittgenstein (objectivism), Hans-George Gadamer (interpretivism), Jurgen Habermas (criticism) and Jacques Derrida (deconstruction) made different pronouncements about education. We use an interpretive–critical lens to analyse human flourishing and then examine

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the consequences of such an analysis for education. Likewise, our analysis of human flourishing in relation to education is not remiss of the fact that any understanding of human action such as flourishing and education cannot be delinked from societal practices such as culture, ethnicity, language, ideology, (non)religion and any other lived experience **(Taylor, 1985; WG2-ch1)**. Taylor **(1985, p. 93)** posits that 'certain self-descriptions' of human actions are constitutive of what makes such practices what they are. Our view is similar: the human capacity for common action is embedded in and informed by religion, culture, ethnicity and language.

Therefore, ideas about what it means to flourish and educate diverge. We do not intend to evaluate the religious, cultural or ethnic interpretations of human flourishing, but aim to develop an understanding of flourishing that can be accepted by everyone. It is therefore necessarily a formal explanation.

2.1 .1

LOCALISING FLOURISHING IN THE LANDSCAPE OF CONCEPTS AND THEORIES

Although we find the word 'flourish' only once in the Delors Report **(International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, 1996, p. 126)**, the concept is unmistakably present. For instance, in its description of a utopian world, the committee writes: '… education is at the heart of both personal and community development; its mission is to enable each of us, without exception, to develop all our talents to the full and to realize our creative potential, including responsibility for our own lives and achievement of our personal aims' **(International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, 1996, p. 19)**.

> **Flourishing can be regarded as a particular interpretation of well-being. This means that 'well-being' is an umbrella term under which we can locate the two central concepts used to express an individual's well-being, namely happiness and flourishing.**

Alexandrova **(2017)** states that a concern with human well-being is at the very root of modern social science. If there were a science of well-being or flourishing, it would be important to clarify a philosophy of science of well-being. With regard to such a science, Alexandrova **(2017)** states that there are three possibilities in our conception or utterance of well-being, which are relevant also to flourishing. Firstly, a circumscription approach to flourishing would aim to circumscribe the notion of flourishing in a particular domain. Philosophers used to follow this approach, describing what flourishing means and interpreting other uses of the term as careless, without any consideration for diversity. Secondly, in a differential realization approach the semantic content of 'well-being' or 'flourishing' does not vary, but acknowledges that how the state is realized varies with context. This is relevant to discussions of whether flourishing is a normative concept. That is, a human may realize flourishing in different ways, in different contexts. There

is not necessarily a normative expectation as to how they do so. Finally, contextualism, drawn from contemporary approaches within a philosophy of language, would assert that flourishing assertions themselves need to be indexed to specific circumstances or conditions. We adhere to the second interpretation, suggesting that it is possible to give a general description of flourishing and education, but acknowledging that their interpretations and realizations vary between cultures, traditions and human beings.
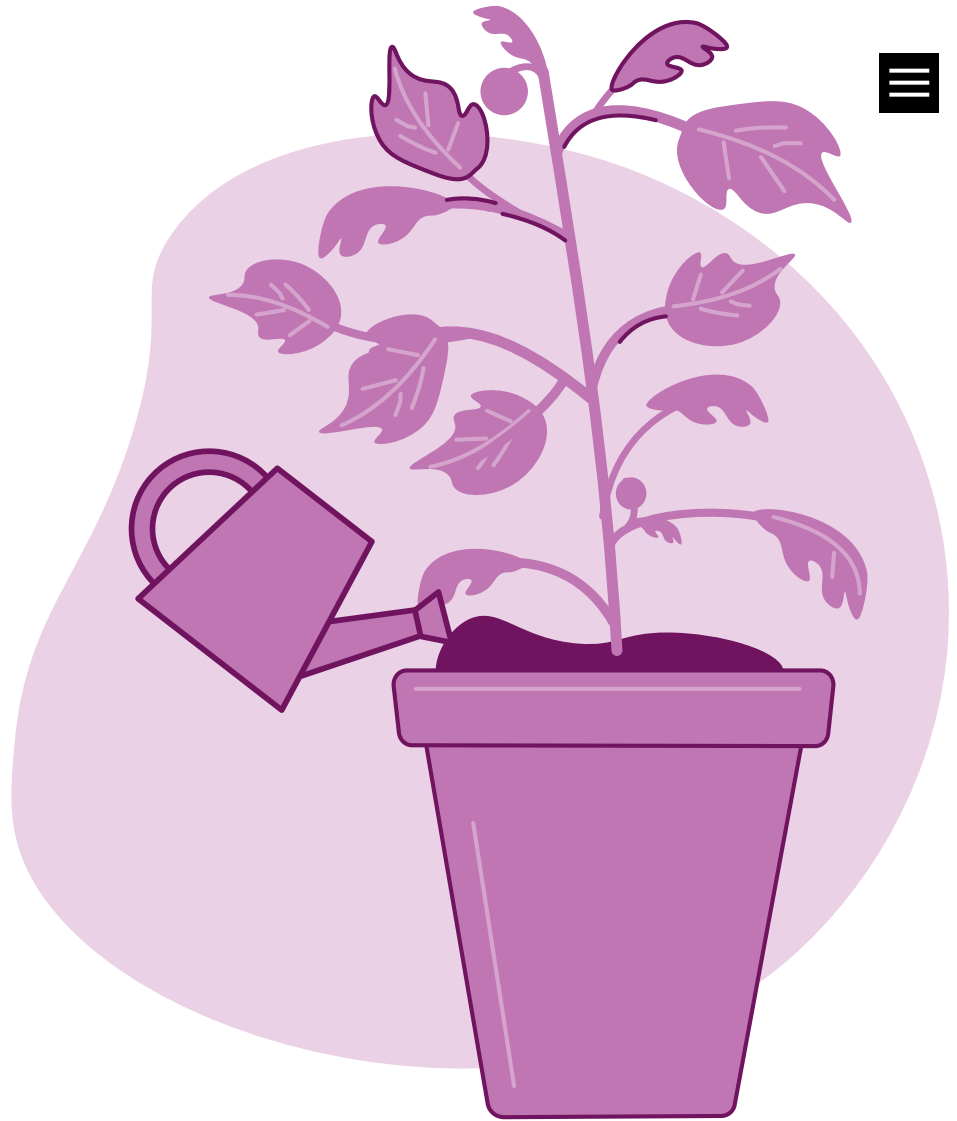
Flourishing can be regarded as a particular interpretation of well-being. This means that 'well-being' is an umbrella term under which we can locate the two central concepts used to express an individual's well-being, namely happiness and flourishing.

Although 'happiness' and 'flourishing' are sometimes used interchangeably, in both daily language and theory, it is important to distinguish clearly between the two, because they do refer to different types of well-

Characteristic of flourishing, is that individuals develop and enact their potential in an optimal way and doing so can mean that at times one has to be persistent, and overcome frustrations and negative emotions.

being. We note three differences. Firstly, in common language, the prime characteristic of happiness is a person's positive emotional state – when someone says they are happy, they express that they are in a good mood, exhilarated, tranquil or satisfied, etc. While we may need to know the person to have a better idea of the type of positive emotional state they are experiencing, we can make some inferences about their positive emotions. Flourishing, on the other hand, is used primarily in reference to an optimal state of something, be it a flower, a tree, a community or a human being. Human flourishing focuses on the ways in which human beings live their lives, for instance, those mentioned in the Delors Report **(International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, 1996)** that people (can) optimally develop. A second and related distinction is that happiness is primarily evaluated from a first-person perspective – for instance, when a person says they are happy, it is deduced that they are happy. While outsiders may say that the person does not have good reasons

for being happy, the person's own evaluation of happiness is sufficient. Flourishing, however, also has criteria that are not subjective and therefore a person might be mistaken in saying they are flourishing. This is the same as for evaluations about the natural world, for example, we would be surprised if someone were to say that a tree that is affected by acid rain is flourishing. Thirdly, happiness can refer to feelings experienced during short periods of time, for instance when people have received good news or see their good friends again. We do not use the word flourishing in that way. When we say that we are flourishing or that another person is flourishing, we give a positive evaluation of a longer period in time and also about the quality of their life overall. The following example can clarify these distinctions. A homeless person who is addicted to crack can correctly say they are happy when they have just smoked their pipe, while we would disagree with them if they were to say that they are flourishing. It also means that one can say that one flourishes

even though there are periods in which one does not feel happy or is struggling to learn or do something **(Badhwar, 2014a, 2014b)**.

Characteristic of flourishing, as we explicate later on, is that individuals develop and enact their potential in an optimal way and doing so can mean that at times one has to be persistent, and overcome frustrations and negative emotions. This contrasts with Aristotle's view of human flourishing, on the grounds that a virtuous person does not feel these negative emotions – this is precisely what distinguishes them from what he calls a continent person **(e.g. Kristjánsson, 2020)**. Education could be a source of diminished feelings of happiness, not only because of the noted emotions while learning, but also because education could also

The subjective well-being theories presume that a) human beings themselves are the judges of their well-being and b) that people experience wellbeing when they have positive emotions about their life.

make one realize that there are boundaries to one's flourishing that one would not know if one had not been introduced to them. We defend good quality education for all human beings to enable their flourishing, not to enhance their feelings of happiness and defend it even if it turns out that unhappy episodes increase.

Happiness as a positive emotional state is what Haybron **(2008)** calls the psychological interpretation of happiness, which is a descriptive interpretation **(pp. 31, 39)** – it denotes that a person is happy, which can be investigated by simply asking a person about their feelings. This is a different concept from the concept of happiness as used in philosophical subjective well-being theories. Such theories describe and defend

what constitutes a happy life; normative criteria are introduced regarding the correct reasons for using 'happiness'.

In the academic literature, three main clusters[1] of well-being theories can be distinguished. By elucidating the differences, several characteristics of flourishing as a particular concept will become clear. Flourishing itself will be further elaborated upon in the next section.

