

Thematic Section: Internationalization, interculturality and neo-humanism

Diversifying Universalism: Neohumanism, Internationalism, and Interculturalism in Education

Diversificando o universalismo: neo-humanismo, internacionalismo e interculturalismo na educação

Diversificando el universalismo: neohumanismo, internacionalismo e interculturalidad en la educación

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Abstract: Neohumanism is a philosophy propounded by Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar which recognizes that humanity needs a new narrative that can provide the inspiration, direction, and tools with which to transform individual selves and collective futures. While acknowledging the vital role that Humanism has played in the historical march towards greater freedom, justice, peace, knowledge, and the utopian vision of a united humanity, Neohumanism challenges the limitations of Humanism, entangled as it is with the host of power/over tactics that characterize modernity. “Diversifying Universalism” explores Neohumanism and Neohumanist education alongside two dominant and contemporary paradigms of a global educational approach aimed at realizing the high ideals of a world united, internationalism and interculturalism, assessing their compatibilities and contrasts, examining their strengths and weaknesses, and suggesting ways in which the integration of certain principles and practices might result in a synthesis that is more comprehensive and effective than any of them alone.

Keywords: Neohumanism. Internationalism. Interculturalism.

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Resumo: O neo-humanismo é uma filosofia proposta por Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar que reconhece que a humanidade precisa de uma nova narrativa que possa fornecer inspiração, orientação e ferramentas para transformar os eus individuais e os futuros coletivos. Embora reconhecendo o papel vital que o humanismo desempenhou na marcha histórica em direção a uma maior liberdade, justiça, paz, conhecimento e a visão utópica de uma humanidade unida, o neo-humanismo desafia as limitações do humanismo, emaranhado como está com a hoste de táticas de poder/sobre que caracterizam a modernidade. “Diversificando o universalismo” explora o neohumanismo e a educação neohumanista ao lado de dois paradigmas dominantes e contemporâneos de uma abordagem educacional global voltada para a realização dos altos ideais de um mundo unido, internacionalismo e interculturalismo, avaliando suas compatibilidades e contrastes, examinando seus pontos fortes e fracos e sugerindo maneiras em que a integração de certos princípios e práticas pode resultar em uma síntese mais abrangente e eficaz do que qualquer um deles isoladamente.

Palavras-chave: Neohumanismo. Internacionalismo. Interculturalismo.

Resumen: El neohumanismo es una filosofía propuesta por Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar que reconoce que la humanidad necesita una nueva narrativa que pueda brindar inspiración, orientación y herramientas para transformar los seres individuales y los futuros colectivos. Si bien reconoce el papel vital que desempeñó el humanismo en la marcha histórica hacia una mayor libertad, justicia, paz, conocimiento y la visión utópica de una humanidad unida, el neohumanismo desafia las limitaciones del humanismo, intrincado como está con la multitud de táticas de poder/sobre que caracterizar la modernidad. “Diversificando el universalismo” explora el neohumanismo y la educación neohumanista junto con dos paradigmas dominantes y contemporâneos de un enfoque educativo global destinado a hacer realidad los altos ideales de un mundo unido, el internacionalismo y la interculturalidad, evaluando sus compatibilidades y contrastes, examinando sus puntos fuertes y débiles, y sugiriendo formas en que la integración de ciertos principios y prácticas puede resultar en una síntesis más completa y efectiva que cualquiera de ellos por sí solo.

Palavras-clave: Neohumanismo. Internacionalismo. Interculturalismo.

The Philosophy of Neohumanism

All molecules, atoms, electrons, protons, positrons and neutrons are the veritable expressions of the same Supreme Consciousness. Those who remember this reality, who keep this realization ever alive in their hearts, are said to have attained perfection in life. They are the real devotees, the real bhaktas. When the underlying spirit of humanism is extended to everything, animate and inanimate, in this universe – I have designated this as Neohumanism. This Neohumanism will elevate humanism to universalism, the cult of love for all created beings of this universe.

P.R. Sarkar, *The Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism*

The philosophy of Neohumanism was articulated by Prabhat Rainjan Sarkar (1921-1990), also known by the spiritual name of Shrii Shrii Ánandamúrti – Indian philosopher, spiritual guru, social reformer, linguist, author, and composer – in *The Liberation of Intellect: Neohumanism* (1982). In this book, Sarkar reconceptualized the centuries-old philosophy of Humanism, a constellation of ideas that released the Western world from the grip of Medieval dogma and superstition, and commenced to replace prevailing religious ideologies with a new view of the individual and its social potential. The roots of Humanism are deep, tracing back to early Greek and Roman cultures, but we concern ourselves here with the version that (re)surfaced in 13th century Italy, spread throughout Europe, and has continued, albeit in changing forms, to the present day. Renaissance Humanism, in concert with an emerging Enlightenment science, ushered in a new era of human inquiry and self-reflection, scientific and technological development, and human rights, and has had a lasting impact on the field of education.

