

A study-guide for

Neohumanist Education

An introduction from the perspective
of biopsychology

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This document is not finished – in particular, it has been suggested that the questions could be reformulated to encourage inquiry-based learning.

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Dedication

To the teachers and staff of the Ananda Marga River School, Maleny, Queensland.
Your professionalism, commitment and enthusiasm are a source of inspiration to me.

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Preface

This introduction to the educational philosophy of Ananda Marga schools focuses on five themes that are unifying concepts through the entirety of Sarkar's philosophy, not just in his discourses on Neohumanism. The first concerns the internal life of humans which in colloquial language we might refer to as the realm of the 'heart'. A Neohumanist education endeavours "to cultivate warm hearts". The second theme concerns the external life of humans, in particular the realm of the mind and objective knowledge, which is what we first think of in connection with education. A Neohumanist education endeavours "to cultivate subtle minds". A warm heart and a subtle mind require a firm foundation, without which the heart becomes cold and the mind becomes crude. The first foundation is *morality* and thus the third theme presented here is "the cultivation of good character". The second foundation (and the fourth theme) is *rationality*, the ability to reason, although as we shall discover, Sarkar understands rationality in a particular sense. And finally, a warm heart and a subtle mind can only flourish where one maintains "balance in life", particularly a balance between one's internal and external life.

The five themes above, *warm hearts*, *subtle minds*, *good character*, *rationality* and *balance in life*, are not peculiar to education. They are surely the stuff of life for everyone from cradle to grave. But this is what an education is about, to equip us with the skills required throughout life. Consequently, the above five themes are a helpful way to structure an introduction to Neohumanist education.

This introduction is written primarily as a study-guide for teachers wanting an overview of Neohumanist education. Discussion questions are included to broaden the scope of what the student takes away. However this study-guide may also be of interest to anyone wanting a better understanding of what Ananda Marga schools are about. Of course there are many ways to introduce Neohumanism and the education system derived from it. I am by training a biologist and hence my interest in a biological perspective. Biology is not everything but it does contribute something helpful to our understanding of Neohumanism and learning!¹

Every Neohumanist school is different – they do not follow a formula. Not all the ideas discussed here will be reflected in every Neohumanist school. Local culture and of course the principal and teachers imprint their character on a school. If this were not so, the school would not be a vibrant place to learn!

¹ According to neurologist turned teacher, Judy Willis, "Neuroscience should be required for all students [of education]." See "*A Neurologist Makes the Case for Teaching Teachers about the Brain*", <<http://www.edutopia.org/blog/neuroscience-higher-ed-judy-willis>>.

1. Introduction

Visiting a Neohumanist School

When you first visit the Ananda Marga River School (AMRS),² you discover a beautiful campus set in tropical bush. A sun-dappled creek flows along one side, with swimming holes much frequented in summer. The school grounds contain vegetable gardens and fruit trees. It must be one of the most beautiful school campuses in Australia. In other respects the school is typical. It teaches the standard Australian curriculum, it satisfies, if not exceeds, all the statutory certification standards and on that basis receives State and Commonwealth funding. It is one of many independent schools in Australia that offer choice to parents.

Look a little deeper however and you discover that it is not just the beautiful environment that makes the AMRS different. Perhaps the vegetarian tuckshop will catch your attention. Or you may be surprised that the students are introduced to meditation and yoga. And you will hear about Neohumanism, the philosophy which motivates the school. What is Neohumanism? Why a vegetarian tuckshop? Why is yoga part of the school curriculum? This introduction attempts to answer these and other questions.

The AMRS is what is sometimes called an *East-West* school.³ An East-West school is *not* a Hindu school operating in the West, just as it is not a Roman Catholic school operating in India. Typically an East-West school is humanist and secular. It teaches a Western curriculum but has an Eastern spiritual ethos because it wishes to be explicit about its concern for the “whole” child. The Maharishi schools in Melbourne <www.maharishischool.vic.edu.au> and Iowa <www.maharishischooliowa.org> promote “consciousness based education”. The Sri Aurobindo Education Society <<http://aurosociety.org/focus-area/integral-education.aspx>>, which operates schools in India, promotes “Integral Education”. The common theme that links East-West schools is their belief that the developing child requires something more than just a physical and intellectual education and that the Eastern spiritual tradition can provide that extra something without the religious dogma.

Questions

1. Visit a nearby East-West school or check out its web-site. How does it compare with the Neohumanist School you are visiting?
2. How many other organisations operate East-West schools in your country?
3. Given your understanding of ‘East’ in this context, what would you expect to see as the ‘East’ component of an East-West education?

What is the purpose of an education?

Education in the Western world is typically humanist and secular. Such schools typically define their mission as two-fold: to enable children to “realise their potential” and to enable them to

² On the outskirts of Maleny in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia.

³ The author was introduced to this term by Richard Waters, foundation principal of the School of Total Education in Warwick, Queensland <<http://www.sote.qld.edu.au/newsletter/2011-12/newsletter.html>>.

contribute something useful to society. Elite schools may in addition allude to the training of future leaders and Christian schools will promote the importance of values. Needless to say, Neohumanist schools want no less for their students – but they go further.

Realising one's potential is very much a humanist ideal – but it has a limitation, because in the humanist tradition human potential is not clearly articulated. In the educational context, realising a child's potential can be physical (to excel on the sports field), material (to succeed in business) or intellectual (to succeed in the professional or academic worlds). But the secular nature of a Western education typically means that a child's spiritual development is compromised, because the West has not learned to disentangle religion and spirituality.

In Neohumanist schools, helping children to realise their spiritual potential is an integral part of their mission. In particular, children are encouraged to develop their “internal life” and to recognise their “interconnectedness of being” with the natural world and planet Earth. Another clarification is required here. The inner and outer life of humans is often linked to mind and body respectively.⁴ However in Neohumanist education, the distinction is more subtle. One's inner life is concerned with the capacity to love selflessly, with what the Self embraces. External life, on the other hand, is concerned with the accumulation of objective knowledge required to live in the world.

Education is that which liberates.

P.R. Sarkar

This introduction is structured around five themes corresponding to five objectives of a Neohumanist education:

1. **To cultivate warm hearts:** Here a *warm heart* is used as a metaphor for a rich inner life. A warm heart is one which extends its embrace beyond immediate family, friends and school, to include the great diversity of people who live on planet Earth and further to include the fascinating variety of animals and plants that also live on Earth. Their well-being is our well-being. A warm heart expresses wonderment when introduced to the innumerable stars and galaxies that fill the universe – so many possibilities for life to exist on distant planets!
2. **To cultivate subtle minds:** Here we are concerned with the outer or objective dimension of human life. A subtle mind has emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual facility. It goes beyond the superficial to ‘see’ what is not obvious. It is wise, capable of both empathy and calculation. Note that in the Neohumanist approach to education, spirituality is not religious. Indeed, to the extent that spirituality permeates the outer world, it is amenable to science.
3. **To cultivate good character:** The cultivation of a warm heart and a subtle mind can only succeed on a strong foundation of morality. Hence a Neohumanist education is also values based and requires us to make the distinction between good conduct and good character.
4. **To cultivate rationality:** Rationality is another hall-mark of human beings. As we shall discover, rationality and its converse, dogma, have a prominent role in Sarkar's philosophy of Neohumanism.
5. **To cultivate balance in life:** The fifth and final theme returns to the balance of East and West, internal and external in a Neohumanist education. It may be a truism but a happy, fruitful life depends on heart and mind working in concert. Heart without mind is ineffectual and mind without heart is sterile, or worse, veers off in strange directions.

⁴ See for example Wishart, Llewellyn 2010, “Bridging inner and outer ecology: body-mind centering and somatic applications in environmental and nature-based education”, in *BMCA 2010: Somatic Pedagogies: 25th Annual BMCA-USA Conference*, Ohio, U.S.A., < <http://dro.deakin.edu.au/view/DU:30046248?> >

The verb *to cultivate* in the above five themes is quite deliberate. It means to nurture from seed. The endeavour to cultivate a warm heart and a subtle mind does not stop when one leaves school. It is a life-long endeavour. What Neohumanist schools do is plant the seeds.

Questions

1. What is the mission statement of the Neohumanist School you are visiting?
2. How does the mission statement of a Neohumanist school compare with the mission statement of your local public/State school, a local religious school, the school which you attended?
3. What would you look for to decide if a school is achieving its mission?

2. What is Neohumanism?

Neohumanism is the philosophy that motivates educational practice at schools like the AMRS. It was introduced in 1982 by Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, the founder of Ananda Marga, in a series of discourses, which were later compiled into a book titled “The Liberation of Intellect - Neohumanism”. Neohumanism can be appreciated as a synthesis of two great civilising traditions, European humanism and Asian spirituality. The prefix *neo-*, says Sarkar, implies humanism “newly explained”. Sarkar did not introduce Neohumanism as a philosophy of education but when he subsequently founded Gurukul, the educational institution which oversees Ananda Marga schools, he described its mission as “to serve humanity with Neohumanist spirit and to acquire knowledge for that purpose”. And indeed the Neohumanist themes of personal, intellectual and social liberation are an excellent starting point for a philosophy of education.

Humanism is an idea that came to prominence during the European Renaissance, but whose lineage extends back to ancient Greece. Indeed, the Greek philosopher Protagoras (c490–c420 BC) offered a concise definition of humanism which still stands – humanism is the idea that “*Man is the measure of all things*”. This was a revolutionary proposition at the time and has continued to generate controversy through the centuries. It says that right and wrong are not to be determined by an absolute power (in the guise of popes and monarchs) beyond the reach of human experience. Not surprisingly there has been an uneasy tension between humanism and religion over the centuries, but a recent statement by Pope Francis is clearly humanist:

To educate in solidarity therefore means *to educate ourselves in humanity*: to build a society that is truly human means to put the person and his or her dignity at the centre, always, and never to sell him out to the logic of profit.⁵

Some historians consider the defining theme of European history to be its struggle to establish humanism as a social and political reality. And some go so far as to identify the constitutions arising out of the American and French revolutions as the crowning achievement of humanism because finally the power of popes, priests, monarchs and aristocrats was subordinated to the power of the ‘people’. If we accept this overarching view of European history, then it is hard to avoid the conclusion that somewhere in the 20th Century, humanism badly lost its way.

From the vantage point of the 21st Century, humanism has two clear defects. First, if humans are the measure of all things, then where do plants and animals fit into the scheme of things? Second, what is the future of humanity, if our only measure is past and present humans? The future does not look promising given the present. This is where the great civilising tradition of Asian spirituality makes its contribution. It offers a clear understanding of human potential and it illuminates the inner meaning of humanism.

While there are many themes running through the Neohumanist discourses, an important unifying theme is the pivotal role played by *sentiment* in human affairs, not only how sentiment influences individual behaviour but also its influence in social, political and cultural life.

Questions

1. Discuss the proposition that globalisation is about establishing a democratic, secular and humanist society on a global scale?
2. What features make a ‘modern’ Western education humanist and secular? What are the

⁵ Pope’s Message for World Food Day, 16/10/2013, <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/f1wfd2013.HTM>

advantages and disadvantages of a humanist, secular education?

3. The rapid pace of globalisation obviously raises the question of a 'global education'. What should a 'global' education look like? Should it be humanist and secular?⁶

What are sentiments?

Let us begin with a simple definition, but one having many ramifications:

A sentiment is an idea coloured by emotion.⁷

An emotion is physiological, an idea is cerebral and a sentiment is an association of the two. That is, sentiments are learned, the product of culture and schooling. In this section, we explore the emotions that underlie human sentiments and then the ideas which they colour. But first we need a little biology.

The Nerves and Glands

Any understanding of human behaviour must include some account of its biological foundations, the nervous system (the brain, spinal cord and peripheral nervous system) and the endocrine system (consisting of the ductless glands: the pineal, pituitary, thyroid, parathyroid, thymus and adrenal glands, and the pancreas, ovaries and testes). Western psychology places much emphasis on the nervous system as the biological basis of behaviour whereas yoga psychology (the tradition which Sarkar draws upon) gives equal importance to the role of the ductless glands. Our purposes require only the briefest account of these two systems. We will be concerned with three regions of the brain:

The Brain Stem: Often described as the "primitive" or "reptilian" brain because it is the brain region most developed in the reptiles and lower animals. It maintains unconscious body functions (heart-beat, breathing, digestion etc.) and territorial and ritual behaviours. The brainstem is also the centre for those basic "reptilian" emotions that demand a rapid response, for example, surprise-startle and fear-terror.

The Limbic System: Sometimes described as the emotional brain, the limbic system is well developed in mammals. It regulates all the emotions that mediate social behaviours such as nurturing of young. The limbic system sits between the brainstem and the cerebral cortex.

The Cerebral Cortex: The exterior, visible part of the brain most developed in primates and humans. It mediates conscious behaviours requiring advanced cognition. The frontal cortex, for example, is involved in planning, reasoning and problem solving. Parts of the frontal cortex are the only brain regions *relatively* more developed in humans than in higher primates.

We should note that use of terms such as "primitive" and "higher" in reference to different parts of the brain is rejected by many biologists who find the terms homo-centric and implying a moral direction to evolution. As educationalists, we are concerned with the cognitive, aesthetic and moral content of behaviour and animal evolution from reptiles to humans clearly implies a direction from crude to subtle. Biologists may not like the implication, but human civilisation depends on it.

⁶ You might like to read, Marcus Bussey, "Global Education from a Neohumanist Perspective: A Musical Exposition", *Journal of Futures Studies* 12(1): 25-40, 2007.

⁷ This is the third of three definitions in the Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/sentiment>

Note that this three-part anatomy of the human brain does not imply that the parts function independently. Rather there is close cooperation due to complex inter-woven neural connections. However the three parts also have specialised functionality which can best be explained in terms of their evolutionary heritage.⁸

Concerning the endocrine system, Sarkar makes a distinction between the ‘higher’ or controlling glands (the pineal and pituitary) and the remaining ‘lower’ or subsidiary glands. Western science also recognises the pituitary as a “master” gland but it does not attach the same importance to the pineal. According to yoga psychology, secretions from the controlling glands promote ‘subtle’ behaviours⁹ whereas the subsidiary glands are more concerned with ‘crude’ physical function. There are direct and indirect links between the endocrine and nervous systems. Direct links are with the posterior-pituitary and the adrenal glands which can be considered modified endings of nerve fibres. Nevertheless the relationship between the two systems is complex and remains poorly understood.

The Neural Basis of Learning

Contemporary science believes learning to involve the ‘wiring’ of neural circuits to effect stimulus-response behaviours. Once learned, the neural circuit becomes a ‘memory’. ‘Wiring’ in this context means connecting neurons through *synapses*. When we say that sentiments are *learned*, we imply the making and breaking of many millions of synaptic connections. The final state of these connections determines how the cognitive (*ideas*) cortex, the sensory-motor cortex, the limbic system, the brainstem, the autonomic nervous system and the endocrine glands all interact with one another to regulate behaviour. This is the biological substrate of sentiments and instincts. It is also the biological substrate of a primary school education.

The infant brain is a remarkable learner and once those synaptic connections are made, they shape subsequent life. Therefore, in terms of realizing one’s potential, the first years of life are by far the most important. As an example, a University of Kansas study¹⁰ of 42 families from various socio-economic backgrounds found that the career and income earning ability of a child in later life could be predicted from his/her exposure to spoken words between seven and 36 months. Children from high-income families were exposed to 30 million more words than children from families on welfare. Two-way interaction is the key. Television is one-way communication and does not similarly stimulate development of the baby’s brain.¹¹

The Emotions

The words *affect*, *instinct*, *feeling*, *emotion* and *sentiment* overlap ambiguously in common usage. It does not help that academics themselves differ in their use of these words. A major debate is the extent to which emotions are “hard-wired” versus culturally learned. Two important theories, *affect theory* and *appraisal theory* give emphasis to *wiring* and *culture* respectively. These debates are complex and beyond the scope of this introduction. Nor are we obliged to choose between one or other theory. Our purpose here is to paint a general picture of how nature and nurture (wiring and culture) interact to produce the sentiments that dominate human life.

⁸ Thomas Lewis et al. *A General Theory of Love*, Vintage, 2000. Pp31.

⁹ According to yoga psychology, the pineal gland plays a role in subtle spiritual experiences.