The first group of theories are the so-called hedonic theories of well-being **(e.g. Waterman, 2013)**. They are also known as subjective well-being theories. These theories presume that a) human beings themselves are the judges of their well-being and b) that people

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[1] Other distinctions have been made as well. We mention two examples. Firstly, within positive psychology, Waterman (2013) distinguishes: a) subjective well-being; b) psychological well-being (well-being as flourishing); and c) eudaimonic well-being (well-being as self-realization). Thus, he uses similar terms, but for different concepts: well-being as flourishing is called psychological well-being rather than eudaimonic well-being, while self-realization tends to be seen as an aspect of eudaimonic well-being rather than the complete description of it. Secondly, Tiberius (2013) makes a distinction between five types of theory: hedonism, desire-fulfilment, life-satisfaction, objective-list and nature fulfilment. These theories can be placed under the three groups of theories – the first would be an example of a hedonic theory, the second and third are examples of a mixed theory and the final two are examples of objective theories.

experience well-being when they have positive emotions about their life. There are different types of subjective well-being theories but all suggest normative criteria as to what it is that should make people happy. For example, people can be said to be (truly) happy when they are able to: a) do what they most like doing (hedonism or actual desire satisfaction theory); b) fulfill the desires that benefit their interests **(Griffin, 1986)**; c) live according to their values **(Tiberius, 2018)**; and d) undertake activities that require high-quality human capacities **(Mill, 1863)**. There are also theories that take positive emotions as the prime component and add other elements that have an objective character, like Seligman's **(2010)** PERMA model: Positive emotion, Engagement, Positive relationships, Meaning and Accomplishment.

The second group of theories are the so-called eudaimonic theories of well-being. According to objective theories, persons live a life of well-being if they realize goods that are deemed to be objectively good for all people **(Arneson, 1999)** or if they develop or have developed their human capacities to the full. Central to these theories is the idea of optimal functioning, the pursuit of excellence of or the best in oneself **(e.g. Kraut, 2007; Kristjánsson, 2020)**. Of course, theories about what constitutes optimal functioning or the pursuit of excellence may differ.

The third group of theories are the so-called mixed or blended theories. They see both the realization of objective goods as necessary for well-being and the positive evaluation of this by the individual. Mixed theories of well-being combine an objective standard as proposed by the objective theories with the subjective theories' claim that satisfaction with one's life is a necessary condition for well-being **(e.g. Badhwar, 2014a, 2014b)**. An example of a mixed theory is Joseph Raz's well-being theory, the conditions of which 'steer a middle course' **(Raz, 1986, p. 308)**. This theory has influenced many analytic philosophers (of education) (in the context of this

> According to objective theories, persons live a life of well-being if they realize goods that are deemed to be objectively good for all people or if they develop or have developed their human capacities to the full.

chapter, for instance, De Ruyter **(2007, 2018)** and White **(2011)**. According to Raz **(2004, p. 292)**, well-being 'consists in successful pursuit of valuable goals and relationships'. 'Valuable' means that they are whole-heartedly accepted by the individual (implying that the person is autonomous) and that the goals are worthwhile (they are believed to have value 'at least in part independent of the fact that they were chosen and are pursued' **(Raz, 1986, p. 308)**.

The term 'flourishing' is used by proponents of all three types of well-being theories, but in the case of the first group only by theorists who introduce non-subjective criteria into their explanations

of what it means to flourish as a human being.

In addition to demarcating flourishing from well-being, it is important to examine thriving. In popular language 'thriving' is often juxtaposed with 'surviving', drawing either literally or metaphorically from evolutionary biology. In paediatrics, failure to thrive indicates insufficient weight gain or possibly weight loss, not within the expected developmental trajectory. The old Norse etymology of thrive, *thrifa*, to grasp, to get hold of, is more informative than later usage which simply means to grow or increase. Growth or increase does not explicitly mention the environment which is being grasped, or got hold of.

Thriving, like flourishing, has its etymology in an organism in an environment. The term 'thriving' primarily describes the process of the dialectic with the environment; similar to developmental systems approaches, which assert that development of organisms

can be influenced, involving a bi-directional relationship between genetic and cultural factors. Semantic distinctions are important to education, as it is the very 'taking hold of the environment' which is closely related to many aspects of the development of educational potential. The operationalization of eudaimonic well-being within positive psychology and well-being science **(Ryff and Keyes, 1995)** includes environmental mastery and broader discussions of functionings, as does Sen's justice theory, from an economic perspective.

2.1 .2

SOURCES FOR DEVELOPING A DESCRIPTION OF 'FLOURISHING'

This section describes how the concept of flourishing is used in a variety of academic disciplines.

According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is that to which all human beings strive and is an end in itself, that is, human beings do not aim to flourish in order to realize something like wealth, happiness or spiritual enlightenment in life or after the current life of the human being.

The interpretations have been written by representatives from these domains and are meant to give a brief introduction to the breadth of interpretations of flourishing. Not surprisingly, the academic disciplines have their own language and highlight certain aspects of flourishing that are the focal point of their research – in neuroscience, for example, flourishing has a different denotation than in economics. The presented disciplines show the breadth in which flourishing is conceptualized and discussed and form another background for a description of flourishing.

INTERPRETATIONS IN PHILOSOPHY

The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle was one of the first in the history of Western philosophy to develop a comprehensive theory of human flourishing, which he called eudaimonia (having a good soul or spirit). According to Aristotle, eudaimonia is that to which all human beings strive and is an end in itself **(2009, p. 10)**, that is, human beings do not aim to flourish in order to realize

something like wealth, happiness or spiritual enlightenment in life or after the current life of the human being. It is not enough to know that human beings strive for flourishing, in order to discover what human flourishing is, one has to investigate what is characteristic of human nature (what is their function). He concludes that: 'Human good turns out to be [an] activity of the soul exhibiting virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete' **(Aristotle, 2009, p. 12)**. Human beings flourish when they act virtuously **(e.g. Annas, 1993, p. 49; Aristotle, 2009; Curren, 2013; Dunne, 1999; Kristjánsson, 2013, p. 29; MacIntyre, 1967; Nussbaum, 1986; Pakaluk, 2006, p. 385)**. Being a virtuous person is the first central characteristic in Aristotle's interpretation of flourishing. The implication is that children cannot flourish as they are not yet virtuous persons. The second characteristic is that flourishing is a 'dynamic state', as much an ongoing quest (activity) as a state of being **(e.g. Rasmussen, 1999, p. 3; Kristjánsson, 2020)**. For Aristotle,

> **'Flourishing' is also used by philosophers (of education) whose interpretation of 'flourishing' departs most significantly from the link between flourishing and virtuousness.**

this meant that a life can only be evaluated as flourishing from the perspective of an entire life and thus at the end of a person's life; people can meet great misfortunes later in life and this affects our judgement as to whether they lived a flourishing life. Yet, he did presume that it is possible to say that a virtuous adult is flourishing **(Aristotle, 2009, p. 17)**, defending this by claiming that a virtuous adult will be able to deal with misfortunes well and make the most of their life.

Philosophers (of education) who are deeply inspired by Aristotle **(e.g. Curren, 2013; Curzer, 2012; Kristjánsson, 2020)** have differences of opinion if virtuosity is a necessary condition of human flourishing. Indeed, Kristjánsson **(2020)** suggests that it is sufficient for a person to act like a virtuous person while they are still overcoming intentions and emotions that counter virtuous action, which

a truly virtuous person does not have to do. Examples include overcoming irritations caused by one's impatience when helping an elderly person or countering one's prejudices against women in a job application process.

'Flourishing' is also used by philosophers (of education) who do not consider themselves to be neo-Aristotelians, but rather liberal or critical philosophers. Their interpretation of 'flourishing' departs most significantly from the link between flourishing and virtuousness. They suggest, for instance, that flourishing means: a) that a person is able to identify with the life they are living and that this life contains valuable objective goods **(Brighouse, 2006)**; or b) wholehearted and successful engagement in worthwhile relationships, activities and experiences **(White, 2007, 2011)**[2]. A recent prominent view on flourishing, developed by John

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[2]For an extensive overview of ideas of philosophers of education about 'flourishing' see **De Ruyter and Wolbert, 2020.**

In terms of human flourishing, research within empirical psychology has been influenced strongly by debates about hedonic versus eudaimonic conceptualizations of well-being

