

KNOWLEDGE ACCORDING TO IDEALISM

Idealism as a philosophy had its greatest impact during the nineteenth century. It 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. The main tenant of idealism is that ideas and knowledge are the truest reality. Many things in the world change, but ideas and knowledge are enduring. Idealism was often referred to as “idea-ism”. Idealists believe that ideas can change lives. The most important part of a person is the mind. It is to be nourished and developed.

Etymologically Its origin is: from Greek idea “form, shape” from weid- also the origin of the “his” in his-tor “wise, learned” underlying English “history.” In Latin this root became videre “to see” and related words. It is the same root in Sanskrit veda “knowledge as in the Rig-Veda. The stem entered Germanic as witan “know,” seen in Modern German wissen “to know” and in English “wisdom” and “twit,” a shortened form of Middle English atwite derived from æt “at” +witen “reproach.”

In short Idealism is a philosophical position which adheres to the view that nothing exists except as it is an idea in the mind of man or the mind of God. The idealist believes that the universe has intelligence and a will; that all material things are explainable in terms of a mind standing behind them.

PHILOSOPHICAL RATIONALE OF IDEALISM

a) The Universe (Ontology or Metaphysics)

To the idealist, the nature of the universe is mind; it is an idea. The universe has two aspects. The first is the sensory aspect, that part of life open to empirical or sensory exploration and verification. This is a world of illusion. This second aspect, the Real World, lies beyond the sensory world and can only be reached through the intellect. This is the World of Ideas. We can know that the world operates in a reasonable way.

For Hegel, the order of the universe – history – is God thinking. Plato also believed that the soul is fully formed prior to birth and is perfect and at one with the Universal Being. The birth process checks this perfection, so education requires bringing latent ideas to consciousness. In Idealism, all of reality is reducible to one fundamental substance: spirit. Matter is not real; it is rather a notion, an abstraction of the mind. It is only the mind that is real. Therefore, all material things that seem to be real are reducible to mind or spirit.

b) **Knowledge and Truth (Epistemology)**

Idealists believe that all knowledge is independent of sense experience. The act of knowing takes place within the mind. The mind is active and contains innate capacities for organizing and synthesizing the data derived through sensations. Man can know truth through the acts of reason by which an individual examines the logical consistency of his ideas. Some Idealists believe that all knowledge is a matter of recall. Plato was one who held this notion. He based this conclusion upon the assumption that the spirit of man is eternal. Whatever he knows is already contained within his spirit. Every stimulus received by the mind is derived ultimately from God. God is the Infinite Spirit.

Idealists assume that **Truth does exist** and is not merely a creation of the individual or society but exists independent of man or of man's knowledge of it, it can be found. And when, it is found, it will be absolute and binding.

c) **Values (Axiology)**

Idealists generally root all values either in a personal God or in a personal spiritual force of nature. They all agree that values are eternal. Values are absolute and unchanging because they are a part of the determined order of nature. Man is moral when his behavior is in accord with the Ideal and Universal Moral Law which we can and do recognize.

IDEALISM IN EDUCATION

The Idealist view the Learner as a microscopic mind, the Teacher as a paradigmatic self, the Curriculum as the subject matter of symbol and idea (emphasizing literature, history, etc.), the Teaching Method as absorbing Ideas, and the Social Policy of the school as conserving the heritage of civilization. The

educational approach of this philosophy is of a holistic nature in which self-realization and character development is strongly supported.

Aims of Education-

- The purpose of education is to contribute to the development of the mind and self of the learner.
- The education-imparting institute should emphasize intellectual activities, moral judgments, aesthetic judgments, self-realization, individual freedom, individual responsibility, and self-control in order to achieve this development.
- Developing the mind, personal discipline, and character development.
- To bring the child as close to Absolute Truth as possible, in the conception of Ultimate Reality and the students' relation to this Reality.
- To discover and develop each individual's abilities and full moral excellence in order to better serve society.
- Maintenance and transmission of the established values of the past.