¹⁰ Betty Hart and Todd Risley, *The Thirty Million Word Gap*, University of Kansas, < <http://literacy.rice.edu/thirty-million-word-gap> >

¹¹ Nathan Mikaere-Wallis, *Brain Development and Learning*, http://wikieducator.org/Professional_Inquiry/Nathan_Mikaere_Wallis

The immediate response to a stimulus is known as the *affect*. This refers to the unconscious, biological component of an emotion - it is hard-wired, pre-programmed and inherited. According to affect theory, there are nine distinct neural pathways corresponding to nine kinds of affect,¹² each of which results in a distinct, involuntary facial expression. For example, the *surprise* affect causes the eyes to enlarge, the *joy* affect causes the mouth to crease into a smile. Affects allow rapid, non-vocal communication of socially important information. They are the basis for the intuitive reading of faces.

When an affect rises into consciousness it becomes a feeling and when that feeling is recognised as belonging to a category of previous feelings, it is called an emotion. In human beings, we know that emotions have a subjective and objective aspect. The subjective aspect (the *qualia*) is its internal feeling¹³ which we describe with words such as *love*, *surprise*, *fear* etc. Science suggests that these internal feelings have an objective physiological basis, the so-called *molecules of emotion*,¹⁴ which consist of neurotransmitters secreted from nerve endings and hormones secreted by the endocrine glands. These molecules induce flow on effects that alter breathing, heart-rate, mental alertness and so on, which also become part of the internal experience. Consequently, emotions can be difficult to characterise. Note that this objective account of emotions is extremely useful because it facilitates understanding the emotions of those who cannot name their internal state (e.g. children and animals).^{15, 16}

From the biological point of view, affects, feelings and emotions have survival value. Fear, for example, helps an organism to evade predators. The implication is that the emotions are subject to natural selection through an underlying genetic mechanism. A further implication is that relatively few genes underpin our emotional repertoire. Affect theory recognises just nine primary affects but we experience innumerable emotions because the primary emotions combine in great array and with much variation in intensity.¹⁷ Emotions are attended by feelings of pleasure or pain and Plutchik (1927-2006) believes that emotions mediate patterns of behaviour even in pre-vertebrate animals.

Social theories of emotion do not deny the role of biology but they consider the social overlay to be so great that emotions can best be understood from this perspective. (Biology is the canvas on which the painting of emotions is drawn. But biology is *not* itself the painting.) Appraisal theory states that every emotion which mediates a stimulus-response behaviour is also modulated by *cognitive processes*. In particular, the 'ideas' brain evaluates what kind of emotion is appropriate for the current situation. For example, there are rules about when it is appropriate to be angry and the expression of anger in the correct context preserves norms of social behaviour. Affect theory accepts that an adult's emotional life is more complex due to the interaction of affective mechanisms with "ideo-affective formations" (sentiments) but nevertheless retains the divide between affect and cognition. By contrast, proponents of

¹² The nine affects: Two are positive: Enjoyment/Joy; Interest/Excitement. One is neutral: Surprise/Startle. And six are negative: Anger/Rage; Disgust; Dismissal; Distress/Anguish; Fear/Terror; Shame/Humiliation.

¹³ According to some systems of classification, there are three kinds of internal feeling: sensations, emotions and moods.

¹⁴ This is the catchy title of a book by Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion: The science behind mind-body medicine*, Scribner, 1997. ISBN 0-684-84634-9.

¹⁵ N.H. Frijda, "Emotions", in *International Handbook of Psychology*, edited Pawlik and Rosenzweig, 2000.

¹⁶ Gregory Johnson, "Theories of Emotion", in *The Internet Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* (IEP), 2009, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/emotion/#H4>

¹⁷ Although there is no one agreed list of emotions, there is strong commonality. Aristotle compiled this list: anger, friendship, fear, shame, kindness, pity, indignation, envy/jealousy and love. Robert Plutchik < http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Plutchik > recognises eight primary emotions: fear, anger, sadness, joy, disgust, trust, anticipation and surprise.

appraisal theory do not consider this divide to be fundamental.¹⁸ As evidence they argue that emotions can result from a person's interpretation of their circumstances even in the absence of physiological arousal. We leave the debate at this point.

Sarkar refers to the emotions using the Sanskrit word *vrittis*, which he translates as *propensities*, a word which implies a biological impulse that can nevertheless be turned by an exercise of will.¹⁹ The word propensity appears to be consistent with the understanding that the emotions lie at the interface between hard-wired affect and cognitive appraisal.

Questions

1. What is the difference between a mood and an emotion?
2. Do you believe that animals experience emotions? How do you know?
3. What does the word *sentience* mean? Why is this word significant for animal rights?

Sentiments and Instincts

Recall that we defined a sentiment as an idea coloured by an emotion. We can now add to this definition that the neural circuitry underlying sentiments includes the *ideas* part of the brain (cerebral cortex), the *emotions* part of the brain (limbic system) and the 'master' glands (pituitary and pineal). Sentiments are consistent with the *cognitive theory* of emotions. On the other hand, instinctive behaviours, triggered by immediate situational cues, are more consistent with the *non-cognitive theory* of emotions. Their neural circuits lie within the limbic system and brainstem and bypass the *ideas* brain. These theories need not be exclusive. Rather it appears as if humans are born with a repertoire of innate, autonomic behaviours, into which situational and social information becomes incorporated during development. In other words, instincts gradually become sentiments as the *ideas* brain is increasingly incorporated into the neural circuits underlying behaviour. According to Sarkar, the difference between an instinct and a sentiment is that the former activates one or more subsidiary glands via the autonomic nervous system whereas the latter does not.²⁰ To sum up, an emotion, expressed directly through the brain stem and autonomic nervous system, is an instinct. An emotion directed through the ideas brain becomes a sentiment. The former is innate, the latter is necessarily learned.

The psychic structure of a sentiment can become highly complex as different emotions with different layers of social meaning accrete to it. And sentiments are not isolated but rather coalesce in family relationships. My love for a person or object can produce a great range of emotions according to circumstance.

¹⁸ See for example, Ruth Leys, "The Turn to Affect: A Critique", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 37 (3) (Spring 2011), pp. 434-472, The University of Chicago Press, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/659353>.

¹⁹ In yoga psychology, the *vrittis* refer to different tendencies, or psycho-physical propensities, which enable the mind to express a variety of emotions. *Vrittis* can be in-born or acquired through life-experience. They collectively represent the behaviour that makes each person unique: their desires and repulsions, their predispositions and complexes. See Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, *Idea and Ideology*, Kolkata: Ananda Marga Publications, Seventh English Edition, 1993. First English Edition, 1959. Originally dictated in English, 1959. Also < <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vritti> >

²⁰ In Sarkar's terminology, the subsidiary glands are the 'lower' glands concerned with a person's physical status, e.g. the thyroid, parathyroid, thymus, adrenal, pancreas, ovaries and testes. The pineal and the pituitary are the 'higher' or controlling glands, not subsidiaries. See *Idea and Ideology* *ibid*.

In the love of an object, there is pleasure in presence and desire in absence, hope or despondency in anticipation, fear in the expectation of its loss, injury, or destruction, surprise or astonishment in its unexpected changes, anger when the course of our interest is opposed or frustrated, elation when we triumph over obstacles, satisfaction or disappointment in attaining our desire, regret in the loss, injury, or destruction of the object, joy in its restoration or improvement, and admiration for its superior quality or excellence. And this series of emotions occurs, now in one order, now in another, in every sentiment of love or interest, when the appropriate conditions are present.²¹

The sum of a person's sentiments constitutes his/her character and temperament. They include ideas about who one is, who one ought to be and how the world works. Consequently they can be part of one's *invisible self* which one seldom thinks to question.²²

The *what, why, when* and *how* of learning the sentiments which shape our lives is a continuous thread that runs through the years of a Neohumanist education. It is now time to consider sentiments in more detail. We are particularly interested in the sentiments of *belonging* to a community or group. The warm feelings of belonging (and conversely, the deprivation of such feelings) exert immense influence on our individual and collective lives.

Questions

1. While it is convenient to think of sentiments as learned and instincts as innate, this distinction is complicated by the fact that learning itself is frequently an innate faculty. Consider, for example, how birds learn songs from their parents. Is language acquisition in children an instinct or learning? Or both? For one point of view, see Steven Pinker's very readable book, *The Language Instinct*.²³

Relationships and Belonging

Humans are a social rather than solitary species and, from an evolutionary perspective, our survival has greatly depended on close cooperation to find food and ward off predators. Given the importance of group cohesion for survival, it is not surprising that many emotions arise only in the context of *relationships* between people. Positive examples are trust, affection and compassion which contribute to the warm feeling of *belonging*. Negative examples, which can arise instinctively on meeting people from a different group, include envy, disapproval, distrust.

A group or community is a collection of individuals but what defines the group is the nature of the *connections* between them, the group sentiment. The quality of the connections between people is so important to group function that the concept has been raised to the abstract notion of an (economic) resource known as *social capital*. The term has an obvious economic bias but appears to be firmly entrenched.

Social capital is defined as the “empathy and sympathy” in human relationships and the “shared attitudes and goals” of a community,²⁴ and again, as the “connections among individuals –

²¹ Ibid Stout, 1947. <http://chestofbooks.com/health/psychology/G-F-Stout/A-Manual-Of-Psychology/Sentiment-and-Emotion.html>.

²² G.F. Stout, 1947, “Sentiment and Emotions” in *A Manual of Psychology*, University Tutorial Press.

²³ Steven Pinker, *The Language Instinct*, 1994.

²⁴ Tim Hazeldine, *Taking New Zealand Seriously – The Economics of Decency*. Auckland: Harper Collins Publishers, 1998.

social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them”.²⁵ In other words, social capital is embodied in human relationships and in the social, educational and cultural institutions which mould those relationships. Note that *empathy* is considered a vital trait in group function.²⁶ Although not an emotion as such, it is a condition of emotional intelligence. Attempts to measure social capital focus mostly on the levels of trust in a community and the civic involvement of its members.²⁷

There are different kinds of social capital just as there are different kinds of physical and human capital. Sociologist Putnam makes an important distinction between *inclusive* social connections and *exclusive* social connections. Ethnic organizations, sectarian church groups and fashionable country clubs tend to be exclusive even while their internal bonds are strong. Civil rights groups, youth service groups and charitable organizations tend to be inclusive.²⁸

It is here that Sarkar’s analysis of sentiments becomes important because it is not just the emotional connections but the *ideas* associated with them that define the dynamics of a group. Sarkar distinguishes three important categories of group sentiment: *geo-sentiment*, *socio-sentiment* and *human sentiment* or *humanism*.

Geo-sentiment

Geo-sentiment “grows out of love for the indigenous soil of a country”.²⁹ It spans the range from tribal loyalties to nationalist fervour. Geo-sentiments dominate international politics³⁰ and sport but they also infiltrate religious and economic life. The faithful are urged to make pilgrimages to holy places like Varanasi, Mecca and Rome. A capital city wants the tallest building in the world regardless of the cost. Some geo-sentiments can serve a positive purpose, for example ‘buy local’ campaigns which attempt to strengthen a local economy by limiting the drainage of wealth to major centres.

Socio-sentiment

Socio-sentiments are group sentiments unconstrained by ‘place’ or geographical boundary. The four major categories of socio-sentiments in today’s world are associated with religion (people in my religion are saved, others are condemned), class (traders who generate wealth deserve the largest rewards), race (white races conquered the world because they are superior) and gender (men are made in the likeness of God). Socio-sentiments may embrace larger communities than geo-sentiments, but they are far more dangerous because they encourage deeply-entrenched superiority complexes that remain invisible to those gripped by them.

²⁵ Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

²⁶ Three kinds of empathy are distinguished: 1. *Cognitive* empathy, or *perspective-taking*, is the ability to understand another person’s emotion; 2. *Emotional* empathy is the ability to experience another person’s emotion; and 3. *Compassionate* empathy is the spontaneous move to help another person.

²⁷ Trust is measured using questionnaires and civic engagement by counting the number of church groups, unions, sports groups, schools groups, clubs and societies to which people belong. One study has shown that the correlation of income inequality with higher mortality rates is mediated by declining social capital. In other words, income inequality occurs at the expense of social capital and declining social capital has a deleterious effect on public health. See: Kawachi, B. P. Kennedy, K. Lochner and D. Prothrow-Stith. “Social capital, income inequality, and mortality”. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 87(9): 1491-1498, 1997. American Public Health Assoc.

²⁸ Ibid. Putnam.

²⁹ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, 1982, *Liberation of Human Intellect - Neohumanism*, Ananda Marga Publications, p4.

³⁰ The United Nations presents a curious dilemma. National sentiments do not, by definition, extend beyond a national boundary. Does this imply an inherent contradiction in the possibility of a ‘United Nations’?

Human sentiment

Sarkar describes humanism as a socio-sentiment extended to its maximum extent. Recall the suggestion that European history from the ancient Greeks to the present-day has been the struggle to establish humanism. But for the ancient Greeks, the humanist embrace did not extend to slaves or to women. In 18th century England, it did not extend to women or colonies. The struggle of European history was not so much to establish a fixed conception of an ideal ‘Humanism’ but rather to transcend the suffocating boundaries imposed by various kinds of socio-sentiment and to expand the circle of those included within the humanist embrace.

Universalism

The logic of the above three sentiments implies the existence of a fourth sentiment from which no person, animal or plant is excluded – *universalism*. By definition, universalism is not about groups because nothing is excluded. Neohumanism is the philosophy of universal sentiments:

“... 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.”³¹

Neohumanism also contains other important ideas, for example, that the Cosmos is conscious and that humanity is not isolated:

Neohumanism ... takes the universal aspiration of Humanism, to reach beyond the limitation of humanity and to strive for unity at the social level, and suggests a universalism that includes all animate and inanimate existence. Humanity is thus part of a great whole and our job is to increase the radius of our heart’s love... Furthermore, the Cosmos, its matter and the organic forms that populate it, are all taken to be conscious, thus human isolation is broken down. We are never alone, as Sarkar insists. Rather we are bound together in an infinite network of relationships that span material, intellectual and spiritual realities.³²

We will return to the idea of a conscious universe subsequently. With regard to emotional isolation, alienation (the feeling of being an outsider, even in the society in which one lives) is a common theme in contemporary Western literature. For explanation, we need not look much beyond the philosophical foundation of modern Western society, *materialism*.³³ An essential attribute for a useful philosophy of life must be *optimism*. Materialism promises survival of the fittest until the thermal death of the universe overtakes us all. It manifestly fails the optimism test! Here is Max Weber (1864 – 1920), often regarded as the founder of modern sociology,³⁴ struggling with the implications of materialism as a philosophy of civilised (i.e. European) life:

³¹ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, “Devotional Sentiment and Neo-humanism”, in Discourse 1, *Liberation of Intellect*. In fact Sarkar used the term *universal humanism* as early 1957 to describe the ideal towards which human society is moving. It appears to anticipate Neohumanism which was introduced 25 years later. A question arises as to why Sarkar introduced the new word *Neohumanism*, rather than promote the older word *universalism*. Possibly because a warm emotion cannot find purchase on such a vast and abstract idea as universalism. On the other hand, humanism, and by extension Neohumanism, is a sentiment with which contemporary humanity already has some familiarity.

³² Marcus Bussey, “Education for Liberation” in *Understanding Prout, Volume 1*, 2010, eds. J. Carlyle and M. Towsey.

³³ *Materialism*, or as scientists now prefer to call it, *physicalism*, is the belief that only physical matter exists and matter can only be known through the senses. Although materialism is now mostly used in the cultural/life-style sense, it is not unreasonable to assert that physicalism encourages materialism in the narrower sense.

³⁴ See entry in *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* for Max Weber’s contribution to sociology.

... death for [civilized man] is a meaningless occurrence. And because death is meaningless, civilized life as such is meaningless; by its very “progressiveness” it gives death the imprint of meaninglessness.³⁵

By contrast, Neohumanism is an entirely optimistic philosophy. Happiness is a human birthright.

Questions

1. What geo-sentiments did you acquire as a child? How did you acquire them?
2. Soccer in the UK and Australian Rules in Australia have been described as ‘tribal’. What does ‘tribal’ mean in this context? ‘Tribal’ is not normally used to describe tennis or cricket. What is the difference?
3. Can you identify another socio-sentiment apart from the four mentioned in the text?
4. Does humanist sentiment plays an important role in the local political, social and cultural life of your community? What about at the State, National or Global levels?
5. Which famous novelist’s name is almost synonymous with alienation? Name a novelist whose portrayal of life is optimistic. Which was the easier to bring to mind?
6. Do you think the sentiment of universalism is articulated in any of the world’s organisations? Perhaps *Medecin Sans Frontieres*?