Ehrenfeld, draws not only from philosophical theories but also from biology and psychology **(Ehrenfeld, 2019; e.g.Interpretations in ecology and ecosystems, below, written by Ehrenfeld)**[3]. In his existential or ecosystemic interpretation of flourishing, human flourishing not only requires a flourishing ecological system or viability (passing through genetically driven stages from birth to death, like all living organisms), but also existential flourishing. This may emerge when people can develop personal wholeness and live in a situation of social coherence. Personal wholeness springs from the uniqueness of every individual – it is an expression of authenticity, reflecting the person's own values and norms. Social coherence represents the systemic aspect of flourishing and 'is manifest through effective actions within institutions such that the objectives of the particular
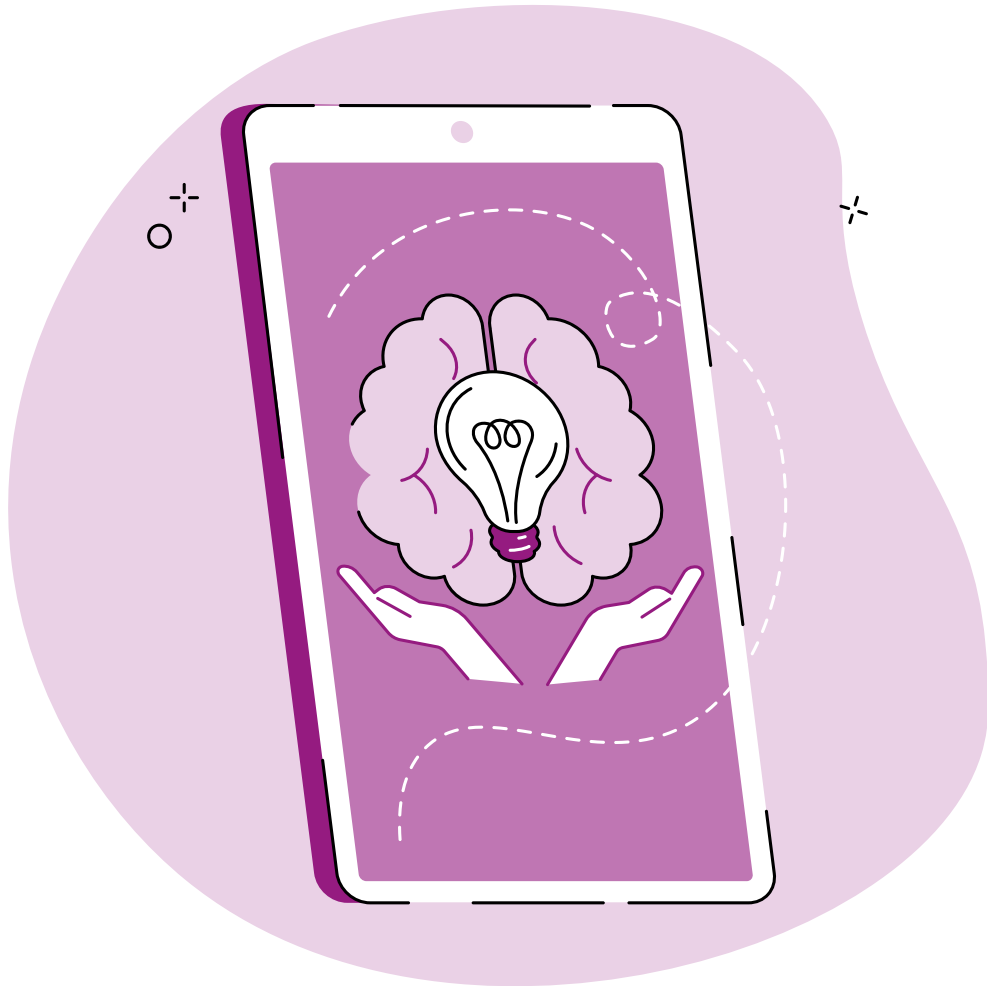
institutions are being attained' **(Ehrenfeld, 2020, p. 3)**. While viability is timeless, personal wholeness and social coherence are historical and therefore relative to agent, time and culture.

INTERPRETATIONS IN PSYCHOLOGY[4]

In terms of human flourishing, research within empirical psychology has been influenced strongly by debates about hedonic versus eudaimonic conceptualizations of well-being **(Waterman, 2013)**. With the increased interest in positive psychology as a subfield, this debate has intensified. The debates are particularly around how well-being is operationally defined so it can be measured (an objectivism lens) as opposed to meta-theoretical or philosophical explanations. Theoretical positions

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[3]We are also thankful for the various short texts that John Ehrenfeld sent us in the process of writing this chapter.

[4]This section also makes use of a short paper written by Nandini Chatterjee Singh.

within psychology often revolve around the primacy given to cognition, affect or motivation and their respective effect on well-being. The measurement debate often includes the degree to which the characteristics of a person are stable traits or are attributed to the situation (immediate or ongoing external conditions). This section considers the recent trait-like taxonomy of character strengths, before considering the affective components of well-being and flourishing, and then comments on motivational aspects of well-being and flourishing.

Peterson and Seligman's **(2004)** taxonomy of character strengths within positive psychology is a strong example of the conceptual links with eudaimonia and virtues. This approach classifies six virtues which are divided

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into 24 measurable character strengths and has been significant in making conceptualizations of virtue ethics appear more tangible, measurable and teachable. This has led to a significant interest in such approaches from practitioners in workplaces and schools with the notion of identifying and using one's character strengths becoming well known, similar to people understanding their personality. This has spawned empirical research investigating the relationship between the use of character strengths and well-being and is also closely linked to the rise of the positive psychology and classroom intervention known as positive education **(Seligman et al., 2009)**. Positive education refers to the use of approaches with empirical support from positive psychology used within educational settings, to enable students to learn and develop approaches which support flourishing and well-being. These approaches have become increasingly used, often based on Seligman's **(2010)** theory of well-being, better known by the acronym PERMA, which refers to

positive emotions, engagement, (positive) relationships, meaning and accomplishment. With the combination of character strengths and discussion of well-being through PERMA, aspects of popular discussion and student learning around the relationship between character strengths (indirectly virtue-ethics) and well-being (eudaimonism) has become more prominent and has led to further empirical investigation of these relationships in schools, workplaces and health services.

Bradburn's **(1969)** 'hedonic balance' focuses on emotion, and suggests well-being is maximized by a high ratio of positive to negative affect. Diener's tripartite model of subjective well-being describes how people experience the quality of their lives and includes both emotional reactions and cognitive judgements **(Diener et al.,1999, 2018)**. Ryff's **(1989)** model of psychological well-being articulates six dimensions that are purported to be more directly tied to the philosophical traditions of the ancient Greeks and psychological theories from

Self-determination theory posits that if conditions afford the opportunity for these psychological needs to be satisfied, a person will function better, that is, experience well-being.

humanistic, existential and developmental traditions. The six dimensions are self-acceptance, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, autonomy, purpose in life and personal growth.

Ryan and Frederick **(1997)** propose the phenomenon of subjective vitality, defined as one's conscious experience of possessing energy and aliveness, which has been viewed as a reflection of both organismic and psychological wellness **(Diener et al., 1999, 2018; Ryff and Keyes, 1995)** and is therefore influenced by both psychological and somatic factors. As a marker of wellness, subjective vitality has the advantage of being a highly accessible, phenomenologically based variable that is content-free with respect to external criteria of well-being such as objective success, health, social supports or aspirational attainments. It is also a variable that can be meaningfully placed within both biological and psychological theories of human functioning **(Ryan and Frederick, 1997)**. Keyes **(1998)** combines the dimensions of subjective and

psychological well-being and adds to it a third dimension of social well-being.

One noticeable change that emerged through these various models was that the concept of mental health began being phrased in positive terms rather than by the absence of mental illness **(Keyes, 2002)**. Thus, flourishing was meant to contrast not just with pathology but also languishing: a disorder intermediate along the mental health continuum experienced by people who describe their lives as 'hollow' or 'empty'. Fredrickson and Losada **(2005)** extend these ideas and describe 'flourishing' as a means to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth and resilience. Building on the emotional states of human beings, they propose affect to represent the spectrum of valenced feeling states and attitudes. While positive affect and positivity interchangeably represent the pleasant end (emotional states such as feeling grateful, upbeat; expressing appreciation, liking)

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Advances in neuroimaging techniques have led to much interest and progress in unravelling the neurobiological circuits in the human brain that promote human flourishing.
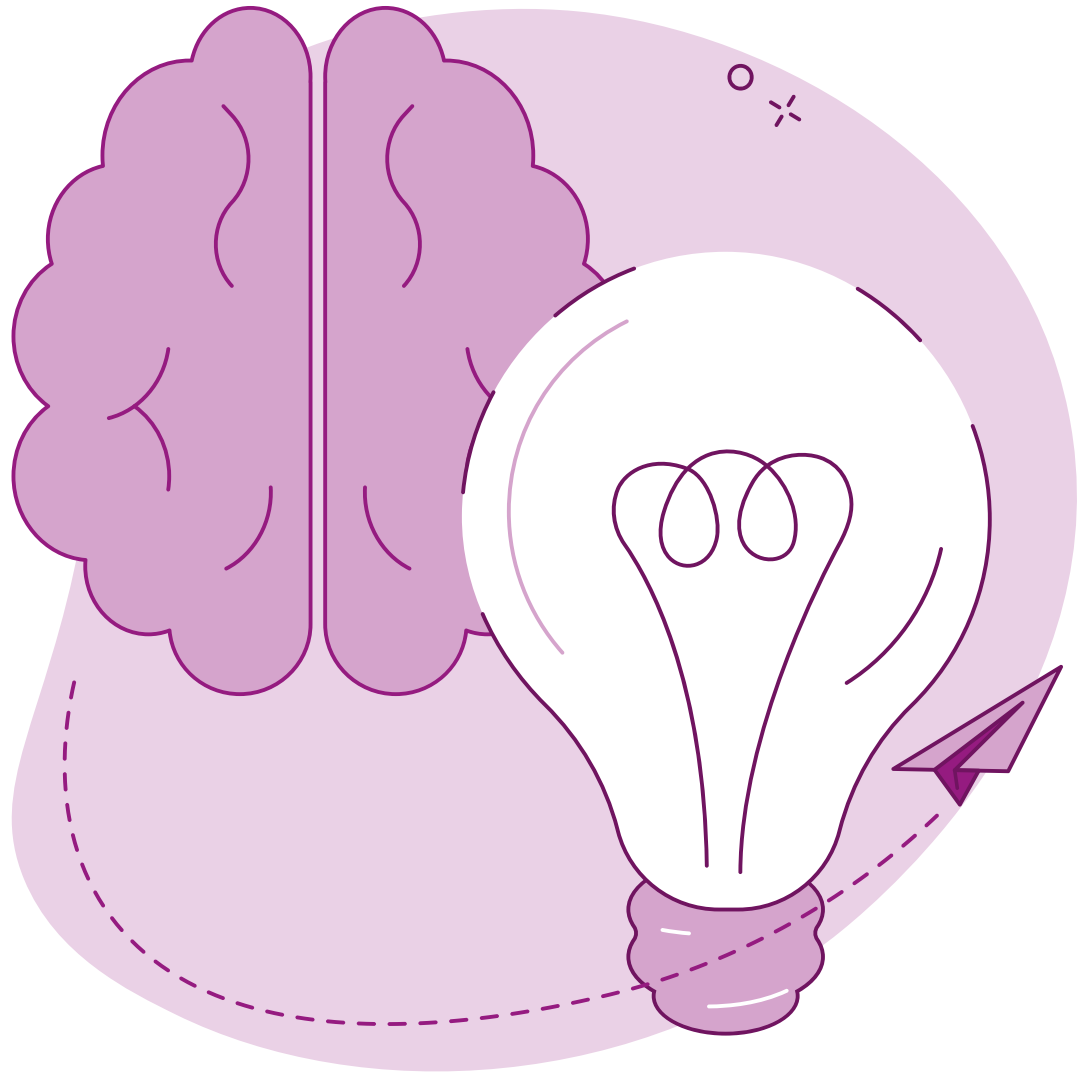
negative affect and negativity represent the unpleasant end (e.g. feeling contemptuous, irritable; expressing disdain, dislike).

