

## Wisdom in Words: A Didactic Analysis of the Poem “*Desiderata*” by Max Ehrmann

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**Abstract.** In a world filled with noise and uncertainty, literature like Max Ehrmann’s “*Desiderata*” offers timeless guidance for living with purpose, balance, and inner peace. This study analysed Max Ehrmann’s prose poem “*Desiderata*” using a didactic literary approach to investigate its moral and philosophical teachings, establishing a connection between its linguistic elements and Carol Ryff’s Psychological Well-being model in promoting eudaimonia. Addressing a gap in existing scholarship, this study is novel in examining “*Desiderata*” as a didactic literary piece, revealing how it systematically imparts moral and philosophical guidance to foster the development of eudaimonia. A qualitative linguistic analysis, guided by Carol Ryff’s Psychological Well-Being framework and employing a didactic literary approach, has been used as the primary methodology of this study. After a thorough analysis, the study revealed that “*Desiderata*” promotes the six components of Ryff’s psychological well-being, which are personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and purpose in life, through its moral and philosophical guidance. The findings suggest that the poem retains social relevance across generations by promoting emotional resilience, authenticity, and inner peace in response to shifting moral standards. The study further recommends integrating literary texts, such as “*Desiderata*”, into values education to promote psychological well-being and moral development. By emphasizing moral reflection and psychological well-being through literature, this study contributes to the broader educational aim of nurturing the holistic development of learners, in harmony with the principles of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4): Quality Education.

**Keywords:** *Desiderata, Didactic Literature, Psychological Well-being, Eudaimonia, Literary Analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

Poetry, like any other literature, can be a source of inspiration, encouragement, and guidance (Aquilina, 1959). In a piece of work, many can be drawn into its message, leading not just to understanding but to awakening (Taylor, 2014), as exemplified by the prose poetry that this paper aims to analyze didactically – the “*Desiderata*” by Max Ehrmann, an American writer, poet, and attorney. It is a prose poem that imparts moral guidance (Rix, 2023), translated from Latin as “things desired” (Nester, 2015). The poem offers practical advice for living a meaningful, peaceful, and dignified life amid the challenges of the modern world. The term didacticism is defined as a form of writing or literature intended to teach or educate the reader—often conveying moral lessons or practical instructions (Nordquist, 2019). This paper analyzed “*Desiderata*” in a didactic approach, exploring how its lines served as an instructional manual to have a virtuous life, focusing on interpreting its key teachings to examine its moral and philosophical principles, and investigating whether adherence to these teachings can guide readers toward eudaimonia, understood as the pursuit or manifestation of personal growth, self-actualization, and human flourishing (Huta, 2013).

Today, “*Desiderata*” is widely quoted in inspirational literature, classrooms, and even therapy contexts, appreciated for its universal and timeless message about the pursuit of happiness and ethical living (Jonas, 2019). Its overall message is to deliver wisdom and guidance, thus offering direction on how one could navigate life with grace and integrity (Beiza, 2024). Because of its enduring relevance and rich moral and philosophical teachings, “*Desiderata*” was chosen as the focus of this study, offering valuable insights into the pursuit of psychological well-being and eudaimonia. The concept of eudaimonia is proposed by Aristotle, which is often described as ‘happiness’ or ‘human flourishing’ (Huta, 2013). However, several interpretations of the term have been given by different scholars. Plato, together with Socrates, believed that it is an individual’s ultimate good or the highest and ultimate goal of moral thought and behavior, which requires virtue to fulfill. However, for Aristotle, in a eudaimonic behavior, virtue is required, but it is not sufficient. He believes that eudaimonia is living life not just acting with virtue but intending to be virtuous (Moore, 2019). Besides that, when you rely on Aristotelian’s Philosophy, it’s not a specific type of happiness or a psychological state, but rather it is perceived as a good and fulfilling way of life that contributes to happiness and well-being (Ryan & Martela, 2016). Therefore, it is the act of doing rational activities for the pursuit of the best within us, or basically, living well with virtue (Davis, 2024).