Expanding the circle of one’s embrace

The negotiation of belonging, who is and isn’t in a group, begins in the school playground. Making such issues conscious, giving children the vocabulary to identify the emotions and ideas that constitute group sentiments, is an essential part of preparing children for the adult world. Furthermore, if teachers have to mediate in playground struggles, how they do so sets an example that will be learned.

The primary school years are the most important for acquiring group sentiments. By the time they leave primary school, students will have learnt the major sentiments at play in the adult world. Easiest to learn (consciously or unconsciously) are those associated with the visible differences of race and gender. The slowest to be learned are those associated with class, because the symbols of status and wealth are not always obvious.

Socio-sentiments once learned are difficult to unlearn. Feelings of superiority easily become part of an identity which one fiercely protects. Sarkar compares the pain of ‘unlearning’ a socio-sentiment to that of extracting a barbed-thorn embedded deep in the flesh. Destructive fighting between religious sects, spreading like a global contagion in the 21st century, illustrates the truth of this.

We are faced with a quandary. On the one side, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs tells us that healthy children require a sense of belonging.³⁶ But belonging to the ‘universe’ is too big and

³⁵ As quoted by Anne Harrington, *Reenchanted Science: Holism in German culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996, p118.

³⁶ Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of five needs are: physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. The need to belong and form attachments appears to be a universal human need, a fundamental psychological motivation. Deprivation or inability to enjoy satisfying social interactions results in loneliness and mental distress.

too abstract a concept to satisfy a young child's need for belonging. Furthermore, from an objective point of view, group sentiment promotes group effectiveness, something that cannot be ignored in the harder adult world of survival. But group sentiments differentiate those who belong from those who do not. So how is it possible to have any practical sense of community without having an inside and an outside, an *us and them*, sentiments that are tearing the 21st Century apart?

A first step in resolving this dilemma is to recognise that we all belong to multiple communities, the local street, suburb, State, country and the world. As they develop, children are introduced to larger and larger communities. Before a negative sentiment is allowed to define the bounds of a community, the child can be introduced to a larger community which embraces what was previously 'outside'.³⁷ In other words, teachers encourage students, step by step, to expand their *community of embrace*. Just as European history is a story of struggle to expand the humanist embrace, so a child's development is a kind of recapitulation – the effort to ever expand his/her community of embrace. Teachers at Neohumanist schools guide their students through this journey. There are forces at work both to hinder and help the teacher in this regard.

One hindrance is that the infant brain is already wired to detect *difference*. And difference in the biological world means danger with its associated feelings of caution and mistrust. Thus it is easy for children to attach negative emotions to physical, cultural, psychological and religious differences from their norm. In short, instinct is a significant factor that children and teachers must negotiate.

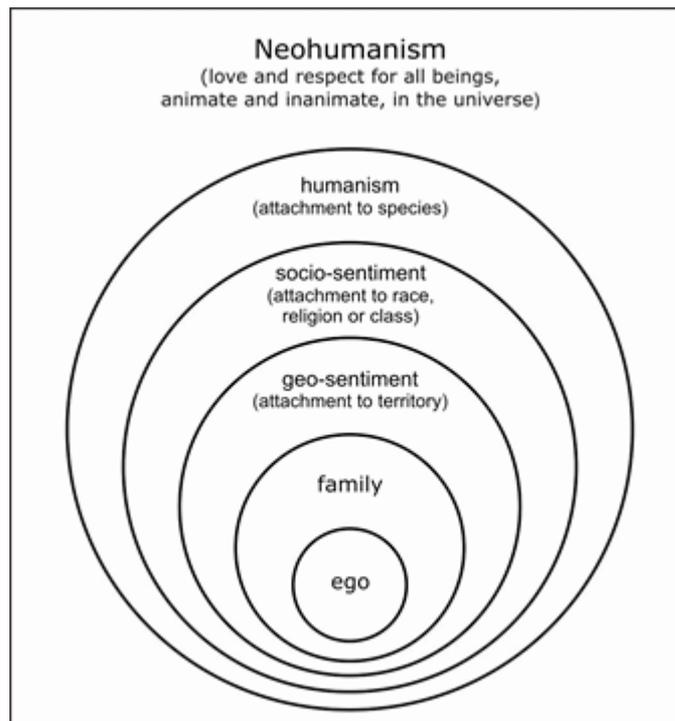


Figure 2: Expanding the circle of one's embrace.³⁸

³⁷ This is a school-ground implementation of a maxim attributed to Einstein: "No problem can be solved from the same level of consciousness that created it". <www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins130982.html>. The exact wording differs with the source. For example: "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them." Applying this maxim to the global level tells us that the solution to conflict between nations is not internationalism, but universalism.

³⁸ Reproduced from Inayatullah, Sohail, Marcus Bussey & Ivana Milojevic (Ed.). *Neohumanist futures education: Liberating the pedagogical intellect*. Taipei: Taiwan: Tamkang University Press, 2006.

Another hindrance: geo- and socio-sentiments are difficult to counter because the emotions which colour them are deeply satisfying and, depending on the associated idea, essential for well-being. Yet, the teacher does not wish to let a limited sentiment go unchallenged until the day it metamorphoses, chameleon like, into something destructive, such as violence in the sports stadium.

Fortunately there are many factors to assist the teacher. First, proximity breaks down barriers, that is, mixing children of different race, religion, culture, class in the playground. Second, it is not difficult for a child to learn the appropriate context for sentiments. He/she quickly learns that barracking for the Arsenal players and abusing the Chelsea players in an English side is not appropriate at the World Cup! Third, once a person recognises the stunting effect of a limited sentiment on their lives, it becomes intolerable. This is a fundamental feature of human psychology: “... *the innermost desire of people is to expand themselves maximally in all directions*”.³⁹ So we come to the most important of the sentiments that Sarkar describes, *devotional sentiment*.

Devotional sentiment

Up to now, the sentiments we have examined are more or less familiar to the Western mind. They are evident in family, social and political life and can be analysed intellectually. Most Westerners are taught that selfishness is a vice and inclusivity is a virtue. But the concept of devotional sentiment is less familiar in Western culture and it is here that the spiritual tradition of the East enters the East-West Neohumanist synthesis.

We begin with the simple distinction between a person’s internal life and their external life. Consider someone who has spent a lifetime building a global empire, but on their deathbed feels hollow and dissatisfied. Their external life was successful but their internal life was neglected. Or consider a very ordinary feeling that we have all experienced, here expressed by the brilliant but lonely philosopher Wittgenstein writing to a friend: “*One word* that comes from your heart would mean more to me than three pages from your head!”⁴⁰ Even for a genius, a rich inner life means more than a rich intellectual life. But just what does this mean? What constitutes a rich inner life, a meaningful life? These are questions that deserve frequent reflection and primary school students on the cusp of puberty are becoming old enough to ponder them.

Devotional sentiment belongs to one’s internal world. It is the first sentiment to be introduced in the Neohumanism discourses, yet Sarkar does not discuss it in depth, other than to emphasize its importance in transforming narrow sentiments into universalism. Instead he references his 1981 series of discourses⁴¹ on the life and teachings of Krishna, the great Indian yogi, king and philosopher who lived about 3500 years ago. Krishna is best known in the West through the *Bhagavad Gita*, which narrates a dialogue between Krishna and Arjun on the eve of the battle of the Mahabharata. Krishna explains that there are three kinds of yoga, the yoga of *action*, the yoga of *knowledge* and the yoga of *devotion*. While action and knowledge (the external paths of yoga) cannot be neglected, all comes to naught without the internal path, the path of devotion. At this point we require a definition:

³⁹ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, “Devotional Sentiment and Neo-humanism”, in Discourse 1, *Liberation of Intellect*.

⁴⁰ Written to a friend Rowland Hutt, 20th August 1941. *Ludwig Wittgenstein – the Duty of Genius* by Ray Monk, Vintage 1990, p433.

⁴¹ Shrii Shrii Anandamurti, *Namami Krsna Sundarum*, Kolkata, India: Ananda Marga Publications, English Edition 1981. (Note: Shrii Shrii Anandamurti is the name used by Sarkar for publishing his discourses on spiritual topics.)

Yoga is a set of practices and a life-style whose purpose is to develop one's full physical, mental and spiritual potential.

Yoga will be introduced in more detail subsequently but the above description clearly implies pushing back the boundaries of what one is currently capable – in all the dimensions of life. Schools, by definition, are about the yoga of action and the yoga of knowledge. Probably every school would say its mission is to develop physical and academic potential. Neohumanist schools are no exception but they are also explicit about developing the potential to love.

Devotional sentiment is difficult to talk about in the school context because it is primarily internal and if it appears in a Western education then it is likely to be religious in intent. But there is no equivalent of 'religious instruction' for devotional sentiment. Devotional sentiment can be learnt but it cannot be taught. At primary school level, it cannot be a subject in the curriculum and yet teachers must be conscious of its place in pedagogical practice. Note that the term *devotional sentiment* is used rather than *love* because it carries a much broader meaning. Devotional sentiment is in fact a spectrum of sentiments (such as, love, trust, compassion, affection, kindness and appreciation in all their shades) that break down barriers between people. Devotional sentiment can also manifest as devotion to selfless duty and to a noble calling, for example to teaching or to nursing. However the word *love* is often used in the same way, so the words *devotion* and *love* will be used interchangeably here.

Neohumanist schools take the attitude that the ability to express devotion is innate and potentially limitless in every person. It flows from a deep internal source to the outside world through a child's thoughts, words and actions. This potential is not automatically realised however, because biology, culture and so many obstacles can get in the way. The yoga of devotion is about removing the obstacles, the hurts and the stubbornness that block the natural flow of affection from the human heart.

Every Neohumanist School will find its own vocabulary and culture to assist children discover their capacity for love. It ought not be left to chance, for in the words of Leo Buscaglia:⁴²

You may have the 'capacity' to love, but if left undeveloped, you will never gain the 'ability'.

Here are some thoughts on devotional sentiment in a Neohumanist education.

- Devotional sentiments are not complicated – they can (and indeed, ought to) appeal to adults and children alike. For example, here is a 'simple' thought from a children's story by Leo Buscaglia:

*Love is always bestowed as a gift – freely, willingly and without expectation.
We don't love to be loved; we love to love.*

- There is a common saying that describes the deeper intent of devotional sentiment: "*True love knows no bound*". Devotional sentiment accepts no narrowness, no restraint on the expansion of life. The tremendous mental expansion required to embrace universalism gets its motivation and sustenance from devotional sentiment.
- Devotional sentiment can only be approached internally. No external show or ritual is helpful.

*The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched.
They must be felt within the heart.
– Hellen Keller*

⁴² Felice Leonardo Buscaglia (1924 – 1998) was professor of Special Education at the University of Southern California. He is often known as "Doctor Love". His book "*Living, Loving and Learning*" (1985) is recommended. < http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Leo_Buscaglia>.

- Sarkar describes devotional sentiment as “the greatest treasure of humanity” because it can transform narrow sentiments (geo-, socio- and human sentiments) into universalism. It may begin internally, but when it percolates into the external world it is like the spring rains bringing a desert to life.

This element of devotion, the most precious treasure of humanity, must be preserved most carefully. Because it is such a tender inner asset, to preserve it from the onslaughts of materialism, one must build a protective fence around it, just as people put up a guard-rail around a small tender plant. Now the question is, what is this protective fence? It is a proper philosophy which will establish the correct harmony between the spiritual and material worlds, and be a perennial source of inspiration for the onward movement of society.⁴³

- It is not easy to extend one’s affection to something which is dead. A little frisson can be added to a child’s experience of their world if they feel it to be conscious and alive. This experience is not just a contrived fantasy for children. A small, but growing, group of scientists are challenging the materialist dogma of a dead universe. Feel the excitement in biologist Elisabet Sahtouris as she plays with her understanding of a living universe:

As we recognize the universe to be conscious, intelligent, alive, and all of us co-creators, what is our role? Are we not the creative edge of God? We are the universe inventing itself. And that intelligent Cosmos, or God – whatever you call it; doesn’t matter which word you use as long as we agree that it’s alive, intelligent, conscious, and creative – that is looking through your eyes, working through your hands, walking on your feet. Isn’t that exciting? How does the universe get to know itself? Through all of us and what we are doing.⁴⁴

- This idea, that the universe is ‘alive’, that it has a ‘mind’, is not new even in the West. It appears in the philosophies of the mathematician Alfred Whitehead and the evolutionist Sewell Wright:

The only satisfactory solution ... would seem to be that mind is universal, present not only in all organisms and in their cells but in their molecules, atoms and elementary particles.⁴⁵

More recently Charles Birch, former professor of biology at the University of New South Wales, summed up the idea:

There is but one theory, known to me, that casts any positive light on the ability of brain cells to furnish us with feelings. It is that brain cells can feel! What gives brain cells feelings? It is by the same logic that we may say – their molecules. And so on down the line to those individuals we call electrons, protons and the like. The theory is that things that feel are made of things that feel.⁴⁶

- The word *yoga* means *union*, that is, the merger of one’s small identity with that of the universe. In this sense, yoga is the goal of life. But the universe is vast, too vast for an adult, let alone a child. So devotional sentiment starts with one’s immediate world and

⁴³ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, “Devotional Sentiment and Neohumanism”, Discourse 1 in *Liberation of Intellect*.

⁴⁴ Elisabet Sahtouris is an evolutionary biologist, <http://www.sahtouris.com/INFO/>. Sahtouris is not the only biologist to break with materialism. She works with James Lovelock (of Gaia fame) and Lynn Margulis.

⁴⁵ Sewell Wright as quoted by Birch (see next citation), p. 24. See also: Wright, Sewell. “Gene and Organism”, in *American Naturalist* 87, pp. 5-18, 1953. See, www.harvardsquarelibrary.org/unitarians/wright-sewall.html.

⁴⁶ Charles Birch. *On Purpose*, Sydney: New South Wales University Press, 1990, p. 32

grows outwards from there. Ultimately, the effect of devotional sentiment is to dissolve every feeling of separation.⁴⁷

- An easy way for children to discover their capacity for love is through stories, song and chant. Neohumanist schools use many songs and chants with life-affirming themes, including the Sanskrit mantra *Baba nam kevalam – Love is all there is*.⁴⁸
- Devotional sentiment is a language that crosses many boundaries. The poetry of the 13th Century Islamic scholar and mystic, Rumi (Persia, 1210? – 1273), speaks the same language as the poetry of Rabindranath Tagore and St Francis. Here is a thought from Rumi (said to be the “best selling poet” in the United States) which reminds us that devotional sentiments *pull* us rather than *push*:

*Feel yourself being drawn by the deeper pull of what you truly love.*⁴⁹

Everybody feels the limitations of their ability to love. We are all familiar with the tight constriction of a selfish thought carried through to action. It is not possible and not necessary for teachers in Neohumanist schools to be perfect embodiments of love! However it is possible for teachers to understand the importance of devotional sentiment in human life and to introduce it into their students’ lives.

In the East, the yoga of devotion has traditionally been a quest pursued in isolation from society (in the Himalayan Mountains). In the West, the pursuit of humanism has been an external quest, through politics, intellect and science. One’s internal life was irrelevant or an impediment, because in most cases it was trapped by centuries of dogma and ritual. Neohumanism attempts to break both these traditions. It seeks a synthesis because, ultimately, liberation in external life, whether individual or collective, depends on the liberation of internal life.

Questions

1. It is frequently stated that competition is required to get the best out of a person, to get them to their maximum potential. Would you agree?
2. What is the role of competition in school sport? What is the role of ‘houses’ in school sport?
3. Is it possible to enjoy narrow sentiments according to circumstance but simultaneously retain the inner bearing of a Universalist?
4. Here is a personal thought from Einstein. Is he trying to express the same thought as Elisabet Sahtouris above?

The most beautiful and most profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the

⁴⁷ Marcus Bussey makes an interesting observation that when he asks his students to think globally, hope diminishes. “The global is just too BIG!” Compared with the intellect, the heart has a truly remarkable ability to bridge the gulf between the individual, the global and the universal. See Marcus Bussey, “Global Education from a Neohumanist Perspective: A Musical Exposition”, *Journal of Futures Studies* 12(1): 25-40, 2007.

