



Neohumanism: A Philosophy of Education for Our Time

Philosophy – the Pursuit of Wisdom

Philosophy (Greek: *philo-* "loving" + *sophia* "knowledge, wisdom") is at the heart of all theories of education. Pursuing wisdom may seem like an old-fashioned idea in most modern cultures, with their emphases on getting a good job, getting ahead, and accumulating wealth. But we live in challenging times: we have entered a new era in human history that scholars call the Anthropocene, a phase of planetary development in which human impacts on the earth may cause or have caused irreversible damage. If we are to survive and thrive, we need **wisdom** now more than ever.

Every decision made by a teacher (and they make hundreds of decisions a day) is grounded in a set of beliefs, whether these are held consciously or unconsciously. These beliefs are concerned with the Big Questions:

- What does it mean to be human?
- What is the purpose of life?
- What is knowledge and how do we come to know?
- What do we value? How should we live?

Underneath these Big Questions are inquiries specific to education:

- What should be the aim of education?
- What is the role of culture in the educational process?
- How do children learn best?
- What is the appropriate role of the teacher?
- What is worth knowing, and how does a teacher decide what to teach?

Neohumanist Education, first introduced by P. R. Sarkar, has been developing over the past several decades and is based on the philosophy of Neohumanism which offers unique answers to the above questions. Most philosophies of modern education emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. For purposes of comparison, we offer a brief sketch of the major ones.

Some historical educational philosophies

Perennialism

Perennialists believe that the important ideas put forth by major thinkers in human history need to be passed down from generation to generation through the study of classic texts. It is a conservative philosophy that is teacher-centered, subject matter centered, and focused on intellectual development and the preservation of culture.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism, a philosophy that has dominated Western educational thought and practice, concerns itself with the outward presentation of a child (their *behaviors*), not their inner life. In this model, children are born with minds considered "blank slates," which can be written upon



with any ideas valued by the culture. Young people's behavior is conditioned with precise stimuli, rewards, reinforcements and punishments, and is particularly useful for social engineering.

Romanticism

The Romantics, in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, reacted against mechanistic materialism, science, new technologies, and the emerging bureaucratic society. They rejected the idea of the human being as a blank slate, and believed us to be born with innate powers, or a divine spark. They embraced the deep feelings of the individual soul and its emotional, spiritual, poetic and artistic nature. The Romantics believed that the Enlightenment period had "disenchanted" the earth, and they sought to reestablish the magic, mystery, mysticism and myth that had characterized most of human history. Teaching methods in this framework foster personal freedom, awe, wonder, and the cultivation of imagination.

Pragmatism

Pragmatists believe that learning is a transaction between the inner world and the outer world, and that people construct knowledge through having experiences and reflecting on them. They advocate inquiry-based learning, practical activities, analysis, reason, and logic. Pragmatists value democracy and democratic ways of living, so teaching methods in this framework are characterized by cooperative group learning, real world problem-solving, and discussion.

Critical Pedagogy

Challenges to these earlier philosophies of education came in the later 20th century with the advent of Critical Pedagogy, a philosophy of education that takes a hard look at the social structures that construct our worlds. Drawing upon a Marxist conceptual foundation, Critical Pedagogy insists that we acknowledge the ways that capitalist relations, racism, sexism and other forms of oppression have limited the full development of human powers. It supports forms of education grounded in the development of critical thinking and social analysis in order to understand and overthrow these limitations.

The Philosophy of Humanism

The philosophies mentioned above may seem radically different from each other. For example, on **knowledge**: The Perennialists believe that knowledge resides in texts and is best transmitted that way from generation to generation. The Behaviorists believe that knowledge only matters if it results in observable behavioral change, and that such change can be conditioned through rewards and punishments. The Romantics believe that each soul is born with innate knowledge, and they seek to "draw out" (Latin: *ēducēre*) the potential of the child. The Pragmatists believe that knowledge resides in the interaction between the external world and the mind of the child. The Critical Pedagogues would assert that without critical thinking about received knowledge, we would just continue to be brainwashed by our cultures.