In terms of motivational theories relating to flourishing, humanistic theories have the most relevance. Self-determination theory **(Deci and Ryan, 1985)**, also known as organismic dialectical theory, in which needs are met via an interaction between the person (internal) and their (external) environmental conditions, is a needs theory of motivation, positing that humans have three universal psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. These are conceptualized as nutriments, necessary for psychological functioning, which have to be nurtured by the social environment. For instance, an autonomy-supporting teacher will provide greater choices and pedagogic opportunities for a student, whose intrinsic motivation to study will increase. Self-determination theory posits that if conditions afford the opportunity for these

psychological needs to be satisfied, a person will function better, that is, experience well-being. Due to its conceptualization of optimal functioning, it is considered as an eudaimonic approach to well-being amongst empirical well-being researchers **(e.g. Ryan, Curren and Deci, 2013)**.

INTERPRETATIONS IN NEUROPSYCHOLOGY/ NEUROSCIENCE

Advances in neuroimaging techniques have led to much interest and progress in unravelling the neurobiological circuits in the human brain that promote human flourishing. Much of this work has focused on uncovering links between brain circuits and human behaviour during states of flourishing. Broadly described as 'positive neuroscience' it seeks to unravel the neural mechanisms that support flourishing, psychological well-being, resilience and promotion of health **(Kong et al., 2020)**. A recent meta-analysis of functional magnetic resonance imaging studies demonstrates

that prosocial behaviour activates distinct regions of the brain that include the insula, temporal lobe and superior temporal gyrus. This is distinct from areas activated during reward which include the lentiform nucleus, thalamus, caudate nucleus, parahippocampal gyrus and anterior cingulate cortex **(Wang et al., 2019)**. These findings indicate the possibility of distinct neural circuitry in the brain associated with human flourishing.

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These brain circuits underlying human flourishing can be cultivated by explicit training and can thus be taught like literacy and numeracy and should therefore be mainstreamed into education systems and classrooms.

Along similar lines, a separate set of studies investigating neural circuits linked to eudaimonic well-being and subjective well-being find interesting divergence in underlying brain areas. While the left middle temporal/fusiform gyrus is a hub node of a network associated with eudaimonic well-being **(Diener et al., 2018)**, the left primary/secondary somatosensory cortex is a hub node of the network associated with subjective well-being, suggesting that eudemonic and subjective well-being are localized in different regions of the brain. A number of brain imaging studies also document the role of mindfulness/meditation **(Davidson et al., 2003; King et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019)** and compassion **(Klimecki et al., 2013)** in improving well-being with an increase in prosocial behaviour. An important and notable feature here is the positive effect of regular training in the cultivation of well-being and flourishing. By examining the brain structure of Tibetan Buddhist monks, Davidson and colleagues show that regular meditation practices produce behavioural and structural

changes in the brain that promote increased well-being **(Davidson and Lutz, 2008)**. This emerging research has led to the exciting and encouraging proposition that well-being and flourishing can be trained or cultivated by regular practice based on the principles of neuroplasticity, which is the ability of the brain to change due to training **(Draganski et al., 2004)**.

How might these findings manifest in learning and education? Firstly, human flourishing has a neurobiological basis and requires specific brain circuits to be nurtured. These brain circuits contribute to the development of competencies of social and emotional learning that may be described as necessary skills that are required to equip all learners to identify and navigate emotions, practise mindful engagement and exhibit prosocial behaviour for human flourishing towards a peaceful and sustainable planet **(Singh and Duraiappah, 2019)**. Secondly, these brain circuits underlying human flourishing can be cultivated by explicit training and can thus be taught like

In the second quarter of the twentieth century, the hedonistic concept of happiness was being gradually discredited in mainstream economic theory for being unmeasurable and unscientific and was eventually replaced by a preference based approach

literacy and numeracy and should therefore be mainstreamed into education systems and classrooms. Thirdly, human flourishing has measurable outcomes which may allow us to evaluate it in learning and education. These and many more ideas underlying the science behind human flourishing are discussed in **WG1-ch3**.

New insights and approaches from neuropsychology and neuroscience to the field of human flourishing suggest great promise and excitement not only in measuring and characterizing human flourishing but also in adding to our understanding of the neurobiological basis that is part of the different constructs of flourishing **(Keyes, 2002; Diener et al., 2018)**. We look forward to newer insights and understanding of how flourishing as skill develops in the future

INTERPRETATIONS IN ECONOMICS

Until quite recently, mainstream economists have avoided discussing flourishing or related

terms such as welfare, well-being and happiness. Nevertheless, concepts of flourishing, or what makes life worthy, are an inevitable element of economic theory and always underlie it either explicitly or implicitly **(Oswald, 1997)**. Up until the twentieth century economics was dominated by hedonic conceptions of flourishing or happiness. Grounded in utilitarianism, most economists, including Henry Sidgwick, Alfred Marshall and Williams Stanley Jevons, assumed that happiness is achieved by maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain **(Sen, 2008)**. Some disagreement existed regarding what constitutes pleasure and pain and how to weigh them, but the basic principles of the hedonistic concept were retained **(Juster, 1991)**.

In the second quarter of the twentieth century, the hedonistic concept of happiness was being gradually discredited in mainstream economic theory for being unmeasurable and unscientific and was eventually replaced by a preference based approach **(Drakopoulos, 1997)**. This

move seemingly disconnected economics from happiness and flourishing because the latter were no longer needed to explain economic phenomena **(Harsanyi, 1996)**. In practice, however, it led mainstream economists to implicitly embrace a concept of flourishing based on desire satisfaction. According to this approach, the more one satisfies one's actual desires, the better off one is **(Sumner, 2003)**. In other words, we flourish when we

receive what we want. The notion of desire satisfaction also stands as a basis of the relationship between flourishing and material wealth. It is assumed that the wealthier we are, either as individuals or as a state, the more we can satisfy our desires or create the conditions that enable us to do so.

What characterizes concepts of flourishing underlining economics, both old and new, is

a commitment to subjectivism and maximization. In economic theory it is assumed that each individual is the best judge of their own interest **(Penz, 2008)**. The economic commitment to subjectivism has both an epistemic and moral justification. It is held that one knows oneself better than anyone else and that from a moral perspective paternalism should be avoided **(Norton, 1994)**. Economic concepts also assume that the level of flourishing results from the aggregation of positive experiences, be it pleasures in nineteenth-century conceptions or desire satisfaction today **(Hausman, McPherson and Satz, 2016)**. The aim in economics is, therefore, to maximize positive experiences. In the nineteenth century the aim was the maximization of pleasure, but this was replaced by maximizing desire satisfaction.

> **For all life forms, other than human beings, flourishing is a state wherein biological potential is realized**

Over the last few decades, the concept of happiness or flourishing that stands at the core of mainstream economics has been severely challenged from both within and outside the economic professions. Empirical research has revealed that increased wealth and the desire satisfaction it permits often do not result in higher levels of reported happiness **(e.g. Easterlin, 1974; Layard, 2011)**. Empirical research has also shown that people often misjudge their own interest and make systematic errors in pursuing their own good **(Frey and Stutzer, 2002; Layard, 2011)**. In addition, many economists including, for example, Sen **(2000)**, Layard **(2011)**, Scitovsky **(1992)** and Frank **(1997)** have pointed to the theoretical limits of the existing conception of well-being or flourishing that underlies mainstream economics. It is argued that a person can live an impoverished life, from a third-person perspective, while satisfying their desires **(Sen, 2000)**. It is also maintained that people's tendency to adapt to existing patterns of consumption makes it increasingly hard for them to experience happiness even when their desires are being satisfied **(Scitovsky, 1992)**. In addition, economists point to tension between public and private goods as a reason for why desire satisfaction might not result in better lives **(Frank, 1997)**. Finally,

Humans interact as cultural entities within the myriad social institutions that constitute a society. Flourishing in this domain emerges when individuals act coherently within the structures of this institutional or cultural ecosystem.

it is suggested that attempts to maximize desire satisfaction damage the environment in ways that can hinder flourishing **(Stiglitz, Sen and Fitoussi, 2009)**. These are, of course, only selected examples from a rapidly growing economic literature discussing the limits of existing mainstream economic conceptions of well-being and flourishing.

INTERPRETATIONS IN ECOLOGY AND ECOSYSTEMS

Flourishing is a particular configuration of the most basic telos of all living organisms: to exist in the world in such a manner as to reproduce themselves as individual organismic entities and as species. This telos has been named, variously: viability, autopoiesis and homeostasis. Living entities exist to maintain their life. This is not a tautology but the description of a dynamic, closed system.

For all life forms, other than human beings, flourishing is a state wherein biological potential

is realized. Biological potential is manifest in the expression of genes. For humans, the biological is complemented by an existential or cultural potential **(Ehrenfeld, 2019)**. The biological component of flourishing emerges only if organisms live coherently with their natural habitat. Their genes contain an evolutionary record of such coherence. If the external conditions change such that their genetic phenotype cannot cohere, the species will disappear locally or may even become extinct. Ecosystems provide proper habitats for all of the organisms they contain. The ecological system can be said to flourish when all the contained species pass through genetically driven stages from birth to death, that is, they flourish as individual components of the system. In this biological sense, human flourishing is no different from the flourishing of all other living organisms.