⁴⁸ According to the yogic understanding, humans are capable of love because love is the very ‘substance’ of the Cosmos. This is in fact the deeper meaning of *Baba nam kevalam*. It is impossible to do justice to thousands of years of yogic scholarship in just one paragraph. The only purpose here is to provide the reader with some hint that behind the ‘eastern’ contribution to Neohumanism lies a long heritage. For more on devotional sentiment one can read Sarkar’s spiritual texts.

⁴⁹ According to Wikipedia. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rumi>

mystical. It is the sower of all true science. Someone to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can longer stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. ... That deeply emotional conviction of the presence of a superior reasoning power, which is revealed in the incomprehensible universe, is my idea of God.⁵⁰

5. Where does the human capacity for selfless love comes from?

Four key ideas so far

1. The primary objective of a Neohumanist school is to help students develop their devotional sentiment, that is, to develop a love of humanity and the world around them. Devotional sentiment is the most precious treasure of humanity.
2. Neohumanist teachers work towards this objective by progressively encouraging students to attach positive emotions to universal ideas.
3. The biological substrate for such learning is neural. Attaching emotions to ideas means the breaking and making synaptic connections between millions of neurons and their related glands.
4. Early learning shapes later learning and children have more “plastic” brains than adults. So the earlier in life that positive emotions are attached to universal ideas the better.

⁵⁰ Albert Einstein. This may be a combination of two quotes. See <http://www.quotes.net/authors/Albert+Einstein>

3. Education for the Whole Child

A fundamental premise of Neohumanist education is that every human being, child or adult, is a physical, mental *and* spiritual being. Yoga is a science which adopts this holistic view in order to promote human development, which is why yoga is beneficial in an *education for the whole child*.⁵¹ Some may question calling yoga a ‘science’ because it does not have Western credentials. From the perspective of materialism (the philosophy that informs Western science) mental and spiritual phenomena are *epiphenomena*, derivative of physical processes. Yogic science *does not* reject Western science but does reject the *reductionist dogma* of materialism – mental and spiritual phenomena have their own status and cannot be reduced to physical processes.⁵² Indeed, as Western science brings its focus to bear on traditional yogic practices, such as postures, diet and meditation, it has only helped to confirm the benefits of yoga.⁵³

Neohumanist teachers commit to the endeavour of becoming whole – all the dimensions of life (physical, emotional, sentimental, intellectual, social, aesthetic, moral, spiritual) are acknowledged in theory *and* in practice. When teachers make a commitment to become whole, their students will imbibe the commitment by osmosis. It need not be ‘taught’.

This section begins with a brief introduction to the Western science of *biopsychology* and the light it sheds on the nature of sentiments. We then introduce yoga and its contribution to a Neohumanist school. We discuss the yogic understanding of mind in some depth and the section concludes with some thoughts on meditation and spirituality.

Biopsychology

Biopsychology, as the name implies, is a study of the interaction between biological processes and mental processes, between body and mind. The biological processes of interest are those of the brain, nervous system and endocrine system. The mental processes are perception, thinking, learning, memory, emotion, motivation and the behaviours that these produce. It is important to note that the relationship between body and mind is two way. Body influences mind and mind influences body.

Biopsychology is a young science in the West and can be traced to the 1950’s with the discovery of synapses, neurotransmitters and the chemistry of hormones. The discipline has made rapid advances in the past two decades and is a very exciting field of research! Here we are concerned with just two recent discoveries that shed light on *human sentiments*.

The Physiology of Sentiments

Until recently, neuroscientists assumed that emotion and reason were at odds, that without emotions a person could make better (more rational) decisions. Emotional behaviour and

⁵¹ This is the motto of the Ananda Marga River School.

⁵² A sure sign of a dogma is the language it elicits when challenged. Here is the language thrown at a professional philosopher posing a non-material account of consciousness: Colin McGinn, reviewing Ted Honderich’s book *On Consciousness*, describes it as “banal and pointless”, “excruciating”, “absurd”, running “the full gamut from the mediocre to the ludicrous to the merely bad”. And McGinn admitted, this was after the editor had asked him to tone down his review! See < <http://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/jan/21/-sp-why-cant-worlds-greatest-minds-solve-mystery-consciousness>>.

The question of what constitutes valid scientific enquiry is beyond the scope of this article but see Michael Towsey, “After Materialism”, in *Eternal Dance of Macrocosm*, Vol 2, (2011), edited Michael Towsey.

⁵³ The Indian Government has recently announced that it will provide free yoga classes to its bureaucrats in order to promote their health and productivity. <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/mar/20/indian-civil-servants-to-get-free-daily-yoga-lessons>

motivational drive are believed to be regulated by a part of the brain known as the *cingulate* or *limbic cortex*. Reasoning, intelligence and moral decision making, on the other hand, are strongly correlated with the *orbito-frontal cortex* (OFC). The OFC is one of the few parts of the cerebral cortex relatively larger in humans than in other primates, some evidence that it endows humans with rational capacities not shared by other species.

It has come as a great surprise in recent years to discover that persons with lesions to the OFC (which sever its connection to the cingulate cortex), not only lose their ability to make decisions, but also their ability to experience emotions. Yet their IQ measures remain unaffected. It turns out that all decision making involves the emotional parts of the brain. Even decisions which are not apparently emotionally or morally charged still engage parts of the brain associated with emotion. In other words, emotion and reason depend on one another.⁵⁴

Perhaps we should not be surprised. Cognitive processes such as thinking, learning and reasoning are mediated by large networks of neurons linked to one another through millions of synaptic connections. Learning involves adjustments in the strength of those millions of connections. Electrical and chemical processes are involved. Nerve firing is an electrical phenomenon but the synaptic gaps are crossed by chemical neurotransmitters.⁵⁵ And neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, serotonin and adrenaline, are also *molecules of emotion*.⁵⁶ As neural networks think and reason, they simultaneously produce emotional states. Learning determines how neurons are connected and which sentiments dominate our thoughts and actions.

This close integration of emotion and reason means that there is no such thing as a 'pure idea'. Every idea is, to a greater or lesser degree, a sentiment, depending on the intensity of the emotion attached to it. Even mathematical ideas become sentiments. Teachers know this because they are very conscious to introduce new subjects with positive affect. No teacher likes to hear children complain that they don't like maths because they don't like the teacher!

The Biopsychology of Trust

Recall that *trust* is one of the primary emotions.⁵⁷ There is no simple relationship between human emotions and the hormones that underlie them but in the case of trust, two molecules are extremely important, *oxytocin* and *vasopressin*. Both are secreted into the blood stream by the posterior pituitary gland and both are polypeptides consisting of a sequence of just nine amino acids. Trust is a major determiner of decision making. It is not surprising, therefore, that the posterior pituitary is linked to the OFC via the hypothalamus (part of the limbic system).

Both hormones have been the subject of intense research over the past decade. Scientists interested in *neuro-economics* (the study of the neurophysiological processes that underlie economic decision making) have discovered that intranasal sprays of oxytocin cause a substantial increase in trusting and cooperative behaviours.⁵⁸ Oxytocin also appears to play an

⁵⁴ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, First Edition, 1994; Penguin paperback reprint 2005: ISBN 0-14-303622-X.

⁵⁵ This is a vast subject and a rapidly changing field. Here are just two introductory web-sites. <http://www.curioushumans.net/gain-control-of-your-emotions-let-your-neurons-do-the-work-for-you/>. <http://www.humanillnesses.com/Behavioral-Health-A-Br/Brain-Chemistry-Neurochemistry.html>

⁵⁶ Ibid Candace Pert, *Molecules of Emotion*.

⁵⁷ In Plutchik's list of primary emotions. See earlier footnote.

⁵⁸ Paul Zak, R. Kurzban and W. Matzner. "The Neurobiology of Trust". *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, **1032**: pp 224-227, 2004. See also URL2 <http://abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s1481749.htm>.

important role in mental health, alleviating some of the signs of autism.⁵⁹ Likewise vasopressin is implicated in primate cooperative behaviours. *Bonobo* monkeys, for example, display cooperative behaviours that enable them to solve tasks that *chimpanzees* cannot solve.⁶⁰ Both species are equally intelligent, but given a task to retrieve out-of-reach bananas, bonobos solve it (for example, by one climbing on the shoulders of another) whereas chimps fail for want of trust. It turns out that these differences can largely be correlated with a single ‘vasopressin’ gene, which bonobos have but chimps do not.

And of course, all humans have the same ‘vasopressin’ gene. Yet sociologists find that measures of trust vary greatly from country to country. Cultural environment determines the extent to which ‘trust’ genes are expressed. In one study,⁶¹ an aggregate measure of ‘trustworthiness’ ranged from a low 3% in Brazil to 65% in Norway. In a ranking of some 42 countries, Australia came in eighth position just ahead of India, Switzerland and the USA. The data suggest that low aggregate trust is correlated with poverty. Governments can increase aggregate trust with policies which promote education, communication technologies and reduce wealth inequality.⁶²

Recall that social capital was defined in terms of trust and empathy and that these behavioural traits facilitate social and economic interaction by encouraging cooperation between strangers. We now know that oxytocin and vasopressin are the physiological underpinnings of trust and that they influence collective well-being and the creation of a vibrant society. It is for this reason that Neohumanism takes an interest in the biopsychology of sentiments.⁶³

Questions

1. Trust can be fragile? How can a teacher build trust in the classroom and in the school?
2. Consider the following questions in the context of schools. How is trust broken? What can be done to repair a broken trust? What can be done to prevent the breaking of trust?

What is Yoga?

If biopsychology is a young science in the West, then here we make a bold claim that biopsychology in the East is an *old* science. For many centuries, the most notable feature of the East’s practice of yoga, Zen, martial arts and medicine has been the disciplined integration of mind and body.

The origins of yoga are lost in prehistory and there are different proposals as to its genesis. According to Sarkar, yoga as we understand it today emerged out of a synthesis of the Tantric practices of indigenous India and religious practices introduced with the Aryan migrations of

⁵⁹ “Nasal spray gives hope on autism”. *The Sunday Times*, February 14, 2010. http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/life_and_style/health/article7026369.ece, link valid 16 February 2010.

⁶⁰ Newby, Jonica. *Making love not war*. Catalyst, ABC TV, 20 September 2007. <http://abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s2038245.htm>

⁶¹ Paul Zak, “Trust”. *Capco Institute Journal of Financial Transformation*. v7: pp 13-21, 2003.

⁶² Ibid. See Figure 1 in Zak.

⁶³ For a different perspective on Neohumanism, from the point of view of economics and the cooperative system, see: Michael Towsey, “The Biopsychology of Cooperation” in *Understanding Prout, Volume 1*, 2010, eds. J. Karllyle and M. Towsey.

several thousand years ago.⁶⁴ Two significant early names in the development of yoga are Shiva and Krishna. What today is known as *ashtanga yoga*⁶⁵ (eight limbs of yoga) was codified by Patanjali (circa 200 BCE) and has survived to the present as a ‘living lineage’. The eight practices are:

- Yama: five avoidances or moral principles to guide human conduct.
- Niyama: five observances or practices of self-purification.
- Breath control: important for physical health and mental concentration.
- Asanas: yoga postures which some mistakenly believe to be the totality of yoga.
- Sense withdrawal: to withdraw one’s mind from the external world.
- Concentration: to focus one’s awareness on a single object.
- Contemplation: to merge successive moments of concentration into an effortless, uninterrupted flow of ideation.
- Samadhi: to merge one’s individual consciousness with that of the Universe. This is actually the end result of the previous seven practices.

The last four limbs collectively make up the practice of meditation. Neohumanist schools teach those elements of ashtanga yoga that are appropriate for young children, in particular, yama, niyama, easy postures and simplified forms of meditation. Yama and niyama (yogic moral principles) are of immediate benefit from a young age. The teaching of postures and meditation at this age is more to plant seeds for the future.

Yoga postures

The practice of yoga postures (known as *asanas* in Sanskrit) promotes physico-psychic well-being by regulating the activity of the ‘ductless’ endocrine glands. These play a delicate balancing game as they secrete chemical messengers into the blood-stream. One hormone stimulates a set of responses, another inhibits it. All work together in complex feedback loops in conjunction with the autonomic nervous system. They are controlled by the pituitary, which is in turn controlled by the brain and mind.⁶⁶ Recall that all this regulatory activity has a subjective side – it stimulates and inhibits complex arrays of ideas and their attached emotions, that is, human sentiments.

Asanas work directly on the glands and thereby indirectly regulate thoughts and emotions. They exert either a pressurising or depressurizing effect on particular glands (a kind of glandular massage) causing those glands to become more or less active. Consequently it is better not to practice asanas at random. Usually they are prescribed according to a person’s physical and sentimental constitution. Asanas are subtle, yet powerful because very small changes in secretions can have a remarkable effect on wellbeing.

Asanas become particularly important at puberty when the full complement of endocrine glands becomes active. Nevertheless practice of basic asanas is helpful for pre-adolescents and the child’s imagination can be caught by those postures named after animals. There are numerous books and websites suggesting ways to interest children in yoga postures. See the *Yoga Touch* program⁶⁷ and other websites.^{68 69}

⁶⁴ Ramesh Bjonnes, “*The Dawn of Enlightenment – a Brief History of Tantra and Yoga*”, in “*Eternal Dance of Macrocosm*”, Vol 2, (2011), edited Michael Towsey.

⁶⁵ There are several standards for Romanising the spelling of Sanskrit words. Sarkar prefers the spelling *astaunga*. To avoid confusion, we have used the spelling typically found on Western web sites.

⁶⁶ <http://www.abc-of-yoga.com/health/glands.asp>

⁶⁷ Rudramohan, *Yoga Touch*. Three handbooks available at:

Why a vegetarian tuckshop?

The AMRS only provides healthy vegetarian food at its tuckshop and parents are asked to provide only vegetarian food in school lunches. Why? The evidence for the superiority of a balanced vegetarian diet is now overwhelming. A particularly important study was a joint 20 year project of the Chinese Academy of Preventive Medicine, Cornell University and the University of Oxford.⁷⁰ Researchers measured mortality rates from cancer and other chronic diseases in 100 people in each of 65 Chinese counties. They found that counties with a high consumption of animal-based foods were more likely to have higher death rates from “Western” diseases than counties that ate more plant foods.

In a recent controversial decision, the US panel of nutritionists that helps set federal dietary guidelines recommended, for the first time, that Americans eat less meat. They noted that a diet lower in animal-based foods is not only healthier, but has less of an environmental impact. This is a remarkable decision given that dietary recommendations in the US are highly politicised.⁷¹

Apart from promoting a balanced diet of fruit, vegetables, grains and pulses, ayurvedic medicine⁷² also places foods into three categories, *sentient*, *mutative* and *static*. Sentient foods are good for the body and calming for the mind. Mutative foods may or may not be good for the body but make the mind restless (examples: coffee, tea and carbonated soft-drinks). Static foods are bad for the body and mind (examples: meats and alcoholic drinks). It is well established that junk ‘foods’ (high in sugar, colourings and preservatives) make it difficult for children to concentrate. Hence, Neohumanist schools encourage children to eat sentient foods.

Ayurveda promotes the idea that *you are what you eat*. What you eat influences what you think and feel. Here is an important metabolic pathway as understood by yogic physiology:

food → *lymph* → *nerves & glands* → *hormones* → *thoughts & feelings* → *sentiments*

Food becomes lymph; lymph becomes the substance of nerves and glands and therefore the substance of secreted hormones; hormones influence what we think and feel. Subtle food builds a subtle body which in turn becomes the seat of a subtle mind.

Questions

1. Is yoga is a religion? Give reasons.
2. And now for something completely different! What do you typically have for breakfast? What did your parents and grandparents have for breakfast when they were young? Ask your grandparents what their parents (your great-grandparents) had for breakfast when they were young. How has breakfast changed over the last 100 years? Consider this in the light of the maxim “*You are what you eat*”.
3. Should schools interfere in what students eat? Why?