In addition to the advancement of knowledge and understanding of the world we live in, Humanism has had contradictory political effects, paralleling (and supporting) a global system of empire-building, colonialism, and capitalism. And of particular relevance today, the liberation of humans from limiting dogmas, coupled with the advance of Enlightenment science, has had contradictory effects, as Max Weber proposed over 100 years ago – a world that benefitted in many ways from rationally derived explanations, but a world no longer rich with the mysteries and wonder of creation – a disenchanting, alienating place devoid of spiritual and transcendent dimensions of experience (Labaree, 2019). And compounding the long term effects of this emergent worldview, the new empowerment of the individual resulted in the centering of the human species and an emphasis on the mastery, domination, and control of nature, rather than an acknowledgement of our entanglement¹ with all of creation.

It is these limitations of classic Humanism that Sarkar set out to challenge in his treatise. With Humanism, he shares the utopian vision of a united humanity, but is unwavering in his critique of the forms of domination, subordination, discrimination, materialism, exploitation, and the imposition of “pseudo-culture” (i.e. capitalist cultural products) – the whole range of “power-over” tactics that characterize the era of modernity/coloniality founded on Humanism. He has extended the critique of human domination over other humans to the rest of the world as well: plants, animals, and other animate and inanimate systems. In some ways, his ideas are aligned with “deep ecology” but without the anti-human baggage of some thinkers in this area (Bookchin, 1995). In the Neohumanist paradigm, humans are the most developed species as defined by cognitive function and language; they therefore hold great responsibility for the well-being of all, an “all” in which humans, animals, plants and the rest of the natural world are deeply interconnected and mutually interdependent.

Sarkar spoke on a multitude of subjects, including wide-ranging prescriptions for social change and justice in the spheres of politics, economics, and culture. The philosophy of Neohumanism finds perhaps its most developed expression in educational theory and practice, at the heart of which is a premodern/postmodern or perhaps transmodern ontology of relationality. New ways of knowing, thinking, doing, and being are at the heart of Neohumanist pedagogy, supported by a developmental process that understands the roots of conflict and domination in limiting geographic and social sentiments. “Geo-sentiment” signifies the attachment to territory, and is often at the root of religious, economic, and political conflict. While people’s love for their homeland can be a source of deep meaning, such passions are often exploited by corrupt leaders to goad people into war. “Geo-patriotism” results when such leaders promote the idea that their country is superior and others inferior (and therefore should be conquered). “Geo-economics” results when corrupt leaders attempt to strengthen the economic status of their own territory at the expense of others. Such geo-sentiments lie at the root of colonialism, economic imperialism, and of much of the warfare of the modern era. In contrast, “socio-sentiment” is not confined to a defined territory, but is more expansive in its reach, encompassing, at one end of the spectrum, allegiance to family, clan, and tribe, and at the other, race, caste, and religion – any social group to which one belongs. The focus on one’s social identification, to the exclusion of others, has also led to violent conflicts, persecution, xenophobia, racism, and exploitation.

In recent history, the antidote for conflict has been Humanism, with its high-minded ideals of democracy, human rights, and internationalism. But Humanism, says Sarkar, is “nothing more

¹ The word entanglement comes to us from the world of quantum physics, and in utterly simplified terms refers to the interdependence of matter and energy systems. As often happens, the term began to surface in social theory, and has come to signify “both the multiplicity of interconnected worlds and our entanglements in multispecies ecologies that include different knowledges, practices, and technologies” (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020, p. 8).

than an enlarged form of nationalism” [...] and “[a]s long as there are bondages of nationhood [...] the tendency to exploit individuals or the collectivity will continue to exist (Sarkar, 1982, pp. 60-61). Overcoming destructive cognitive and affective sentiments is the task of Neohumanist education, a pedagogy that integrates and synthesizes critical pedagogy, decolonization, and spirituality in ways profoundly relevant to the present world-historical moment. Two approaches capture the essence of this task. The first is the cultivation of an awakened rationality capable of discerning limiting sentiments when they arise, even when they are well-disguised. In place of the limiting sentiments is the *principle of social equality*, the cornerstone of building a genuinely just global society. In Sanskrit, this movement of humanity is termed *Sama Samaj Tattva*.

This disposition to develop what Sarkar terms a “rationalistic mentality” (1982, p. 74) is not merely the external adoption of a set of beliefs, however. In Neohumanism, the process of cultivating such a mindset depends on the second approach: a proto psycho-spirituality, that is, the conscious mental effort to expand the radius of one’s care outward from the limiting sentiments to a universal love for all and a concern for the common welfare. From a Neohumanist standpoint, “the ‘baby’ of spirituality was thrown out with the ‘bathwater’ of organized religion (Vedaprajananda, 2006, p. 28), and we must cultivate a non-dogmatic spirituality based on contemplative practices and authentic morality in order to truly realize the high ideals promoted by the Humanists. And furthermore, the attribution of moral standing and rights must be extended to all creation in order to overcome the anthropocentrism fostered by classic Humanism: “The recognition of the existential value of plants and animals,” and even more recently, of bodies of water and land, “adds an ecological dimension to Humanism” (Ibid., p. 29). Only with such a “deepening of Humanism with a psycho-spiritual approach and the widening of Humanism, with an ecological component” (Ibid., p. 29) might we finally have the effective tools we need for tackling the enormous ecological and socio-economic problems facing our global society.

