

## NEO-HUMANISM, GLOBALIZATION, AND WORLD FUTURES

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### Summary

A new philosophical approach could play an important component in the work of solving current and future ecological problems and in laying the groundwork for the political and economic structures of a future global society. Neo-humanism, an ecologically and spiritually centered humanism, widens the perspective of traditional humanism and gives importance to all living beings. Neo-humanism holds that all living beings have intrinsic or existential value, regardless of their utility to human beings.

From the perspective of neo-humanism, economic development should not be achieved at the cost of eliminating the Bio-diversity of the planet. Reforming the educational system and the mass media can accelerate life-style changes, which will encourage people to make a wiser utilization of physical resources.

Similarly, from the standpoint of neo-humanism, economic development should not come at the cost of social justice. Present patterns of economic globalization, in which economic wealth and political power is concentrated in particular regions (the North) or in particular social classes could give way to a more equitable arrangement (See *North–North, North–South and South–South Relations*). Neo-humanist thinkers see a decentralized economic system with an emphasis on balanced regional development and economic democracy as a cornerstone of a global society of the future. A corresponding

political structure based on a party-less democracy and eventually including a world constitution and world government would complement the economic system.

These new economic and political structures may be come into actual existence through a combination of global crises and ongoing campaigns by progressive activists.

## **1. Neo-humanism**

Traditionally, humanism has focused on man's relations to man, and this viewpoint was instrumental in advancing the cause of social justice throughout the world. In the current era of environmental crisis, an expanded form of humanism, neo-humanism, also considers humanity's relationship with other living beings and the entire eco-system. First formulated by P.R. Sarkar in 1982, neo-humanism holds that the core human value is love for all living beings (See *Sustainable Education: Imperatives for a Viable Future*). Due to unfavorable social circumstances, the expression of this value is often thwarted, and as a result humans engage in conflicts within their own species and with other species as well. Understanding the reasons why humanity's innate love is checked, and how it can be corrected is a key feature of the neo-humanist approach.

### **1.1. Geographic Sentiments**

A great portion of human activity is guided by rationality. Humans study their environment and make decisions based on a logical understanding of their situation. However, not all human action is guided by rationality. People have various likes and dislikes that cannot be explained in terms of rational deduction alone. In the neo-humanist analysis, these are known as "sentiments."

One of the most important human sentiments is the attachment that people feel for their particular geographic location. Geographic or geo-sentiments are evident in a farmer's intense feeling for each inch of land that he owns. The love one has for his or her hometown or village is another example. As innocent as these first examples are, when politicians make use of this sentiment they often transform it into sub-sentiments that goad people to war.

Geo-patriotism, geo-economics and geo-religion are all examples that demonstrate the power of the geographic sentiment. In the case of geo-patriotism, the political leadership tells the body politic that their country is the best, and that others are inferior. The propaganda used to support this idea may contradict geographical, economic, historical and cultural facts, but the passion aroused by this sentiment is enough to mobilize masses to fight bloody wars. World War Two is a case in point.

Another variant of the geo-sentiment is geo-economics. Here the goal of the political leadership is to strengthen the economic position of their particular nation-state at the expense of others. Mercantilism, the sixteenth century policy of capturing the gold and other wealth of the New World and bringing it to Spain, Portugal and other European centers is an extreme example of geo-economics. The continued colonization of the Americas, Africa and Asia by European countries up into the twentieth century can also be viewed as a manifestation of geo-economics.

Still another variant of the geo-sentiment is geo-religion. Here people believe that a particular location is a holy site of their faith and will not recognize the claims of others to this site. The continuing battle over the status of Jerusalem, stretching from the Crusades right up to the present day, is an example of the power of a geo-religious sentiment in shaping human events.

From the standpoint of neo-humanistic analysis, the only way to neutralize the often devastating effects of geo-sentiments is through education which will provide people with knowledge needed for them to make rational decisions in social, political and economic matters. Going further it is not merely the provision of facts which is necessary, but it is necessary for people to develop a consistently rational methodology in analyzing the claims of political leaders who may try to utilize geo-sentiments. When this rational spirit is achieved, then it is difficult for geo-sentiments to be used in the political arena.

## **1.2. Social Sentiments**

In the same way that one may develop an attachment to a particular geographic location, people also express strong identification with social groups to which they belong. A simple version of what neo-humanism calls a socio-sentiment is the allegiance that a fan has for his or her favorite football team. But this allegiance can also be to a racial group, religious group, linguistic group or ethnic group.

As with geo-sentiments, socio-sentiments are often the cause of intense intra-human conflict. The problems of racism, extreme nationalism, xenophobia, etc. in the neo-humanist analysis are considered to be manifestations of various socio-sentiments. As these socio-sentiments are deeper and more tenacious than the geo-graphic sentiments, neo-humanist thought holds that mere education is not enough to put an end to racism, hatred of foreigners, persecution of minority groups, etc.

