**Realism in Education**

**By Dr. V. K. Maheshwari**

Realism is the refinement of our common acceptance of the world as being just what it appears to be. According to it, things are essentially what they seem to be, and, furthermore, in our knowledge they are just the same as they were before entering our consciousness, remaining unchanged by our experiencing them. Although some of the early pre-Christian thinkers dealt with the problems of the physical world (most notably the early Greek physicist- philosophers, Democritus and Leucippus) the first detailed realistic position is generally attributed to Aristotle.

Reality, according to Aristotle was distinguishable into form and matter. Matter is the substance that all things have in common. For Aristotle these to substance were logically separable although always found together in the empirical world. The more closely anything approaches pure form, the higher it reigns in the Aristotle hierarchy. At the top of this hierarchy is pure form, which may be viewed as the highest form of reason. It is the Prime-Mover which gives the universe its orderly nature. Matter, which is at the base of the hierarchy, is nothing by itself. Further up the scale come man, the heavens, and finally the Prime-Mover which is pure form and reason.

**Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century: Comenius and Locke**

Throughout his writings, John Amos Comenius emphasizes the primary importance of the gathering of knowledge or sense data. In 1658 he published his Orbis Pictus, the first successful textbook, which set out the doctrines of sense realism. Comenius felt that the human mind, like a mirror, reflected everything around it.

John Locke was a philosopher as Comenius was an educator, and Locke’s writings reflected this orientation just as Comenius’ showed his lifelong interest in pedagogy. Locke’s greatest contribution both to philosophy and to philosophy of education was his doctrine that ideas are not innate but that all experience is the result of impressions made on the mind by external objects. The implications of this are spelled out in his concept of the tabula rasa or the mind as a blank sheet on which the outside world must leave its impressions. At the time of birth, man’s mind is a blank slate upon which sensory experiences of the world create impressions. All ideas, according to Locke, must come from either sensation or reflection.

**Philosophical Rationale of Realism**

Realism is interested in objects and facts. In general, realists believe in the independent existence of the experiential universe. They have a healthy respect for the “facts” of both the sciences and the social sciences.

Let us look at the old question about the falling tree on the desert island for a moment. The question is usually as follows: “If a tree falls on a desert island and there is no one there to hear it, is there any sound?” How would the idealist and the realist differ in looking at and answering this particular question? If objects exist independent of any knowledge about them, it is obvious that we have an irreconcilable dispute between the realists and the idealists. Where an idealist would say that a tree in the middle of the desert exists only if it is in some mind, or if there is knowledge of it; the realist would hold that whether or not anyone or anything is thinking about the tree, it nonetheless exists. The realist has revolted against the doctrine that things that are in the experiential universe are dependent upon a knower for their existence.

**Knowledge and Truth (Epistemology)**

As idealists emphasize the ontological dimensions of philosophy, the realists focus upon epistemological concerns. Basically, there are two different schools of epistemological thought in the realist camp. While both schools admit the existence and externality of the “real” world, each views the problem of how we can know it in a different way. The realists have been deeply concerned with the problems of epistemology. Realists pride themselves on being “hard-nosed” and not being guilty of dealing with intellectual abstractions

The neorealist describes the knowing process as closely identifying the knower with the object known. They say that the object of external world is **presented** in consciousness, not **represented**. They mean to say that when I perceive an object, it is the same identical object in the world **out-there,** which is in my consciousness. There is not some **go-between** which mediates between me and the object, such as a mental image of the object which is in my consciousness but not out there in the object.

The first position or presentational view of knowledge holds that we know the real object as it exists. This is the positions of the New Realists. When one perceives something, it is the same thing that exists in the “real” world. Thus, mind becomes the relationship between the subject and the object. In this school of thought there can be no major problems of truth since the correspondence theory is ideally applicable. This theory states that a thing is true is as it corresponds to the real world. Since knowledge is by definition correspondence, it must be true.

These real entities and relations can be known in part by the human mind as they are in themselves. Experience shows us that all cognition is intentional or relational in character. Every concept is of something; every judgment about something. The realist holds that this is a peculiar relation by which the knowing act becomes united with, in a nonmaterial sense, or directly identified with something really existent. To know something is to become relationally identified with an existent entity as it is.

The Critical Realists take a different view of knowledge and one, which seems to answer many of Dr. Morris’ criticisms, dealing with errors in perception. Their position is a representational view. This position holds that although something exists in reality our knowledge is not of it, but of a representation of it. Thus, the Critical Realist is faced with the question of how knowledge, if it is not direct apprehension of something, gets to our minds. Or to put it in the terms of the Critical Realists, what is the vehicle of knowledge? We do not know the world directly (epistemological monism) but by means of some intervening phenomenon (epistemological dualism), which effects how we perceive and think about the world.