The Concept of Student

- The learner is a spiritual being in the process of becoming. His is a finite personality which, with proper molding and guidance, might more like the Ideal or the Absolute.
- Man is, in a sense, a small representation of the Absolute Self. The student must bring himself closer to the Absolute through imitation of the exemplar (the teacher) and through study of those subjects (the humanities) which best represent or symbolize the true ideas of which the human race has knowledge.

The Concept of Teacher

- Idealists have high expectations of the teacher. The teacher must be excellent, in order to serve as an example for the student, both intellectually and morally.
- The teacher must also exercise great creative skill in providing opportunities for the learners' minds to discover, analyze, unify, synthesize and create applications of knowledge to life and behavior.

- The teacher serves as a model for the student by teaching through example and guidance the lifelong habits of patience, tolerance and perseverance towards a goal.
- The teacher should be close to the Absolute and should be, in a very real sense, a co-worker with the Absolute in developing the pupil's capacities and guiding him closer to knowledge of the Ideal.
- Teaching is considered a moral calling. The teacher's role is to be a skillful questioner who encourages students to think and ask more questions in an environment that is suitable for learning

The curriculum

- The idealist curriculum which places a considerable emphasis on the study of history and the reading of biographies because through the study of the past, we can find appropriate truths around which to model our present behavior.
- The idealist curriculum emphasizes the study of the humanities. Thus, we find the idealists strong in their belief that the "proper study of mankind is man" and interpreting this to mean the history of the human race.
- The curriculum must include those subjects essential for the realization of mental and moral development. These subjects provide one with culture, and they should be mandated for all pupils. Moreover, the subject matter should be kept constant for all.
- The idealist educator has little place in his curriculum for field trips and empirical or sensory data.

Instructional Methodology

- Plato's idealism suggested moving from opinion to true knowledge in the form of critical discussions, or the dialectic. At the end of the discussion, the ideas or opinions will begin to synthesize as they work closer to truth.
- Knowledge is a process of discovery that can be attained through skillful questioning.
- Idealist education involves depth of learning, a holistic approach that involves teaching the whole rather than its parts.

- The idealist is not concerned with turning out students with technical skills so much as having students with a broad view and understanding of the world in which they live.
- While the lecture method is still important in an idealist's education system, it is considered more of a way to convey information and to help students comprehend ideas.
- Self-realization and self-education are very important in idealism. While teachers cannot always be present when learning occurs, they must attempt to stimulate students so that learning occurs even when they are not present.
- Project based learning is an example of a self-directed learning activity where learning can occur without a teacher's presence
- 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 classroom structure and atmosphere should provide the learners with opportunities to think, and to apply the criteria of moral evaluation to concrete within the context of the subjects.
- All three methods employed by the idealists are open to criticism. All rely on ideas that are already known and allow little or no opportunity for the student to explore new ideas and new areas of interest. Because of this there is a tendency to reinforce the cultural lag between education and the society.

Concept of Discipline

- For them authority begins by being external, but should end in becoming internal through habit formation and self-control.

Critical Appraisal of Idealism

Here are the most common criticisms of this philosophical school.

- Linked with traditional religion
- Idealistic education was considered bookish and lacking relevance

- Lack of emphasis on the importance of science and technical education
- Sets Unobtainable Goals
- Ignores the Physical Self
- Deemphasizes Experience
- Leads to Totalitarianism
- Emphasizes Humanities
- Science today has challenged idealism

TO CONCLUDE:

Idealism has been influential in education for a considerable amount of time. It is considered a conservative philosophy because of its emphasis in preserving cultural traditions. The strengths of idealism include encouraging thinking and cognition, promoting cultural learning, and providing for character development of students. Teachers are considered valuable parts of the educational process who should strive to provide a comprehensive, systematic, and holistic approach to learning that stresses self-realization.

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- **By-**
- **Dr. Muktamani**
- **Asstt. Professor.**
- **B.Ed. (Regular)**
- **DDE, LNMU**