In understanding “*Desiderata*” as a didactic literary piece, this study also draws upon the classical foundation of poetic instruction as outlined by the Roman poet Horace in *Ars Poetica*. Horace claims that the ultimate goal of poetry is to instruct and to entertain (*prodesse et delectare*), and stresses decorum—the rule that the style and tone of a poem must be appropriate to its content and intention (Matz, 2000). “*Desiderata*” achieves this Horatian ideal by combining moral teaching and poetic elegance. Its language, tone, and structure are deliberately simple and serene, reinforcing its philosophical message and making its teachings accessible to

readers of all generations (Baldwin, 2025). In this context, Ehrmann's poem can be regarded as a contemporary echo of classical didactic poetry, employing poetic form to both inspire and instruct and form character, in line with Horace's vision of poetry as both a moral and aesthetic experience.

Several online articles, primarily in blogs, have analyzed the meaning of "Desiderata" through a reader-response approach (BusinessBalls, n.d.; Jarvis, n.d.; Jonas, 2024; Lovler, 2017; Rix, 2023). These articles interpret the poem's significance based on the general guidance it offers to readers, emphasizing its inspirational and philosophical themes. Villadarezd (2022) examined Max Ehrmann's "Desiderata" through a structural analysis in the paper titled "Surface and Deep Structures in 'Desiderata' ". The study focused on the poem's immediate constituents and the semantic components of its sentences, offering a linguistic and syntactic breakdown that highlights how structural elements contribute to the formation of meaning. However, despite existing analyses, a critical gap remains in the study of "Desiderata" as a didactic piece. While the poem is widely regarded as offering guidance, no study has explicitly examined how "Desiderata" functions didactically to achieve eudaimonia, the development of the best in oneself (Huta, 2013). There is a lack of research that systematically investigates the poem's instructional approach—how it conveys moral and philosophical guidance in a structured and pedagogical manner. This study aimed to fill that gap by analyzing "Desiderata" as a didactic literary piece, exploring its instructional techniques and their effectiveness in imparting wisdom for achieving eudaimonia.

This analysis used Carol Ryff's psychological well-being model as a framework to examine the themes within "Desiderata", highlighting how Max Ehrmann's poem embodies these elements to guide individuals toward eudaimonia (happiness) (Kraut, 1979). Psychological well-being, in this context, is didactic in nature because it describes fundamental aspects of a happy and meaningful life, such as self-acceptance, autonomy, and personal growth, which serve as educational ideals. By presenting these components as goals or virtues to be cultivated, the model itself acts as a form of teaching, offering a moral and psychological blueprint for living well.



Figure 1. Carol Ryff's Psychological Well-being (2013)

The purpose of the study was to analyze "Desiderata" using a didactic approach to highlight its moral and philosophical teachings, demonstrating its relevance in shaping ethical perspectives and personal development. The poem

"*Desiderata*" serves as a guide for self-improvement, offering timeless wisdom on navigating life with integrity, resilience, and self-awareness. In this regard, "*Desiderata*" is as much about providing a philosophical view to allow readers to ground themselves in peace and acceptance of themselves and others, while maintaining balance amidst the uncertainty of life fates (Ehrmann, 1927). The lasting relevance of "*Desiderata*" lies in its ability to engage readers with the same types of challenges and experiences evident in contemporary society. Studying "*Desiderata*" advocates for emotional health, mindfulness, and connection to all we share as human beings (Smith, 2015). By emphasizing values such as kindness, humility, and self-reflection, "*Desiderata*" remains a valuable resource for personal growth, inspiring individuals to lead purposeful and fulfilling lives (Johnson, 2020).

Based on the background explained earlier, this study aims to analyze specific lines from "*Desiderata*" to determine how the poem reflects Carol Ryff's six components of psychological well-being, which include personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and purpose in life. Additionally, the study aims to investigate how *Desiderata* promotes the concept of eudaimonia through its moral guidance, highlighting how the poem encourages the development of the best possible version of oneself.

### **Overview of Didactic Literary Approach**

This analysis employed the didactic literary approach, which focused on the instructional and moral teachings embedded within a literary work. Aristotle is widely recognized as the main proponent of didacticism, as he emphasized that literature should not only entertain but also instruct, aligning with his belief that art serves a moral and educational purpose (Literary Latitude, n.d.). Didactic literature is frequently produced with the express intent of guiding readers toward a specific ethical or intellectual realization, teaching right living through advice (Lichtheim, 1996). This viewpoint considers how writings are intended to convey knowledge, impart lessons, or promote moral, religious, or societal ideals.