Other significant differences concern **the role of the teacher**: For the Perennialists, the teacher is an authority figure, the holder of cultural knowledge, and the students are the receivers of this knowledge. For the Behaviorists, the role of the teacher is to provide conditioning stimuli, and ensure the correct response. For the Romantics, the teacher is a “gardener,” nurturing the plant (the child) but allowing the child to grow freely. For the Pragmatists, the teacher is the “guide on the side” – a facilitator of knowledge, setting up the environment and organizing activity. And for the Critical Pedagogues, the teacher is a sort of “consciousness raiser,” posing critical questions and helping students learn to ‘read the world,’ and understand how power operates in the lives of people.

Despite these major differences, all of these ways of thinking about education share a common root: the Enlightenment philosophy of Humanism, a philosophy with a number of key (mostly unexamined) assumptions:

- Humans are the masters of creation, separate, and disconnected from Nature
- Nature exists to be measured, controlled, and utilized for human benefit
- The individual is the primary unit in society, and self-interest should govern our behavior
- Reason and logic are the most valuable ways of knowing
- Progress is equated with unfettered technological development and unlimited economic growth

The philosophy of Humanism brought important changes to a world steeped in superstition, dogma, and feudalism. With the new importance of the individual came increasing rights to many (not all) people. The ideas of democracy took hold in Europe, though its monarchies would survive into the present day. Scientists began to explore their world through observation, measurement, and the application of reason and logic. Truth became something discovered, not something given from on high. Discoveries and inventions made life easier and more comfortable for many people.

These positive outcomes were paralleled by negative developments that have brought us to the brink of global disaster. Newly conceived “individuals” engaged in a competitive struggle for survival, and with the dissolution of the traditional bonds of family, tribe, and community, an epidemic of mental illness, substance abuse and despair has swept many societies. Capitalism emerged as the dominant way of organizing the economy, and industrialism, the engine of this economy, required the extraction of ever greater quantities of the Earth’s resources. Humans have poisoned the planet with the waste products of industrialism. Technology has brought not just comfort and ease for a few, but ever greater weapons of destruction, some capable of wiping out all life on the planet. Colonialism and later, economic imperialism came to dominate, oppress, and exploit the people of the Earth.

In many ways, Humanism contained the seeds of its own demolition. In order to overcome these negative developments in human society, human consciousness must *evolve* to a more advanced level. Humanist philosophy and its educational offspring are inadequate to this evolutionary task. We need to cultivate new ways of thinking aligned with pedagogical practices that will help us bring up a new generation of souls capable of surviving and thriving in these extraordinary times. This is the mission of Neohumanist educators.



The Philosophy of Neohumanism

Neohumanism challenges the forms of domination brought about by Humanism, while retaining its positive aspects – the dignity and worth of people, the elimination of dogma, the importance of reason and the search for truth, and the values of democracy, including equality and freedom.

But Neohumanism is non-hierarchical, in that it ensures that *all humans*, especially those that have been historically classified as less-than-human (women, children, people of color, people with disabilities, gay, lesbian, and transgendered people) have equal rights and status. Neohumanism extends the notion of rights to an even wider sphere (plants, animals, rivers, the air). Many scholars believe that giving moral standing to these “more-than-human others” (Abram, 1997) is the only way to halt the ecocide that is destroying our planet.

The love for all created beings is at the core of Neohumanist thought, and at the center of Neohumanist educational theory. This reconceptualization of what it means to be human and the learning of how to deepen and extend our relationships with each other and with all creatures, and of how to learn to live in life-sustaining and planet sustaining ways – this is the evolutionary task before us, and one to which Neohumanist education is profoundly well-suited. What follows is an overview of four of the main categories of thought that philosophers address, and a brief contrast of the ideas of Humanism and Neohumanism, especially as these relate to the education of young people.