Based on this introduction to the main points of Neohumanist philosophy, we can see that despite sharing a social vision with the tenets of Humanism, it deviates from Humanism in that it extends the trajectory of rights to non-humans in the context of cultivating an inclusive sentiment of caring for all beings. It is more explicitly devoted to the elimination of hierarchies of race, social class, caste, ethnicity, gender, and all of the other social divisions that have led to conflict and domination. Perhaps most importantly, it asserts the centrality of a non-dogmatic spirituality in the moral leadership necessary to transform society towards greater justice, peace, and well-being.

In the next sections of this article, we consider the philosophy of Neohumanism and Neohumanist education alongside two dominant and contemporary paradigms of a global approach to education aimed at realizing the high ideals of a world united, internationalism and interculturalism, assessing their compatibilities and contrasts.

Neohumanism and Internationalism

Founded on universalism, Neohumanism shares certain affinities with internationalism and internationalization in the area of education. In principle, internationalism refers to cooperation between or among nation-states in order to promote the common good. Internationalism would thus transcend the boundaries of nationalism, which is characterized by particular group interests and geo-sentiments or even socio-sentiments, and aim for the general welfare of people(s) in different countries around the world. As an agency of the United Nations, itself an international organization with an internationalist agenda, UNESCO is a prime example of such a principle or ideology in practice, inasmuch as it “contributes to peace and security by promoting international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information,” according to its stated mission (UNESCO, n.d.). In addition to foregrounding the common goals of “peace” and

“security” through cooperation, UNESCO’s declared vision is to foster “dialogue and mutual understanding,” recognize the “intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity,” create global citizenry, encourage “cultural heritage and the equal dignity of all cultures,” and strengthen “the bonds between nations,” always with the goal of “development.”

In comparison, Neohumanism presents a number of values that resonate with the internationalist principles of UNESCO. Accordingly, Neohumanist education rejects national(ist) educational systems that are skills-based, narrow-minded, competitive, and dominative of others and the environment.² Addressing its own form of all-round “development,” specifically in the “physical, mental and spiritual realms of human existence” (Ánandamúrti, 2013, p. 506), it strives to create an ethical, values-based education relevant to the current global moment and its (un)foreseeable future(s). According to the futurist scholar Marcus Bussey:

The holistic nature of neohumanist education also makes neohumanist futures relevant to the emerging global learning environment. Such an environment has the potential to be either colonising or participatory in nature. Neohumanist education builds on local cultural and economic patterns while holding a global vision for humanity as an integrated, sustainable system of ecological and cultural networks that balance global needs with local imperatives. (2006, pp. 17-18)

A major difference, however, between Neohumanist and internationalist approaches to education is evident in the means employed to achieve the aforementioned “peace” in the world. Whereas UNESCO affirms that peace must be “founded on dialogue and mutual understanding” or else “built upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of humanity,” Neohumanist education reiterates such principles while adding a spiritual dimension to the human and social sciences by promoting the attainment of peace through the intuitional science of yoga, which includes the practice of meditation. It also reinforces the concern with ecological consciousness and environmental sustainability characteristic of Neohumanism in addition to the preoccupation with political awareness, social justice, and economic prosperity typical of internationalism.

By seeking to go beyond established internationalist principles of education, Neohumanist education effectively recognizes the limitations or even shortcomings of internationalism, rightfully challenging it. Internationalism indeed has many aspects, all of which have been or may be duly critiqued. Three forms or “concepts” of internationalism have been respectively identified as “hegemonic,” “revolutionary,” and “liberal,” and subsequently described as follows (Halliday, 1988). Hegemonic internationalism is characterized by the dominance of one nation or nation-state over others, which arguably represents the imperialism and colonialism that have been the hallmark of modernity and its supposedly civilizing mission, in which primarily European nations with predominantly Eurocentric perspectives have united, or rather, unified the world through the exploration and exploitation of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania. Meanwhile, and in response to such hegemony, revolutionary internationalism is characterized by the determinacy of international ideologies in social movements, which is often associated with socialism or communism but is also applicable to other forms of resistance to the global order(s) or powers that be, such as the feminist, antiracist, anticolonial, and even environmentalist movements (Löwy, 1998). Finally, liberal internationalism is characterized by the interaction and cooperation of nations and nation-states to achieve common goals such as peace and prosperity, which would, in theory, represent the principles of the United Nations, whose stated purposes are to “maintain international peace,” “achieve international co-operation,” and attain “common ends” (U.N. Charter art. 1, para. 1-4). In practice, however, the current (new) world order appears to endorse a rather neoliberal internationalism characterized by globalization and so-called “free” trade, which