The emphasis on purpose and clarity, which often prioritizes the message over creative or aesthetic considerations, is a defining characteristic of didactic literature. According to Abrams, the primary purpose of Didactic literature is to teach or transmit knowledge, not to entertain (Abrams, n.d.). This distinction distinguishes didactic literature from lyrical or narrative texts, which may aim to evoke emotions or provide an immersive experience without explicitly imparting a moral lesson. Max Ehrmann's poem, "*Desiderata*", presents universal ethical concepts through his work, making it a classic example of didactic literature—literature that seeks to inspire and educate rather than merely amuse. Since the prose poem is interpreted to be written to impart advice and moral instruction (Baldwin, 2020), the didactic literary approach is a good fit for its analysis. This approach also makes the text highly relevant for language learning, as it not only develops comprehension and interpretative skills but also reinforce "*Desiderata*", presents universal ethical concepts through his work, making it a classic example of didactic literature—literature that seeks to inspire and educate rather than merely moral, religious, and societal values embedded in the text.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to analyze Max Ehrmann's poem "Desiderata" through the lens of didacticism, analyzing how the text serves as a means to teach the reader something (Nordquist, 2019). This approach helped to examine the poem's instructive components, uncovering the layers of meaning and linguistic content embedded in the text. The primary method of analysis is linguistic analysis, which involves studying language and its components, such as meaning and function, to understand how speech functions (Ubaydulloyevna, 2022). The analysis of the lines of the text is conducted through specific themes grounded in the theory of eudaimonia, as proposed by the Greek philosopher Aristotle (Lake, 2022). Specifically, we utilize the components of individual psychological well-being, as outlined by the psychologist Carol Ryff, in connection with eudaimonia, as our analytical tool.

Eudaimonia is defined as the pursuit of virtue, excellence, and the best within us (Huta & Watterman, 2014). Aristotle believed that it is a rational activity that aims to pursue 'what is worthwhile in life' or, basically said, 'pursuing happiness' (Moore, 2019). In our analysis, we identified themes in the poem "Desiderata" based on the psychological well-being model advocated by psychologist Carol Ryff (Positran, 2020). This analysis utilized the identified components of psychological well-being in a person; specifically, autonomy, positive relationships, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, personal growth, and purpose in life (Ryff, 2013). We analyzed how these themes are embedded in the poem "Desiderata" and how its author, Max Ehrmann, used it to convey a message and a lesson to its readers.

In examining the intentional messages of "Desiderata", we analyzed the poem through a didactic lens, focusing on how its language guides readers toward moral and philosophical ideals. Each line was examined not only for its thematic relevance to Ryff's psychological well-being model but also for how it functions as moral instruction, consistent with didactic literature. This allowed us to evaluate how Max Ehrmann deliberately crafted his poem to teach values that reflect the classical aim of literature to both educate and elevate.

### Corpus

The main corpus of this analysis is the single poem written in prose entitled "Desiderata"—a Latin term for "things desired". It was composed by Max Ehrmann, a lawyer and poet from Terre Haute, Indiana, who was born in 1872 and died in 1945. "Desiderata" is said to have been motivated by a wish Ehrmann made in his diary: "I should like, if I could, to leave a humble gift—a bit of chaste prose that had caught up some noble moods" (The Confused History of "Desiderata" (2008). The written poem reflects things that are important in life or "something that is needed or wanted" (Team Poetrysoup, 2024).

The history of “*Desiderata*” is characterized by misattribution and eventual recognition. There is a common myth that the poem “*Desiderata*” was a century old and was found in the Church of Baltimore in 1692 (Businessballs, n.d.). As mentioned, it was often cited as “*Found in Old St. Paul's Church, Baltimore, Dated 1692*”. However, in January 1971, an article of Norman Deck of the Racine Public Library sought help in identifying the true origin of the prose such as in April 11, 1971 another editor of *The Exchange* was also curious about the poem’s origin, summarized a response published in the *New York Times Book Review* which clarified that “*Desiderata*” was actually written by Max Ehrmann in 1927 (Lynch,1972). Contextually, this poem imparts wisdom for overcoming life's challenges through its emphasis on inner peace, conveying a message of resilience, unity, and striving for peace and happiness amidst life's complexities (Jarvis, n.d). The researchers analysed this prose poetry by examining lines that incorporated the identified themes.