When the underlying spirit of humanism is extended to everything, animate and inanimate, in this universe – I have designated this as Neohumanism. This Neohumanism will elevate humanism to universalism, the cult of love for all created beings of this universe.
(Sarkar, 1982, p. 7)

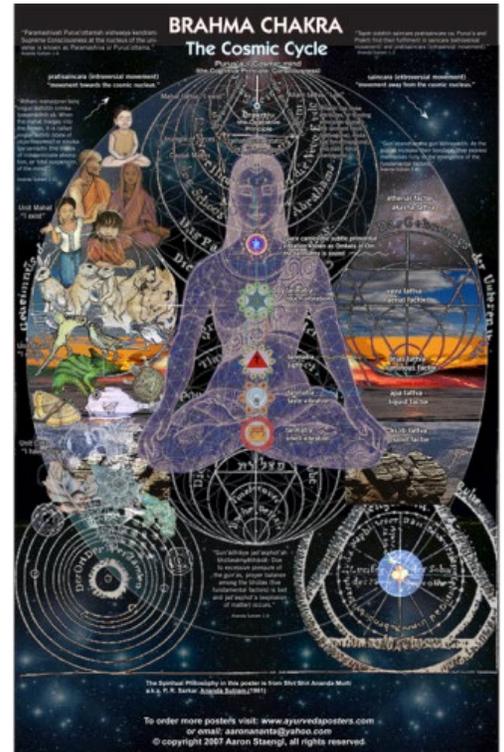
Four Major Philosophical Categories

Cosmology/Metaphysics

Cosmology and metaphysics ask fundamental questions about the origin and nature of the universe, such as:

- Is there a Creator?
- Why was the universe (or the pluriverse/multiverse) created?
- How did life come about?
- How do human beings fit into the plan?
- What is the relation between mind and matter?

Throughout all time, humans have told themselves *cosmic creation stories*, explanations for the mystery of existence. At the core of all human societies with their rituals, customs, folkways, traditions, and ethics is their creation story. Whether our story features a giant turtle or a big bang, they are all attempts to provide meaning and purpose to human life. We are at an evolutionary crossroads now, and the story we tell ourselves may determine the future of life on earth. Scientists and religionists alike say we need a new story – one that is consistent with all we know from our scientific endeavors, but one that embraces the Great Mystery that science has yet to penetrate.



Neohumanism is such a philosophy – one that posits the existence of a Supreme Intelligence, *and* honors the rationality and wonder at the root of scientific investigation. It adopts the premise that matter evolves from this Cosmic Consciousness and mind evolves from matter as described in the Yogic Cycle of Creation (Brahmacakra). In this model of creation, the “unit mind” (what many call the “soul”) experiences evolution similar to the scientific understandings of evolution, but with a fundamental difference: the ultimate unification of the unit mind with the Supreme Consciousness from which it was created (*Yoga*, from the Sanskrit root *yug*: to yoke, attach, join). This core idea – the ultimate union of the human with the Infinite – is an idea shared by the many different historic and contemporary schools of Yogic thought.

Yogis believe that this inherent divinity is the motivation guiding humans to learn, expand their minds, and develop their full potential. A teacher who accepts the idea that each young person in their care is on a unique and soulful evolutionary journey seeks to understand the interests and motivations of each child, in order to help them find meaning and purpose, and discover their unique gifts. Understanding the nature of *samskaras*, (the cause and effect actions and reactions activated as the soul progresses towards its destiny), the thoughtful teacher pays close attention to the psychic bondages and limitations in each child and provides support to overcome them. In this way, the Neohumanist educator works with the child in the construction of the young person’s personal story, a story that is embedded in the larger narratives of their culture and of all creation. The ultimate aim of such an education is that a young person will grow to expand their circle of love, connect in meaningful ways with all beings, and embrace a benevolent universal outlook to guide their journey in the world.



What differentiates this spiritual approach from other religion-based pedagogies is the rejection of dogma. Neohumanist education is concerned with overcoming the bondages and limitations in the mind – limitations such as biases, false ideas, complexes, neuroses, etc. It accomplishes this by pairing the development of the intellect through rational thinking with the development of the spirit through contemplation, insight, and the awakening of conscience, with the overall aim of learning to think in terms of the welfare of all created beings.