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/zkz02tgev81sjwt/The%20YogaTouch%20new%20handbookone.doc>

⁶⁸ <http://www.yogajournal.com/article/family/teach-children-well/>

⁶⁹ <https://yogainternational.com/article/view/the-secret-to-teaching-yoga-to-children>

⁷⁰ T. Colin Campbell, *The China Study*, 2005. This is said to be one of America’s best-selling books about nutrition. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_China_Study

⁷¹ <http://thehill.com/regulation/237767-vegan-diet-best-for-planet-federal-report-says>

⁷² Ayurveda is a system of traditional Indian medicine, which uses a range of treatments including yoga, massage, acupuncture and herbal medicine, to promote health and wellbeing

What is a Subtle Mind?

As stated previously, a Neohumanist education *cultivates warm hearts and subtle minds*. Having explored what is meant by a ‘warm heart’, we now turn to the meaning of a ‘subtle mind’.

The Substance of Mind

Yoga psychology, and indeed most Eastern philosophies, accepts the *substantive theory of mind*, that is, mind is a substance distinct from, but interacting with physical matter. Of course materialist philosophies reject this – mind is nothing more than physical processes in the brain. It probably makes no difference to a teacher’s classroom practice whether she accepts the substantive theory of mind or not. However familiarity with the yogic understanding of mind will help teachers to understand the culture of Neohumanist schools.

If mind is a substance, then what kind of substance? It is worth remembering that when physicists asked this question of matter in the 20th Century, the answer turned out to be perplexing and ambiguous. Matter appears to have the contradictory attributes of both *wave* and *particle* depending on how one ‘looks’ at it. Likewise, the yogic literature refers to mind as having the objective attributes of both wave and particle. Just as matter waves have wavelength and frequency, so do mental waves. Just as matter particles have various ‘charges’ which determine how they interact with other particles, so mind particles have attributes that are the basis of subjective experience (qualia), likes and dislikes.

The anatomy of mind

Western psychology accepts that mind has three compartments, the *conscious*, *subconscious* and *unconscious* minds (Table 1, lower left column). Yoga psychology recognises five layers of mind (columns 3, 4 and 5, Table 1), the lowest two corresponding (awkwardly) to the conscious, subconscious and unconscious categories. The five layers are arrayed on a spectrum from crude to subtle, from short wavelength to long. The layers are distinguished by: 1. wavelength and frequency (the objective description); 2. our subjective experience of them; and 3. the ‘eye’ with which each layer views the world.

Table 1

Common terminology	Wilber's terminology	Sarkar's terminology	Descriptive terminology	The Mind's Eye	Spectrum of subtlety
Superconscious	Transpersonal Trans-egoic	Subtle causal	Universal mind	Eye of the Spirit	subtle
		Subliminal	Archetypal mind	Eye of Discrimination	^
		Supra-mental	Intuitive mind	Eye of Intuition	^
Conscious Subconscious	Personal, ego	Subtle	Symbolic, rational mind	Eye of Reason	^
Unconscious	Pre-personal, pre-egoic	Crude	Sensory/motor, instinctual mind	Eye of the Flesh	crude

The sensory-motor mind is at the ‘crude’ end of the spectrum because sensory experience is easily accessible to ordinary consciousness. By comparison, intellectual ideas can be more or less difficult to grasp and certain kinds of spiritual experience are extremely subtle and difficult to grasp with ordinary consciousness. It seems to be a general rule that the different kinds of

mental experience sustain happiness in inverse degree to their ease of attainment! Tasty food is necessary for happiness but it fails to be enough once readily obtained. Conversely, spiritual experience is elusive but offers sustained contentment in the long term. Although different names are used by different schools of philosophy for the layers of mind, there is general consistency about what they do:

The sensory-motor mind

This layer is the interface between body and mind and therefore at the ‘crude’ end of the spectrum of mind. Much of its activity is unconscious, concerned with sensory-motor processing, instincts and animal survival. Indeed this is the *animal mind*. It interacts with the physical body through the *chi* (Chinese medicine), *prana* (Ayurveda) and *meridians* (acupuncture). It sees with the *Eye of the Flesh*.⁷³

The rational-symbolic mind

Although the seat of human consciousness can range over all layers of mind, typically its locus is this second layer, the rational mind. Memory and thinking are its major occupations. Abstract reasoning using natural and symbolic languages is its greatest achievement. Hence Wilber describes this mind’s eye as the *Eye of Reason*. The rational-symbolic mind has a much larger domain than the sensory-motor. It calculates back to the origins of the universe, it predicts the future and plans for it. It postulates and manipulates different mathematical infinities.

The transpersonal mind

The top three layers of mind are frequently collapsed into one, variously called the *causal*, *transpersonal*, *trans-egoic* or *superconscious* mind (Table 1). In the superconscious state, one’s sense of identity transcends the normal bounds of the egoic mind. *Transpersonal psychology* is gradually finding a place in the West because it fills a void in orthodox Western psychology which trivialises spiritual experience (e.g. as a computational error in brain’s neural processing). Transpersonal psychology accepts *peak experiences*, *altered states of consciousness* and *spiritual experiences* on their own terms. Transpersonal experiences are frequently confused with pre-personal experiences because both are departures from ‘normal’ personal or ego-consciousness. Ken Wilber offers an insightful analysis of this confusion.⁷⁴ One distinction between the pre-personal, personal and transpersonal minds lies in their relationship to the outside world. The pre-personal mind is passive – reacting to outside circumstances but not creating them. The personal mind is active – an ‘agent’ that attempts to mould external circumstances to its will. For the transpersonal mind however, the ‘outside’ world is within. The sense of agent (“I do”) is absorbed into the feeling of *all is within* (“I am”).

The Intuitive Mind

We experience this layer of mind as moments of intuitional clarity or insight. Hence this mind’s eye is the *Eye of Intuition*. Its capabilities are beyond logic and reason. Here is Mozart’s description of the intuitional process during composition:

When I feel well and in good humour, or when I am taking a drive or walk ... thoughts crowd into my mind as easily as you could wish. Whence do they come? I do not know and have nothing to do with it ... Once I have a theme, another melody comes, linking itself with the first one, in accordance with the needs of the composition as a whole. It does not

⁷³ This is Wilber’s terminology, as is the *Eye of Reason* and the *Eye of Spirit*. Different schools of Eastern philosophy use different terminology for the layers of mind.

⁷⁴ Ken Wilber, *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm*, Shambhala, Boston 3rd Edition revised, 2001.

come to me successively, with its various parts worked out in detail, as they will later on, but it is in its entirety that my imagination lets me hear it.⁷⁵

Intuition is also integral to scientific discovery, although once a discovery becomes accepted, the role of intuition is generally erased from the rational account of it!⁷⁶ The most common ‘normal’ experience due to the intuitive mind is *empathy*.

The Archetypal Mind

Sarkar describes this layer of mind as “subliminal” because we typically experience it indirectly rather than directly. Wilber calls it “archetypal” because it is the mind in which differentiations and distinctions first begin to emerge out of Spirit. An archetype has “one leg here and the other in infinity. It points to the transcendent”.⁷⁷ Moral discrimination, wisdom and psycho-spiritual longings are characteristic of this layer. Wisdom is the ability to discriminate between that which provides short-term pleasure and that which provides long-term contentment – hence the *Eye of Discrimination*. The psycho-spiritual longings will be introduced subsequently.

The Universal Mind

This is the highest, most subtle level of mind, the interface between mind and Spirit. It is a transcendent state of consciousness that encompasses and embraces the universe as its own. Such experiences are known as Samadhi. This experience of the unity of everything precludes any sense of differentiation, demarcation, hierarchy – hence the *Eye of Spirit*.

It is misleading to think that you are a physical being having a spiritual experience. Rather take the view that you are a spiritual being having a worldly experience.

Teilhard de Chardin

The development of mind

Since Piaget’s theory⁷⁸ of the four stages of cognitive development became popular in the 1960’s, it has been subject to intense investigation. The theory has survived although, as might be expected, in a more flexible and nuanced form. An important modification is that cognitive development is now known to be systaltic rather than linear. That is, development proceeds in cycles of speed (called *growth spurts*) and pause (in which cognitive function may even regress). Fischer, who is one of a school of neo-Piagetian theorists,⁷⁹ recognises ten cycles of cognitive development between birth and about the age of 25.⁸⁰ The first three growth cycles concern sensory-motor development, the next four underpin representational thinking (starting

⁷⁵ As quoted by Brian O’Neill; *Mozart, Creativity and Gestalt Therapy*, www.behavior.net/forums/gestalt/1998/16_5.htm.

⁷⁶ For an example of the importance of intuition in science, see Gerald Holton’s account of Fermi’s discovery of the controlled nuclear chain reaction. Gerald Holton, “The Birth and Early Days of the Fermi Group in Rome”, in *Proceedings of the International Conference, “Enrico Fermi and the Universe of Physics”*, Rome, September 29 – October 2, 2001. p. 66. Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei and the Istituto Nazionale di Fisica Nucleare, www.enea.it/com/ingl/New_ingl/publications/editions/pdf/8_Proceedings_FERMI_2001.pdf

⁷⁷ A Jungian insight.

⁷⁸ Jean Piaget (1896 - 1980). <http://ehlt.flinders.edu.au/education/DLiT/2000/Piaget/stages.htm>

⁷⁹ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neo-Piagetian_theories_of_cognitive_development for theorists who integrate concepts from Piaget’s theory with concepts from cognitive psychology and neuro-physiology.

⁸⁰ K. W. Fischer, (2008). “Dynamic cycles of cognitive and brain development: Measuring growth in mind, brain, and education.” In A. M. Battro, K. W. Fischer & P. Léna (Eds.), *The Educated Brain* (pp. 127-150). Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

around 2-5 years) and the final cycles concern abstract thinking (from around 10 to 25 years of age).⁸¹ These cognitive cycles appear to be underpinned by well-observed cycles of neural development, particularly in the making long-range cortical connections.

Another modification of Piaget's original theory is that cognitive development is strongly influenced by social, cultural and educational factors. Indeed, the kinds of relationship a child has with carers in the first year of life is one of the most critical factors in his/her future development.⁸²

In addition, children develop at different rates (thus the average trajectory is not strongly cyclical) and the cyclical pattern is not so evident where the child lacks a stimulating learning environment to fully exercise the emerging neural substrate. In fact, the learning environment is critical for cognitive development and while the early cycles may be driven by a biological clock, the later cognitive cycles are entirely learning dependent and may not occur at all in the absence of appropriate stimulation.

According to the yogic understanding, the five layers of mind sit on a physical base. By physical base is meant the entire physical body, not just the brain. However, human cognitive development is clearly correlated with neural development. Just as cognitive development is from 'concrete' to 'abstract', yoga describes the development of mind as unfolding from 'crude' to 'subtle'. We may equate the sensory-motor developmental stage to the unfolding of the first layer of mind, the sensory-motor. We may equate the representational and abstract developmental stages to the unfolding of the second layer of mind, the rational-symbolic. This sequence is clearly dependent on cortical maturation.⁸³

The neural correlates for the three higher levels of mind are not known (which, in any case, are not recognised as such in Western science) but in the yogic schema, these layers of mind represent the future potentiality of human beings. Recall the second defect of humanism, that if we only have past and present humans as our measure of humanity, then what of the future? In the yogic view, humanity has hardly begun to explore the potentiality of the human mind, yet cognitive development gives insights into how the more subtle layers of mind will unfold.

- The unfolding of higher levels of mind will be systaltic, with speed and pause.
- The unfolding of higher levels of mind will require deliberate and conscious effort. It will also depend on a supportive social, cultural and educational environment.
- Once a more subtle faculty of mind develops, it must be exercised to be retained. *Use it or lose it* applies as much to mind as to body. Thus mind can unfold but it can also contract back on itself if not encouraged.

In yoga psychology, the development of mind from baby to adult can be compared to the unfolding of a lotus flower having five layers of petals each with many petals. Each petal represents a specific mental faculty. The outer-most layer of petals (the sensory-motor mind) opens first, followed by the other layers successively from crude to subtle. The second layer begins to open before the first is fully bloomed and even the inner-most layers exert a subliminal effect long before they are experienced consciously. Indeed most people only get

⁸¹ See Table 8.1 in Fischer, *ibid.*

⁸² The following YouTube video is well worth watching to gain an understanding of the importance of relationship and communication in the early years of life. Nathan Mikaere-Wallis, *Brain Development for Babies: An introduction to neuroscience and infant development*, < <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-CB-A4awkRU> >.

⁸³ The visual cortex matures long before the prefrontal cortex. Synaptic density (one of the milestones in cortical development) peaks in the visual cortex at 7-8 months whereas for the prefrontal cortex it peaks around 3-4 years. Joan Stiles and Terry L. Jernigan, "The Basics of Brain Development", *Neuropsychology Review*, 2010 Dec; **20**(4): pp327-348. doi: 10.1007/s11065-010-9148-4, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2989000/>.

one or two glimpses in a life-time of the subtlest layers of their mind. Such experiences are often referred to as ‘religious experience’ but the term is a misnomer because they are not confined to persons with religious affiliation.⁸⁴ When asked, “Have you ever been aware of or been influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?” some 62% of people surveyed in Nottingham said they had had such an experience at least once or twice in their life.⁸⁵

The nature-nurture debate

Psychological development follows the unfolding of mind, from crude to subtle. Mind unfolds according to its own dynamic, its own nature, although of course environment and culture influence the psychological outcome. This understanding has an immediate impact on our interpretation of the *nature-nurture* debate. Humans are instinctual, intellectual, social, moral and spiritual, *by nature*. But nature in this view is something more than the domain of physiology and genetics – it now includes the universe of minds and consciousness. How a human develops still depends on choices made in the context of inborn and environmental factors but now the inborn is not confined to genes, and environment is not confined to the physical. So, the Neohumanist perspective is not one-sided concerning the old debates about *nature* versus *nurture* and *determinism* versus *free will*. But its notion of *inborn* and *environment* are both greatly expanded.

What is human nature?

Animal nature is easy to define – it is directed to the exigencies of survival: food, sleep, reproduction and avoiding predators. Humans are sometimes described as *rational animals* but this definition entirely misses the point, just as the descriptor *moving plants* reveals nothing about animals. Neohumanism makes the distinction between *human nature* and *animal nature*. Here the word ‘nature’ is being used in a different sense to the previous section – to mean the essence of a thing, without which it does not deserve its name.⁸⁶ The essential human nature takes the form of three motivations or *longings*, which collectively make the human species remarkable. We have hinted at each of them earlier:

1. The longing to expand one’s mind beyond every limitation. This longing motivates adventurers, scientific enquiry and those who challenge injustice and dogma. Ultimately it is discovered that only something infinite satisfies this longing.
2. The longing to merge in love. This longing is at first sought through attachment to another person but is satisfied only when it blossoms into a devotional sentiment that knows no bound.
3. The longing to establish the fraternity of life. This longing motivates a person to a life of service; to care for the sick and unfortunate, to teach the young and to protect the environment.

The purpose of a Neohumanist education is to awaken these three longings in each and every student. And Neohumanist teachers bring their own experience of these longings to the classroom. What a privilege! It is a beautiful paradox that all three longings ultimately arrive at the same destination. Collectively, Sarkar refers to them as *Longing for the Great*.

⁸⁴ <http://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/library/alister-hardy-religious-experience-research-centre/>

⁸⁵ <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/belief/2009/nov/07/religious-experience-research-centre-lampeter>

⁸⁶ The word *ethos* (borrowed from Modern Greek) has a similar meaning. The Sanskrit word is *dharma*.

Questions

1. What is the difference between creativity and intuition?
2. What might be done in the school setting to increase a child's intuitive faculty?
3. Have you ever been aware of or been influenced by a presence or a power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self? Have you ever talked about it with someone else?
4. Do you feel that one of the three human longings is more strongly expressed in you than the others? Do you feel them at different times? How would you describe the feeling of them?

Meditation

Every person's experience of meditation is different. Some find it easier to go deep than others. The first rule of the meditator: *never compare yourself to others!*⁸⁷ The second rule of the meditator: *set aside all judgements about how 'good' you are at meditation* – it does not work like that! What can be said generally is that the practice of meditation is beneficial for mental and physical health, regardless of what you think is happening. Indeed, in the increasingly complex emotional and intellectual climate of the 21st Century, meditation helps to combat stress and maintain mental balance. The physical body has many automated systems to maintain homeostasis, such as constant body temperature, constant blood glucose and constant salt levels. The mind has no such automated homeostasis mechanisms – conscious control is required to steer a path between many mental complexes: inferiority versus superiority, introversion versus extroversion, depression versus mania, domineering versus submissive – the list is quite long.⁸⁸ Meditation makes one more aware of mental state and therefore more able to maintain balance.