As mentioned, a didactic literary approach will be the main course of analysis for the poem, “*Desiderata*.” Literary analysts employ this approach to literature when they should focus on whether the piece of work embodies or reflects moral teaching or guidance, and how it facilitates a deeper understanding of how literature conveys moral principles and practical life lessons (SuperSummary, n.d.). In this case, this study purposely used the work of Max Ehrmann, “*Desiderata*”, since it contains a series of philosophical reflections and moral teachings that guide readers didactically.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

This section of the study presents the moral and philosophical themes embedded in the poem by examining key lines from it. This discussion explored their alignment with Carol Ryff’s six components of psychological well-being through an analysis that aligned the discussion with the research objective. This part highlighted how the poem's enduring significance acts as a guide to navigating life with wisdom and inner peace.

In examining the decorum of didacticism in *Desiderata*, the study primarily focuses on the intratextual elements of the poem—how its internal structure, linguistic choices, tone, and progression work in harmony to reinforce its moral and philosophical teachings. The decorum, understood through Horace’s classical notion that a literary work’s style must suit its subject and purpose, is evident in the poem’s serene tone, clear moral voice, and cohesive structure (Matz, 2000). These elements align with the poem’s didactic purpose, making its instruction both aesthetically pleasing and ethically persuasive (Abrams, n.d.; Nordquist, 2019). While the primary focus is intratextual, the study also briefly acknowledges intertextual elements, such as its philosophical roots in Aristotelian ethics (Moore, 2019) and its stylistic echo of classical didactic poetry, particularly Horace’s *Ars Poetica* (Matz, 2000). However, these references serve more as contextual anchors than analytical

focal points. Therefore, the study remains chiefly centered on how "Desiderata"'s internal literary mechanics uphold the decorum of didacticism.

### ***Social Standard of Morality***

Before analyzing the lines embedded in the text, it is essential to gain insight into the social standards of morality. When "Desiderata" became popularized in the 1970s, society had moral standards that emphasized personal integrity, strength, and harmony—standards that align with the poem's key messages. As morality continued to advance, the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed a growing consciousness about social justice, environmental care (Stephens, Willis, & Church, 2008), and mental health (Walthal, 2020), further making the poem relevant in promoting peace, humility, and harmony in a rapidly changing world. "Desiderata" remains timeless in offering moral wisdom that transcends generations, urging people to cultivate kindness, sincerity, and inner resilience amidst the rapid changes in society.

### ***Identifying Carol Ryff's Six Components of Psychological Well-being in Max Ehrmann's "Desiderata"***

"Desiderata", according to Glenn Rix's analysis, is composed of twenty-eight lines divided into six paragraphs (Rix, 2013). The interpretation of the lines in this paper is not analyzed paragraph by paragraph, but rather by the points and ideas they convey, which correspond to our identified themes: personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and purpose in life.

#### ***a. Personal Growth***

*"Go placidly amid the noise and the haste,  
and remember what peace there may be in silence"*  
-Ehrmann line 1

The poem starts with the abovementioned powerful line. Ehrmann used the words "Go placidly" and "remember" to encourage readers to find inner calmness amidst the *noise* and *haste*, and seek self-improvement by keeping in mind the tranquility that silence can bring. Glenn Rix, in his article, interpreted it as advice to remain calm amidst the bustle of everyday life and practice silence (Rix, 2013). In silence, another analyst posits that this is the locus wherein peace may be discovered, which is advantageous for one's mental state (Baldwin, 2020). Additionally, a blog written in 2019 states that the author of the poem, Max Ehrmann, started off by writing about finding peace within; he added that we have to wade through the busyness of the world along with finding our place of silence and calm (Jonas, 2024). Together, we can say that this one impactful line is advice for the development of oneself. This depicts growth by encouraging inner peace and self-awareness amid chaos, thereby aligning with the social expectation that true moral development is demonstrated through calmness, self-control, and emotional maturity in challenging situations.

*"Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans".  
-Ehrmann line 6*

Along with personal growth comes this line, a call to recognize one's achievements and enjoy them, as well as what is envisioned for the future — a celebration of personal progress in itself. It tells people that whatever they have should be treasured (Rix,2013), and the goal is to be happy with their own accomplishments (Jonas,2024). This line promotes appreciation for both present achievements and future aspirations, aligning with the social expectation that maturity involves recognizing progress and contentment in one's journey.