Human flourishing has a second social dimension because our ecosystem includes cultural as well as natural objects. Humans interact as cultural entities within

individuals act coherently within the structures of this institutional or cultural ecosystem. The human organism differs from other life forms in many ways, but one important aspect is self-consciousness and associated self-expression. Human flourishing, in addition to its dependence on these two systemic aspects, may emerge when an individual expresses that self, authentically, as an independent, autonomous entity – in other words, when they own and are responsible for their actions. All three conditions need to be exhibited, more or less continuously, over a period of time for flourishing to emerge. In this ecological sense, it is not a momentary phenomenon.

2.1 .3

DESCRIPTION OF HUMAN FLOURISHING

The interpretations of human flourishing found in the various academic disciplines[5] have informed us in developing a description of human flourishing that is both comprehensive and general in character: it does not favour a particular theory of flourishing and avoids using words that are associated with particular theories. Moreover the description is formal, allowing for various interpretations of the central elements of the description (possibly informed by a particular worldview). And, as has been alluded to above, framing human flourishing in the context of an interpretive-critical perspective allows us to foreground some of its constitutive meanings as well as possibilities for human actions, including social change, human self-empowerment and liberation. We propose the following description:

Human flourishing is both the optimal continuing development of human beings' potentials and living well as a human being. It means being engaged in relationships and activities that

Human flourishing is both the optimal continuing development of human beings' potentials and living well as a human being.

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[5]It should be noted that we have also been informed by texts from other academic disciplines, such as that by the theologian **Volf (2015)**.

These assumptions about the qualities of potentials also mean that determining or ascribing potentials does not automatically reveal how people should be treated or how pupils ought to be educated (education is not a technical enterprise).

are meaningful, that is, aligned with both an individual's own values and humanistic values, in a way that is satisfying to them. Flourishing is conditional on the contribution of individuals and requires an enabling environment.

The description contains five central concepts that we shall expound upon below.

OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT

Just as trees and flowers flourish in many different ways, we posit that optimal development is relative to an agent (agent relative), which is related to an individual's potential. Human beings share many potentials generally conceived, but individuals have different levels of potential and, therefore, what is optimal for A can be different from what is optimal for B.[6] Thus, people's development should be evaluated against their own standards, not against those

of others. Unlike in the natural world, we can also say that human flourishing is agentially relative – human beings develop potential in different ways (with influence from their cultural background, language, beliefs, etc.) and also to function well in different ways (see also next point). Furthermore, flourishing is a dynamic state of human development, but not necessarily a linear, progressive one.

Although optimal development is agent and agentially relative, there are still independent (pre) conditions of human flourishing; (pre)conditions that need to be fulfilled to be able to say that a human being is flourishing. Preconditions are described at the end of the chapter; here we focus on what are called constitutive conditions, that is, the conditions that allow us to say that people flourish.

[6]Note, however that the comparison should not be dependent on the circumstances in which they live (**e.g. Nussbaum, 2006, 2011; Sen, 2000, 2008**).

POTENTIALS[7]

According to Article 29 of the Convention of the Rights of the Child, children are entitled to develop their potential to the full. Whilst long standing debates relevant to potential have existed in the metaphysics literature, including Aristotle's notions of potential and actuality, the current purpose is to provide accessible insights into this area as it relates to human flourishing, particularly in the context of education.

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[7]It is possible to distinguish a fourth type of potential: potentiality. The potentiality of human beings refers to things (e.g. skills, dispositions) that are not there yet, that are in the making. Whether or not potentiality can be actualized is part of the quest (of life) of human beings, although educators can cultivate its development once it is discovered. The potentialities referred to above, for example, the potential of an author to write books is a skill that can be developed to bring about an altered state, that is, the authoring of a book.

What human potential means, or what it is, is not self-evident. A most insightful clarification of the concept comes from Scheffler **(1985)**. There are two aspects of his theory that inform our description of 'flourishing', namely his presuppositions **(pp. 11–16, 63)** and his classification of three types of potential. Central to Scheffler's **(1985)** theory is that: a) the stock of human beings' potentials changes over time – some potentials are actualized and lead to other potentials; some are discovered later in life; some disappear after a certain age. Thus, there are no fixed potentials; 'In no case is potential a metaphysical essence governing the predetermined direction of the subject's development, nor is it a durable feature intrinsic to the subject' **(p. 63)**; b) human potentials can be positive and negative (people can be potentially evil and good); and c) not all potentials can be (harmoniously) attained. On the basis of these presuppositions, Scheffler **(1985)** argues that we require a normative evaluation of which potentials should be attained/developed in

particular ways. These assumptions about the qualities of potentials also mean that determining or ascribing potentials does not automatically reveal how people should be treated or how pupils ought to be educated (education is not a technical enterprise). In **WG1-ch4** a normative idea about which curriculum enables human flourishing is defended. Scheffler **(1985)** offers a helpful distinction between three ways in which 'potential (s)' can be used: as a capacity notion, a propensity notion and a capability notion.

Capacity represents possibility; ascribing a capacity to someone means that one denies a presupposed argument for the necessity that they cannot do/be(come) x. Having a capacity means that if the conditions are correct, someone will be able to do or become what the capacity indicates they are able to do or become. For example, saying that John has the capacity to play the piano means that if there were a piano he would be able to play it **(Scheffler, 1985, pp. 47, 48)**. A capacity notion of potential

Approaches to capability are relevant to human flourishing through their emphasis on potential and optimal development and how conditions enhance that potential.

only denies that a person cannot acquire some characteristic, it does not say that they will. For example, psychologists have attempted to measure ability for some time, particularly through measurement of the construct of the intelligence quotient (IQ). Debates around the legitimacy of IQ measurement often relate to its malleability or environmental pre-conditions, namely whether it is or should be a measure of capacity, or whether it should be used to predict capability **(Nisbett et al., 2012)**. Such debates remain highly relevant to education and education policy, for they elucidate positions about the objectivity of claims.

A stronger notion is the propensity notion of potential **(Scheffler, 1985, pp. 52–58)**. The propensity to become something or other or to acquire a feature of a certain sort expresses that a conditionally predictable endpoint (which can be good or bad) will be reached if conditions x to z are present **(p. 57)**. Thus, if we say that someone has the propensity to play the piano, they can predict

that they will do so if there is a piano, has had sufficient piano lessons and the time to practise. Propensity may also be compared to character strengths as a trait, such as propensity to contribute to individual fulfilment for oneself and others **(Peterson and Seligman, 2004)**. Finally, the capability notion of potential refers to a person's effectiveness in promoting a designated outcome **(p. 58)**. Having the capability to become x means that it can be predicted that a person will become x if they make the effort **(p. 61)** A capability is what is within a person's power to do and what they are free to do **(p. 59)**. Capability is highly relevant to conceptualizations of flourishing because of its link to potential or becoming. Capability crosses multiple disciplines including economics, education and to a lesser extent psychology, which uses 'ability' moreso, particularly through the measurement of the construct of IQ mentioned above.

In the economics discipline, Sen's **(2000, 2008)** work on capability is well known. Sen argues that a person's well-being depends

upon what they are actually capable of doing and being. An individual's substantive freedom to rationally choose to be and to do what they value being and doing is central for their flourishing and agency. Such agency is a key characteristic of humanistic values in which a human being is not totally predetermined by external conditions. Nussbaum's **(2011)** capabilities approach emphasizes social justice and dignity in which freedoms or opportunities are created by a combination of personal abilities and political, social and economic environments. Robeyns **(2016)** offers capabilitarianism as another name for the capability approach and highlights that the capability approach is a normative

> **Philosophical theories that draw on Aristotle's view of flourishing propose a naturalistic interpretation and refer to aspects that are characteristic of human beings, not of monkeys or ants.**

framework which includes a family of (capability) theories. All capabilitarian theories focus on what a person is able to be and to do (their capabilities) and/or those capabilities that they have realized (their functionings). These and other approaches to capability are relevant to human flourishing through their emphasis on potential and optimal development and how conditions enhance that potential.

LIVING WELL AS A HUMAN BEING

Philosophical theories that draw on Aristotle's view of flourishing propose a naturalistic interpretation and refer to aspects that are characteristic of human beings, not of monkeys or ants. Some theories of human flourishing focus strictly on what is typical of human beings in contrast to other types of beings **(e.g. Aristotle, 2009; Foot, 2001)**, while others have a wider scope and include characteristics that human beings share with other species, like feelings, or the things that are good for human beings (what they

need to flourish), which can be good for non-human beings too **(e.g. Holma, 2007; Nussbaum, 2006)**.

Defence of this wider notion of naturalism is plausible, for the potential of human beings is related to their nature. However, this does not imply that human beings are determined by their nature. Empirical research on the influence of genetic make-up and the environment on human development shows time and again that (the interaction between) the two explain an individual's character and behaviour **(e.g. Rutter, 2006; Plomin, 1990; Interpretations in neuropsychology/neuroscience, above)**. Thus, human beings' potential develops and is enacted in various ways. For instance, a person who is technically skillful can develop these capacities in various jobs and hobbies. Curiosity can lead to explorations within the confines of one's house or the wish to venture out into the world, but is also required for being an active citizen, a critical consumer and for learning in general. Furthermore, while at a general level we could say that human beings share the

From the explication of potential and naturalism we conclude that flourishing is a hybrid concept: it is naturalistic, culture dependent and agent relative.

same potential, at a more concrete level we see that individuals have different potentials. For example, not all human beings have the capacity for high jumping, playing a flute or becoming a proficient carpenter or a minister of education. Both the individual diversity in potential and the variety in which people can develop and enact their potential, means that human flourishing is agent-relative: human beings flourish in their own way **(Aristotle, 2009; De Ruyter, 2012; Foot, 2001; Huta, 2013; Kraut, 1979; Rasmussen, 1999)**.