Ontology

Ontology (Greek *ōn, ont-* 'being' + *-logy* 'study of') is the study of what it means to be human. Related to metaphysics and cosmology, but focused more explicitly on the nature of *being*, it asks fundamental questions about meaning and purpose:

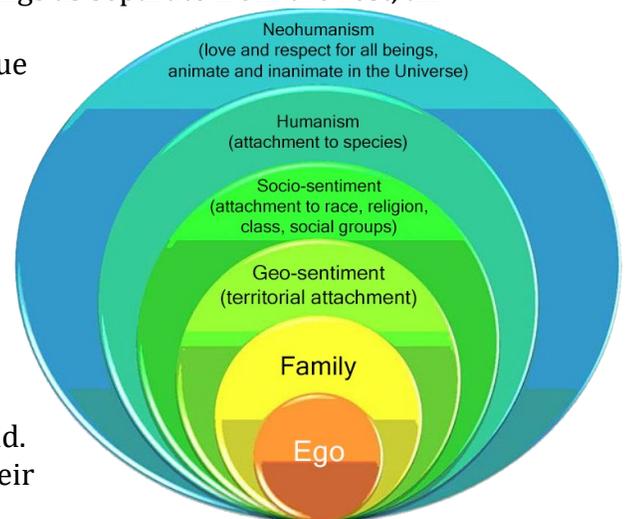
- Why was I born?
- What does it mean to be human?
- What is my purpose in life?
- Do I have a soul?
- How should I relate to other beings?

We have learned that Neohumanism is a philosophy that encompasses the mundane and the cosmic, which understands the known universe as dynamic, and that defines the human as a multi-dimensional being engaged in a quest for realization and spiritual understanding.

One main idea that profoundly shaped Humanist thinking about *being* is the idea of the individual, the "I" as a bounded entity, surrounded by stable substances and objects in space that constitute separate "others" to manipulate, utilize, and transact with. This sense of separation, mastery, and control in concert with an economic system predicated on resource extraction, endless growth, and needless consumption has led us to the ecological tipping point at which we find ourselves. Neohumanism requires the cultivation of an ontology that is **relational**, that understands there is no separation of self and other, of knower and known, of subject and object, but rather endless flows of being and becoming in which we are deeply interconnected with everything in creation, visible and invisible, material and molecular, objective and subjective. Here is what one of our great Western scientists had to say about the nature of ontological *being*:

A human being is a spatially and temporally limited piece of the whole, what we call the "Universe." He experiences himself and his feelings as separate from the rest, an optical illusion of his consciousness. The quest for liberation from this bondage is the only object of true religion. Not nurturing the illusion but only overcoming it gives us the attainable measure of inner peace. (Albert Einstein, 1950)

How to facilitate the growth of young people in this "quest for liberation" from the limited sense of "I-ness" to an expanding circle of connection is illustrated in this graphic. In the first phase of existence, there is the small self, the ego and its identification with the body and its needs and the growing awareness of the surrounding world. The individual's sense of identity expands to the family, their





sense of place (geo-sentiment) and ever outwards to include one's social groups, clan, social class, race and ethnicity, religion, etc. (socio-sentiment) and ideally, to all of humanity. This is not a linear process and it is not a "stage theory" (an inevitable progression through identifiable stages of growth).