There are many kinds of meditation advertised in Western countries and most Westerners have little idea what the differences signify. For example, the point of concentration (if there is one) may be the third eye, tip of the nose, breath or the heart chakra. Some meditation techniques use a mantra, some not. From the point of view of Neohumanist schools, there are a few key factors that are considered important:

- The technique should acknowledge a spiritual purpose. The physical and mental health benefits of meditation are a bonus!
- The technique should acknowledge the four skills of sense withdrawal, concentration, contemplation and Samadhi, although these need not be introduced explicitly.
- The technique should use a mantra.

Without depending upon mantra...Buddhahood cannot be attained.

Dalai Lama

A mantra serves two purposes. It is a device that helps to focus the mind. And second, the mantra must convey an idea that has no bound or limitation. And this brings us back to the Neohumanist concern with learning sentiments.

⁸⁷ An excellent introduction for the novice meditator is: *Close your Eyes and Open your Mind – An introduction to spiritual meditation*, by Dada Nabhaniilananda, Ananda Marga Publications, 2005.

⁸⁸ In fact, the list is as long as one's list of virtues because, according to Aristotle, every virtue is a "golden mean" at the optimum point between *excess* on one side and *deficiency* on the other. More on this later.

Most people think of meditation as having purely mental benefits, but it is becoming clear that meditation has remarkable physical side effects, for example, influencing gene expression and cortical development.⁸⁹ From the educator's point of view however, meditation is also a form of *learning* (even in the sense of changing synaptic connections in the brain⁹⁰). The meditator learns a sentiment which associates the emotions of tranquillity and trust with the universal idea of the mantra. The learning of positive sentiments *necessarily* means the *unlearning* of negative sentiments! This is how meditation promotes happiness.

Those new to teaching young children to meditate in the classroom may be dismayed at the amount of fidget and giggling. Some children cannot close their eyes – but then neither can some adults. It is unreasonable to expect young children to sit still and meditate like adults. But brief periods of making the attempt are worthwhile. Consider the fifth limb of ashtanga yoga, *withdrawal of mind* from the outside world. If a young child gradually learns to sit still for a few seconds and close their eyes, this can be regarded as the first step to acquiring the meditator's skill. It may be considered a success if, by the time a child leaves primary school, he/she can sit for ten minutes and achieve a short period of concentration!⁹¹ We should not forget that a child may hold onto a brief glimpse of the mystical for his/her entire life.

*One does not seek to see oneself in running water, rather in still water.
For only what is itself still can impart stillness unto others.*

Chuang-tse⁹²

Questions

1. Is there a practice in the Western secular or religious tradition that is equivalent to meditation?
2. Why do most Westerners equate yoga to the postures known as *asanas* and know nothing of the eight yogic practices?
3. What is the difference between prayer and meditation? Between dream and meditation?

⁸⁹ A 2014 study was the first to reveal genetic and molecular differences between meditators and non-meditator controls, including altered gene-regulation and reduced expression of pro-inflammatory genes, which in turn correlated with faster physical recovery from stressful situations. See <<http://www.news.wisc.edu/22370>>. Investigations of acupuncture in both humans and rats suggest that needles in specific meridians alter the levels of microRNAs (small RNA molecules) that in turn regulate genes responsible for antihypertensive effects. These studies combined suggest that meditation exerts its effect on gene expression via pranic energy transferred through meridians (the subtle body's energy pathways) which affects microRNA expression.

Another study has shown that brain regions associated with attention and sensory processing (e.g. prefrontal cortex and right anterior insula) were thicker in meditation participants than matched controls. This was the first study to show structural changes in the brain as a result of meditation. (It should be noted that the cortex thins with age, so the authors suggested that meditation might offset age-related cortical thinning.) Lazar, SW., Kerr, CE. Et al., "Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness", *Neuroreport*, 28 November 2005, Vol 16 (17), pp 1893-1897.

⁹⁰ For an overview of the neuroscience of meditation see, M. Ricard, A. Lutz and R.J. Davidson, "Mind of the Meditator", *Scientific American*, November 2014, p23.

⁹¹ Just as for yoga postures, there are several programs available for teaching kids to meditate. The following two use the language of *mindfulness*: the MindUP Family Program (<http://thehawnfoundation.org/learning-community/families/>) and the Smiling Mind Education Program (<http://smilingmind.com.au/education-program/>). Both emphasise the mental and physical health benefits of meditation.

⁹² Chuang-tse was a Chinese Taoist sage, dates uncertain, c.360 BC - c.275 BC.

What is spirituality?

Spirituality is the endeavour to manifest Spirit in one's life. And Spirit is the light hidden deep inside every human heart. It is what makes humans capable of love. It is the well-spring of devotional sentiment and of all virtue. It cannot be 'seen' but it beckons like the sweet sound of a flute calling deep in a forest.

Another definition: Spirituality is that pertaining to Cosmic Consciousness.⁹³ This definition focusses on the universe as a Conscious Entity, as Subject and as the ultimate Witnessing Entity of all phenomena in the universe. It is interesting to observe how many metaphors are used to describe the one idea. A mountain peak is one but its appearance depends on the direction of ascent.

Ultimately everyone wants an object of happiness which is timeless, changeless and limitless. Even children have a sense of this – when lost in play they wish it might go on forever, only to be disappointed when parents call or the bell rings. Humans are not satisfied with anything limited, yet material things (and even ideas) are by their very nature limited in time and space. That which is limitless is extraordinarily subtle. Hence a subtle mind is required to grasp it.

Indigenous Culture

Neohumanist schools can introduce spirituality by identifying spiritual ideas in local culture. In Australia, as in most countries of the world, one need look no further than indigenous culture. Actually, in the words of Uncle Bobby Randall, "We are all indigenous when we go back to our roots."⁹⁴

Silas Roberts, first chair of the Northern Land Council, describes Aboriginal spirituality as follows:

Aboriginals have a special connection with everything that is natural. Aboriginals see themselves as part of nature. We see all things natural as part of us. All things on Earth we see as part human. This is told through the idea of dreaming. By dreaming we mean the belief that long ago, these creatures started human society.

These creatures, these great creatures are just as much alive today as they were in the beginning. They are everlasting and will never die. They are always part of the land and nature as we are. Our connection to all things natural is spiritual.

And Bobby Randall once again:

Being alive connects you to every other living thing that is around you. Your spirit, your psyche, your physical, your mental – you are all connected with other living forms – you are one with everything else that there is – the oneness – the completeness of the oneness.⁹⁵

Conclusion

In this section we have traversed the full spectrum of mind from its interface with matter, through layers of increasing subtlety, to its interface with Spirit. Our purpose was to give some glimpses of what is meant by *cultivating a subtle mind*.

The mind is a vast universe which humanity has only just begun to explore. As always with the unknown, there is an element of fear. But the human species is irresistibly drawn by the mystery and the spiritual promise of the subtle unknown. Typically it is artists, poets, musicians

⁹³ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar.

⁹⁴ Bobby Randall, an elder of the Pitjantjatjara people, Australia, in the documentary "Surviving Earth".

⁹⁵ As stated by Bobby Randall, traditional owner of Uluru, Central Australia, in a documentary film, *Kanyini*, directed by Melanie Hogan, Australia: Hopscotch Entertainment, 2006.

and novelists who lead the way, reaching out to ever more subtle experiences that elude science and philosophy – hence the importance of art, music and creative programs in schools.

*.... And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.*

- William Wordsworth, extract from *Tintern Abbey* 1798.

Questions

1. What is the difference between one's emotional life and one's spiritual life?
2. If you were offered a wish that would come true, for what would you wish?

4. Virtue and Good Character

It is frequently assumed that a major role for schooling is *socialisation*, imparting habits of behaviour which conform to established custom. It is true that children must adjust to the mores of society.⁹⁶ However the habits of good conduct which a Neohumanist school wishes to encourage are not so much about conforming or fitting-in as about assisting them to flourish.⁹⁷ We promote virtue and good character because they are liberating, for both the child and his/her classmates. This difference is profound.

The Changing Ethical Landscape

Behavioural decisions that affect individual and collective well-being come within the scope of *ethics*.⁹⁸ For many centuries what individuals ought and ought not to do was determined by religious codes, such as the *Ten Commandments*. Rule-based morality has two advantages: 1. Rules offer clarity – one does not have to think too deeply about the consequences of an action because the rules say what to do; 2. Religious rules have the authority of God so there is an internal motivation (whether born of love or fear) to please God. The decline of religion over the past century has been paralleled by a decline in authority of religious codes.

Utilitarianism

In the modern era, *utilitarian ethics* have gradually replaced religious ethics. According to utilitarian ethics, good conduct is decided by consequences rather than intentions. *Utilitarianism* was formulated during the social upheavals of the industrial revolution as an ethical foundation for liberal capitalism. In this role, it supports the argument that the greatest good is achieved when individuals pursue their self-interest within free markets. The individual intentions may be selfish but the consequence is the greatest good. In the 20th century, utilitarian ethics became stridently puritan. Milton Friedman, for example, denounced *social responsibility* in economic life as a “fundamentally subversive doctrine”.

But the doctrine of ‘social responsibility’ taken seriously would extend the scope of the political mechanism to every human activity. It does not differ in philosophy from the most explicitly collectivist doctrine. ... That is why, in my book *Capitalism and Freedom*, I have called it a “fundamentally subversive doctrine” in a free society.⁹⁹

Likewise in a grand piece of sophistry, Ayn Rand rejected altruism and self-sacrifice as false virtues and instead argued for the *virtue of selfishness*. One’s own well-being is the ultimate moral value.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ In India, England is known as the land of *please’s* and *thank-you’s*. Can you imagine life without *please’s* and *thank-you’s*?

⁹⁷ Words such ‘flourish’ and ‘thrive’ appear with much frequency in the recent literature on ethics in education. See for example, Marcus Bussey, “Critical Spirituality: towards a revitalised humanity”, *Journal of Futures Studies* 10(4):39-44, 2010.

⁹⁸ It is necessary to clarify that there is no real difference between *ethics* and *morality*. They are both about cultivating ‘habits’ of good conduct. Indeed the word *ethics* is derived from the ancient Greek *ethos* meaning *habit*. (In Modern Greek, *ethos* has a somewhat different meaning.) If there is a differentiation, then the term *ethics* is more inclined to be used in a professional setting in order to keep a distance from traditional religious morality. The word *morality* is derived from the Latin *mores* meaning *customs*.

⁹⁹ Milton Friedman, *The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits*, The New York Times Magazine, September 13, 1970. Friedman is considered to be the ‘father’ of modern neo-liberal economics.

¹⁰⁰ Ayn Rand, (1964). *The Virtue of Selfishness: A New Concept of Egoism*. New York: New American Library. ISBN 0-451-16393-1. Rand is only important because her extreme libertarian and free market philosophy influenced a subsequent generation of U.S. economists. When asked with whom he would most like to have

The decline of religious morality and the rise of utilitarianism has had two detrimental consequences. The first is that personal morality is increasingly left to the individual. Moral education has been largely abandoned in the public school system because there is no consensus about what it should look like. Furthermore, separation of church and State makes it easy for public schools to pass the responsibility for moral education to the churches. But church participation is declining because religion is perceived as irrational in a modern age.

The problem is that, left to their own devices, people frequently make bad moral choices and then suffer the inevitable painful consequences. *Moral suffering* rather than physical suffering is the major cause of pain in contemporary Western society.¹⁰¹ The West has made great progress in reducing material suffering, but little in reducing moral suffering – which is hardly surprising for we give little attention to moral problems and when we do, it is of the wrong kind. This brings us to the second detrimental consequence of the changing ethical landscape – that moral behaviour is assumed to be equivalent to what the State does *not* prohibit.

Given a decline in personal ethical standards and given that it does not want to involve itself in what was a traditional domain of the church, the State has responded by regulating good conduct through legislation. But secular rules have a weak hold because they do not excite intrinsic motivation. A case in point: banking is the most highly regulated sector of an economy and yet this did not prevent a global financial crisis due to the immoral conduct of bankers. Without intrinsic motivation, rules become an obstacle to circumvent. The State responds by adding more rules to fill the gaps but it is only a matter of time before the new rules are also circumvented. Over the past twenty-five years, the U.S. Congress has created more than 500 *new crimes per decade!*¹⁰² And there is no end in sight. But rules without internal motivation must fail because there will always be gaps that can only be filled by personal integrity.

Utopianism

There is an unlikely third strand to this story of a shifting ethical landscape. While 19th Century utilitarian philosophers were establishing the moral high ground for free-market capitalism, the rapidly growing socialist movement argued that immorality is a consequence of poverty and illiteracy, that is, external circumstances imposed by society. Their solution was to abolish inequality in the belief that the seeds of selfishness would then disappear. Various experiments in utopian living based on this belief were attempted in the 19th Century and all ultimately failed.¹⁰³

Utopianism may be defined as the belief that the human character can be perfected without conscious internal struggle; that ‘fixing’ the external or social environment is sufficient. Even through the 20th Century and into the 21st, the belief persists that moral deficit can be fixed by abolishing material deficit.¹⁰⁴ In a materialist philosophy, all problems have a material origin and therefore a material solution. Neohumanism is egalitarian – it recognises that society must

breakfast, President Reagan nominated Ayn Rand. With classic utilitarian irony, Milton Friedman described Rand as “an utterly intolerant and dogmatic person who did a great deal of good.”

¹⁰¹ The author is indebted to Peter Smith for this insight and others. His essay, *Virtue Ethics: an ancient solution to a modern problem*, 25 September 2014, is well worth reading. See <https://scientiasalon.wordpress.com/2014/09/25/virtue-ethics-an-ancient-solution-to-a-modern-problem/>

¹⁰² Ibid, Peter Smith. Yes, a worthwhile read!

¹⁰³ For more on the history of the utopian socialist movement, see Michael Towsey, “The Biopsychology of Cooperation” in *Understanding Prout, Volume 1*, 2010, eds. J. Carlyle and M. Towsey.

¹⁰⁴ According to author, James Wood, as late as the 1940s, George Orwell believed that in an equal society the seeds of human selfishness would wither. James Wood in an interview on the ABC, Radio National, The Book Show, 11 May 2009, <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2009/2566126.htm> concerning his essay “A Fine Rage”, *The New Yorker*, 13 April 2009, p 54. More recently see *Life Without Money*.

fight poverty and illiteracy. But once this is achieved we are still left with the mental seeds of selfish behaviour that are shared by all humans, rich and poor alike. Dealing with these requires a subtle, internal approach.

Questions

1. Give an example of moral suffering that you have heard on the news recently.
2. Can a society as a whole experience moral suffering?
3. Do you know a couple who send their child to a religious school even though they are not of that religion? Why have they made that decision? Would you make the same decision?

Virtue and Good Character

The difference between good conduct and good character is that the former is a behavioural perspective which is not concerned with motivation. Good character requires the cultivation of internal virtue which in turn draws on *wisdom* (discrimination) and *devotional sentiment* (the internal desire to promote others well-being). Neohumanist schools adopt two approaches to the cultivation of good character – the practice of *virtue ethics* and the practice of *cardinal human values*. They are complementary. We discuss virtue ethics in this section and cardinal human values in the next.

The Virtues

In order to address the contemporary lack of consensus concerning moral codes, educators are turning to the concept of *virtue* as the basis for a moral system. The advantage is that virtues are recognised across cultural and religious boundaries and they can be presented in a non-sectarian manner. The respected Virtues Project¹⁰⁵ promotes 52 virtues: assertiveness, caring, cleanliness, commitment, compassion, confidence, consideration, cooperation, courage, courtesy, creativity, detachment, determination, diligence, enthusiasm, excellence, flexibility, forgiveness, friendliness, generosity, gentleness, helpfulness, honesty, honour, humility, idealism, integrity, joyfulness, justice, kindness, love, loyalty, moderation, modesty, orderliness, patience, peacefulness, perseverance, purposefulness, reliability, respect, responsibility, self-discipline, service, tact, thankfulness, tolerance, trust, trustworthiness, truthfulness, understanding, unity.

