

Unit–2

CLASSICAL & MODERN PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON EDUCATION I

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Idealism is a philosophical approach that has as its central tenet that ideas are the only true reality, the only thing worth knowing. In a search for truth, beauty, and justice that is enduring and everlasting; the focus is on conscious reasoning in the mind. Plato, father of Idealism, espoused this view about 400 years BC, in his famous book, *The Republic*. Plato believed that there are two worlds. The first is the spiritual or mental world, which is eternal, permanent, orderly, regular, and universal. There is also the world of appearance, the world experienced through sight, touch, smell, taste, and sound, which is changing, imperfect, and disorderly. This division is often referred to as the duality of mind and body. To

understand truth, one must pursue knowledge and identify with the absolute mind. In idealism, the aim of education is to discover and develop each individual's abilities and full moral excellence in order to better serve society. The curricular emphasis is subject matter of mind: literature, history, philosophy, and religion. Teaching methods focus on handling ideas through lecture, discussion, and Socratic dialogue (a method of teaching that uses questioning to help students discover and clarify knowledge). Introspection, intuition, insight, and whole-part logic are used to bring to consciousness the forms or concepts which are latent in the mind.

The other ancient Greek philosophy is Realism. Realists believe that reality exists independent of the human mind. The ultimate reality is the world of physical objects. The focus is on the body/objects. Truth is objective-what can be observed. Aristotle, a student of Plato who broke with his mentor's idealist philosophy, is called the father of both Realism and the scientific method. In this metaphysical view, the aim is to understand objective reality through "the diligent and unsparing scrutiny of all observable data." Aristotle believed that to understand an object, its ultimate form had to be understood, which does not change. Aristotle also was the first to teach logic as a formal discipline in order to be able to reason about physical events and aspects. The exercise of rational thought is viewed as the ultimate purpose for humankind. The realist curriculum emphasizes the subject matter of the physical world, particularly science and mathematics. Teaching methods focus on mastery of facts and basic skills through demonstration and recitation.

2.2 OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, you will be able to:

1. Define Idealism and Realism.
2. Compare Idealism and Realism.
3. Analyze curriculum on the basis of Idealism and Realism.
4. Discuss the main tenets of Idealism and Realism.
5. Evaluate the Role of Realism in the History of Education.

2.3 IDEALISM

Idealism is one of the oldest schools of thought in the world of philosophy, originating in human nature itself, continuing from the primitive man to his present counterpart in some modified form the other. From the idealistic and point it has **overtone of spirituality since it believes that the ultimate existing element is spiritual in nature.** The entire universe is an extension of them in do soul. From the epistemological stand point it is better called Idealism, implying there by that thought or idea has greater validity than the physical object. From then or most and point it is accurately represented by the term Idealism which means that the theory attaches greater importance to ideals than of acts in this world. Obviously, the term idealism connotes different concepts when placed in various contexts. Whatever the context, the word definitely represents a particular theory in philosophy (Ornstein & Levine, 2008).

2.3.1 Chief Characteristics of Idealism

It has always been believed that idealism is the philosophic theory which is a complete contradiction of the theory known as realism. Idealism has the following characteristics:

1. Universe subsists within the spirit or mind. According to this philosophic theory, the entire world is fundamentally of the nature of spirit or mind which accounts for its being called idealism.
2. Mechanistic explanation of universe is inadequate. Idealists refuse to accept that the world or

universe is susceptible to a mechanical explanation, or to believe that the processes of Nature can be explained on a mechanistic principle. For this reason, the idealists are opposed to all deterministic thinking.

3. Teleological explanation of universe. Opposed to the mechanistic explanations of the universe the idealists turn to a teleological theory which holds that human life and natural processes have a common objective which both are simultaneously trying to achieve. They do not object to or reject science but for them the scientific explanation of the universe is not the last word on the subject. Their standpoint is best exemplified by the axiological attitude.
4. Synthesis between Man and Nature. It becomes inevitable for the idealists to believe that there is harmony between the natural processes and human activity. Both Man and Nature are busy in working out a common destiny.
5. Man is central to the universe. Idealists are also humanists from this standpoint. They believe that man, being the ultimate in spiritual existents, is central to the universe. Human life has a universal and omniscient importance or value. And in man's ultimate good lies the final objective of the universe. It is in man that mind, the spiritual element underlying the entire universe, realizes its essential and purest nature.
6. Special attention to the normative and social sciences. Opposed to the realists and the materialists, the spiritualists or idealists do not accept the scientific explanation of the universe, based on scientific laws. They prefer the assistance of the normative and the social sciences in their own scheme of the universe. Ethics, aesthetics and logic make up the three normative sciences while the chief among the social sciences are psychology and sociology. The idealistic explanation of the universe makes greater use of psychology, ethics, logic, aesthetics, etc., than of chemistry, physics, mathematics and the rest of the natural sciences. It is only natural for such an explanation to be completely opposed to the materialistic or naturalistic explanation of the universe.
7. Evaluative explanation of the universe. In other words, the idealists profess an evaluative explanation of the universe and of human life, which is what makes them idealists. It should be kept in mind that the term idealists do not imply the vague-minded dreamer or imaginative visionary. The idealist does not reject the assistance of the natural sciences in comprehending the universe but he does not accept such natural facts to be the be all and end all of human life. His notion comprehends the realization of truth, beauty and goodness in human life.
8. Conceptualists. In the field of epistemology, the idealist is better called a conceptualist since he believes that the object has no existence apart from its concept. In professing this view the idealist propounds a theory completely at variance with the realist conception of the problem. He believes that the object and its qualities do not have any existence independent of the conception of them. Knowledge influences them. Knowledge of an object occurs not directly but indirectly, through the medium of thought. Objects are not public, since they change with the viewpoint from which they are observed. An object has no existence apart from the thought of it. Existence lies in being related to consciousness.
9. Universe is knowledge. The idealists hold that the universe can be known through the medium of reason or mind since both mind and the universe are invested with an identical spiritual element. Hegel goes so far as to establish an identity between mind and Nature by positing that mental categories coincide with stages in the development of the universe. Whatever the minor differences among them, all idealists hold that the universe is knowable.
10. Emphasis on the mental or spiritual aspect of universe. Another important characteristic of the idealist thought is that it emphasizes the mental or spiritual aspects of the universe without nullifying or completely rejecting materialistic explanations of it. It is this higher aspect which conveys some meaning to the lower or material aspect. And everywhere the lower can be explained in terms of the higher. The naturalists or materialists reverse this by explaining the higher in terms of the lower. Idealism opposes this process (Shrivastava, 2003).