² For more information, see the Neohumanist Education (NHE) website: <https://neohumanisteducation.org/about/>.

demonstrably benefit richer, “developed” nations at the expense of poorer, “undeveloped” or “developing” nations through a process of socioeconomic imperialism that has otherwise been termed neocolonialism. Such a form of internationalism would not represent the ideal “solution” for international relations, according to the Neohumanist Sarkar, since in addition to exploitation it inevitably leads to global conflict:

Suppose I was working for a particular nation, but now I am working for all nations. When I admit the existence of nations and say that I am working for all nations, then it is neither humanism nor universalism – it is merely internationalism. When I use the term “internationalism,” I am admitting the existence of separate nations, and along with this I must naturally also think, within the nations, of the people's five fundamental requirements of life (food, clothes, education, shelter, and medical care). But when I discover that one nation is trying to thrive on the life-blood of another, I oppose it, and this opposition ultimately leads to world war. So internationalism is not the solution either. (1982, p. 57)

Inasmuch as Neohumanism vehemently condemns not only political and economic but also social and cultural exploitation, Neohumanist education is manifestly opposed to hegemonic internationalism in the form of imperialism or colonialism. Seeking social and environmental justice, such an education is implicitly aligned with revolutionary internationalism, despite Neohumanism’s explicit rejection of communism due to its being solely based on materialism, as well as the leadership’s use of the “force of arms, terror and control over freedom of speech – to keep the people oppressed” (Sarkar, 1988, para. 12). In the end, Neohumanist education would be more akin to a liberal internationalism, particularly with regard to the ideal of cooperation and the pursuit of a common goal, were it not arguably a disguise for a neoliberal internationalism founded on capitalism, to which Neohumanism also steadfastly objects. Thus, UNESCO’s affirmation that it “helps countries to adopt international standards and manages programmes that foster the free flow of ideas and the exchange of knowledge” (n.d.) must be viewed with suspicion or even disbelief from a Neohumanist perspective, in the extent to which such a discourse may be said to represent a (pre)dominant (neo)liberal internationalism that is, in fact, hegemonic in its quest for internationalization in the area of education.

Neohumanist education bears significant similarities and critical differences with an international education based not only on the principles of internationalism but also on the processes of internationalization. If internationalism has been defined as cooperation between or among nations, internationalization has been described as production and consumption across nations. Although effectively denoting a process of becoming international, internationalization is generally associated with cross-border commerce and characterized by expansion into international markets, where would-be global products or services are adapted to local needs or uses. Such a globalizing tendency indicates the intimate relation between internationalization and globalization, the former being the precondition for the latter, which is currently (re)shaping the (post)modern world. There is actually a growing body of “work interrogating internationalization in the context of globalization” in the form of research that not only recognizes “the increasing neoliberal orientation of internationalization,” but also argues that “development, more recently aided by globalization, is a neocolonial, even imperial project” (Beck, 2021, p. 135; p. 138).

As with internationalism, development is definitely a primary goal of internationalization in all industries, including education, as affirmed by UNESCO. Internationalization in education is mostly associated with tertiary or postsecondary education, though there are a number of instances in secondary education as well, and it usually refers to a process of commercialization that includes research in addition to education. Characterized by both competition and collaboration among schools, colleges, and universities around the world, internationalization evidently shares the same inherent principles and practices as internationalism with regard to its global or cross-cultural values

and its neoliberal or even neocolonial agenda. Indeed, a (neo)liberal internationalism represents the driving force behind internationalization in the area of education. International education has arguably “thrived in a market-driven era” while internationalization has “resulted in increasing commercialisation and intensive competition,” thus demonstrating an apparent contradiction with “the more altruistic goals of international education proclaimed in institutional mission statements and government policies” (Pike, 2012, p. 133). A “critical question” would be whether an international education founded on (neo)liberal internationalism and developed through an internationalization likewise based on neoliberalism or even neocolonialism contributes to the “realization” or the “illusion” of a global community “in which the principles of equity, social justice and sustainability are core and in which the circle of compassion is sufficiently wide to embrace all inhabitants” (Ibid., p. 147). In other words, “[w]hile the rhetoric of international education purports to promote the concept of a global community [...] this claim may be illusory” (Ibid., p. 133).