Another point of contention is whether human flourishing simply means the optimal development of the natural capacities of human beings. We suggest that this is a simplistic and mistaken idea, because it cannot be denied that human beings have potentials that are detrimental to themselves and others and/or enact them in a way that is detrimental to themselves or others. This means that a normative evaluation of human potential is necessary. Kraut **(2007)**, for instance, proposes that we should not begin with

(human) nature and suggests that this is always good for us, but when we look at human activities and practices that we believe to be good and investigate what is characteristic for them, 'we say that nature gave us something good in all these cases' **(p. 147)**. For example, when we look at the ways in which people around the world dealt with the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, we can say that they were able to do so because of their intelligence, creativity, empathy, sociability and physical capacities.

The human capacity to make normative evaluations is one reason to reject a simple deduction of human flourishing from given capacities or human needs and can explain that people live different flourishing lives **(e.g. Foot, 2001)**. Human beings differ from other living creatures in that they are normally able to change themselves intentionally (if the circumstances in which they live allow them alternative routes and if they are not hindered by serious psychiatric disorders or intellectual disability), because they are able to reflect on themselves and their

environment. This ability for reflection includes their evaluation of the ways in which they best develop their potential and enact it to live a good life. This will be more or less influenced by their cultural environment. For instance the majority of women around the world will believe that they flourish when they develop their nurturing and caring potential to look after their children. This capacity means that evaluating whether a human being is flourishing has a subjective dimension as well. We will return to this below.

From the explication of potential and naturalism we conclude that flourishing is a hybrid concept: it is naturalistic, culture-dependent and agent-relative. Flourishing is also both objective and subjective: there are potentials that human beings need to be able to develop and enact to say that they are flourishing, but human beings also have their own views, preferences and desires about the ways in which they best develop and enact their potential.

There are aspects of living that are good for all human beings, simply because they make a life a human life. We identify three main categories of what constitutes 'good': firstly, having relationships (with family members, friends, community members, citizens, animals and the environment); secondly, being engaged in activities (e.g. play, work, learning, caring); and thirdly, agency. Note that these categories are general and the ways in which they are enacted are influenced by the culture in which humans live and are dependent on or relative to what is good for an individual human being.

MEANINGFUL

Not every relationship and activity that human beings engage in is an expression of their flourishing. When human beings are forced into a relationship or activity (like work) that does not align with their (deepest) values and potential or when they only act out of self-interest to the harm of others, we argue that they do not

We identify three main categories of what constitutes 'good': firstly, having relationships; secondly, being engaged in activities; and thirdly, agency.

fully flourish as human beings. In the first case such relationships or activities are not meaningful to the individual, because they cannot be a source of significance for them, in other words they do not contribute to the individual's belief or feeling that what they do matters. Nor can they be a source for a sense of purpose; in other words, they do not contribute to an individual's reasons for living their life (in a certain way) **(e.g.Martela and Steger, 2016; George and Park, 2016 about the dimensions of meaning in life).** The more dominant the meaningless spheres of life, the bigger the impact

> **Central humanistic values are: negative and positive freedom, that is, being free from inappropriate interference from others and being free to engage in activities and relationships**

on a human being's flourishing. However, meaninglessness can affect people in different ways. For instance, while Aisha experiences feelings of worthlessness and depressive moods because of her monotonous job, Bellah sees the job as instrumental in being able to live a meaningful life. While Bellah could be said to flourish at a higher level if she had a meaningful job, she can still be regarded as a flourishing person. When people act out of self-interest only (the second case), the relationships or activities undermine the meaning, in the sense of having importance, of someone or something else and therefore cannot be meaningful. Thus, relationships and activities are meaningful when they are a source of significance and purpose.

This resonates with Susan Wolf's **(2010)** view which suggests that meaning in life 'arises from loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way' **(p. 8)**, involving 'subjective and objective elements, suitably and inextricably linked' **(p. 9)**. Further, meaning arises 'when

subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness' **(Wolf, 2010, p. xii)**. This idea is also expressed by the psychologist William Damon **(2009)**, who has written extensively on (the development of) purpose in life, and suggests that 'purpose is a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self' **(p. 33)**.

VALUES

Tiberius's **(2018)** value fulfilment theory of well-being proposes that our lives go well to the extent that we pursue and fulfill our appropriate values. Tiberius **(2018)** asserts that we live well when we succeed emotionally, reflectively and over the long term. Well-being is a life rich in value fulfilment and momentary well-being is considered within a whole-of-life perspective. This leads to the question of what are values, or what is the activity of valuing? Tiberius **(2018)** states that we are motivated to promote or

People can be said to flourish when they enact their potential irrespective of whether they affirm that they are doing so or whether they are satisfied with the way in which they are able to lead their life.

pursue the values to which we are committed and that we are likely to react emotionally if our values are helped or threatened. Valuing here is also a judgement that something is good in some way. Values in this sense are seen as generating reasons for us to behave in a certain way. Likewise, what seems to underscore a value fulfilment theory of well-being is that a human's capacity to proffer reasons is considered as interconnected with their emotional disposition. In this way, reason and emotion are intertwined as by implication a value fulfilment theory of well-being recognizes both the significance of proffering reasons and internalizing emotions.

Central humanistic values are: negative and positive freedom, that is, being free from inappropriate interference from others and being free to engage in activities and relationships (for

which human beings tend to need support from others, for instance in the form of protection or in the case of young people, in the form of education);[8] equality and equity of human beings; solidarity with (groups of) human beings; care for sentient beings; and care for the environment.

Moral values have a particular status among the values of a flourishing person. While flourishing persons do not have to be or aspire to be morally sanctimonious, it is characteristic for them to value the flourishing of other human beings. At a minimum, they respect the negative freedom of others and, if they have the opportunity, contribute to the possibility that others can flourish as well. The first is less demanding than the second and therefore the moral value in contributing to other people's flourishing is qualified; not according to their intention of

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[8]The terms positive and negative freedom were introduced by the philosopher Isaiah Berlin (in an article in 1958 that was reprinted in 1969 and in many other sources that are freely available on the internet) for the two ideas (or what people would call types) of freedom or liberty mentioned.

whether or not they want to do so, but dependent on what people are able to do. Some are in a situation whereby they can only contribute to the flourishing of people close by, while others have the means and the opportunity to help large groups of people or people further removed to flourish. This is not based on the view that flourishing people are naturally inclined to act morally or that they always act morally (although they will feel ashamed or guilty if they have done something immoral) or that they do not have to overcome other desires and negative emotions. There are ample empirical illustrations that such presumptions are not true. They do, however, point to the importance of education in which these humanistic values are fostered. In this way, flourishing and education seem to be intertwined on the basis of shared moral values.

SATISFACTION

People can be said to flourish when they enact their potential irrespective of whether they affirm that they are doing so or whether they are satisfied with the way in which they are able to lead their life. This, however, does not seem to cohere with our common understanding of human flourishing. It seems incorrect to say that someone flourishes if they do not share that evaluation or if they are unhappy with their life (which could be a clinical depression, but also a 'healthy evaluation' of what their life turns out to be). Therefore the description includes a subjective evaluative dimension of flourishing.

Satisfaction has both a cognitive valuative and emotional dimension. Human beings flourish if they: a) can (authentically) affirm that their life is good, that is, they have reasons for giving a positive evaluation; b) have overall positive feelings about their life (they are happy), which does not mean that they have to have these positive feelings all the time or about everything they do.

2.2

Description of education (and teaching, learning and evaluation)

Education, like any other concept, is constituted of meanings that give it form and matter. A formal element of a concept refers to the rationale or guiding principle that gives it its form, whereas matter

Within teaching, there is a relationship among teachers and students. Likewise, learning denotes a relation among learners, teachers and texts.

refers to the many ways in which a concept manifests in actions, referred to as practices **(Kovesi, 1970)**. A form of education is the activity that describes education as a human relation. In other words, without a form of human relations, education cannot exist. Education is what it is on the basis of humans' relations with themselves and others: humans and other humans, human and non-humans and humans and the environment.

Towards the end of the fifth century B.C., Greek sophists explained education as training for promoting individual happiness **(Graves, 1926)**. In opposition to such a view on education, Platonists and Aristotelians understood the concept as a synergy between an individual and a democratic society. Subsequently, the influences of scholastic thought resulted in education being conceived of as a human practice underscored by acts of reason and faith. It was only after the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century that Kant **(1996)** and Rousseau took further

the idea that education is an act of rationality. In the nineteenth century, education was understood as an act of uniting the self and the world in the Anglo-Saxon world, and in Europe as Bildung – a matter of enculturating (civilizing or cultivating or moralizing) the autonomous self in the world **(Lovlie and Standish, 2003)**. Other than the dominant Western notion of educare (to nourish or train) **(Winch and Gingell, 1990)**, in Muslim society, education is also referred to as ta'dib (good education) **(Al-Attas, 1991)**, whereas ubuntu (human dignity and interdependence) is most poignantly used in relation to education on the African continent **(Waghid, 2014; WG2-ch8)**. Therefore, we recognize that there are multiple understandings of education based on different cultural and religious orientations.

Elements of matter manifest in practices such as teaching, learning and evaluation. Put differently, teaching, learning and evaluation are multiple ways in which the concept of education is realized. Within teaching, there

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The question arises: if education is underscored by the notion of a human relation, what makes teaching, learning and evaluation what they are or become?

is a relationship among teachers and students. Likewise, learning denotes a relation among learners, teachers and texts. In a similar way, evaluation is underscored by relations among evaluators (teachers) and evaluees (students). Consequently, teaching, learning and evaluation can be considered as educational activities. It is the concept (form) of education that organizes the many ways (matter) in which teaching, learning and evaluation unfold. In other words, the concept of education is constituted by the acts of human relations that in turn give rise to how teaching, learning and evaluation are organized.