2.3.2 Types of Idealism

Generally speaking, there are many varieties of idealism in vogue but the more prominent ones can be conveniently listed as follows:

1. **Subjective Idealism.** This particular species of idealism is to be found in the thought of Berkeley, the British philosopher in the tradition of empiricism. It is termed subjective since it holds that all objects of knowledge are subjective in as much that they depend upon the mind. It is equivalent to a conceptual theory since it also holds that the universe is composed of either minds alone or of minds and their ideas, nothing else besides. According to Berkeley, existence lies in perception, meaning thereby that a thing exists only when it is the subject of perception. Anything which cannot be the subject of mind cannot exist. He does not imply thereby that the object must be a subject of only a mind, but of any mind that exists in the universe. It is also difficult to have an infinite number of thoughts in one mind which is finite; they can exist only in an infinite mind, and this mind is God. Subjective idealism also holds that the qualities of an object have existence as elements in perception, not otherwise. Images depend upon the human mind while objects have their existence since they are perceived by God. Objects correspond to the knowledge of them while knowledge corresponds to the objects. Knowledge is direct awareness of the object. Objects are not public.
2. **Phenomenalism.** This particular form of idealism was propounded by Kant the German philosopher. Kant's first discovery concerned the limits of man's knowledge, and it led him to the conclusion that the only knowledge that is possible to man is knowledge of the phenomenon. From this hypothesis he proceeded to argue that objects are phenomenal, that their existence as well as the existence of their qualities depends upon their being known. An object is just as it appears to being its phenomenal appearance. There is direct knowledge of the phenomenal object, and this knowledge depends upon the construction of the mind. We can never know the thing-in-itself, or what is otherwise called the Noumenal reality. Therefore, this kind of reasoning leads subjective idealism to a kind of scepticism. This type of idealism finds its greatest difficulties in the duality it has posited between phenomenal and noumenal reality, object and its sensations and their classes, and between the mind and its categories of thought. Hegel is the most important thinker of all those who indulged in the effort of trying to resolve this dualism.
3. **Objective Idealism.** The Hegelian form of idealism is also known as objective idealism. According to Hegel the ultimate reality is the absolute eternal substance, outside which nothing can and does exist. If he believed this, then obviously his thought resembled the subjective idealism of Berkeley. But his idealism is given a different designation for he combines it with a touch of realism. He believed that although objects are not independent of the mind they are real and not dependent upon the finite mind. He accepts the independent existence of objects that is independent of the finite mind. Hence the name objective idealism. Deviating from the dualism between phenomenal and noumenal reality created by Kant, Hegel believes that objects are just what they appear to be although the perception of them changes along with the change in our knowledge of them. The existence of objects does depend upon knowledge and so does the existence of their qualities. The nature or form of objects is determined by knowledge, which is direct. This knowledge of objects is private and personal rather than public because they are the subjects of individual and private minds, not limited by another mind. The Absolute is the ultimate subject, within which all the limited objects are mutually related. From the standpoint of the Absolute all knowledge is subjective but from man's standpoint it is objective. Hegel, therefore, represents the line of objective idealists.

2.3.3 Idealism in Education

Ever since knowledge dawned in human mind man has been thinking about problems ontological, epistemological, eschatological and axiological. The questions of philosophy in the beginning of human knowledge were everywhere mixed with psychological problems. Thus, psychology in the beginning was concerned with the nature of the mind and the processes of consciousness. As men lived in small groups and the society was generally confined to a particular village, city or group of villages, the solutions offered were simple. There was hardly any distinction between social and political problems as the

political institutions were developed as a means to social welfare. Therefore, most of the ancient thinkers did not distinguish between social philosophy and political philosophy. As the life was simple and social stratification and differentiation was not complex the thinkers offered solutions working in more than one field of knowledge. Most of the thinkers were teachers and men of education who used to pass their life completely free from worldly affairs. The state and the society generally extended support to these scholars and they were generally respected and followed. The job of instruction and education of the younger generation was generally entrusted to these men of letters. The state supported finance but not interfered in the process of education. These great teachers formed their own personal institutions where their disciples collected to hear their learned discourses and learn through their lives. In this way, society was generally governed by the teachings of these great scholars though the administrative machinery was almost everywhere in the hands of the state.

2.3.4 Aims and Ideals of Education

Idealism has influenced every sphere of education. In the first place we will glance at the impact of idealism on the aims of education. Since idealism believes human personality to be the most important, it wants education to aim at the development of human personality culminating in self-realization. In the words of Home, "The end of ends, the goal of goals, according to Idealism, is the increasing realization of the Absolute Idea for the individual, society and the race". Further explaining this aim of education, Rusk has commented, "We may accept that the aim of education is the enhancement or enrichment of personality, the differentiating feature of which is the embodiment of universal values".¹ These universal values are expressed as the beauty, goodness and truth, and the aim of education is to concretise these values in the child's life. Thus the idealists cherish the following aims and ideals of education:

1. Development of personality. As has been already pointed out, the most important aim of education, according to the idealist thinkers, both ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, is the development of personality. This has been called man-making by Vivekananda. Explaining this ideal of education, Herman Harell Home says, "The forces that make men and women I find to be heredity, environment and will. Education is not a fourth elemental force, but it does its work in cooperation with these three. Education, through public-opinion influences and may come to control, the force of heredity, it is itself a part of the physical and social environment; it assists in the formation of will. By consciously directing, through education and otherwise, these forces shall in time have the true superman of our modern dreams, as well as the ideal people of Plato's Republic. But unlike Plato and Shaw, we shall have to work through, not without, the family as an institution."
2. The idealists believe that man is God's finest and ultimate creation. That is why development of the human personality has been accepted as the aim of education, and stress has been laid on the teaching of humanitarian subjects such a literature, art, religion, ethics, etc. Through education the cultural and social heritage of the community must be maintained and transmitted to the following generations. Some other idealists believe that the aim of education is to guide the individual to self-realization, for this also includes the development of the personality. Such development, in fact, is the development of those divine qualities which are inherent in human beings but which are dormant at his birth. The educator's task is to manifest these qualities. And for this reason every human being has an equal right to education.
3. Self-realisation. As has been already pointed out, according to idealists the aim of education is self-realisation. This is the individualist aim of education emphasised by the idealist.
4. Development of will power. Self-realisation requires development of will power. H.H. Home has given eight points for the realisation of this ideal:
 - (i) The training of the will should be indirect by activity rather than idea.
 - (ii) The object lesson method according to time and context should be used.
 - (iii) The power of will should be increased by self-suggestion, knowledge and practice.
 - (iv) Practice is the only way to acquire will power.
 - (v) Proper discipline leads to will power.