**Concept of Good  (Axiology)**

The realist believes in natural laws. Man can know natural law and live the good life by obeying it. All man’s experience is rooted in the regularities of the universe or this natural law. In the realm of ethics this natural law is usually referred to as the moral law. These moral laws have the same existential status as the law of gravity in the physical sciences or the economic laws which are supposed to operate in the free market. Every individual has some knowledge of the moral and natural law, but this knowledge may be minimal. Among realists, there are at least two general theories of value: (1) that values are simple indefinable elements, which are experienced for what they are when we experience them, and (2) that values are dependent upon the attitudes of the sentient beings experiencing them.

**Realism: in Education**

For the realist, the world is as it is, and the job of schools would be to teach students about the world. Goodness, for the realist, would be found in the laws of nature and the order of the physical world. Truth would be the simple correspondences of observation. The Realist believes in a world of Things or Beings (metaphysics) and in truth as an Observable Fact. Furthermore, ethics is the law of nature or Natural Law and aesthetics is the reflection of Nature.

Realists do not believe in general and common aims of education. According to them aims are specific to each individual and his perspectives. And each one has different perspectives. The aim of education should be to teach truth rather than beauty, to understand the present practical life. The purpose of education, according to social realists, is to prepare the practical man of the world.

The science realists expressed that the education should be conducted on universal basis. Greater stress should be laid upon the observation of nature and the education of science. Neo-realists aim at developing all round development of the objects with the development of their organs.

The realist’s primary educational aim is to teach those things and values which will lead to the good life. But for the realist, the good life is equated with one which is in tune with the overarching order of natural law. Thus, the primary aim of education becomes to teach the child the natural and moral law, or at least as much of it as we know, so that his generation may lead the right kind life; one in tune with the laws to the universe. There are, of course, more specific aims which will lead to the goals already stated. For example, realists set the school aside as a special place for the accumulation and preservation of knowledge.

Realists just as other philosophers have expressed the aims of education in various forms. According to **John Wild** the aim of education is fourfold to discern the truth about things as they really are and to extend and integrate such truth as is known to gain such practical knowledge of life in general and of professional functions in particular as can be theoretically grounded and justified and finally to transmit this in a coherent and convincing way both to young and to old throughout the human community.

**REALISM AND THE CHILD:**

Realism in education recognizes the importance of the child. The child is a real unit, which has real existence. He has some feelings, some desires and some powers. All these cannot be overlooked. These powers of the child shall have to be given due regarding at the time of planning education. Child can reach near reality through learning by reason. Child has to be given as much freedom as possible. The child is to be enabled to proceed on the basis of facts; The child can learn only when he follows the laws of learning.”

Broudy describes the pupil by elaborating four principles which, according to him, comprise the essence of the human self. These are the appetitive principle the principle of self-determination the principle of self-realization and the principle of self-integration.

The appetitive principle, mentioned first, has to de with the physiological base of personality. Our appetites disclose the need of our tissues to maintain and reproduce themselves. Physiological life, and therefore the life of personality, cannot go on unless these necessary tissue needs are supplied. In order for us to do anything about our tissue needs, except on an animal level, we must be aware of them; and in being aware of them, we realize that pleasure and pain are central.

The self has continuity formal structure antecedents in the past and a yearning toward the future. Our experience has some continuity throughout changing events and places and in order to explain this we must recognize that the self is a common factor in all of these experiences even though there are gaps in consciousness such as when we are asleep or under anesthesia. The self has form as well as continuity. As for determinism rationality requires that we recognize the validity and dependability; of cause-and-effect relations but we do not need to hold to determinism with the meaning that all of our experience is the result of physical forces. Our power to symbolize is one element of our experience that does not bear out the truth of this kind of determinism.

The third principle of selfhood, self-realization supplements freedom as such with value concerns. Freedom does not carry built-in guarantees that it will be turned to good ends. In order to be freedom it must be free to make us miserable. The how of choosing, as well as the what which is chosen is a necessary ingredient of the good life.

The child is to be understood a creature of the real world there is no sense in making him a God. He has to be trained to become a man only.  To the realist, the student is a functioning organism, which through sensory experience, can perceive the natural order of the world. The pupil, as viewed by many realists, is not free but is subject to natural laws. It is not at all uncommon to find realists advocating a behavioristic psychology. The pupil must come to recognize and respond to the coercive order of nature in those cases where he cannot control his experiences, while learning to control his experiences where such control is possible. At its most extreme, the pupil is viewed as a machine, which can be programmed in a manner similar to the programming of a computer.

**REALISM AND THE TEACHER:**

The teacher, for the realist, is simply a guide. The real world exists, and the teacher is responsible for introducing the student to it. To do this he uses lectures, demonstrations, and sensory experiences, the teacher does not do this in a random or haphazard way; he must not only introduce the student to nature, but show him the regularities, the “rhythm” of nature so that he may come to understand natural law. Both the teacher and the student are spectators, but while the student looks at the world through innocent eyes, the teacher must explain it to him, as well as he is able, from his vantage point of increased sophistication. For this reason, the teacher’s own biases and personality should be as muted as possible. In order to give the student as much accurate information as quickly and effectively as possible, the realist may advocate the use of teaching machines to remove the teacher’s bias from factual presentation.