*"But let this not blind you to what virtue there is;  
many persons strive for high ideals,  
and everywhere life is full of heroism."  
-Ehrmann line 15*

Max Ehrmann emphasized in this line the importance of individuals maintaining awareness of high ideals in themselves and others. Higher ideals mean change for the better; going beyond or above ordinary (Gerber, 2016), this line refers to setting a standard for oneself. Thus, adding the advice to *"let this not blind you for what virtue there is"* emphasizing the necessity not to lose sight of the goodness that exists in the world despite the temptations it offers. We know that growth requires resilience, and growth-based resilience plays a role in the developmental persistence and positive emotions of an individual (Amir & Standen, 2019). Balancing setting high ideals with realistic expectations requires a constant commitment to achieving positive well-being. Therefore, Max Ehrmann wanted to convey in this line the importance of acknowledging the virtues that many people exhibit (Baldwin, 2020). This line promotes personal growth by encouraging individuals to pursue high ideals while maintaining awareness of the virtues of others, as society believes that true development involves self-improvement and recognition of goodness beyond oneself.

*"Be cheerful. Strive to be happy".  
- Ehrmann lines 24-25*

The last lines of the poem are two powerful sentences that encourage active seeking of happiness and personal fulfillment. Eudaimonia and happiness are two distinct concepts, according to an article by Ryan and Deci; eudaimonia suggests that not all desires or outcomes that bring happiness necessarily yield well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2021). Aristotle asserts that we should consider happiness as those actions that are worthy of choice in their own right. In the eudaimonic perspective, happiness is not about the things we own, but rather how we live our lives (Crespo & Mesurado, 2014). These lines, although short, make it impactful since they can serve as a daily reminder to aspire to true happiness that resides deep within us. Thus, depicting growth by emphasizing the pursuit of inner happiness and meaningful living, as the society values personal integrity, emotional resilience, and contributing to the well-being of others.



**b. Self-acceptance**

*"If you compare yourself to others,  
you may become vain or bitter for always there  
will be greater and lesser person than yourself"*  
– Ehrmann line 5

This line promotes self-acceptance by serving as a warning about the danger of comparison. According to Aranha, in her summary and analysis of the poem, in this line, the poet advises against evaluating worth through comparison with every person, because pride would make people arrogant (Aranha, 2025). And as any comparisons lead to vanity or bitterness (Rix, 2013). Vanity, along with envy, is a by-product of deep-seated insecurities (Muhammad, 2017). Realistically, through the line *"for always there will be greater and lesser person than yourself"*, the poem acknowledges the existence of more accomplished people and others who are less so, making the comparison an endless cycle. Robert Helget, a millennial therapist, believes that comparison is a human condition—a biological necessity for survival. However, he added that what is not necessary is for it to lead to shame (Helget, 2020). Altogether, this line embodies Max Ehrmann's emphasis on accepting oneself for who we are by highlighting the futility of comparison and encouraging individuals to value themselves without being influenced by others' achievements. This aligns with societal values of self-worth and emotional balance.

*"Take kindly the counsels of the years,  
gracefully surrendering the things of youth"*  
– Ehrmann line 13

This line serves as advice for people to embrace change by learning from life experiences as a way to navigate the future (Jonas, 2024). There is the importance of accepting the passage of time with wisdom and grace. "Counsels of years" encompasses life experiences, including those of our youth when people are inexperienced, passionate, and restless (Aranha, 2025)—reminding us to remain humble in the lessons of life without compromising our dignity. Max Ehrmann, through this line, teaches about acceptance that people change through the years in any aspect, but what's more important is the ability to move forward with dignity and to find beauty in every stage of life, aligning with the social expectation of maturity and dignity in growing older.

*"Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself  
You are a child of the universe no less than  
the trees and the stars; You have right to be here."*  
– Ehrmann lines 16-17

Max Ehrmann emphasizes in this statement the need to balance self-discipline with self-compassion in order to recognize one's worth. This affirms that every individual, like nature, belongs to the universe without having to justify their existence and supports the idea that while self-improvement requires discipline, it should not come at the cost of self-kindness. In reality, many individuals struggle with self-criticism (Gilbert, Baldwin, Irons, Baccus, & Palmer, 2006) often pushing themselves relentlessly in pursuit of perfection. So, the line practically teaches its readers not to be overly self-critical of themselves (Rix, 2013), for just like everything around us, we belong in this world; each of us has the right to do so. Thus,

depicted in this line is the importance of balancing self-discipline with self-compassion, aligning with the social expectations of maintaining emotional kindness for oneself.