The inconsistencies or contradictions of an international(ist) education do not, in and of themselves, necessarily cancel the validity of its competing claims or propositions, nor do they ultimately negate any sincere efforts to promote either the “altruistic goals” or the principles of “equity, social justice and sustainability” in addition to “the concept of a global community” proclaimed in the missions and policies of organizations such as UNESCO. It is in this regard that a universalist Neohumanist education may be contextualized within the scope of an international(ist) education arguably founded on neoliberalism and neocolonialism that is currently undergoing processes of internationalization. Indeed, the aim of Neohumanist education, which was founded in India, is not only to be universal but also to become international, in a sense, by expanding into other countries, where its curriculum would be adapted to local traditions. As previously mentioned, a specific form of development is indeed the expressed objective as indicated by Sarkar, who asserts that “the real meaning of education is trilateral development – simultaneous development in the physical, mental and spiritual realms of human existence. This development should enhance the integration of the human personality” (Ānandamūrti, 2013, p. 506). Sarkar adds that “[r]eal education leads to a pervasive sense of love and compassion for all creation,” which would be the equivalent of an international(ist) education’s desire to create a “circle of compassion [...] sufficiently wide to embrace all inhabitants” of the globe. Finally, and despite its distinct aims, Neohumanist education shares with international education certain intercultural values that include the principles of social justice and environmental sustainability in addition to the formation and transformation of both local and global communities.

Neohumanism and Interculturalism

Envisaging diversity as much as universality, Neohumanism also shares a number of affinities with interculturalism and interculturality in the area of education. By definition, interculturalism refers to dialogue and interaction between, across, or even within cultures. As with internationalism, interculturalism seeks to transcend the boundaries of culturalism, which is based on specific group characteristics and socio-sentiments, and strives to promote common needs or desires, shared values or expressions, and mutual respect or recognition of distinct people(s) around the world. UNESCO itself has been active in developing an intercultural education by establishing guidelines based on certain “recurrent principles.” In sum, such an education “respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all;” “provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society;” and finally, “provides all learners with cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills that enable them to contribute to respect, understanding

and solidarity among individuals, ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups and nations” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 32).

UNESCO’s guidelines for intercultural education expressly attempt to accommodate “both *universalism* and *cultural pluralism*” (Ibid., p. 11). In order to reconcile the apparent “tension” between universality and diversity, due importance is given to local languages and histories in addition to global discourses and designs. An intercultural(ist) education thus seeks “to establish and maintain the balance between conformity with its general guiding principles and the requirements of specific cultural contexts,” generally through “the inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices [and the] development of inclusive curricula that contain learning about the languages, histories and cultures of non-dominant groups” (Ibid., p. 10; p. 19). Meanwhile, its “distinct aims” are, namely, 1) “learning to know” through the combination of general knowledge and specific projects; 2) “learning to do” through the acquisition of occupational skills and diverse competencies, such as teamwork; 3) “learning to live together” through the development of mutual understanding, an “appreciation of interdependence,” respect for common values, such as peace, and “a spirit of solidarity and co-operation;” and finally, 4) “learning to be” through the cultivation of personality, potential, and a “sense of identity” in order to act with autonomy, judgment, and responsibility (Ibid., pp. 19-20).

The objectives and values of Neohumanist education clearly resonate, in both theory and practice, with an intercultural(ist) education that is arguably also related to the international(ist) education outlined by UNESCO. Its “overall objectives” include the development of “the full potential of the whole child”; the promotion of “co-operation” and “teamwork;” the acquisition of “practical skills necessary for life [...] as well as independent problem solving skills;” the development of “self-knowledge” and a knowledge of “personal gifts;” the encouragement of “a universal outlook, free from discrimination based on religion, race, creed or sex,” and of “respect for all cultures;” the application of “what is learned to practical life;” and finally, the encouragement of students “to become active and responsible members of society” (Objectives, n.d.). Such evident similarities between Neohumanist and intercultural(ist) education do not, however, preclude apparent differences, mainly with regard to the former’s spiritual and ecological dimensions. It is thus important to bear in mind that Neohumanist education aims at the integral development of “physical, emotional, intellectual, creative, intuitive and spiritual capacities;” the facilitation of “personal growth in areas such as morality, integrity, self-confidence, self-discipline;” the development of “a sense of aesthetics and appreciation of culture” in the forms of “literature, art, drama, music and dance;” the development of “a benevolent rational intellect and a sense of justice;” the promotion of “an awareness of ecology in its broadest sense – the realization of the inter-relatedness of all things;” the encouragement of not only “respect” but also “care and universal love for all;” and finally, the inspiration for a spirit of “service” (Ibid., n.d.). Such objectives and values are mostly absent from intercultural(ist) education and therefore make Neohumanist education unique in both its scope and its approach.

In order to better contextualize the values and objectives of Neohumanist education in terms of the principles and aims of intercultural(ist) education, it becomes necessary to consider the philosophical basis of Neohumanism in terms of the theoretical foundations of interculturalism, which is derived from the concept of interculturality. An evidently internationalist and apparently interculturalist UNESCO has rather simply defined interculturality as “the existence and equitable interaction of diverse cultures and the possibility of generating shared cultural expressions through dialogue and mutual respect” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 17). Although such a definition may be useful in distinguishing interculturalism from multiculturalism, it does not adequately consider the more nuanced significance of the term interculturality, which would place

an arguably constructive, neocolonial internationalism in opposition to an incontestably deconstructive, decolonial interculturalism.