The whole concept to teaching machines is compatible with the picture or reality as a mechanistic universe in which man is simply one of the cogs in the machine.

A teacher should be such that he himself be educated and well versed with the customs of belief and rights and duties of people, and the trends of all ages and places. He must have full mastery of the knowledge of present life. He must guide the student towards the hard realities of life. He is neither pessimist, nor optimist.

He must be able to expose children to the problems of life and the world around.

To master one’s own environing life natural, social through knowledge of the broader life of the ancients.

**REALISM AND CURRICULAM:**

**According to humanistic realism,** classical literature should be studied but not for studying its form and style but for its content and ideas it contained.

**Sense-realism-** attached more importance to the study of natural sciences and contemporary social life. Study of languages is not so significant as the study of natural sciences and contemporary life.

**Neo-realism-** gives stress on the subject physics and on humanistic feelings, physics and psychology, sociology, economics, Ethics, Politics, history, Geography, agriculture varied arts, languages and so on, are the main subjects to be studied according to the Neo-realists

**Subject matter is the matter of the physical universe**- the Real World- taught in such a way as to show the orderliness underlying the universe. The laws of nature, the realist believes, are most readily understood through the subjects of nature, namely the sciences in all their many branches. As we study nature and gather data, we can see the underlying order of the universe. The highest form of this order is found in mathematics. Mathematics is a precise, abstract, symbolic system for describing the laws of the universe. Even in the social sciences we find the realist’s conception of the universe shaping the subject matter, for they deal with the mechanical and natural forces which bear on human behavior. The realist views the curriculum as reducible to knowledge position espoused by E.L. Thorndike that whatever exists must exist in some amount and therefore be measurable.

**REALISM AND METHODS OF TEACHING**

The method of the realists involves teaching for the mastery of facts in order to develop an understanding of natural law. This can be done by teaching both the materials and their application. In fact, real knowledge comes only when the organism can organize the data of experience. The realist prefers to use inductive logic, going from the particular facts of sensory experience to the more general laws deducible from these data. These general laws are seen as universal natural law.

When only one response is repeated for one stimulus, it conditioned by that stimulus. Now wherever that situation comes, response will be the same; this is the fact.

For Herbart, education was applied psychology. **The five-step method he developed was as follows:**

**Preparation:** An attempt is made to have the student recall earlier materials to which the new knowledge might be related. The purpose of the lesson is explained and an attempt to interest the learner is made.

**Presentation**: The new facts and materials are set forth and explained.

**Association:** A definite attempt is made to show similarities and differences and to draw comparisons between the new materials and those already learned and absorbed into the apperceptive mass.

**Generalization:** The drawing of inferences from the materials and an attempt to find a general rule, principal, or law.

**Application:** In general this meant the working of academic exercises and problems based on both the new information and the relevant related information in the appreciative mass.

In their method, the realist depends on motivation the student. But this is not difficult since many realists view the interests of the learner as fundamental urges toward an understanding of natural law rooted in our common sense. The understanding of natural law comes through the organizing of data through insight. The realist in their method approves anything which involves learning through sensory experience whether it be direct or indirect. Not only are field trips considered valuable, but the realist advocates the use of films, filmstrips, records, television, radio, and any other audiovisual aids which might serve in the place of direct sensory experience when such experience is not readily available. This does not mean that the realist denies the validity of symbolic knowledge. Rather it implies that the symbol has no special existential status but is viewed simply as a means of communicating about, or representing, the real world.

**A teacher should always keep in mind**-

* Education should proceed from simple to complex and from concrete to abstract.
* Students to be taught to analyze rather than  to construct.
* Vernacular to be the medium of instruction.
* Individual’s experience and spirit of inquiry is more important than authority.
* No unintelligent cramming. More emphasis on questioning and understanding.
* Re-capitulation is necessary to make the knowledge permanent.
* One subject should be taught at one time.
* No pressure or coercion be brought upon the child.
* The uniformity should be the basic principle in all things.
* Things should be introduced first and then the words.
* The entire knowledge should be gained after experience.
* There should be a co-relation between utility in daily life and education.
* The simple rules should be defined.
* To find out the interest of the child and to teach accordingly.

Thus, the realism has brought great effect in various fields of education. The aims, the curriculum, the methods of teaching the outlook towards the child, the teachers, the discipline and the system of education all were given new blood. Realism in education dragged the education from the old traditions, idealism and the high and low tides to the real surface.

From this very general philosophical position, the Realist would tend to view the Learner as a sense mechanism, the Teacher as a demonstrator, the Curriculum as the subject matter of the physical world (emphasizing mathematics, science, etc.), the Teaching Method as mastering facts and information, and the Social Policy of the school as transmitting the settled knowledge of Western civilization. The realist would favor a school dominated by subjects of the here-and-now world, such as math and science. Students would be taught factual information for mastery. The teacher would impart knowledge of this reality to students or display such reality for observation and study. Classrooms would be highly ordered and disciplined, like nature, and the students would be passive participants in the study of things. Changes in school would be perceived as a natural evolution toward a perfection of order.

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