- (vi) The educands should be acquainted of facts concerning nature and society.
 - (vii) Development of moral character by ethical instruction.
 - (viii) Freedom to make choice in most of the matters concerning the individual.
5. Synthesis of Man and Nature. Another aspect of the idealistic conception of education is the synthesis between nature and human beings. Adams has suggested that education must aim at achieving an understanding of nature in human beings and educating them to achieve harmony with it. This can be done by acquainting the educated with the permanent laws which guide and control natural phenomena. These laws of nature are the causes of all natural activity. Only through such knowledge can the educand arrive at a harmony with all that lies around him.
 6. Cultural Development. Greatest significance is attached to the cultural environment created by religion, morality, art, literature, mathematics, science, etc. That is why the idealist tendency is to stress the teaching of humanities so that the cultural and social heritage is maintained intact and allowed to grow. Education is also concerned with enabling the individual to make his own contribution to the cultural development of the community. The ideals of beauty, goodness and truth are the spiritual ideals of the human race, and the child has to be trained to achieve them in reality. Education must transform the child into a true human being by educating him to manifest the divine qualities which are invested in him. The idealists argue that there is system in every part of the universe, and hence the individual must also be taught to create some system in his life through intellectual and spiritual guidance. For this it is essential to develop every aspect of his life—the physical, moral, ethical, intellectual, spiritual and the aesthetic. Failure to develop any one of these would create an imbalance in the individual's personality. In the words of Froebel, "The object of education is the realisation of a faithful, pure, inviolable and hence holy life. Education should lead and guide man to clearness concerning himself, and in himself, to face with nature, and to unity with God".
 7. Exploration of Universal Values. Idealism places more emphasis upon more universal objects of education. Ross puts it thus, "The function of education is to help us in our exploration of the ultimate universal values so that the truth of the universe may become our truth and give power to our life. Education must aim at adapting not only to the physical environment but to every kind of environment."³ Rusk points out, "The purpose of education is to enable the child to reconcile himself to reality in all its manifestations, not merely to adapt himself to a natural environment". From among all these various kinds of environment, the cultural environment is considered to be the most important because man's cultural characteristics are his most distinctive qualities.

2.3.5 Idealism and Curriculum

Explaining the idealist bases of curriculum as the imparting of spiritual and cultural heritage to the child along with his self and personality development, Herman H. Horne writes, "It is better to centre education in ideals for children and the race rather than in children themselves. After all children are immature, dependent and plastic members of the race. They are often irrational in their individuality." As Socrates said in effect to the sophists, "Not man but reason is the measure of all things, not individuality but universality, not percepts, but concepts. Ideals are the norms for all human experience, including that of children. After all, it is still true that obedience to just law is a virtue, that following physical laws leads to health, that truth is something to be discovered, rather than made, that conformity is a large element even in creativity, that repression is a necessary phase of expression. Under the influence of paidocentrism (what a hybrid), self-expression may easily become self-explosion."

Idealists insist on emphasis being placed on the study of humanities such as literature, art, religion, morality, etc., along with the teaching of science. All the elements necessary for attaining God are included in the curriculum suggested by idealistic followers of Plato, who laid down that education must aim to realize the ideals of truth, beauty and goodness. Hence, he has suggested the inclusion of all those subjects or disciplines which help in the realization of these ideals. Most significant among man's

activities are the intellectual, the aesthetic and the moral. The teaching of language, literature, history, geography, mathematics and science will encourage intellectual activity while the aesthetic impulse can be reinforced through art and poetry. Moral activities can be taught and instilled in the educand through the teaching of religion, ethics, etc. This curriculum is determined on the basis of the goals to be realized through education and by the criterion that it must reflect the experience, culture and glory of the human race. Man's experiences relate not only to his physical or natural environment but also to his social experiences, knowledge of which can be obtained through a study of the natural and the social sciences.

James Ross, the educationist, has classified human activity in two groups—physical actions and spiritual activity. Physical activity includes the entire range of actions relating to bodily welfare and to motor skills. The teaching of these must also be a part of education and they can be taught through physiology, exercise, medicine, hygiene, etc. Spiritual activity comprehends all intellectual, ethical, aesthetic and religious activity, all of which can be taught through history, geography, science, mathematics, language, ethics, art and religion. Herbart, the idealist philosopher of education, grants these subjects the main place in the curriculum because these subjects can contribute more than any other to the spiritual progress of man. But this is the shortcoming of the idealistic philosophy because it does not attach any significance to the teaching of science. Herbart points out that the part that literature and history can play in the spiritual development of man, cannot be played by science.

For that reason, scientific subjects such as the natural sciences, mathematics and even history and geography are granted a secondary role.