### **c. Autonomy**

*"Be yourself. Especially do not feign affection.  
Neither be cynical about love; for in the face of all aridity and  
disenchantment, it is a perennial as the grass. "  
- Ehrmann lines 10-12*

The statement above encourages authenticity and independent thinking regarding emotions and relationships. The line "Be yourself" is one of the phrases that belong in the Hall of Fame of clichéd advice, according to entrepreneur Anthony Yeung. However, he asserts that it is *terrible* advice for people, as it seriously limits personal results and hinders development and growth (Yeung, 2021). He added that aside from saying '*be yourself*' we can instead say '*be the person you want to be*'. Yet originally, Max Ehrmann in this line, instructs about the cruciality of authenticity and a balanced perspective in love. Although the advice is considered cliché, the phrase highlights the next line, "*Especially do not feign affection*," that means insincere emotions can be detrimental to both personal integrity and relationship (Falkenberg, 1988). Collectively, these lines advocate for living authentically and maintaining faith in the enduring power of love, even in the face of adversity. Accordingly, it encourages autonomy by emphasizing the importance of authenticity in emotions and relationships, aligning with the social value of emotional honesty and integrity.

### **d. Environmental Mastery**

*"Exercise caution in your business affairs  
for the world is full of trickery "  
-Ehrmann line 8*

Given that dishonesty exists in the world, this line serves as a reminder to exercise caution in both professional and financial matters. Max Ehrmann advises people to handle their interactions with caution and knowledge. The adage "exercise caution" emphasizes the importance of making informed decisions and exercising discernment in business to prevent dishonesty and potential loss. Ehrmann's advice remains timeless, as people often fall prey to financial disinformation due to overconfidence or a lack of skepticism, according to *The Psychology of Money* (Housel, 2020). In this context, "trickery" refers to any form of manipulation, fraud, or unethical behavior. Ehrmann does not suggest complete distrust but rather a balanced approach—being careful yet open to opportunities. This is consistent with contemporary views on financial literacy, which advocate for individuals to evaluate risks and verify information before making decisions (Malkiel, 2019). By preparing people for potential obstacles and emphasizing the importance of independence and informed decision-making, Ehrmann's counsel promotes resilience, aligning with the social value of being vigilant and self-reliant in navigating life's challenges.

*"And whether or not it is clear to you,  
No doubt the universe is unfolding as it should"*  
-Ehrmann line 18

The reader is reassured by the statement that, despite facades, life has a natural path. Ehrmann promotes confidence in the bigger picture, even if he admits that clarity is not always immediate. The statement "whether or not it is clear to you" suggests that uncertainty and perplexity are normal aspects of life. In *"The Happiness Hypothesis,"* Jonathan Haidt argues that many aspects of life follow patterns that we may not immediately understand, yet they contribute to long-term growth (Haidt, 2006). It aligns with Stoic perspectives, which encourage human development and acceptance of circumstances outside one's control (Pigliucci, 2017). According to research in positive psychology, accepting life's uncertainties can enhance psychological well-being by reducing anxiety and increasing acceptance (Seligman, 2011). Resilience—accepting the here and now and believing that things will work themselves out in due time—is the message. When taken as a whole, these phrases highlight the value of awareness, flexibility, and faith in life's inherent path. They help people find inner peace while making sensible decisions in the outside world. That way, it aligns with the social value of resilience and faith in the process, that individuals must navigate challenges with confidence and inner peace.

#### ***e. Positive Relationships***

*"As far as possible, without surrender,  
be in good terms with all persons"*  
- Ehrmann line 2

Written in the first stanza, the second line of the poem discusses maintaining personal relationships while upholding personal values. Tom Walsh, in his article, "Pondering on Max Ehrmann's 'Desiderata'", asserts that this line, the poet suggests the importance of getting along with others, but also the importance of others getting along with you (Walsh, n.d.). Max Ehrmann's didactic tone suggests that although promoting good relationships is valuable, it should not come at the expense of one's self-respect. Similarly, Walsh added that when you try to get along with people by letting them dominate you, you lose your inner peace, and the relationship becomes destructive (Walsh, n.d.). Through this, Max Ehrmann teaches a principle of personal boundaries within social harmony, making this ethical and practical. This promotes harmony with others while stressing the importance of personal boundaries, which society expects as standards of positive relationships.

