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## What is the Point of Art?

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What, then, are the consequences of holding to a therapeutic vision of art? Principally, the conviction that the main point of engaging with art is to help us lead better lives – to access better versions of ourselves. If art has such a power, it is because it is a tool that can correct or compensate for a range of psychological frailties. To summarize some of these frailties:

1. We forget what matters; we can't hold on to important but slippery experiences.
2. We have a proclivity to lose hope: we are oversensitive to the bad sides of existence. We lose out on legitimate chances of success because we fail to see the reasonableness of keeping going at certain things.
3. We incline towards feelings of isolation and persecution because we have an unrealistic sense of how much difficulty is normal. We panic too easily, as we misjudge the meaning of our troubles. We are lonely – not that we have no one to talk to, but because those around us can't appreciate our travails with sufficient depth, honesty and patience. This is partly because the ways we show the pain of our choppy relationships, envy or unfulfilled ambitions can easily seem pejorative and insulting. We suffer and we feel that this suffering lacks dignity.
4. We are unbalanced and lose sight of our best sides. We aren't just one person. We are made up of multiple selves, and we recognize that some of these are better than others. We meet our better selves too often by chance, and when it is too late; we suffer from a weakness of will in relation to our highest ambitions. It's not that we don't know how to behave, we simply fail to act upon our intermittent best insights because they aren't available to us in sufficiently convincing forms.
5. We are hard to get to know: we are mysterious to ourselves and therefore no good at explaining who we are to others, or being liked for reasons we think are appropriate.
6. We reject many experiences, peoples, places and eras that have something important to offer us because they come in the wrong wrapping and so leave us unable to connect. We are prey to superficial, prejudiced judgements. We think things are 'foreign' far too defensively.
7. We are desensitized by familiarity and live in a commercially dominated world that highlights glamour. Hence we often end up dissatisfied that life is humdrum; we are gnawed by the worry that life is elsewhere.

It is in relation to these seven psychological frailties that art finds its purpose and value as a tool, and offers us seven means of assistance:

1. A CORRECTIVE OF BAD MEMORY: Art makes memorable and renewable the fruits of experience. It is a mechanism to keep precious things, and our best insights, in good condition and makes them publicly accessible. Art banks our collective winnings.
2. A PURVEYOR OF HOPE: Art keeps pleasant and cheering things in view. It knows we despair too easily.
3. A SOURCE OF DIGNIFIED SORROW: Art reminds us of the legitimate place of sorrow in a good life, so that we panic less about our difficulties and recognize them as parts of a noble existence.
4. A BALANCING AGENT: Art encodes with unusual clarity the essence of our good qualities and holds them up before us, in a variety of media, to help rebalance our natures and direct us towards our best possibilities.
5. A GUIDE TO SELF-KNOWLEDGE: Art can help us identify what is central to ourselves, but hard to put into words. Much that is human is not readily available in language. We can hold up art objects and say, confusedly but importantly, 'This is me.'
6. A GUIDE TO THE EXTENSION OF EXPERIENCE: Art is an immensely sophisticated accumulation of the experiences of others, presented to us in well-shaped and well-organized forms. It can provide us with some of the most eloquent instances of the voices of other cultures, so that an engagement with artworks stretches our notions of ourselves and our world. At first, much of art seems merely 'other', but we discover that it can contain ideas and attitudes that we can make our own in ways that enrich us. Not everything we need to become better versions of ourselves is already to hand in the vicinity.
7. A RE-SENSITIZATION TOOL: Art peels away our shell and saves us from our spoilt, habitual disregard for what is all around us. We recover our sensitivity; we look at the old in new ways. We are prevented from assuming that novelty and glamour are the only solutions.