T.P. Nunn, another educationist, has glanced at the idealistic conception of the educational curriculum, and has remarked, "The school is to consolidate the nation's spiritual strength, to maintain its historic continuity, to secure its achievements, and to guarantee its future".⁴ In order to achieve all these goals, education in the school should consider two kinds of activities. In the first group fall such activities which create conditions by which the individual and social life is ensured and maintained, and this can be done through physical health, customs, social organisations, ethical conduct, etiquette, religion, etc. Education must provide opportunities, therefore, for physical training, ethics, religion, etc. The second group of activities is the one which is more important outside the sphere of the school. In this group lie those activities which maintain the cultural life of the community because they are creative. In order to evolve skills for such activities, educationists advocate teaching of literature, art, music, various kinds of handicrafts and manual skills, sciences, mathematics, history, etc. Hence the curriculum must be so designed that it can help to acquaint the individual with his social and cultural heritage and also to enable him to make some positive contribution to this heritage. Nunn writes, "In the school curriculum all these activities should be represented. For these are the grand expression of the human spirit, and theirs are the forms in which the creative energies of every generation must be disciplined if the movement of civilization is to be worthily maintained."⁵

2.3.6 Idealism and the Educator

Idealistic pattern of education grants the highest place to the educator, and conceives of the educator and educand as two parts of an organic plan. The educator creates a specific environment for the educand's development and provides guidance so that the latter may progress towards perfection and a rounded personality. The most precise explanation of the educator's role is manifested in Froebel's kindergarten pattern of education, in which the school is treated as a garden, the educand as a delicate plant which requires nurturing and the educator as the cautious gardener. Although even in the absence of the gardener the plant will continue to grow and will inevitably follow the laws governing its nature, the gardener has a certain significance in that he has the skill to develop plants. He may be unable to change a rose into a cabbage, but he certainly can contribute his mite to the plant's development. His efforts help in achieving perfection in this development, a level of perfection which would otherwise have been impossible. The educator plays a parallel role in the school. He can guide the educand appropriately

because he knows the rules which govern the latter's development. Through his guidance he can make this natural development into a process leading to perfection and beauty. Ross explains, "The naturalist may be content with briars, but the idealist wants fine developing according to the laws of nature, to attain levels that would otherwise be denied to him".⁶ Clearly, the idealists attach much more value to the educator than do the naturalists. Adams opined that both the educator and the educand are two parts of the intellectual universe both of which should be considered equally important. The educator inspires the educand to realize the ideals of truth, goodness and beauty, and guides him along the path to its realization.

2.3.7 Idealism and Educational Methods

Turning to methodology in education, idealists suggest that the method must be oriented to achieving the complete development of all the innate abilities of the child and to train him for self-realization. In Rivers' words, "The process of education in childhood consists, or should consist, in the direction of innate or instinctive tendencies towards an end in harmony with the highest good of society of which the child is an active member. Idealists believe in a harmony between individual and social objectives. The child must be provided with a liberal environment for his development and his education should be related to present experience. One finds, therefore, that many elements of the idealist methodology are common with those of the naturalist, realist and pragmatist methodology.

The idealist methodology in education lays special stress on the three following processes:

1. **Instruction.** The term instruction as used here implies educational instruction which is believed by Herbart to be essential to education. But instruction does not mean that the child's mind should be stuffed with various scraps of information. It implies a modification and a refinement of the child's mind. For this it is essential that the educator must provide sympathetic guidance. The idealists believe that training of all kinds must be provided in the school.
2. **Activity.** Like the naturalist methodology, the educational methods recommended by the idealists also are based on activity. The child must learn through doing. Although the child can learn much by asking questions after lectures in the school, creative activity is much more important. This creative activity should be natural, continuous and progressive. This helps in moving towards self-realization, because it encourages the child to manifest his innate tendencies. Through mental activity the child learns cheerfully and happily and this also helps in the development of his personality. Besides, by these means the child learns rapidly. Hence, idealists also stress that instruction should be active.
3. **Experience.** Idealist methodology also places considerable stress on experience. Every educand must base all his education on his own experience. The educator's task is not to stuff his own experience in the educand's mind but to provide the latter some insight into his own experience. The guidance given by the educator helps to manifest many frustrated and repressed tendencies and drives of the educand. Independence is an essential pre-requisite for experience. For this reason, idealists believe freedom to be an essential part of education but it must be remembered that this freedom is not absolute, but controlled and guided.

It is evident from the foregoing account that idealists believe the experiences of both the educator and the educand to be of great importance. Both of them should be active and they should indulge in the mutual exchange of experience so that they can progress. The teaching method should be such that the child should recognise it as a mode of self-instruction.

2.3.8 Idealism and Discipline

Discipline is a part of the question concerning educational methods and some people feel that idealists are in complete opposition to the naturalists for the latter believe in complete freedom while the former insist on discipline. The only grain of truth in this assumption is that idealists stress the value of discipline as part of the educative process, without, in any way, detracting from the importance of freedom and liberty.

In fact, idealists interpret discipline as being based on independence and they try to harmonize the two. Rigorous discipline is never accepted by the idealists. Discipline must always take the shape of self-discipline, because only then can it guide the educand along the path of self-realization. Education basically aims at training the child in true independence. It is argued that the child is not independent at birth. This independence is granted to him or acquired by him in the process of education because, in the absence of education, there is no self-realisation, and without self-realization there is no independence. Rousseau believed that the individual was born free but that later on he is bound in chains. On the contrary, Froebel expressed the conviction that man is born in chains, and that he has to steadily win this freedom for himself, for, no one can grant it to him. Independence is not a divine gift, because even God cannot give independence. True independence can be won only by oneself, by one's own acts. Through the medium of education, the individual can break the chains which bind him at birth. The educator must develop in his educands the capability of reasoning and arriving at a decision by the use of which the educand can achieve his own development, naturally and by his own inspiration. Independence lies not in a revolt against the environment but in achieving harmony with it. Hence, the child must be trained for independence in the school. He should be taught to discipline himself and to contribute to the disciplined behaviour of others, besides himself. Through a steady development of this kind, the individual becomes the member of a group of self-disciplined individuals. It can thus be concluded that the idealists do not favour the notion of allowing the child to roam free of any restraint but prefer to guide his freedom. For this reason, the child's activities are controlled in the school. Physical punishment and external restraints are not the methods of achieving this. It is better realized through developing such qualities as self-resignation, obedience, humanity, politeness, etc. Once these qualities are evolved in the individual, he achieves a stage of self-discipline. Froebel denies any importance to any system of punishment. Instead, he believes that it is better to encourage self-control and self-guidance in the child through sympathy. He believes that the child should not be submitted to any external pressure. It is only through discipline that the child can realize the ideals of education, and once it has understood this, it can discipline itself. Idealists, therefore, believe in the efficacy of discipline through influence and impression, not through fear and coercion. But, discipline can be created among the educands only when the educators themselves create and present good models of discipline. Their own conduct and behaviour should be conditioned by a knowledge of the child's interests and inclinations. In their own behaviour, they must present the highest ideal of self-discipline, for only then can any discipline be expected from the educand. Idealists have criticized the establishment of discipline through threats, repression and punishment. They believe that the entire natural, social and spiritual environment in which the child lives should be fashioned in such a way that it should encourage the desire for self-discipline in the child. Plato believed that the child in the school is restrained with the intention that he may be granted greater liberty gradually as he develops higher. As the individual develops to a level of higher responsibility, he should be granted successively more liberty.