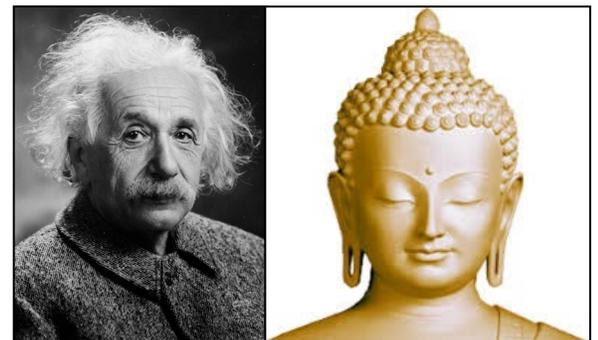
None of these phases of identity are problematic in themselves: one can hold a great love for the land on which they live, or one's social identity can be a source of strength. Problems can arise when a person gets stuck on this identity "chain" – when they come to feel that their race is superior or that their religion is the only correct one. Their expansive flow is then blocked, or reversed. Neohumanism teaches that is our destiny to remove all such limiting labels and continue to expand our consciousness into an identity of interconnectedness, of integral unity, rather than separation and superiority. When we remove all the labels we have affixed to ourselves, we find something that precedes all labels, and with that existential awareness lies the connection with the consciousness of everything in the universe. This is the ontological task of Neohumanist educators, to facilitate the movement of young people through this ever-expanding circle of connection.

In the context of *relational being and becoming*, Neohumanist education challenges everything from our notions of individual achievement to our valuing of independence and autonomy, from our theories of human development and cognition to theories of experience and academic subject matter. If everything is in process, or relational, then we must awaken to the profound interdependence between the human organism and the environment, the life histories and trajectories of 'objects' and our own implication in these, as well as the human connection to transcendent levels of mind. A Neohumanist curriculum embraces this multidimensionality, the whole of ontological experience. The tangible implications of this central idea will be more fully articulated in upcoming sections.

Epistemology

Epistemology (Greek *epistēmē* 'knowledge'+ *-logy* 'study of') asks fundamental questions about the nature of knowing:

- What is knowledge?
- How is knowledge constructed?
- What are the sources of knowledge?
- How do we come to know anything?
- How can we know what is true?



Conventional education concerns itself primarily with knowledge about the external world, what Sarkar calls "extroversial knowledge." Neohumanist education approaches extroversial knowledge through the application of current scientific principles of investigation, inquiry, documentation, analysis, logic and critical thinking. Neohumanist education also recognizes the validity of "introversial knowledge," gaining knowledge about one's Self through the practice of meditation and intuition. This careful balancing of the pursuits of external and internal knowledge aims to awaken the capacities of insight, intuition, empathy, compassion and discernment in order to ensure that knowledge gained through study of material phenomena is applied in ethical and conscientious ways, for the welfare of all.



Throughout our Humanist history, conventional Western models of education have spread across the planet, resulting in the loss of language, tradition, culture, and indigenous ecological knowledge. Some scholars have aptly called this “**epistemicide**.” In the process of valuing a particular version of scientific investigation and reason over all other forms of knowledge creation, and in the context of conquest, patriarchy, and economic imperialism, ways of knowing that exist outside these contours have been marginalized or suppressed: embodied knowing, contemplative knowing, intuitional knowing, narrative knowing, aesthetic knowing, mythic knowing, and intergenerational knowing. Neohumanist educators work to cultivate an **epistemological pluralism**, while understanding that all ways of knowing are not necessarily equal, and that different epistemologies are suited to different tasks and purposes.

The quest for truth is the epistemological task, a task now made more urgent by the contemporary global infrastructure of misinformation and disinformation. Digital technologies and popular media, for all of their potential worth, have brought about a flourishing “ecosystem of alternate realities” that make it possible to mislead masses of people, spread false ideas, and gain power over the lives of human beings.

To be a Neohumanist educator is to engage with some challenging epistemological contradictions:

- How to navigate the tensions between reason and intuition, the spiritual and the rational, the material and the ideal, the internal and the external, skepticism and inner knowing?
- How to teach in a way that is deeply rooted in the language and culture of specific people and places, while cultivating a sense of universalism (love for all creation)?

One Western scholar states the challenge this way, when he notes that this younger generation

may be the last who can still reverse the negative megatrends converging today. In order for these children to learn the needed ***new ways of thinking*** the present generation in charge of society must begin to set up for them **a kind of education it never had and arrange to educate itself further at the same time.** (Moffett, 1994)

These “new ways of thinking” must cultivate a sense of universal love for all creation, an understanding of the deep interconnectedness of all life, and an appreciation for the multiple ways of knowing available to humanity. They must strive to free the mind from any and all discrimination and bias on the basis of race, class, caste, gender, etc. They must nurture the capacity to penetrate the lies and misinformation that permeate the mental sphere, and foster the courage to “speak truth to power” – to challenge corruption, authoritarianism, oppression and violence wherever it threatens the collective welfare. They must “liberate the intellect,” and cultivate the wisdom to see humanity through the spiritual, psychic, intellectual and physical challenges of this era.