A particular kind of social outlook is needed in order to surmount the obstacles which socio-sentiments place in the way of social harmony. Broadly speaking, it is possible to observe two basic approaches that individuals have towards society. Some people live only for their own selfish pleasure and never think of the needs or rights of others. In neo humanistic terminology they are following the principle of selfish pleasure. The second approach which neo-humanism identifies is where people have a determination to move towards their own personal goal but also make a resolve to eliminate the social inequalities that divide humanity. This approach is known as the principle of social equality, and is considered by neo-humanists to be a cornerstone in efforts to build an equitable and just society. Sarkar explains that the endeavor to advance towards the ultimate reality by forming a society free from all inequalities with everyone of the human race moving in unison is called *Sama Samaj Tattva* (*principle of social equality*).

The process of building thoughts and actions based on this principle of social equality is what neo-humanist thinkers call “proto psycho-spirituality.” When a human being identifies with a particular social group, his radius of thought is in a sense confined to the limits of that group. The conscious ongoing effort that people make to expand their radius of thought to include, not just a single social group but the entire universe, is a

mental process (psychic) which culminates with love for all other beings, and hence neo-humanists consider it to be a psycho-spiritual approach. If this process is cultivated and if the principle of social equality is also observed, neo-humanists believe that is possible for people to overcome the socio-sentiments that cause social strife.

### **1.3. Ordinary Humanism**

The last obstacle, identified by neo-humanists as a barrier to social harmony, is humanism. At first this statement may appear strange, but neo-humanists here are referring to a degenerated form of humanism.

Throughout the world national leaders often try to put a smooth gloss or give a civilized explanation for their policies, even when they are in fact trampling human rights. Thus words like “peace,” “democracy” “internationalism” “brotherhood” may be attached to actions that are in fact contrary to the real spirit of humanism. The tendency of humanism to turn into pseudo-humanism is the first defect which neo-humanists cite in what they term “ordinary humanism.”

According to neo-humanists, the decline of humanism into empty slogans can be avoided through psycho-spiritual practices which ensure that “love for all beings” becomes a strong motivating force in an individual’s life rather than an abstract phrase to which only lip-service is given. Neo humanist thinkers attribute the defects of ordinary humanism to the absence of such practices. As humanism traditionally grew in reaction to the excesses of religion, the secular shape that it took was bereft of any religious or spiritual base. From a neo humanist standpoint “the baby of spirituality was thrown out with the bathwater of organized religion.” Neo-humanists recommend the practice of psycho-spiritual exercises (such as meditation) in order to provide people with a continuous source of inspiration thereby enabling them to live up to humanist ideals.

Another shortcoming of traditional humanism is that while giving importance to human rights, it does not recognize the rights of plants and animals. Neo humanists believe that the cruelties, which animals have suffered down the ages, and humanity’s current wanton destruction of flora and fauna, is evidence that the arena of human concern needs to be extended. In recent years the growth of the animal rights movements and the linking of social justice organizations with environmental causes is evidence that the base of humanism is widening.

The lack of importance given to plants and animals in traditional humanism is addressed by neo-humanists who identify two sources of value in all plants and animals. There is utility value and existential value. Humans usually take care of plants and animals because of their utility value. If a cow gives milk it has utility value to the human being and he feeds it and keeps it alive and well. If that same cow can no longer give milk, its utility value diminishes and the human being may no longer keep it alive. Neo-humanists look not only to utility value but also to the existential value of any plant or animal. They say that regardless of a plant or animal’s utility to humans, a plant or animal wants to maintain its own existence, and that humans should recognize this existential value. Thus from the neo-humanist standpoint if a plant or animal has no

utility value or even negative utility value, its existential value argues for preserving it and against its destruction. This recognition of existential value of plants and animals adds an ecological dimension to humanism.

Neo-humanists believe that the deepening of humanism with a psycho-spiritual approach and the widening of humanism, with an ecological component makes it an appropriate tool in tackling the ecological and socio-economic problems facing an emerging global society.

## **2. Global Society of the Twenty-first Century**

As the twenty-first century opens, one of the key descriptive words for the new century has been globalization. Recently the issue of globalization has caused a sharp polarization around the world. Proponents of economic globalization say that the implementation of free trade and the integration of the world economy will usher in a new golden age of prosperity for all. However, opponents of economic globalization contend that it is a process that will only aggravate already deep chasms dividing the worlds haves and have-nots. They also contend that the process of economic globalization is running hand in hand with the increasing destruction of the environment and the homogenization of culture.

While globalization usually refers to economic globalization, and a globalization according to one particular style of economics and politics, there are other possibilities. Hazel Henderson looks ahead to a society in which a strong civil sector exerts its influence to bring about social justice, to an economic system in which a thriving micro-enterprise sector brings about a better distribution of wealth and to the evolution of an effective system of global governance. Likewise, Neo-humanists also envision a global society based on common values of respect for all people and as well as for other living beings. Instead of a globalization that destroys the environment and results in the imbalances of wealth, a global society in which the values of social justice and ecology both have a significant role to play is another possible scenario for the future. The emergence of such a global society would encompass changes in fundamental values, lifestyle as well in the economic and political strata.

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### **Biographical Sketch**

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