If multiculturalism is based on the concept of cultural diversity (i.e. multiple cultures), which is related to cultural identity, interculturalism should be founded on the concept of cultural difference (i.e. between cultures), which is related to cultural hybridity. In *The Location of Culture*, culture theorist Homi Bhabha (2004) defines cultural diversity as not only “the recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs” but also “the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity” (p. 50). In other words, cultural diversity does not acknowledge that cultures are always (trans)forming and (inter)acting with other cultures in a present time and space that updates their past and relocates their origin. In contrast, cultural difference acknowledges the “ambivalence” of culture and the process of “differentiation” in the enunciation or performance of cultural identity itself (Bhabha, 2004, pp. 50-51). According to Bhabha, culture is neither “unitary” in itself nor “dualistic” in relation to another, since the performative “act of cultural enunciation” is always already marked by difference in the very “structure of symbolic representation,” or in the actual form of expression, which is constituted by a “split” or “disjuncture” between the enunciation or performance and its “cultural positionality,” or “its reference to a present time and a specific space” (Ibid., pp. 52-53). In other words, there is a fundamental difference not only between what is expressed and how, but also between the expression itself and its spatiotemporal location or context. Any notion of an existential cultural identity as a “homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People,” must therefore be (re)considered in terms of an essential cultural hybridity, inasmuch as all cultures or cultural expressions are “constructed in this contradictory and ambivalent space of enunciation” (Ibid., pp. 54-55). A true interculturalism or “*intemational culture*,” Bhabha concludes, would ideally be “based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*” (Ibid., p. 56).

Fundamentally related to the postcolonial concept of cultural difference and its so-called “interstitial,” “liminal,” “in-between” or “third” space of enunciation, interculturality may furthermore be related to the decolonial concept of colonial difference and its denominated “fractured locus of enunciation” (Mignolo, 2012, p. xxvi). In *Local Histories/Global Designs*, decolonial thinker Walter D. Mignolo (2012) defines the colonial difference as both “the space where the coloniality of power is enacted” and “the space where the restitution of subaltern knowledge is taking place and where border thinking is emerging” (p. xxv). In other words, it indicates a spatiotemporal location not only of subordination and subjugation but also, and perhaps more significantly, of restoration and reclamation. According to Mignolo, the colonial difference specifically refers to the “confrontation” between colonized “local histories,” such as those of the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Oceania, and colonizing “global designs,” such as those of Europe and now of the United States. The modern/colonial encounter between Eurocentrism and a non-Western alterity ultimately “creates the conditions for dialogic situations in which the fractured enunciation is enacted from the subaltern perspective as a response to the hegemonic discourse and perspective” (Ibid., pp. xxv-xxvi). In other words, such a meeting allows for an eventual situation in which *the colony strikes back* or else *the subaltern can speak*. From this perspective, interculturality may precisely be viewed as a “response” to the hegemonic discourses of (inter)nationalism and (multi)culturalism, thus representing a form of the “border thinking” that Mignolo considers to be “more than a hybrid enunciation” or expression and ultimately a “logical consequence of the colonial difference” (Ibid., p. xxvi).

The concept of interculturality has been (re)defined from a decolonial perspective by the liberation philosopher Enrique Dussel (2012), who like Bhabha sought to overcome the “culturalist perspective” in which culture constituted “the valorative-mythical content of a nation (or a group of nations)” (p. 29). In “Transmodernity and Interculturality: An Interpretation from the Perspective of Philosophy of Liberation,” Dussel recounts how a “historical rupture” in the philosophy of culture caused by “the emergence of *critical* Latin American social science” resulted in the old classifications of “metropolitan” and “colonial” being replaced by the new categories of “core” and “periphery” (2012, pp. 31-32). This line of thinking made it possible to split the “substantialist conception of culture” and discover “fractures” both within and between cultures, not only in the form of intercultural “dialogue” or “clash” but also, and perhaps more importantly, as the “*domination and exploitation* of one culture over others” (Ibid., p. 32). In effect, a “new vision of culture” would arise from the discovery of its “location” (Ibid., p. 32), which would otherwise situate the aforementioned cultural and colonial difference(s) and their respective liminal “space” or fractured “locus” of enunciation. Interculturality could no longer be simply understood as interaction between, among, or within cultures when it was overshadowed by coloniality, or in Dussel’s words, “overdetermined by the entirety of the colonial era” (Ibid., p. 32), thus resulting in an asymmetrical dialogue of domination and exploitation with regard to peripheral cultures. Just as Bhabha argues in relation to the so-called “Third Space,” which is said to have “a colonial or post-colonial provenance” (2004, p. 56), Dussel asserts that oppressed peripheral culture(s) should be “the point of departure for intercultural dialogue” (2012, p. 33). Moreover, such a dialogue should be expressly “*transversal*,” meaning “from the periphery to the periphery” (e.g. “from the feminist movement to the antiracist and anticolonial struggles”), and not “presuppose the illusion of a non-existent symmetry between cultures” (Ibid., p. 43). In other words, interculturality would effectively reflect the interaction not between critics of the “core” and the critics of the “periphery,” but rather between “*the critics of the periphery*” themselves (Ibid., p. 48). For Dussel, such an intercultural dialogue results in a “process of self-affirmation” that is ultimately transformed into a “weapon of liberation” from neocolonialism and from “the globalization of European/North American culture, whose pretense of universality must be deconstructed from the optical multi-focality of each culture” (Ibid., p. 49).