In considering education (paideia), Rorty **(1999, p. 117)** posits that human relations are guided by two necessary and equal processes, namely, socialization and individuation. Socialization involves familiarizing students with what teachers consider to be true, whether it is true or not. In other words, students are socialized into an inherited tradition of knowledge that prepares them for a future

political, social and economic life **(Rorty, 1999, p. 118)**. Individuation prepares students to think critically and to challenge the prevailing consensus about what is considered as true **(Rorty, 1999, p. 118)**. Rorty's interpretation of socialization is similar to both what Biesta **(2015, p. 77)** identifies as qualification that involves the transmission and acquisition of knowledge, skills and dispositions that qualify students to do something for a particular profession, and the socialization function of education, which is the introduction of the younger generation into the ways of society and communities, their social, cultural and political orders. In addition to qualification and socialization, Biesta distinguishes the function of subjectification **(2015, p. 77)**. Subjectification, similar to individuation, concerns the ways in which students come to exist as subjects of initiative and responsibility rather than as objects of the actions of others **(Waghid and Davids, 2017, p. 39)**.

The question arises: If education is underscored by the notion of

In learning, students act as human agents intent on coming to make sense of what they are taught. That is, their learning becomes significant on the basis of their potentialities being evoked to see the point.

a human relation, what makes teaching, learning and evaluation what they are or become? Firstly, when one teaches one provokes students to come to understanding. Teaching would not be teaching if students were not aroused to see the point **(Greene, 1995)**. The point about teaching is that it implies a relational act according to which students are encouraged to act in particular ways. And, to provoke students implies that they are invited to think for themselves – a matter of being summoned to come to understanding. Secondly, learning happens when students' potentialities are evoked to come to understanding in agential ways of being and acting **(MacIntyre, 1999)**. Learning would fail to be learning if students' potentialities were not evoked in the quest to gain understanding and insight, and be encouraged to embark on academic, political, economic, social and environmental activism. In learning, students act as human agents intent on coming to make sense of what they are taught. That is, their learning becomes significant on the basis of their

potentialities being evoked to see the point. When their potentialities are evoked they exercise their freedom to think for themselves and make sense of the world around them. Exercising one's freedom is a matter of acting with autonomy. And, when one does act with autonomy one creates opportunities to come to understanding, that is, one constructs meanings, critiques and differences with others. Simply put, one exercises one's freedom in a positive way. However, one can also act freely in a negative way whereby one articulates claims unconstrained by the freedom of others. Of course, exercising one's freedom in an unhindered way can also be disadvantageous for one's relations with others because one might act unjustly towards them. And, when one exercises one's freedom in a negative way, unhindered by the freedom of others, there is always the possibility that one can act unjustly towards others. Hence, negative liberty might not necessarily be advantageous to cultivating just human relations. In agreement with Gutmann

(2003), acting freely should not be left unconstrained, especially if justice towards others is undermined. Thirdly, evaluation involves making reasonable judgements about what is taught and learned, that is, as a form of deliberative inquiry teachers make sense of what students proffer as a consequence of their

In sum, education is constituted by the act of a human relation.

learning. Evaluation would not count as evaluation if reasonable judgements were not proffered about what constitutes teaching and learning, and if such judgements were not determined in deliberative action. To evaluate as teachers do, and to be evaluated as students are, does not happen in isolation but rather, in a way that both teachers and students can justify. When teachers justify their evaluation of students' work, they give an account of why students produce work of a specific kind, that is, they provide a justification for their evaluation.

Like education, teaching and learning involve human relations. Drawing on the seminal thoughts of Spinoza **(2007)**, teaching and learning happen when teachers and students act responsibly and responsively towards one another. Human flourishing can be achieved when teachers and students act in ways that are desirable not only for themselves as individuals, but also for all others. As argued elsewhere, when teaching and learning lead to the inculcation of goodness

and equal respect and dignity for all others, then teachers and students become free to actualize their own potentials in ways that will not cause harm to others **(Davids and Waghid, 2019b)**. Thus, teaching for Spinoza **(2007)** is not individualistic, egotistical or insular but is about engaging with students and the world in which they live so that whatever students learn not only changes who they are for the good but also addresses social injustices that might hinder their flourishing. Self and collective fulfilment (flourishing) would be wanting if teachers and students did not act freely and rationally driven by a desire to honour and respect one another in their relations. In this way, human flourishing also seems to be related to the self doing things collaboratively with others so that together the selves undergo an alteration. In other words, teachers and students act in the interests of one another – a matter of being responsive to one another – when they recognize one another's presence as speaking beings capable of making judgements about that

> We contend that human flourishing has greater potential to be realized if it is considered in relation to an understanding of education that holds the promise for human flourishing.

with which they agree or disagree. Showing dissent (disagreement) is a matter of recognizing differences in others' claims that encourages an individual to adjust and re-articulate their own formulations. In this way, students learn to speak more confidently and teachers act with care **(Waghid, 2019, p. xv)**.

In sum, education is constituted by the act of a human relation. When an individual thinks on their own they do so privately or in relation to their inner self, possibly comparing their thoughts with existing ones on a particular matter. Through education, an individual's thoughts commune with an external other self. Thus, the individual connects their thoughts with those of others, even in a private sphere. In this way, education is both a private and public experience where the thoughts of one person can be brought into conversation with those of others. If such a relation were not present, education would not be possible. This rationale of a human relation organizes teaching, learning and evaluation in specific ways.

We have identified teaching as provocation, learning as evocation and evaluation as deliberation on the basis that these human acts are manifestations of how education manifests in institutions and practices. In light of such an understanding of education, we contend that human flourishing has greater potential to be realized if it is considered in relation to an understanding of education that holds the promise for human flourishing. If education were not enacted through the agency of provocation, evocation and deliberation it might not be possible to realize human flourishing in the ways suggested above **(WG2-ch8)**.

2.2 .1

DEMOCRATIC AND COSMOPOLITAN EDUCATION

We posit that human flourishing is particularly enhanced by a form of education that is democratic and cosmopolitan. Considering

The notion of cosmopolitan education is one that engenders human relations that are inclusive despite its emphasis on difference and otherness

that education is constituted by the idea of a human relation, such a relation, if it is democratic and cosmopolitan, has the potential to enhance human flourishing. Gutmann **(1987)**, Callan **(1997)** and Benhabib **(2004)** place a high premium on democratic engagement in the pursuit of cultivating educational relations among humans. According to Gutmann **(1987)** humans act democratically when they exercise their individual freedom autonomously (independently) and interdependently with other humans. When humans act independently and in collaboration with others the possibility of, and opportunity for, learning together and making defensible and collective ethical judgements would be enhanced. Benhabib **(2004)** posits that democratic iteration is at the core of democratic education. That is, when humans listen attentively and converse with one another in educational contexts, their forms of engagement are invariably altered and renewed in relation to a democratically inspired ethical opportunity **(Davids and Waghid,**

2019a, p. 25). Callan **(1997)** avers that educational relations among humans ought to be guided by ethical confrontation so that humans use their opportunity to recognize the right to contest views and engage in dissent as they endeavour to persuade one another through deliberation and conciliation **(WG2-ch8)**. The point about democratic education being constituted by autonomous and interdependent action, iteration and ethical confrontation is that humans create opportunities to engage openly and freely with one another's views, take responsibility for one another's views, and although they would be provoked by confrontation they would continue 'to speak their minds without being silenced, even when their views are provocative and dissenting' – a matter of exercising their human agency towards freedom **(Davids and Waghid, 2019a, p. 47)**. In other words, through democratic relations, their education would be individually and collectively pursued on the basis of disturbing doubts about one another's claims. In this human relation, flourishing

2

In our elucidation of human flourishing three prominent concepts emerged in relation to the notion of potential(s): capacity, capability and propensity.

becomes conditional upon acts of democratic engagement, that is, interdependence, iteration and ethical confrontation.

The notion of cosmopolitan education is one that engenders human relations that are inclusive despite its emphasis on difference and otherness. Nussbaum **(2000)**, Derrida **(2010)** and Hansen **(2011)** proffer understandings of cosmopolitan education that can enhance human flourishing. Nussbaum **(2000)** argues for a notion of universal hospitality, in particular having respect for cultural differences and enacting human responsibility that can contribute towards confronting human problems on the basis of critical argumentation and deliberation as human beings endeavour to eradicate prejudice, inequality and injustices vis-à-vis their educational concerns. Derrida's **(2010)** view of cosmopolitan education is premised on an understanding of human relations underscored by a notion of unconditional hospitality. This view of unconditional hospitality is one
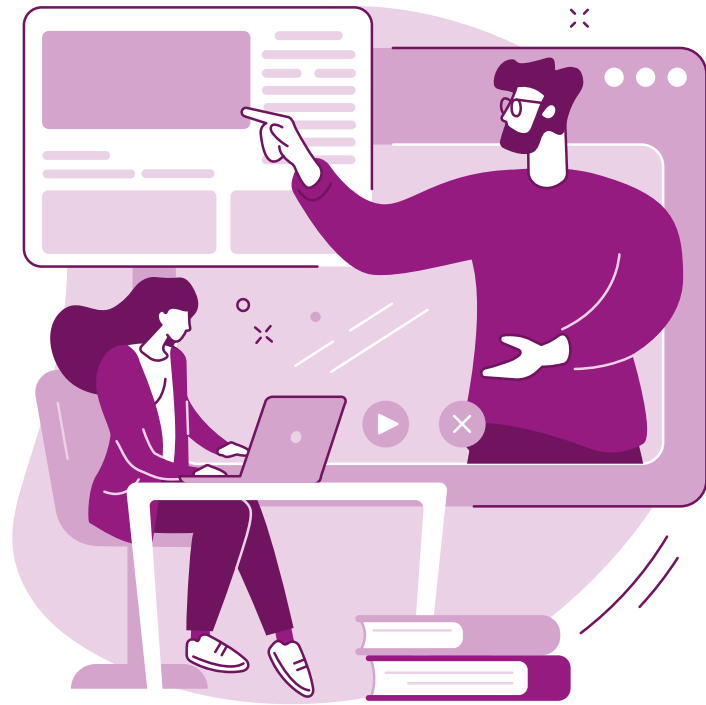
of interruption whereby humans are prepared to forgive the unforgivable in order to eradicate hatred, resentment, torture, genocide and other crimes against humanity. Hansen **(2011)** takes a different look at cosmopolitan education and makes a cogent case for the notion of a reflexive openness to the self and what is known to the self. In other words, cosmopolitan education as pursuing a reflexive openness to the self implies that a person has to be open and reflexive towards that which is known to them – a matter of performing self-introspection and self-critique. Only then, the possibility exists for the individual to be open and critical to that which is not known to them. Hansen makes the case that cosmopolitan education is about enhancing a reflexive openness to that which is still in becoming. The notion of a cosmopolitan education with its emphasis on cultivating universal hospitality, unconditional hospitality and a reflexive openness to what is known and yet to come can create opportunities to possibly enhance human

flourishing. This is so on the basis that human flourishing depends on the cultivation of relations that resonate with hospitality, unconditionality and reflexive openness to the known and what is still to come. It is in hospitable, unconditional and reflexively open relations that humans' education contributes to their opportunities to flourish.