2.3.9 Idealism in Contemporary Education

Though idealism may have been very much left aside in the contemporary field of education, it is undoubtedly the most ancient school which has influenced education throughout its history. Even now the following points may be noted concerning the influence of idealism in the contemporary field of education.

1. Wider and higher aims. As the nationalist aims of education are giving place to humanist aim, idealism has become more relevant to the modern educationist. The idealists present the highest and the widest aims and ideals of education summed up in such terms as self-realisation, man-making, development of personality, harmony of man and nature, realisation of truth, goodness and beauty and realisation of heaven upon earth. All these aims have been emphasised by contemporary philosophers of education in East and West.
2. The ideal teacher. In this age of science, the model of ideal teacher is still presented by idealism. Whatever may be said about the need of practical education and the utilization of scientific means, no teacher can influence the educands without some sort of idealism. Teaching involves

communication which very much depends upon rapport between the teacher and the taught. This is possible only when the teacher considers the taught as a part of his self and thus becomes selfless in his profession. The ideal of character building cannot be achieved unless the teacher himself presents the model of ideal character.

3. Integrated and multisided curriculum. While other systems of philosophy of education lay emphasis upon science and technology, the idealists point out the eternal value of humanities, social sciences, art and literature. In fact, they lay emphasis upon an integrated curriculum which may include every branch of knowledge. Thus the idealist curriculum is the most liberal, the most dynamic, the most multisided and therefore, most conducive to the cultural development of the individual and society.
4. Moral education. Thinkers everywhere today lament at the general loss of moral character. Everywhere development of moral character is being considered as an urgent need, to save the world from future catastrophe. The idealists explain the aims and means of moral education.
5. Self-discipline. The idealist concept of freedom as self-discipline has come to stay. It prescribes central place to the child in the system of education and lays emphasis upon natural development. Natural development requires freedom but freedom cannot be enjoyed without self-discipline. Contemporary educationists unanimously accept the need of freedom and discipline and agree that self-discipline is the only way for proper development.
6. Psychological methods. Even the pragmatists agree that some sort of idealism is necessary for teaching, particularly that of humanities, art and literature. The idealists include instruction, activity and experience in their methods of teaching. The idealist method of teaching is most effective in religious and moral teaching. It is a solid ground for character building and realisation of intimate relations between the teacher and the taught.

In spite of the abovementioned contribution of idealism to education, today it is more and more being left in the background while pragmatism and realism are coming to the front. This is due to the following disadvantages of the idealist philosophy of education:

1. Utopian aims. Plato, the first idealist philosopher of education, presented a scheme which was through and through Utopian in spite of its deep insight into human life here and there. In fact, in his idealistic flight the thinker often leaves the solid ground and presents aims and ideals which can be neither realised nor cherished.
2. Theoretical methods. The idealist method of teaching makes too much of memory, personal contact and brain faculties. They lay less emphasis upon the development of various types of interests and abilities which help the educand in playing important role in society.
3. Lack of specialization. The idealist curriculum is too wide and lacks specialisation which is a growing demand of modern education.
4. Neglect of science and technology. The idealist thinkers have laid emphasis upon culture in education and neglected science and technology. Therefore, today most of the educational institutions have rejected idealistic curriculum.
5. Teacher-centred. While modern education is child-centred or educand-centred, the idealist system is teacher-centred. By expecting too much from the teacher it does not allow him to live as a human being with a multisided personality. Too much expectation from the teacher ultimately results in his criticism by the students and society. The role of teacher today is very much different from his role in ancient times. Education today is a life-long but limited part of life. It goes on even without the teacher. Various audiovisual means are replacing the all-important role of the teacher. Therefore, neither the modern teacher nor the taught accept the ancient idealist concept and status of the teacher.

From the perusal of the above mentioned advantages and disadvantages of the idealist philosophy of education it is clear that though some sort of idealism must stay in every field of education, the aims and ideals, the methods, the curriculum and the school management, etc., the ideal of education cannot be realised without the help of naturalism, pragmatism and realism(Sharma,2002).

2.4 REALISM

Realism is the theory that holds that the existence of objects is real. For this reason, it is also sometimes called objectivism. Both realism and objectivism are metaphysical theories concerned with the existence of things. In epistemology realism holds that in the process of knowledge things are independent of the existence and influence of the knower. Hence the main tenet of this theory in the epistemological field is that object and its qualities are independent of and uninfluenced by the knower and the process of knowledge (Ornstein& Levine, 2008).

2.4.1 The Chief Tenets of Realism

As a general rule the chief tenets of realism are the following:

1. Existence of objects is independent of knowledge. According to the native realists objects exist irrespective of our knowledge of them. Scientific realism accepts this notion but according to it thoughts concerning the objects are based on the mind.
2. Qualities are inherent in known objects. According to the naive realist the qualities that are experienced in the objects are part and parcel of the object while the scientific realist distinguishes between primary and secondary qualities, maintaining that primary qualities belong to the object while the secondary are attributed to the object by the mind in the process of knowing.
3. Knowledge does not affect the object or its qualities. According to the naive realist the object or its qualities do not suffer by becoming the subjects of knowledge but according to the scientific realist this theory does not hold true for secondary qualities.
4. Knowledge of objects is direct. According to the naive realist, knowledge of the objects is direct and perceptual. According to representationism, this is true of simple thoughts, for in complex thought knowledge is indirect since complex thoughts are compounded of simple ones.
5. Objects are common. According to the analytical realists objects are common while according to the representationists objects are commonly available only for the purposes of primary or elementary thought. Scientific realism holds that the same object may be experienced different by different individuals.
6. Relation between object and thought. Naive realism holds that there is relation between object and its thought, but the scientific realist rejects this theory (Shrivastava, 2003).