Axiology

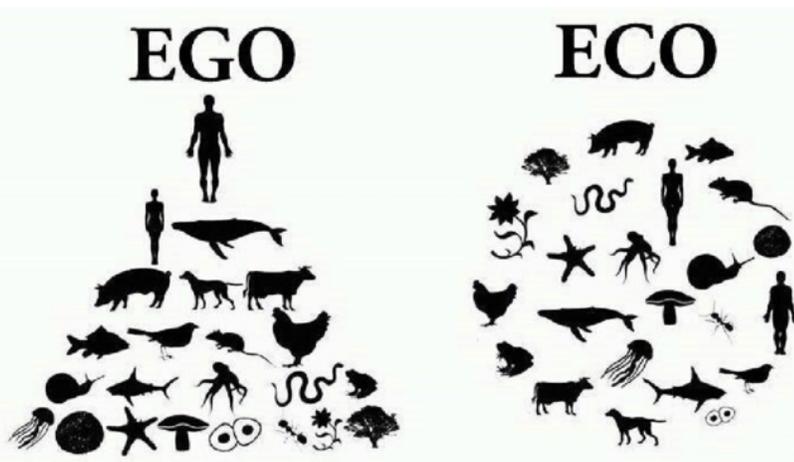
Axiology (GR: *axia* “value” or “worth” + *-logy* ‘study of’) includes the study of both ethics and of aesthetics. It asks fundamental questions of value:

- What do we consider to be of worth?
- What constitutes the good, the true, the beautiful?
- What is progress?
- How should we live?
- What are my values?

NHE is an inherently value-based philosophy and pedagogy, adhering to universalism, love for all creation, social equality and all-around benevolence.

Ethics. Along with the necessary “new ways of thinking” that need to be nurtured, “new ways of being” are required for the new era. We are currently living in a time of cultural pluralism, a fine idea at its core, but one which has had consequences. It has brought about a sense of ethical relativism, and there is uncertainty about what if anything, can be considered a cardinal value. In our late-Humanist society, in which ‘Man is the measure of all things,’ self-interest often supersedes nobler intentions such as altruism and service. As well, capitalist ethics have become the dominant social value, and the market is an ultimate arbiter of ethical questions. Should we endanger fragile habitat in order to drill for oil? Of course, if profit is the main value.

Humanism measures **progress** in terms of increasing material abundance, personal comfort, and convenience (for some) and scientific and technological achievements (without regard for their consequences). While not ignoring economic well-being nor downplaying the importance of scientific knowledge, Neohumanism apply other measures to progress: how a society treats *all* of its people, how it relates to other species and the environment, and in terms of non-material factors such as happiness and fulfillment. In Neohumanism, **progress** means growing our circle of love, making our society reflect that love, and ultimately moving away from the exclusive focus on materialism towards the mysterious source of existence (divinity). The movement towards these goals, in Neohumanism, represents authentic **progress**.



In the relational, process philosophy of Neohumanism, in which **the inherent value of all living things is acknowledged**, ethics are the principles we must use to regulate these many and varied relationships. Sarkar rejects the kind of simple rule-based morality encoded in many traditions, yet subscribes to the notion of overarching ethical principles under the broad umbrella of the question: **Does this contribute to the welfare of all?** The curriculum

can no longer be constructed to serve dominant economic and political interests, as it is currently, but must address the deep interconnections that we are coming to understand between and amongst humans and all ‘other’ life forms.