The above list is not fixed or complete: we might add *positivity*, *contentment* and *prudence*. Some are words we also use for emotions (most noticeably love and trust) and some are traditional moral principles (kindness, truthfulness, honesty, moderation). We might consider honesty to be more important than tact but, according to Aristotle, the virtues are not optional. Rather he considered them to be an indivisible *unity*. A person cannot decide to ignore one and practice others because a deficiency in one threatens them all. For example, honesty requires courage, which in turn requires prudence. A reckless (imprudent) person may not have the

¹⁰⁵ <http://www.virtuesproject.com/>. The Virtues Project™ is a global grassroots initiative to inspire the practice of virtues in everyday life. It operates in some 95 countries and was honoured by the United Nations during the International Year of the Family as a “model global program for all cultures.” The Virtues Project was founded in Canada in 1991 by Linda Kavelin-Popov, Dr. Dan Popov and John Kavelin. They realized that virtues are universal qualities of character honoured by all of humanity. The Virtues Project™ produces books, cards, and posters to foster the practice of virtues in individuals, families, schools, and organizations.

common sense to recognise danger (foolishness rather than courage) nor the patience to exercise tact.

There is much we can learn from Aristotle concerning virtue.¹⁰⁶ He did not argue that people *should* be virtuous but rather that virtue is a necessary condition for happiness. However the Greek word *eudaimonia* for *happiness* also encompassed ideas such as success, fulfilment and realisation of potential.

Virtue, advised Aristotle, cannot be learned from books – it must be practiced. He also regarded each virtue as representing a *golden mean*, a balanced behaviour poised between the extremes of *excess* and *deficiency*. For example, generosity is a golden mean between profligacy and meanness. Courage is a golden mean between aggression and cowardice. Trust is a golden mean between naivety and cynicism. We shall return to trust as a golden mean.

Questions

1. What other virtues do you think could be included in the above list?

Cardinal Human Values

There is one difficulty with the use of the recognised virtues as the basis for a moral system, there are so many of them! For practical purposes, an ethical/moral code should have three qualities, *purpose*, *motivation* and *brevity*:

Purpose in the case of ethics is two-fold: 1. to promote individual *peace of mind* without which happiness and success in life are impossible; and 2. to promote *collective well-being*.

Motivation is of three kinds: fear of punishment, expectation of reward and internal desire. While internal motivation is essential, fear is additionally required in practical life because internal motivation sometimes fails. At such times *fear of consequences* is a necessary safety-net. Reward can also be appropriate, for example in economic life when attempting to promote the recycling of waste. But these are exceptions. Good behaviour only becomes good character with intrinsic motivation.

Brevity helps make a moral code easy to remember. Law makes an abysmal moral code (as anyone who has read a statute will know). Young children do not yet have the maturity to sift through options and consequences. A practical moral code should therefore consist of relatively few principles worded in a way that remains relevant for child and adult alike.

Perhaps it is for brevity that Sarkar promotes the concept of *cardinal human values*, virtues that not only transcend culture and religion but are also *cardinal*, that is, they are *fundamental* values on which everything else depends. Although he does not state it explicitly, a wider reading of Sarkar suggests that he promotes the yogic code of conduct (*yama* and *niyama*¹⁰⁷) as

¹⁰⁶ Aristotle's ethics are called *Nicomachean Ethics* because his lecture notes on ethics were compiled and edited by his son, Nicomachus.

¹⁰⁷ See Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, *A Guide to Human Conduct*, 1957 (EiEdit). See also Bussey, "Education for Liberation" in *Understanding Prout, Volume 1* for a further account of the *Yama* and *Niyama* and their importance in Neohumanist education. Sarkar uses the terms *cardinal human values* and *cardinal human principles* interchangeably.

a starting point for cardinal values. These consist of ten principals divided into five avoidances and five observances.

The five avoidances:

Each of these can be expressed in the negative (an avoidance) or in the positive (a virtue).

1. Nonviolence: not to cause harm to others consciously by deed or omission; gentleness; kindness; to do good according to one's capacity.
2. Non-deceit: not to tell lies; benevolent truthfulness.
3. Non-stealing: not to take or to covet that which belongs to others; honesty.
4. Non-objectification: not to use others as objects; to see the divine in everyone and everything.
5. Non-acquisitiveness: simple living. Too many possessions disturb mental peace.

Most cultures around the world accept the first three of these principles and it is hard to imagine a sustainable society that ignores them.

Of the above five principles, *non-objectification* is of particular importance. Objectification is the use of a person (or any living entity) as an object for one's own purpose, without regard for his/her well-being. This principle appears in Neohumanism as the distinction between *utility value* and *existential value*.¹⁰⁸ To recognize the existential value of a person is to recognize that their joys and sorrows are as important to them as mine are to me. This requires an ability to be conscious of another person's consciousness – to expand one's own consciousness beyond its limited ego boundary.

The five observances

These are expressed as five virtues.

1. Cleanliness: both physical and mental, external and internal.
2. Contentment: to be accepting of what one has; to exercise restraint over one's desires.
3. Service: to help others even at the cost of inconvenience to oneself.
4. To read good literature and keep good company.
5. To take the shelter of the Cosmic Entity: In practice, this means to maintain a positive mental attitude of trust and optimism about life. It means to hold onto the belief that the universe is has its own wisdom and its own timetable; that the difficult challenges which beset us in life are opportunities to learn and to grow.¹⁰⁹

Acceptance of the above cardinal human values as a moral code has important benefits: 1. they constitute a 'natural' code of conduct in that they facilitate the developmental sequence of expansion and subtification of mind; 2. they are not ends in themselves but a means to the realization of individual potential and to social progress; 3. they provide the necessary foundation for a peaceful mind and a rich spiritual life; 4. their practice builds trust and therefore the quality of human relationships. Recall that social capital is defined in terms of the trust and empathy inherent in social relationships. Therefore the building of social capital has a moral dimension; and 5. they are egalitarian because they are of benefit to all – their practice, by definition, excludes group or class interest.

¹⁰⁸ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, *Liberation of Intellect*, p63.

¹⁰⁹ Expressed as a double negative, this observance means to avoid pessimism, bitterness, distrust, cynicism, hopelessness, resentment and negativity. You will feel a lot better for it! And so will those around you.

Questions

1. In recent decades, international courts of law have attempted to reach across national and cultural boundaries. Give an example? What is the premise on which these courts are based?
2. Look up the word *exploitation* in Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Exploitation>. How does the language compare to that used to define *objectification*?
3. What human faculty helps prevent a person from using others as objects?
4. Why is reading good literature and keeping good company so important that it is considered to be moral principal?

Ethics in Practice

Morning Circle

For many Neohumanist schools, including the Ananda Marga River School, the school week begins on Monday mornings with *morning circle*. The whole school, with teachers and interested parents, sit together. In other schools this might be called school assembly. Morning circle may include singing, dancing, chanting, contemplation, or discussion, but whatever the content, the aim is that students “contribute to the collective intelligence and wisdom; at the same time they are supported by the powerful synergetic flow”.¹¹⁰

After songs and meditation, morning circle will typically focus on a specific virtue. Children do artwork, role-plays, writing and brainstorming to explore all the ramifications of a virtue. One class each week presents their understanding of the week’s virtue and writes an affirmation about that virtue which is presented to the gathering. The AMRS has selected ten virtues as the school’s cardinal human values: compassion, love, honesty, respect, simple living, contentment, responsibility, courage, service and knowledge. Apart from morning circle, the virtues are also embedded in stories, songs, learning activities and in all that the school does.

The biopsychology of moral decision making

Here are three interesting studies:

A 2009 study: Brain scans have opened a huge field of research into what parts of the brain participate in different mental activities. For example, it has been discovered that pondering a situation calling for altruism or compassion activates a region known as the medial prefrontal cortex (MPC), sometimes described as the *social-empathic cortex*. However, pondering a moral dilemma activates many parts of the brain *simultaneously* – the MPC, the dorso-lateral prefrontal cortex (whose functions include planning and abstract reasoning), the anterior-cingulate cortex (involved in decision making, empathy and conflict detection) and the limbic system which, as already noted, regulates emotional state. The authors concluded that the neural underpinning of wisdom may involve an optimal balance between the more primitive brain regions and the most recently evolved.¹¹¹ There is the ‘balance’ word again!

¹¹⁰ A. Merz, (2000). “Morning circle”, in Neo-humanist Education. Germany: Ananda Marga Gurukula Publications, p. 30.

¹¹¹ Dilip Jeste and Thomas W. Meeks. “A seat of wisdom in the brain?” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, 6 April 2009.

A 2010 study: 20 pairs of male volunteers were asked to share money while having brain scans. It was found that equitable sharing promoted activity in those parts of the brain that process pleasurable rewards. In other words, sharing gives us pleasure. But more surprising was the result when researchers manipulated the shares so one man was richer. The richer man was then asked to share an additional sum of money. Even when the richer man retained the additional money, his brain scan did not indicate a corresponding pleasure. In other words there was a discrepancy between his ‘greedy’ behaviour and the resulting pleasure revealed by his brain. According to the researchers this apparent incongruity “highlights the idea that even the basic reward structures in the human brain are not purely self-oriented”.¹¹²

A 2015 study: Rather than measuring brain scans, this fascinating investigation measured immune system markers. Eighty healthy adults were asked about their lifestyle and what made them happy. Scientists then took blood samples, analysing the white cells for immune system markers. Participants who derived happiness from more self-centred hedonistic pursuits had increased markers believed to promote inflammation and reduced markers to fight infection. By contrast, those who derived pleasure from more altruistic pursuits had decreased inflammation markers but increased markers associated with production of immune system antibodies. Note that all the participants reported deriving pleasure from their activities but their cellular physiology revealed a different story. We appear to be better off mentally *and* physically when we adopt ‘altruistic’ rather than ‘selfish’ life-styles.¹¹³

Trust, naivety and cynicism

Trust has been a recurring theme through this introduction to Neohumanist schools. It is a primary emotion. It is essential for healthy human relationships and for healthy communities. It is an essential component of social capital, one which sociologists attempt to measure. It is necessary for cooperation and for learning. The cardinal human values preserve trust and cultivating trust is a virtue. But trust is also vulnerable – it depends on people treating each other with respect (acknowledging each other as spiritual beings) and not using each other as objects for their own purpose. In short, trust is at the core of life but cannot be taken for granted. Recall Aristotle’s belief that every virtue is a golden mean between excess and deficiency. It is helpful to consider the excess and deficiency of trust – naivety and cynicism respectively.

Naivety

We have already come across naivety in the utopian belief that the human character can be perfected without personal internal struggle; that selfishness can be abolished with external fixes alone. Naivety becomes a vice when it places social well-being in the hands of those who have no ability and no interest to promote it. Nevertheless utopia has spawned a literary genera that spans centuries and finds a readership in times of strife.¹¹⁴

Cynicism

It is easy to read and write about good character. It is of course another matter to live it. When we read about important persons behaving corruptly (those of high religious, political and

¹¹² For further information see Marlowe Hood, “Subconsciously, humans want to share the wealth”, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/breakingnews/world/view/20100225-255261/Subconsciously-humans-want-to-share-the-wealthstudy>. Link valid 6 May 2015. The study was originally published in *Nature*, February 2010.

¹¹³ BL. Fredrickson, KM. Grewenb, KA. Coffeya et al., 2015 “A functional genomic perspective on human well-being”, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the USA*, vol. **110** (33)

¹¹⁴ *Utopia* by Thomas More (1478-1535) and *Walden Two* by B.F. Skinner (1904-1990) are two of many examples.

social status whom we want to respect), cynicism is an easy response. “Why should I bother to acquire virtue? Humans are selfish by nature. Virtue is just a veneer – a waste of effort!” Just as naivety has spawned a utopian literature, so cynicism has spawned a literature of dystopia.¹¹⁵

Cynicism hardens the heart. It is the enemy of devotional sentiment. A child’s transition from innocence to reality ought not to be accompanied by cynicism. Teachers should never express a cynical sentiment and they should question one if heard. And children *are* susceptible to cynicism. It can, for example, come as a shock to discover that one’s parents are not perfect. Cynicism is a way of deflecting the pain of a broken trust and passing it to someone else. Not passing on the pain is an act of courage and a gift to ones friends and colleagues. However broken trust is also of collective concern because it damages social connections, the ‘social fabric’, and therefore a social response is additionally required. This brings us to the issue of behavior management in Neohumanist schools.

Questions

1. Cynicism is sometimes defended in entertainment on the grounds of realism. How can children best be prepared for their encounters with cynicism and naivety?

Restorative Practice

The Ananda Marga River School has adopted *Restorative Practice* as its approach to behaviour management although this terminology is inadequate because restorative practice achieves more than behaviour management. We introduce restorative practice by highlighting two distinctions: 1. *restorative justice* versus *retributive justice*; 2. *restorative practice* versus *restorative justice*.

Restorative justice is a program originally developed within the Canadian judicial system in the 1970s to give offenders the opportunity to take responsibility for their behaviour and to acknowledge harm done to victims. Its focus is on repairing damage, restoring relationships and reintegrating the offender into the community. This is a major shift from blame and punishment, the hallmarks of retributive justice.¹¹⁶

In fact restorative justice was the norm in many earlier societies. Even in England, restorative justice was only replaced by retributive justice following the Norman invasion of 1066 A.D. By the 12th century, crime came to be viewed as an offense against the state rather than injury to persons and community.¹¹⁷ The contemporary interest in restorative justice was assisted by the revival of indigenous communities, particularly in Canada, the U.S., and New Zealand. Prior to European contact, the Maori had a restorative justice system known as *Utu* which is now being reintroduced to New Zealand.¹¹⁸

Restorative practice has its origins in restorative justice but is a broader concept. The latter is *reactive*, consisting of formal or informal responses to wrongdoing *after* it occurs. Restorative practice is *proactive*. It builds relationships and a sense of community to *prevent* conflict and wrongdoing. Restorative practice is now an active field of research in schools, businesses and

¹¹⁵ For example, *Animal Farm* and *1984*, both by George Orwell (1903-1950).

¹¹⁶ <<http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/southernadelaide/pages/information/restorative>>

¹¹⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Restorative_justice>

¹¹⁸ *Utu*, Ministry of Justice, New Zealand. (Valid link 17 September 2013).

government. In schools, it is not so much a ‘program’ as a culture. It builds positive relationships between students, teachers, staff and parents rather than focusing on misbehaviour. Nevertheless, it has been shown to reduce student misbehaviour, bullying and crime and to improve the climate for learning.¹¹⁹

Two key features of restorative practice are: 1. a focus on relationships rather than the individual in isolation; and 2. a focus on internally motivated behaviour change rather than external pressure. Both these are familiar themes within Neohumanism:

1. To restore relationships means to restore the positive *sentiments* which bind teachers and children. This in turn means to restore the *emotions* of trust, love and respect and to restore the *idea* of school as community. However trust depends on trustworthiness, which in turn depends on previous experiences of group behaviour. Hence the importance of learning habits of good conduct. Good conduct promotes trust and trust is the foundation of teaching & learning.¹²⁰
2. To focus on internal motivation means to utilise the three human longings. For example, despite possible protestation by a wrong-doer, we can assume that somewhere inside she/he desires to restore a lost connection with community. And despite possible demands for revenge, we may assume that the victim can be helped to understand that desire for revenge cripples one’s life. Acknowledging wrong-doing is difficult when its origins are invisible (unconscious) to the children concerned. The process of repairing relationships requires *expansion of consciousness* – it is a liberation. In this way, good conduct becomes good character.

Restorative practice may be a challenge for teachers because it requires them to be explicit about their classroom practice. It asks of them the courage to create a space where students can experience situations that develop their emotional and social capacity. We have already noted that moral decision making demands whole brain engagement. It cannot be learned from books any more than can tennis or sculpture.

A restorative classroom setting is one that values dialogue through an inclusive approach where everyone expects to be heard, and through this participatory process students develop the capacity to learn in a practical way that emotions are an important and legitimate expression of healthy dialogue. This helps students to deal with conflict, tensions and difference in respectful ways that engender trust, empathy, responsibility, and foster healthy relationships.¹²¹

At the AMRS, restoring relationships can take many forms which are decided upon by the student in conjunction with teachers. There is often a service element to help build the student’s self-esteem and confidence through helping others. The Principal of the River School reports that one of the consequences of restorative practice is that students do not fear telling the truth. Furthermore, children learn to recognise trigger factors that influence their behaviour and monitor themselves accordingly. Restorative practice is ethics in action:

$$\textit{Reflection} + \textit{Ethics} + \textit{Action} = \textit{Thrival}^{122}$$

¹¹⁹ The International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP) <<http://www.iirp.edu/what-is-restorative-practices.php>>

¹²⁰ <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/southernadelaide/pages/information/restorative/>

¹²¹ Terry O’Connell, Lesley Oliver, Lyn Doppler 2007. <http://www.decd.sa.gov.au/southernadelaide/pages/information/restorative/>

¹²² Marcus Bussey, “Critical Spirituality: towards a revitalised humanity”, *Journal of Futures Studies* **10**(4):39-44, 2010.