2.4.2 Types of Realism

The main types of realism are the following:

1. Naive realism. This is propounded by common sense according to which objects are independent of mind whether they are known or not. Object possesses its own qualities. Knowledge does not affect the object. The object is precisely what it is seen to be. Objects are known directly and objects are common for all.
2. Representationism. This theory is the product of Locke's mind. It states that the object's existence is independent of knowledge but metaphysical thought depends upon the mind. Primary, objective, individual and secondary qualities are inherent in the object. Knowledge does not impress upon the object but it can influence metaphysical thought. Thoughts are the representations of objects. Knowledge of objects is direct in the case of simple thoughts but indirect in the case of complex ones. In simple thoughts objects are common or universal but not so in complex thinking.
3. Neo-Realism. This is a novel approach to the Platonic theory of reality. In this theory it is believed that the total object is not the subject of knowledge but its aspects are, and they are independent of knowledge. The qualities of the object are its own and knowledge does not affect them. An object is what it is manifestly seen to be. Knowledge of the aspects of an object is direct while logical entities are universal.
4. Critical Realism. The theory was first propounded in America at the turn of the century and is critical in nature. It also believes that the existence of objects does not depend upon knowledge in any way. The object is possessed of qualities and is directly known. Objects may or may not be universal. Critical realism does not hold that the object is previously what it is seen to be or that it is

seen to be exactly what it is. When the object becomes object of knowledge it is influenced by knowledge. Knowledge can be direct as well as indirect. The relation between the knower and known is not direct but takes place through the medium of thought, which is the subject matter of knowledge. Different people can have different knowledge of an identical object.

These different theories of realism have been arranged in order of their historical appearance and none of them has been found to satisfy completely. Each and every one has been objected to and found wanting in some respect.

2.4.3 Comparison of Idealism and Realism

In the varied fields of epistemology, metaphysics and evolution, idealism and realism present two almost completely differing theories. They differ in the following respects:

1. Difference in epistemology. Idealism and realism differ in the following respects on the various questions of epistemology:
 - (i) According to idealism objects have no existence apart from their ideas, while according to realism, objects have an existence independent of any knowledge of them.
 - (ii) Idealism maintains that qualities are imposed on the object by the mind while realism holds that qualities are a part of the object.
 - (iii) The idealistic tenet is that knowledge influences the object and its qualities while the realist theory is that objects cannot be affected in this way.
 - (iv) According to idealism objects are known indirectly through the medium of their ideas but realism holds that objects are known directly.
 - (v) In idealism it is believed that different objects appear differently to different people but in realism it is believed that objects are universal.
2. According to idealism objects are not what they appear to be since their knowledge is indirect but realism maintains that objects are precisely what they appear to be.
 - (i) According to idealism objects have no existence apart from their ideas, while according to realism, objects have an existence independent of any knowledge of them.
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 - (v) In idealism it is believed that different objects appear differently to different people but in realism it is believed that objects are universal.
 - (vi) According to idealism objects are not what they appear to be since their knowledge is indirect but realism maintains that objects are precisely what they appear to be.
4. Metaphysical Differences. From the metaphysical standpoint realism and idealism differ in the

following respects:

- (i) According to the idealists the universe exists within the mind while the realists are of the opinion that the natural world is independent of the mind.
 - (ii) The idealists believe in some kind of synthesis between man and nature while the realists deny the existence of any such synthesis.
 - (iii) Idealism states that man is the centre of the universe while realism does not attach the same importance to man with reference to universe.
 - (iv) Idealists are idealistic while the realists are realistic.
5. Difference on cosmology. Realism and idealism differ in the following respects on questions regarding cosmology:
- (i) According to idealism the mechanistic explanation of the universe is not adequate while realists propound this mechanistic explanation.
 - (ii) Idealism holds that creation of the universe is teleological while the realists do not believe in there being any purpose in creation.
 - (iii) In explaining creation the idealists lay the stress on normative and social sciences while the realists rely more heavily on the natural sciences in their explanation of creation.
 - (iv) Idealism puts forth a value judgment of the creation while realism is more factual in this analysis.
 - (v) According to the idealists the world is known through the mind while realists do not attach so much importance to the mind in understanding the universe.
 - (vi) Idealism stresses the mental and spiritual in its explanation of the world and realism the material and physical.

From the above analysis of idealism and realism it should be fairly obvious that the two theories are almost contradictory and mutually exclusive. In evaluating the two it must be said that idealism seems more appropriate for understanding the values of human life, which is, in fact, the aim of all our knowledge and science. A more comprehensive standpoint, on the other hand, will make it clear that both idealism and realism view the universe from different standpoint, and hence the difference in their respective metaphysics, epistemology and cosmology. To a liberal, dynamic philosopher with broad vision the two will appear to be complementary. In their respective ways both show glimpses of truth and according to one's standpoint one may be as satisfied with one as one may be with the other. It depends on one's mental make-up as to which will appeal to one. Nevertheless, it must be said that idealism, on the whole, is a philosophy that is more mature, refined, optimistic, comprehensive and it elevates the lot of mankind. Nothing can be gained denigrating realism but there can be no denying superiority of idealism.

2.4.4 Realism in Education

The following may be considered landmarks in the field of realistic thinking in education:

1. Erasmus (1446-1537). According to Erasmus knowledge is of two kinds: Object knowledge and world knowledge. Of these the world knowledge comes first and then comes object knowledge. However, object knowledge is more important than world knowledge. In the curriculum Greek, Latin and Grammar should be taught first of all. This helps in gaining proper object knowledge after which teaching in other subjects may be started.
2. Rabelais (1483-1533). Rabelais supported social, moral, religious and physical education in place of classical, linguistic and literary education. He pleaded for free thinking. According to him books should be not only mastered but also practised. The teaching should be made interesting. This is also true in physical education. The aim of education is to make practical life better.
3. John Milton (1608-1674). Milton's philosophy of education is available in his book entitled, Tractate on Education. According to Milton the aim of education is to know God, to love Him and to be one with Him. Milton presented a plan of education for the child from 12 to 21 years of age. First of all, Latin, Grammar, Arithmetic, Geometry and morality should be taught. After it

education may be imparted in agriculture, physiology, handicraft, natural philosophy, geography, etc. Poetry, literature, languages, economics, politics, history, etc., may be taught as supplementary studies. Milton gives more importance to ideas than words, to practical efficiency than ostentatious achievements. He defined education in these words, "I call, therefore, a complete and generous education that which fits a man to perform justly, skillfully and magnanimously all the offices, both private and public of peace and war".