In a Neohumanist education, ethics is infused throughout the curriculum; every subject from biology to history is approached through an ethical study framework. Social-emotional learning is essential in developing empathy, compassion, and understanding of the ‘other.’ In the study of ethical dilemmas (and we face countless of them in this new era), it is important to cultivate the arts of reflection, deliberation, and discerning judgment, to invoke, as Sarkar suggests, both reason and intuition. In these ways, ethics can become, as he proposes, a facilitator of personal and social transformation – a tool for expansion.

Aesthetics. Since the beginning of recorded human history, people have engaged in painting, design, song, music, storytelling and movement. Such activities are literally how we create our worlds. In modern Western societies, the arts are commodities, with ascribed value based on notions of uniqueness and scarcity. In many other societies, especially those that have lived in a simpler harmony with their environments, aesthetic practices are so embedded in culture that their languages literally have no word for ‘art.’

The arts are essential to Neohumanist educational practice, both on their own individual merits, and as entry points and expressive possibilities for all subject matter. In Neohumanist education the arts serve ancient and life-preserving functions, involving young people in participatory aesthetic experiences that create and recreate the fundamental stories of our existence – our human bonds, our relationships with plants, animals, sea and sky, and the mythic stories that carry forth and transmit the blueprints of a moral universe (Kesson, 2019). In these ways, the arts are both catalysts and facilitators of the metaphysical, ontological, epistemological, and ethical foundations of education. For Neohumanist educators, ethics and aesthetics are essential to determining what is worth knowing, what should be taught, how should subjects be organized and what are essential guiding questions. Both of these topics will be addressed in more depth in subsequent sections.

Thinking Philosophically

A philosophy is not much use if it cannot guide our actions. The philosophy of Neohumanist education has implications for how teachers go about all that is involved in teaching and learning: how they conceive of the learner, how knowledge is constructed, what is worth knowing and doing, how they make decisions, what they choose to teach, and how they can cultivate the kind of character in young people that will enable them to survive and thrive in these extraordinary times.

Building on historical philosophies

The philosophical foundations of Neohumanist education draw something of value from each of the earlier philosophical traditions. From the Perennialists comes the idea that knowledge, to be of worth, need not necessarily be *new*. There is wisdom to be found in the past, and the knowledge embedded in cultural traditions, such as the knowledge that has been passed down by indigenous people about how to live in ecological balance with their environments, is valuable.

From the Behaviorists comes the idea that in order for any learning to be internalized, there must be reinforcement from the environment. We can decry the social engineering aspect of this philosophy, while retaining the notion of positive reinforcement, and the importance of providing authentic feedback and celebrating the accomplishments of young people.



From the Romantics comes the essential idea of the inner life of the child, and how vital it is to value the motivations and interests of each learner. They also remind us of the magic and mystery at the heart of existence, and of the importance of nurturing the imagination.

From the Pragmatists comes the very key idea that *experience* – real life engagement with the ‘stuff’ of the world – should be at the center of education. Learning needs to be active, with a rich and stimulating environment that engages the child in doing, playing, making, experimenting, feeling and thinking. Inquiry, collaboration, cooperation, and problem-solving are key elements of Neohumanist education.

And finally, Critical Pedagogy addresses the vital importance of learning to question what is given, to examine texts (written, spoken, visual, etc.) for the ways that they shape and limit our thinking, to learn to ‘read the world,’ and to be alert for manifestations of power and oppression.

Unique Aspects of NHE

Though drawing from the best ideas of other traditions, Neohumanist educational philosophy is distinct in certain ways.

Sá vidyá yá vimuktaye - “Education is that which liberates.”