5. Rationality and Critical Thinking

Rationality

Rationality is defined as a quality or state that conforms to reason.¹²³ Reason, in turn, is the power of the mind to think, understand, and form judgements logically. Rationality implies a logical consistency between action and purpose, between ends and means. Rationality is also contextual – what is rational to an economist is not rational to a family with a mortgage.

However, Sarkar uses the term *rationality* in a very particular sense. If rational behaviour depends on the effective use of reason to achieve a goal, then Sarkar would add that the goal must be *collective well-being*. Any other goal is *irrational*. Rationality is life-affirming. In practice, the ability to determine which actions do or do not contribute to collective well-being requires wise discrimination. Hence says Sarkar:

*The path of rationality is discrimination.*¹²⁴

As noted previously, rationality is usually understood to be at odds with sentiment. Neohumanism, however, acknowledges what neuro-biologists have learned – that reason cannot be divorced from sentiment because the two are intertwined in the brain. Rationality is not reason divorced from sentiment but reason empowered by positive universal sentiments. So we make the following distinction: *Sentimentality* is to follow an idea because its emotion gives pleasure. *Rationality* is to follow an idea because it is conducive to collective well-being. A good education is about associating positive emotions with universal ideas so that rationality more easily becomes a habit.

And those who possess the inner asset of devotion within their hearts and follow the path of rationality in dealing with the external world, must be victorious. They alone can accomplish worthy deeds in this world.¹²⁵

Dogma

Much of Neohumanism is concerned with the means to recognise and overcome social dogmas. Sarkar defines a dogma as *an idea beyond which the mind is not permitted to go*. Geo-sentiments and socio-sentiments are dogmas because, by definition, they establish a boundary between self and other which is not to be crossed. Even humanism is a dogma when it cannot embrace the natural world.

Study (educating oneself) and rationality are essential to overcome dogma. In addition, socio-sentiments succumb when challenged by the Principle of Social Equality. Recall that within every socio-sentiment lies a superiority complex, a selfish belief that one has a right to privilege. Neohumanism is fundamentally egalitarian. It promotes the Principle of Social Equality which it sets in opposition to the Principle of Selfish Pleasure.

Identifying dogmas is not easy because the boundary of an idea is not always immediately apparent and, as previously observed, the emotions maintaining that boundary can be very satisfying. Hence all of the means offered by Neohumanism are required to challenge dogmas:

- devotional sentiment

¹²³ Merriam-Webster Dictionary, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/rationality>

¹²⁴ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, *Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism*, 1982, First edition, p16. Implicit in Sarkar's definition of rationality is the idea that science can only be of benefit to society if it is motivated by Neohumanist sentiments.

¹²⁵ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, *Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism*, 1982, First edition, p19.

- a subtle mind which sees what is hidden to most
- virtue ethics and good character
- rationality

*Sentimentality based on rationality is the strongest force in the universe. And sentimentality without rationality takes the form of, or rather the distortion of dogma.*¹²⁶

Questions

1. Does rationality diminish creativity? See the following article for consideration of this question. <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/philosopherszone/unleashing-the-creative-nietzsche-the-phenomenologists/6504578>
2. Rationality implies a logical consistency between action and purpose. There are two accepted kinds of logic. What are they and in what context are they used? Which logic is implied here?
3. Is a dogmatic idea unethical or can only actions be unethical?

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking implies something more than rationality. An insightful definition is due to Foucault: critical thinking is the work “we do upon ourselves in order to ‘make’ our subjectivity an object of self-reflexive thought”.¹²⁷

Rationality is the application of reason to sentiments which are ‘visible’. Critical thinking is the application of reason to help make invisible longings, sentiments and motivations become visible. In the primary school classroom, it helps students and teachers become more conscious of how they use their minds. It also helps to sensitise teachers to pseudo-culture. We discuss self-reflexive thought and pseudo-culture in turn.

Self-reflexive thought – knowing one’s Self.

Everyday consciousness is dualistic – there is our internal world which ‘sees’ and there is the outside world which ‘is seen’ and there exists a *subject-object relationship* between them. The world of objects is visible, but the subject which sees is invisible.

*A blade cuts things but not itself.
Eyes see everything except themselves.*¹²⁸

The subject-object relationship constantly changes during a child’s development as his/her mind unfolds from crude to subtle. Those layers of mind that have opened to reveal themselves appear to us as *objects of thought*. Those more subtle layers of mind, that are yet to open, constitute our *self*, the ‘Eye of the Mind’, the lens through which we view the world but which remains invisible to us.

¹²⁶ In “*The Noumenal Cause and the Personal God*”, talk given by Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, 20th May 1979, Timmern, Germany.

¹²⁷ As quoted in: Geoff Danaher, Tony Schirato and Jen Webb, *Understanding Foucault*, Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 2001, first published Allen and Unwin, 2000.

¹²⁸ *A Zen Forest. Sayings of the Masters*, translated by Soiku Shigematsu.

In the early stages of child development, the mind unfolds without conscious effort. At each developmental step, the *self* (the locus of consciousness) withdraws into a more subtle layer of mind and a portion of mind that was previously subject now becomes an object of thought. Simultaneously, there is a tremendous expansion in the domain of what is ‘seen’ and comprehended. So expansion of consciousness feels like an epiphany – a liberation.¹²⁹

However, at some point in a child’s development, the unfolding of mind ceases to be ‘automatic’. Learning requires conscious effort or ‘work’. But the rewards of an expanding mind (those ah-ha! moments that are such a delight to teachers) more than justify the effort. At some further point in a child’s development, the unfolding of more subtle layers of mind requires *introspection* or *self-reflection* rather than acquisition of objective knowledge. While Foucault’s definition of critical thinking is insightful, his understanding of the ‘work’ done upon ourselves is predominantly intellectual. And the ‘subject’ he would have us expose is that hidden in culture. From a Neohumanist point of view, expansion of consciousness requires increasingly *internal work* to “see” the more subtle layers of mind. Meditation is one form of internal work. But it is also the work done by children in Restorative Practice, when they attempt to shine the light of consciousness on their behaviour and its effect on their relationships. Making the unconscious, conscious, and making the invisible, visible, *is the education which liberates*. This remains true at any age.¹³⁰

Questions

1. How does meditation help to develop insight, self-awareness?

Pseudo-culture

One of the darker but ubiquitous dangers in adult life is the encounter with seductive words that disguise a hidden intent. In the case of advertising and financial contracts, adults learn the hard way to read between the lines. Children are introduced to this murky aspect of life through fairy tales about the wolf in sheep’s clothing and Little Red Riding Hood. Neohumanism acknowledges this reality by observing that positive sentiments can be used to disguise a nefarious intent. Sarkar refers to *pseudo-humanism*¹³¹, *pseudo-spirituality* and *pseudo-culture*. An example of pseudo-Neohumanism (too many prefixes!) would be green-washing, the all too prevalent use of environmentally friendly words to disguise an environmentally unfriendly activity.

It is not appropriate to expose young children to the cynicism that lies behind the use of pseudo-positive sentiments. Cautionary tales such as Little Red Riding Hood are hint enough. But teachers will want to beware false sentiments when selecting teaching materials. In this regard, Sarkar gives particular importance to *pseudo-culture*.

¹²⁹ See Ken Wilber, *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm*, for an excellent account of the unfolding of mind and the accompanying changes in the subject-object relationship. Published Boston: Shambhala, 3rd Edition revised, 2001.

¹³⁰ Bussey describes this process as critical spirituality. See for example, Marcus Bussey, “Critical Spirituality: towards a revitalised humanity”, *Journal of Futures Studies* 10(4):39-44, 2010, in which he extends the meaning of ‘critical thinking’ to include ‘critical spirituality’.

¹³¹ An example of pseudo-humanism, according to Foucault, is the idea of “the people”. It is a false sentiment invented to authorise claims to power.

Recall that culture has the same root as the verb *to cultivate*. What Neohumanist schools wish to cultivate is warm hearts and subtle minds and the culture of Neohumanist schools reflects this intention. But the dominant culture of contemporary Western society is not so oriented. Consider the following:

- By the age of 14, the average American child has seen 11,000 murders on TV.¹³²
- The average cartoon depicts 26 violent incidents.
- Research indicates that children who see violence frequently on television can become less sensitive to the pain and suffering of others and come to view aggression as an acceptable way of solving problems.¹³³

Common sense suggests that something is not right here. The Western preoccupation with death and violence cannot be healthy, particularly for children. Consider the following:

- The child's brain is very plastic. It is a 'one-shot learner' – it learns an association of images and ideas in just one exposure. This is how children learn a first language without effort.
- The brain becomes less plastic with age. For example, after puberty it is hard to learn a second language. But also it becomes much harder to *unlearn* the experiences and sentiments acquired as a child.

Discussions about the effect of violence in contemporary culture are complicated by commerce – violent films and video-games make big money. Scientific studies attempting to shed light on the consequences of virtual-violence are confounded by the inherent conservatism and uncertainty of scientific research.¹³⁴ Once again common sense is required here. It is surely preferable that young children are only exposed to positive images, themes and ideas.

There is however a pseudo-cultural grey-zone that is much more difficult to negotiate – those cultural expressions which keep the subtle dimensions of life *invisible*. In this category would be Hollywood films which portray the consumerist middle-America life-style as the norm and which are devoid of nobler sentiments. The grey-zone will always invite heated debate because it is easy not to notice that something subtle is missing. The issue is to be decided by critical thinking and not dogmatic definitions. Bollywood movies are a case in point. Some hate them, others love them – but this kind of debate misses the point.

One of the currents that Neo-humanist schools find themselves swimming against is what is termed “pseudo-culture”, the homogenous (mostly American) music, films, and television shows that are designed not to uplift the human spirit, but to gain short term profits for their makers. These products are finding their way into every corner of the world, and eroding local cultural expressions and sentiments. This raging current of cultural products is countered in Neo-humanist schools by working to develop local art and craft forms, by media literacy and the development of a critical social/political awareness, and by fostering the creative transmission of cherished local values to future generations (through plays, murals, literature, and other forms of expression).¹³⁵

¹³² R. J. Harris, (1989): *A Cognitive Psychology of Mass Communication*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

¹³³ http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/shore/shore072.shtml

¹³⁴ Naomi Oreskes and Erik M. Conway, *The Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming*, Bloomsbury Press, 2010, offers an excellent expose of how the inherent uncertainty in scientific results is used to sow confusion in the use of those results.

¹³⁵ Kathleen Kesson, “Tantra: The quest for the Ecstatic Mind”, in *Nurturing Our Wholeness: Perspectives on Spirituality in Education*, Volume 6 of the Holistic Education Series, ed. Yoshiharu Nakagawa and John P. Miller, pub. Foundation for Educational Renewal, March 2002.

Once again we must return to the word *cultivate*. Praiseworthy cultural expressions cultivate loving hearts and subtle minds, but in an entertaining and emotionally moving way. They inspire virtue and they stir universal sentiments. The mental effort required to discriminate culture from pseudo-culture is critical thinking. It is true that critical thinking is the domain of university courses and not primary schools. But the discrimination exercised by teachers when selecting classroom materials is vicariously imbibed by the plastic minds of young children.

Questions

1. What are two films or television shows that you have seen recently that you would put in the category of pseudo-culture? And two that you would consider culture in the true sense of the word? What are your reasons?

6. A Balance of East and West

Sarkar's written legacy spans a great range of topics: spiritual philosophy, cosmology, human psychology, philosophy of science, social philosophy, economics and philology. And this does not include his most extensive work, a Bengali dictionary (which remained unfinished) and some 5000 songs expressing a great range of spiritual sentiments.

What are the common threads that link this breadth of topics? Word frequency analysis reveals that the two most common words in Sarkar's written output are "human" and "mind". And indeed it could be argued that what Sarkar was most concerned about was the right use of mind to ensure human happiness. There is however one concept that appears frequently throughout Sarkar's work and could be regarded as the capstone which ties it all together: *subjective approach and objective adjustment*.

Subjective approach – Objective adjustment

This concept is so important in Sarkar's work that near the end of his life he appeared to elevate it to moral status in two principals of Neo-ethics:

- Spiritual realisation, being that which motivates virtue, sustains a subtle mind, and drives social progress, "must be accepted as the supreme desideratum in human life".
- There should be a happy adjustment and balanced blending of the different kinds of sustenance required for the many dimensions of human life (physical, emotional, sentimental, intellectual, social, aesthetic, moral and spiritual).

The first principal captures the essence of *subjective approach*. The goal of human life is *internal* and *singular*. All sentiments, all rationality, all desires, all thoughts and actions, all moral codes only acquire meaning in relation to this singular point. The second principal suggests *objective adjustment*. Objective adjustment requires continual change in how one lives in the world because the external worlds of matter and mind are always changing. There is a simple metaphor to clarify this seeming paradox. A yachtsman sailing across the Pacific Ocean will chart a course for San Francisco. The destination is singular. But every hour of every day he must adjust rudder and sails to account for shifting currents, winds and swell. Every moment presents a different circumstance – if no adjustments are made, the destination will never be reached. Therefore subjective approach and objective adjustment is the only rational approach.

Questions

1. The biological sciences tells us that life is an unstable equilibrium and much effort is required to maintain homeostasis. What is the difference between a stable and an unstable equilibrium?
2. Sarkar describes life as follows: *Life is a ceaseless fight to restore an unstable equilibrium.*¹³⁶ Can you give examples of this phenomenon both physiological and psychological?
3. *To maintain balance in life is the spiritual path!* Comment on this thought.

¹³⁶ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, "Conflict" in "Talks on Prout", Original discourse 1961, Published in *Prout in a Nutshell 15*, 1st edition. Kolkata: A.M. Publications.

A Balance of Cultures

We introduced Neohumanism as a synthesis of two great civilising traditions, European humanism and Asian spirituality. Elsewhere Sarkar was explicit: the future of humanity depends on a “happy synthesis” of East and West. It seems to be a fitting way to end this introduction to Neohumanism.

The Asian countries, in spite of their long heritage of morality and spirituality, have been subject to great humiliation during periods of foreign invasion. While the higher knowledge of philosophy propagated by the oriental sages and saints has been accepted as a unique contribution to the store house of human culture and civilization, the people of these lands could not resist the foreign invaders. The history of all the Asian countries, a region of so many religions, has been dominated by foreign powers for centuries together. This imbalance brought about their material deprivation and political subjugation.

On the other hand, the West is completely obsessed with physical development. It has made spectacular progress in the fields of politics, economics, science, warfare, etc. In fact, it has made so much material progress that it seems to be the sovereign master of the water, land and air. But for all that, it is not socially content and miserably lacks spiritual wealth. Unlike the East, in the West plenty of wealth has created a crisis. Therefore, it is abundantly clear that no country can progress harmoniously with only one-sided development.

Therefore, it behoves both the East and the West to accept a synthetic ideology that stands for a happy synthesis between the two. Here, the East can help the West spiritually, whereas the materialistic West can extend its material help to the East. Both will be mutually benefited if they accept this golden policy of give and take...

In the educational system of the East, there is the predominant element of spirituality... So the people of the orient could not but be spiritual in their thoughts and actions. Whereas there is, in the Western system of education, a clear and unilateral emphasis on mundane knowledge. So to build up an ideal human society in the future, the balanced emphasis on the two is indispensable.¹³⁷

Neohumanist schools strive to achieve this balance, yet no two Neohumanist schools will ever be the same. They can never be formulaic. They will always be a *work in progress*. They work within local culture and of course they also express the commitments and enthusiasms of their principal and teachers. But they do share a common purpose – to cultivate human beings with warm hearts and subtle minds.

Questions

1. It has been said that the East represents *subjective approach* and the West represents *objective adjustment*. From this perspective, can the synthesis of East and West ever be harmonious or will there always be an uneasy tension between them?
2. What might a global culture look like?

¹³⁷ Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, “Talks on Education: Basic Differences in Attitude between the East and the West”, in (EIEdit).

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