4. Michael de Montaigne (1533-1592). Montaigne represented socialistic realism which aimed at making child a worldly man. Socialistic realism supported utilitarian viewpoint in education. It criticised bookish knowledge and supported the idea to make knowledge practical. Montaigne was a humanist and a naturalist. He was a realist and a socialist. In fact, he was a socialistic realist. The aim of knowledge, according to him, is to enhance knowledge and reasoning power. Nothing should be admitted without understanding. It is improper to take abnormal interest in goods. Knowledge must be practical. The child should be trained for worldly activities. Virtues should be created since these are the bases of enjoyment of the world. The function of philosophy is not only to tell about thinking but about the livelihood. It gives us a knowledge of virtues. Moral knowledge should be gathered from the biographies of great persons.
5. Richard Mulcaster (1531-1621). Mulcaster represented sensuous or empirical realism. According to empirical realism real education emphasizes training of senses and not the memory. Education is a natural process and should be based in nature. Philosophy of education should be scientific and not imaginary. Word knowledge should follow the perception of the object. New practical ways should be adopted. According to Mulcaster the aim of education is to develop physical and mental power. Child is the centre of education. Mother tongue should be the medium of education. The teachers should have a sound knowledge of the method of teaching.
6. Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon was also a supporter of empirical realism. He condemned bookish education and tried to make it practical. According to him practical knowledge may be gained through the study of Nature. Subjects such as philosophy, literature and language should be considered secondary. Knowledge can be gained by inductive method. This is particularly true in the field of science. Bacon is known as a great supporter of the inductive method in science.
7. Ratke (1571-1635). Ratke was also a supporter of empirical realism. He favoured education through mother tongue. He maintained that one thing should be taught at one time.
Teaching should be done in free environment. Learning should be discouraged. Object knowledge should be acquired by direct experience and experiment.
8. Comenius (1592-1670). Comenius presented far more clear ideas than other realist philosophers. He laid emphasis upon mother tongue, graded curriculum, suitable textbooks, practical application of teaching and four stages of educational structure.
9. Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841). The aim of education according to Herbart, is the multisided development of interests. The child should be made interested in his social environment. The aim of education is character development. This, however, cannot be achieved by preaching but by presenting moral example before the children.
10. Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Herbert Spencer was a naturalist as well as a realist. Complete living is the aim of education and also the aim of life. This may be realised by doing the following activities:
 1. Self-preservation, i.e., care of health.
 2. Earning a living (Preparation for vocation).
 3. Fulfilling duties regarding race-preservation.
 4. Fulfilling duties of a citizen.
 5. Utilization of leisure.

All these activities should be done scientifically.

2.4.5 Aims of Education

The realistic aim of education is a happy and integrated life. According to the American educationist Franklin Bobit, happiness in life may be achieved by fulfillment of human responsibilities and obligations such as:

1. Activities concerned with language,
2. Activities concerned with hygiene,
3. Citizenship activities,
4. Ordinary social activities,
5. Leisure activities,
6. Activities of mental health,
7. Religious activities,
8. Activities concerning race-preservation,
9. Vocational behaviour activities,
10. Vocational activities.

The child should be provided complete knowledge of society. He should know the social circumstances, social organisation and natural environment. Learning is the art of leading practical life. This requires scientific attitude. Scientific attitude is a rational attitude. It is objective and sensuous. The aim of education is to enable the child to acquire knowledge of definite and real objects and to analyse it through reason.

In the sphere of education, realism made its appearance as the revolt against theoretical and verbal education. From the earliest ages educationists have been trying to relate education to the social and natural environment, but very often this truth was forgotten and the process of education was allowed to become very theoretical and merely verbal. At all such times, realism has appeared as the reaction to this tendency. At the root of realism were two factors—the disutility of ancient and medieval ideals, and the development of the scientific tendency. By the sixteenth century an awareness had broken upon men and ancient ideas could not satisfy their needs because they were impractical. In Europe, during the Renaissance, there was a reaction to old Monasticism and Scholasticism. It came to be believed that men must aim at evolving humane qualities, and for this it was felt that a study of the literature in Greek and Latin was essential. After the Renaissance, the next tendency which became prominent was Humanism in which the Greek and Latin literatures came to be called humanistic because of their unique contribution to the progress of mankind. Individuals in favour of these literatures came to be called Humanists and their ideas on education gave rise to the concept of Humanitarian education.

But very soon it was realised that the only thing which could be derived from Greek and Roman literature was a definite style and grammar. When Cicero's style became the object and aim of education, humanitarian education was converted to Ciceroism. An unnecessary emphasis upon the study of dead languages and bookish language within the school drew education far away from real life, and bore little relation to the life outside it.

After the period of humanism came the period of Reformation. This, too did not go beyond obeying a set of rules and concepts, but it gave a tremendous fillip to research by showing a deep inclination towards reason and intelligence which encouraged free thinking. It was the unprecedented growth of science. A revolution in the sphere of knowledge was created by the researches of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, Kepler, Harvey, Bacon and others. In this manner, realism came into existence as the result of the growth of science and an inclination to search for the truth. According to the realists, education should be made to conform to the social and individual needs of the child so that he may lead a happy and contented life in the future. Whatever the other ideals of education, its primary purpose was to prepare the child for real

life, and the criterion of successful education lay in its ability to prepare the child for adult life. One of the major problems which the individual has to face in adult life is the problem of earning one's livelihood. Hence, education must take care that it enables a man to earn his livelihood. And when the emphasis came to be laid on livelihood, it was only natural that the realist pattern of education should stress the need for teaching scientific subjects rather than artistic or literary subjects. In this, efforts are made to harmonise the child's education with real life. The environment of the school should be such that it creates qualities which are required in the life outside the school. Ancient and medieval education was both bookish and exclusively mental. According to the realists, the first function of education was to develop the qualities of determination, reason and intelligence so that he should facilely solve the problems of life. For this reason realists favour the empirical methods of teaching in which all education is done through actual experience. The realist thinkers also favour education through the medium of the mother tongue through the medium of demonstrations, tours and actual experiments. This brings education nearer to life, and also stimulates the use of one's own intelligence instead of making demands only upon the educand's memory. In this manner, it can be concluded that the realists want education to keep in mind the social and individual needs of the educands.