It is from the perspective of a “philosophy of liberation” that interculturality dialogues with Neohumanism and Neohumanist education. In *The Liberation of the Intellect: Neohumanism*, Sarkar decidedly aims for both political and economic liberation in addition to social emancipation and spiritual realization. Neohumanism indeed seeks to free human beings from physical, psychic, and spiritual bondages in the forms of ego-sentiment, geo-sentiment, socio-sentiment, and (pseudo-)humanism, thus countering all forms of exploitation, be it social, psychic, economic, political, religious, or cultural. With regard to cultural exploitation or domination in particular, Sarkar writes:

Human culture is one, though there are some local variations in its expression. But a particular group which is motivated by socio-sentiment to exploit others, tries to destroy the local cultural expressions of other groups. It forcibly imposes its language, dress and ideas on other groups, and thus paves the way for exploitation by paralysing those people psychologically. This is how people guided by socio-sentiment perpetuate exploitation in cultural life. (Anandamúrti, 2013, p. 334)

One way to fight against exploitation and liberate humanity is through study, which Sarkar defines as “intensive intellectual analysis” or the “internal assimilation, subjective assimilation of objective happenings” or events (Ibid., p. 267). Indeed, Sarkar even affirms that “[t]he first step towards the establishment of Neohumanism is study” (Ibid., p. 270). Neohumanist education has therefore adopted the motto *Sa’vidya’ya’vimuktaye*, or “Education is that which liberates,” an ancient yogic principle from the Indian philosophical tradition. Also translated as “knowledge is that which liberates,” such a principle would relate Neohumanism to interculturality through a transversal

dialogue between discourses of the periphery with arguably subaltern perspectives. For Dussel, intercultural dialogue is “neither modern nor post-modern” but rather “*trans-modern*,” arising from the “borderlands” of modernity itself (2012, p. 50). Representing another, different philosophy of liberation, Neohumanism may thus be considered both transmodern and decolonial, inasmuch as it renews the foundations of modernity (i.e. Humanism) from a position of alterity and deconstructs the bases of coloniality (i.e. imperialism) from a condition of subalternity (Oliveira, 2021).

It is finally in this sense of transmodernity that the universalism of Neohumanism may be reconciled with the pluriversalism of interculturalism. Although the very concept of universality would itself seem to presuppose hegemony, it has been argued by the critical theorist Judith Butler that “no notion of ‘universality’ can rest easily within the notion of a single ‘culture,’ since the very concept of universality compels an understanding of culture as a relation of exchange” (2000, p. 24). For his part, Dussel concludes that a “*trans-modern pluriversality*” is precisely one with many universalities, such as European, Vedic, Taoist, Buddhist, and Latin American, which are all “engaged in a critical intercultural dialogue” (2012, p. 50). In the case of a Tantric universality that is fundamentally based on diversity, it can be argued that Neohumanism ultimately represents a philosophy of *one* humanity existing as a multiplicity of *different* humans, while Neohumanist education presents a pedagogy of diverse universalism extending beyond both interculturalist and internationalist education.

A Few Problems (Re)Solved

Theories and practices of Neohumanism and Neohumanist education have been most fully realized in the schools and scholarly writings concerning young children from early childhood up to the secondary levels of education. The reasons for this are manifold: young children have had less exposure to culturally imposed notions of inferiority and superiority, they are less conditioned by hegemonic forces, and there is more possibility of becoming established in empathy and love for the world, reflective or contemplative routines, and a spirit of service through carefully designed pedagogical practices, all Neohumanist ideals of human development towards universalism (once again defined as the liberation from the aforementioned limiting sentiments).