2.3 Relation between human flourishing and education

In our elucidation of human flourishing three prominent concepts emerged in relation to the notion of potential(s): capacity, capability and propensity. If one were to explain human flourishing in light of potentials it could be that one shows the capacity to accomplish a task, for instance, writing poems; one demonstrates the capability to author poems; and one shows the propensity to accomplish the art of poetry. In all three instances, one has drawn on one's potential to write poems. But then, in showing one's prowess to write poems one equally becomes adept at taking poetry into a new realm. Thus, one shows the potential to write poems and to produce novel ones. When one's potential to pursue poetry is accentuated, one invariably draws on the thoughts of others both rationally and imaginatively; it brings one into a relation with others albeit in reality or fictitiously. On this basis, pursuing one's potentials seems to be connected to one's flourishing

Flourishing enhances education – when teachers and students flourish in their teaching and learning, in other words when they can develop their potential and live well and when teaching and learning are meaningful to them, their relations will prosper and both the teaching and learning will be higher in quality.

and in turn, one's flourishing depends on one's relations with others and otherness, for instance, the distinctiveness of the poem one produces. In this way, one's flourishing seems to be intertwined with one's education on the basis that both actions, that is, flourishing and education, are inextricably connected with the idea of a human relation.

Figure 1 shows how human flourishing and education are intertwined (mutually reinforcing). Firstly, education enables flourishing – human beings need to be introduced into the social, cultural and natural world by teaching and learning, in relation to teachers and the environment, for they need to be able to make sense of their world in order to be able to live well as human beings. This means that flourishing can be regarded as an aim of education. Secondly, flourishing enhances education – when teachers and students flourish in their teaching and learning, in other words when they can develop their potential and live well and when teaching

and learning are meaningful to them, their relations will prosper and both the teaching and learning will be higher in quality.

The intertwined character of flourishing and education also shows that flourishing is a hybrid concept: the development of human potential that makes life a human life must inform education (the naturalistic quality of flourishing), but the worlds in which these potentials are fostered are different (culturally dependent) and good education takes into account that children can develop different ways of living well related to their specific potentials and their ideas and preferences about how they want to live in the world (agent-relative). That the last is true can be shown by the fact that for some adults being a teacher is a meaningful way of living well, while others want to use the potentials that teachers need to become an engineer, a doctor or a parent (and there are also human beings who do not have the specific potential to become a good teacher).

2.3 .1

PRECONDITIONS OF FLOURISHING

Finally, education has a complex relationshipwith flourishing: on the one hand it is part of human flourishing and on the other hand it is a precondition of human flourishing – a condition that needs to be fulfilled in order to make human flourishing possible. So far we have described what human flourishing means, that is, which conditions need to be fulfilled in order to be able to say that humans are flourishing; the so-called constitutive elements or constituents. But human flourishing also presumes that basic conditions are fulfilled. These include basic biological needs like food and safety or existential needs like freedom or psychological health.

Preconditions tend to be categorized as internal or external. There are at least three ways to construe internal versus external preconditions relevant to preconditions for flourishing. Firstly, within the context of humans, particularly in individualist cultures, internal conditions are often construed as those within the body boundary, with anything outside deemed as external, which may include social (or cultural) and physical environments. Secondly, some may construe internal preconditions more narrowly, that is, by referring to phenomenological or subjective fields of experience or the 'I' as internal, and hence things within the body boundary such as brain chemistry as external. Thirdly, Aristotle used 'external' in a wider sense, namely for all those conditions that are necessary for human flourishing, but that are largely beyond the agent's control **(Aristotle, 2009, p. 14)**, which means that human beings also require (a bit of) luck to be able to flourish. Thus, Aristotle used the term 'external goods' for a wide array of necessary preconditions of human flourishing such as physical, psychological, societal/political and economic aspects **(e.g. Kristjánsson, 2020, p. 33)**. Some of these are really outside the person
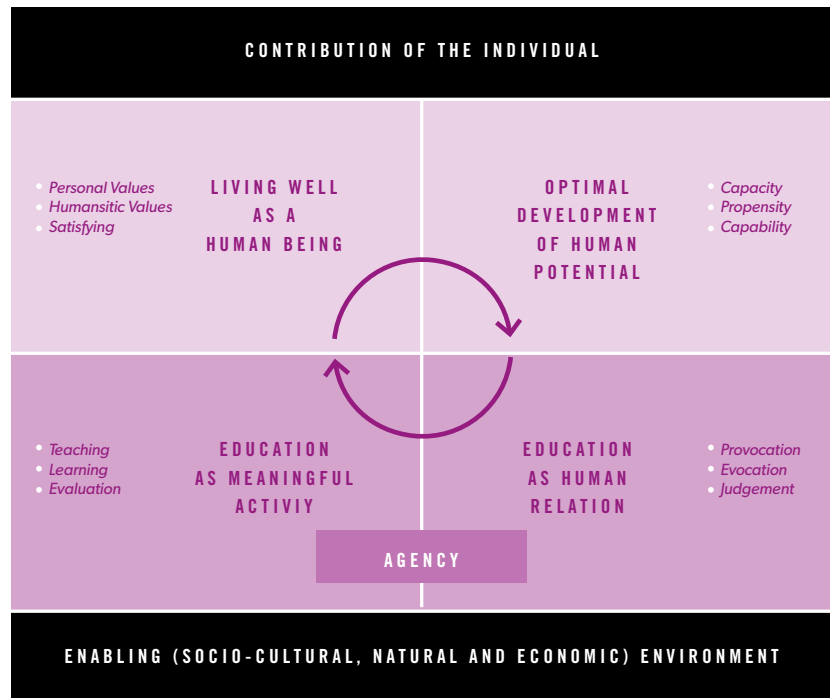
CONTRIBUTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL

- *Personal Values*
- *Humansitic Values*
- *Satisfying*

LIVING WELL AS A HUMAN BEING

OPTIMAL DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN POTENTIAL

- *Capacity*
- *Propensity*
- *Capability*

- *Teaching*
- *Learning*
- *Evaluation*

EDUCATION AS MEANINGFUL ACTIVIY

EDUCATION AS HUMAN RELATION

- *Provocation*
- *Evocation*
- *Judgement*

AGENCY

ENABLING (SOCIO-CULTURAL, NATURAL AND ECONOMIC) ENVIRONMENT

Figure 1. A visual representation of the relationship between flourishing and education

but some are more 'internal'; some can hardly be changed by a person, while conditions such as (mental) health, as well as some aspects of one's societal circumstances, like living in a safe and clean neighbourhood, can be influenced by a person to a certain degree **(Kristjánsson, 2020)**. Further, the wider the group of preconditions, the more difficult it becomes to make a clear distinction between preconditions and constituents, as the relationship between flourishing and education also shows.

For general understanding and policy purposes the first construct, the body boundary definition of internal and external, is likely to be more easily understood. Hence, a genetic precondition would be internal in this sense. A cultural precondition would be external, but may be internalized over time. The issue at hand is which internal and external preconditions are necessary or helpful in their presence or absence. Further, it is important to stress that the majority of preconditions are not under the control of individuals; luck as well as concerted effort is needed to realize the preconditions. These preconditions are dealt with in **WG1-ch3** and **WG1-ch5**.

2.4 Recommendations

To ensure that all children and adolescents will receive education for flourishing, states must (collaboratively) ensure that necessary educational policies and systems are in place and sufficient

institutions or financial support are available. On the basis of our description of flourishing and education, as well as their relation, we propose that the following five recommendations are taken into account in policy-making:

1. The concept of flourishing is a complex (multifactorial) one with various meanings. We suggest that the proposed meaning is used (not only in the ISEE Assessment, but also in other UNESCO documents), for it is comprehensive and culturally neutral. This means that, in principle, it is possible for all governments, school leaders, teachers, parents and pupils to use it. In addition, it is agent-relative, which ensures that the particular characteristics of each human being are taken into account

2. Education should not be understood as a system or an institution, but rather as three central types of activity on the part of teachers and pupils, namely teaching, learning and evaluating, each of which expresses a particular relationship between the actors involved.

3. Education is to be the favoured concept over learning as it ensures that not only are the how and what questions asked (what should pupils learn and how do they learn most effectively; or what should teachers teach and which is the most effective way to do so), but also the why question. The question regarding the purpose of education should be the primary one and answers to it will inform the other two questions.

4. Flourishing and education are to be understood as forms for iterative/reciprocal action. It is not just that human flourishing and education stand in relation with one another. Also, human relations are guided by doing things together (association) in the pursuit of understanding, well-being and thriving (flourishing).

5. The purpose of education is the flourishing of human beings; thus it is not focused on the flourishing of an individual pupil, but takes into account the flourishing of all. individual pupil, but takes into account the flourishing of all.

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