The real meaning of education is trilateral development – simultaneous development in the physical, mental and spiritual realms of human existence. This development should enhance the integration of the human personality. By this, dormant human potentialities will be awakened and put to proper use. Educated are those who have learnt much, remembered much and made use of their learning in practical life. (Sarkar, 1981)

- It balances scientific learning and contemplative learning, aiming to reconcile humanity’s hunger for spiritual development with a commitment to scientific thought and a rational, just society.
- It balances introversial and extroversial knowledge.
- It includes instruction in astaunga yoga (the “eight-fold path”) at developmentally appropriate levels.
- It emphasizes the essential interconnectedness of people with all of creation, expanding the heart to embrace all species.
- It explicitly cultivates a deep ecological sensibility, with an emphasis on caring for land, water, plants, and animals.
- It emphasizes spiritual growth, service, and social activism in the causes of universal welfare (subjective approach/objective adjustment).
- It aims to free the mind from limitations and dogma.
- It is committed to “decolonizing’ pedagogies (more about this is upcoming sections), recognizes the fundamental equality of all people, and aims to repair and heal the social wounds of the past and present.
- It values the specifics of culture and place, and cultivates a universal sentiment as well.
- In contrast to older educational alternatives, it is *dynamic*, adapting to changing times, places, and worldly circumstances.



It is this last point that may protect Neohumanist education from *reification*, a process that too often turns innovative educational ideas into stale dogma.

Conclusion

The centuries old philosophy of Humanism brought us an educational model premised on individual achievement, competition, the acquisition of increasingly abstract forms of knowledge, the myth of meritocracy, and the sifting and sorting of humankind according to narrow definitions of ability. This model has spread across the planet, and conventional wisdom states that the more educated one is, the better, and the more people who have access to this form of education, the better off we will all be. There are very real achievements that have been brought about by modern, Western ways of knowing. But we must acknowledge that much of the damage being inflicted upon the planet in the forms of chemical pollution, climate change, species extinction, and sophisticated weaponry has been implemented by highly educated people (Orr, 1993/1998). And this doesn't even address the collateral damage of competitive forms of education: suicide, an epidemic of depression and anxiety among the young, increasing rates of school dropouts, the loss of languages, cultures, and accelerating inequality.

The old vision of reality is a fragmented one, one in which relationships have been fractured – relations between people, between people and animals, between people and the plant world, between people and their labor, and between people and the mysterious energies of the cosmos that sustain the coming into being, the sustaining, and the perishing of life.

Neohumanism asks us to reconsider the fundamental purposes of education. It strives for a harmonious balance between inner development and engagement with the world, in the belief that meditation and inner work foster an awakened conscience, which translates into transcending differences and creating a sense of unity with all beings. Its principles lie in three main areas:

- 1) Expanding the circle of love to include everyone and everything.
- 2) Freeing the mind from dogma and limitations, cultivating a broad-minded and compassionate rationality that serves as a gateway to realizing our full individual and collective potential.
- 3) Awakening the desire for social and environmental justice through the practice of selfless service; translating values into action to achieve a sense of purpose and connection.

Rather than educate so that a tiny sliver of people rise to the top of the global income chain, we need to educate all people for the art of living well on a fragile and sacred planet. Neohumanist educational philosophy emphasizes not just academic achievement and high test scores, but highlights the importance of cultivating compassion, community, empathy, imagination, insight, friendship, creativity, communication, justice, practicality, pleasure, courage, humor, wisdom, introspection, transcendence, ethics, service, and the ability to live well within the carrying capacity of our ecosystems.

In upcoming sections, we will take a deeper dive into topics that have been touched on in this document: the role of culture in the educational process, how children learn and the most effective ways to teach, reaching all learners, the importance of family and community in the educational process, the various roles that a teacher plays, arts-based learning, place-based



learning, and how curriculum is developed and organized. The philosophy of Neohumanist education as presented here will be woven throughout all of the more practical dimensions of teaching and learning, so we can begin to understand the coherence and integration of all aspects of Neohumanist education.

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Author note: This series on Neohumanist Education is written by Dr. Kathleen Kesson with input from key NHE educators and feedback from participants in a series of webinars that she gave on this topic. Dr. Kathleen Kesson is Professor Emerita of Teaching and Learning, LIU-Brooklyn, NY, USA. She has written extensively about spirituality and education, arts and education, teacher development, and democratic pedagogy. She has been a student of the works of P.R. Sarkar since 1971, and gratefully acknowledges the generous contributions of the many Neohumanist educators and scholars who have worked collaboratively to bring his ideas into practice.