Less attention has been paid to secondary and postsecondary or tertiary education. We believe that a careful reading of ideas related to “transmodern pluriversality” could form an important context for the further development of guiding theories for these levels of education. In Neohumanist writings, great attention is paid to the importance of sustaining local languages and cultures, though since Sarkar’s original discourses were mostly given forty years ago, there is some danger that these commitments could be interpreted in an essentialist framework. The past forty years have brought increased migratory flows due to local, regional, and international conflicts, climate disasters, and failing economic systems resulting from the imperialisms of the colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial periods. These events are producing parallel advances in Neocolonialist theory and practice. Especially important to the development of Neohumanism and its applications to higher education is a deepened understanding of both cultural and colonial “difference,” which we understand as the site of cultural (trans)formation in a context of unequal power relations, and which results in new iterations of selves and others, new hybridized identities and alterities, and new (inter)cultural forms of expression. Reconceptualizing language and culture in these terms is perfectly consistent with Sarkar’s idea(s) of dynamism, in particular his expressed hope that theories and practices need adapt creatively to changes and variations in time, place, person, and circumstances.

That being said, both internationalism and interculturalism might advance with the more explicit incorporation of Neohumanist ideals. Both are grounded in the Humanist ideals of

cooperation, peace, and the expansion of human rights. However, Humanist ideals are deeply rooted in modernity/coloniality and its correspondent capitalism, and carry the baggage of old ideas about the centrality of humankind in the larger planetary ecosystem and the exhortation, at the dawn of the European Enlightenment, to assert human dominion over the Earth. But relying on the status quo (the continuance of modernity) for our survival is magical thinking – the idea that the systems created by the highly educated people that have gotten us into this mess can get us out of it.

United Nations statements are moving away from the engrained anthropocentrism of modernity with their recently issued report “Learning to Become *With* the World: Education for Future Survival.” In this visionary document, it is noted that attempts to achieve sustainable futures which continue to separate humans from the rest of the world are delusional and futile. The report asserts the centrality of education in a pivotal role of radically reconfiguring human place and agency within this interdependent world, and boldly states the necessity of a “paradigm shift: from learning *about* the world in order to act upon it, to learning to become *with* the world around us” (Common Worlds Research Collective, 2020, p. 3).

A genuine pluriversality demands of people that they learn to bracket their engrained assumptions and begin to listen with open minds and hearts to the wisdom encoded in cultures “other” than their own. This is especially difficult for modern people, even “critical” modern people, who have discounted the wisdom traditions of the world as well as the folkways of indigenous people and others who understand the world as a sacred expression of cosmic intelligence and who have lived, in many cases for centuries, within the limits of their eco-systems. Indeed, as Dussel argues, the concept of transmodernity allows for a serious consideration of traditions “*distinct from the Modern*” but that can also “integrate the best of Modernity:”

For example, for the Indigenous cultures of Latin America there exists an affirmation of Nature that is completely distinct and much more ecologically balanced, which today is more necessary than ever, given that capitalist Modernity confronts Nature as something exploitable, marketable, and destructible. The death of Nature is the collective suicide of humanity, and yet this globalizing modern culture learns nothing about Nature from other cultures, which are apparently more “primitive” or “backwards” according to *developmentalist* parameters. This ecological principle can also integrate the best of Modernity (and it should not refuse all elements of Modernity from the perspective of a pure, substantialist cultural identity), in order even to construct scientific and technological development that emerges from the very experience of Modernity. (2012, p. 50)

Modern people thus need to (re)examine the myths that have sustained modernity and deeply embedded notions of human identity: the myths of the isolated individual, of competition, of positivist science and reason, of merit, of private property, and of all hierarchies and systems of domination and ask whether they serve the ultimate needs of life and a healthy bio-system.

As the fossil-fueled dreams of endless growth, mastery of nature, and the accumulation of wealth go up in smoke, literally and figuratively, it is imperative that modern people who have benefitted from the status quo reorient themselves to an ontology of deep relationships to other humans and the rest of the animate and inanimate worlds. The most fundamental myth is the myth of separation. As Thich Nhat Hanh and so many others have reminded us: “We are here to awaken from the illusion of separateness” (in Sattler, 2021, p. 131). Cultural groups at the periphery who never bought into the myth of separation, who have struggled to maintain cosmic balance and work in harmony with their environments, have much to teach those at the core.

The spiritual roots of Neohumanism are the Indic episteme of Tantra (*Tan*: bondage; *tra*: to liberate from), itself an ancient, indigenous tradition that has now become modern in its own

right. In general, Tantra has been interpreted primarily as the individual transcending the limitations of its own ego. Sarkar, however has created a more dynamic agenda for a (trans)modern Tantra, shifting “the emphasis from the individual to the collective by linking the two so that neither could progress without the other. Spirituality ceases to be selfish and becomes a collective act” (Bussey, 2006, p. 86). In this mode, spirituality sheds the individualism of modernity, especially its new age version, and seeks a critically spiritual and social imagination, one that spans the realms of mythopoetic dreaming to a concrete political vision of radical social equality. The true spirit of Neohumanism and Neohumanist education is ultimately to build such a new human society, free of binding sentiments and bound for a liberating reason.

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