*"Speak your truth quietly and clearly; and listen to others,  
even to the dull and ignorant; they too have their story"*  
- Ehrmann line 3

Written after to the lines above is this statement. Max Ehrmann reinforced the idea of calm communication and empathetic listening to others. Empathy plays an important role in informing our moral deliberation (Jefferson, 2019) , The line "even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story" encourages individuals to be considerate to others regardless of their perceived intellect. This line resonates with the social virtue of morality in healthy relationships by promoting respectful

communication and empathy, calling people to esteem others' viewpoints irrespective of their intelligence, thus creating understanding and ethical interaction. This message can also be seen in the teachings of Urbana to her siblings in the 19th-century Filipino text *Urbana at Feliza*. Urbana, depicted as an upright and educated woman, uses formal and refined language in guiding her siblings on how to navigate social interactions with dignity and respect. Urbana instructs, "If you and Honesto are invited to a banquet, be even more careful, for many mistakes can be made there... say good evening or good day to your host, then to the others facing you." Her careful attention to etiquette and decorum reflects the values of the time, particularly during the Spanish colonial period, where societal interaction was closely tied to morality and civility. (Monteza & Miralles, 2023) Urbana's approach reinforces the idea from this line that every individual, regardless of social or intellectual standing, deserves respect and consideration, perfectly aligning with the virtue promoted in the line, "even the dull and ignorant; they too have their story".

#### ***f. Purpose in Life***

*"Keep interested in your own career,  
however humble; it is a real possession  
in the changing fortune of time"*  
– Ehrmann line 7

This line emphasizes the importance of valuing one's career, regardless of its level of status. Ehrmann admits that although life is uncertain ("the changing fortune of life"), a job, no matter how small, provides a sense of self-worth, stability, and fulfilment. The concept of "real possession" suggests that personal involvement provides a sense of purpose and control in the face of life's uncertainties. "Having a sense of purpose in daily work contributes to an individual's overall psychological well-being because it anchors them to something meaningful despite external hardships," claims Viktor Frankl in *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 2006).

Furthermore, current studies on career happiness emphasize the intrinsic value of labor that extends beyond financial compensation. Purpose-driven work is more satisfying than extrinsic rewards like status or money, according to Daniel Pink's argument in *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us* (Pink, 2009). This supports Ehrmann's argument that, in an uncertain world, even a small career has worth, as it offers stability and a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, according to Angela Duckworth's *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance*, resilience and long-term fulfilment are fostered by dedication to one's job, regardless of its social standing (Duckworth, 2016).

Ehrmann emphasizes the value of personal commitment and engagement by encouraging people to "keep interested" in their profession. Staying committed to one's craft, whether as an artist, teacher, or mechanic, fosters a stronger sense of stability and achievement and supports a higher purpose in life. For society, it is essential to instill respect for honest labor and contribute positively to society, regardless of social standing or material achievements.

*Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive him to be.  
And whatever your labours and aspirations in  
the noisy confusion of life keep peace in your soul  
– Ehrmann lines 19-20*

Ehrmann's wide view of spirituality and inner calm is shown in this line. Ehrmann emphasizes that emotional and spiritual well-being depend on having peace with a higher force, or even with one's own philosophy, by saying "whatever you conceive Him to be." This statement acknowledges a variety of religious and philosophical viewpoints. This aligns with William James' idea in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, where he suggests that personal faith, regardless of its form, contributes to inner peace and resilience (James, 2002).

The phrase "whatever your labors and aspirations" also emphasizes the universal challenges of hard work and ambition. Although life is full of obstacles, Ehrmann suggests remaining calm on the inside even when things are chaotic on the outside. According to Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now*, this idea is closely related to self-acceptance and mindfulness. Tolle contends that maintaining inner calm depends on one's capacity to accept life as it comes rather than on outside factors (Tolle, 1997).

Additionally, research in positive psychology supports the idea that developing inner peace enhances overall well-being. In the book *Flourish*, Martin Seligman examines the ways that mindfulness, gratitude, and faith—whether religious or not—can lead to resilience and long-term happiness (Seligman, 2011). These findings are echoed by the notion of maintaining "peace in your soul," which implies that genuine fulfillment originates from an inner sense of contentment rather than from external achievements.

Ehrmann's message serves as a reminder that inner peace is the foundation of true well-being, even though professional goals and outward accomplishments are significant. Finding a solid foundation within oneself—whether through philosophy, faith, or introspection—is essential to navigating life's uncertainties. Finally, the passage connects one's life purpose not only to ambition or profession, but also to developing inner peace that stabilizes you in times of uncertainty. This devotion to inner peace also undergirds the social virtue of morality, as it teaches people to act with compassion, tolerance, and awareness in their interactions with others.