2.4.6 Curriculum

According to the realists the child should be allowed to choose subjects according to his ability from detailed curriculum. He should be taught what is useful in his life. Learning according to one's abilities results in success in practical life. Subjects should be related to one another. They should be planned according to the needs of the society. Education should enable the student to adjust to changing social circumstances. Phrases such as, 'knowledge for the sake of knowledge', 'art for the sake of art', etc., are meaningless. The curriculum should have utility. Subjects such as literature, art, music, dance, etc., are unnecessary. The curriculum should lay emphasis upon science subjects—physics, chemistry, biology, astrology, etc.

2.4.7 Methods of Teaching

Realist thinkers emphasise objectivity, knowledge of scientific facts and the knowledge of the real. Students should be helped to know objectively. This requires knowledge through sense organs. Words are symbols to convey experience. They help in communication of knowledge. Practical verification is the test of all knowledge. Propositions which cannot be verified are nonsense. Facts are related to the present. The teacher should enable the student to know the world. He should not give personal opinions but clarify the facts. In fact, the facts should themselves be revealed without any distortion. Thus, the realists support fact-centred method of teaching.

According to the realist the knowledge of the real involves two laws: Law of aggregation and the law of conversion of simplicity. There is continuity in nature. In concept formation the feelings should not be allowed to interfere. In the law of conversions of simplicity, it has been pointed out that space and time are divided for the sake of convenience. The whole is the aggregate of parts. The parts do not lose their existence in the whole. Therefore, the proper method of teaching is to begin with the part and reach the whole. Knowledge should be analysed into principles, and principles into hypothesis. Facts should be analysed into propositions. Thus, the method of teaching should involve analysis and rational classification.

Realist approach to education is child-centred. The method of teaching should change according to the requirement of the child. The intellect of the child should be developed to enable him to know the facts. Experimentation should be the basis of facts. Knowledge is uniform in nature. The teacher should have firm faith in science. He should have a scientific attitude and develop the same in the educand. He should himself investigate and encourage the educands to do so. He should know the experimental method and train the educands in it. He should understand the needs of the student and fulfil them. He should render a clear, lucid and systematic understanding of scientific facts to the student. He should keep his personal opinion apart from

objective teaching. He should keep an eye upon child psychology and adolescence psychology and mould his methods of teaching accordingly. He should make a selection of subject matter according to the interests of the student.

2.4.8 Contribution of Realism to Education

Like other systems of philosophy of education realism has its advantages and disadvantages. Its impact can be seen everywhere. The realist philosophers influence practical education. In seventeenth century academies for the teaching of natural sciences developed everywhere in Europe and later on in America in eighteenth century. Technical and vocational education has become a common feature of education everywhere. Thus, the following may be considered to be the contribution of realism to education.

Education in Technical and Vocational Subject

Every society needs technocrats and people trained in different vocations. Therefore, in every country of the world today the plan of education is based upon the needs of such persons in the development of the nation.

Practical Bias

The realist insisted upon the practical nature of education. Modern education is empirical, experimental and practical.

Practical Aims.

Even in the field of ideals of education practical aims such as national development, earning a livelihood, personality development or realisation of happiness are being emphasised. These aims conform to real social aspirations.

Widening of Scope

Realists have widened the scope of education to include scientific and technical subjects as well as social sciences and humanities.

Scientific Teaching Methods

Modern teaching methods are more scientific. Help is taken from audiovisual means of education particularly in the teaching of science subjects. Laboratory training is a must for science teaching. More stress is laid on inductive method. The universities are encouraging research in sciences and humanities.

Objective Attitude

Today's education is objective. Personal opinions and feelings are ignored while objective facts are emphasized.

Sense Training

Modern education is empirical, particularly in primary and nursery stages. Stress is laid on sense training so that the child may use his different senses with maximum efficiency in order to directly gain knowledge of the world around him.

Realistic School Organisation

Modern school is organised to be a mini-society. Discipline means self-control and adjustment to facts. The students are required to develop all the traits of personality required in social life. The programmes in the school are geared to make him a responsible member of society.

In spite of the above mentioned advantages and favourable influences of realism on education, there have been certain disadvantages and limitations in realistic philosophy of education. Of these the most important are as follows:

Too Much Emphasis on Objectivity

The terms objective and subjective are relative. Absolute objectivity is impossible. No scientist claims absolute objectivity. Knowledge as well as ignorance, both are subjective as well as objective. Realist's exclusive emphasis on objectivity ignores so much content of knowledge. It neglects imagination, feeling, emotion and sentiments which are also important facts of individual and social life. This leads to negligence of values which, of course, are not facts.

Too Much Emphasis on Facts

Facts and values are interwoven in the fabric of individual and social life. By their exclusive emphasis upon facts the realists tend to ignore values. The theory that values are social facts has led to immoral and corrupt implications. In a sense, values are sui-generis. They are self-evident. No real human life is possible without values. The realistic attitude often becomes factual but not value-oriented. Practice, of course, is useful but theory has also its value. Facts and ideas, both are part of knowledge.

Positivism and Meliorism

Positivism pleads that science alone is the real knowledge. According to meliorism we can make this world better only through science. Both these have some grain of truth but they have their limitations as well. Science cannot substitute philosophy, art and literature. Liberal education should find a place for all these. Some persons have better talents in philosophy, art and literature. Therefore, it is wrong to make science compulsory at all stages of education. Not only academic subjects but even some sort of training in ethics and religion are necessary for a happy life. Exclusive emphasis upon science makes education one-sided.

The above criticism is no condemnation. The contribution of realism is undeniable. The above discussion only shows its limitations. As has been already pointed out earlier, every type of philosophy has its positive and negative contribution to education. This is as much true of realism as of idealism, naturalism and other types of philosophies of education (Sharma, 2002).

2.5 SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

1. Define Idealism and Realism.
2. Compare philosophies of Idealism and Realism.
3. Describe the characteristics of curriculum developed on the basis of Idealism.
4. Discuss the main tenets of Idealism and Realism. Also estimate their applicability in current education system.
5. Evaluate the role of Realism in the history of education.

2.6 ACTIVITIES

1. Analyze National Educational Policy 2009 on the basis of Idealism.
2. Visit a secondary school and observe a classroom environment. Evaluate teaching learning process in the perspective of Realism and make a report of it.

2.7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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