### ***Promoting Eudaimonia Through the Moral Teachings of "Desiderata": A Didactic Study***

When you read "*Desiderata*", you can already see how it explicitly delivers guidance to its readers— one can understand that it is a beacon of ethical advice. As we navigate through its contents, we can deliberately say that through focusing on following its moral guidance, people can be led to eudaimonia, or human flourishing. Highly emphasised in this poem is focus on the virtues of integrity, humility, and a peaceful mind, as well as the need for individuals to remain calm in the face of life's turmoil (Shook, 2019). Readers can easily read the poem, but extracting its essence

can be hard. However, when one embodies its teachings, it will lead them to a happier life. This is where the concept of eudaimonia comes in.

Again, the terms eudaimonia and happiness are different according to Aristotle; happiness for him is defined hedonically, meaning that it is experiencing positive emotions and life satisfaction in the present moment or for only a short period (Vinney, 2024), in contrast to eudaimonia which is defined in his *Nicomachean Ethics* as the highest human good, that can be achieved through a life of virtuous activity by reason (Asselin, 1987). While happiness often refers to momentary pleasures and positive emotions, eudaimonia encompasses a deeper, more enduring state of living a virtuous and meaningful life. Understanding and striving for eudaimonia can lead to a more fulfilling and truly contented existence. (Schaffner, 2023).

Particularly in the lines of the poem, this study presented how the work generally espouses self-awareness and fortitude, following Aristotelian ethics that highlight moral virtues as the essence of more profound happiness (Aristotle, trans. 1999). The encouragement to "go placidly amid the noise and haste" reflects Stoic philosophy's emphasis on contentment, confirming that inner peace is a byproduct of virtuous living, rather than being influenced by external forces. In addition, "*Desiderata*"'s mention of kindness, honesty, and perseverance (Ehrmann, 1927) aligns with the eudaimonic endeavour of having a fulfilling life, as it leads people towards a life of virtue and completion (Fave, 2014). The lines promote eudaimonia by encouraging the cultivation of virtues that foster long-term fulfilment and inner peace, rather than fleeting happiness. By focusing on integrity, humility, and perseverance, the poem encourages individuals to seek meaning and purpose, aligning with Aristotle's view that living a virtuous life is the path to true happiness. Ultimately, through its pedagogical tone and universal moral principles, the poem functions as an ethical guide that aligns individual welfare with moral obligation, thus instilling a comprehensive understanding of eudaimonia.

In alignment with the principles of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education), this study highlights the value of incorporating literary texts, such as "*Desiderata*", into values education as a means of fostering holistic learner development. By encouraging reflection on inner peace, purpose, and the pursuit of a virtuous life, "*Desiderata*" becomes more than a poetic text—it transforms into a pedagogical tool that nurtures not only intellectual growth but also emotional and moral maturity. This integrative approach to education resonates with the core of SDG 4, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and quality education that promotes lifelong learning opportunities. Thus, the study advances the argument that embedding ethically rich literature within educational curricula supports the development of well-rounded individuals prepared to navigate the complexities of contemporary life with empathy, integrity, and purpose.

## CONCLUSION

This research discussion discovered that the poem embodies Carol Ryff's six dimensions—personal growth, self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, positive relationships, and purpose in life—via its reflective and didactic stanzas. Certain lines uphold these themes, demonstrating how "*Desiderata*" teaches people to develop resilience, accept self-discovery, and navigate life with wisdom and integrity. Additionally, the poem espouses eudaimonia as more than simply striving for happiness but as an intentional, virtuous life. With its ethical directives, "*Desiderata*" aligns with Aristotle's thought, encouraging a pursuit of inner tranquility, righteous living, and self-actualization. As a lesson for living, the poem itself serves as a formula for creating an equanimous and fulfilling life, echoing the belief that health is attained through purposeful intent and self-awareness.

Ultimately, "*Desiderata*" operates as more than inspirational poetry; it serves as a philosophical and psychological guide for self- and moral growth. This interdisciplinary reading presents a unique fusion of literary analysis and psychological theory, highlighting the poem's relevance to contemporary discourse on well-being. Its eternal wisdom remains to offer a template for interpreting well-being, and, as such, it is an important literary work for examining the psychological and philosophical aspects of human flourishing.

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