IDEALISM

In education Comenius has been regarded as one of the earliest exponents but it doubtless originated with Socrates and clearly evident in writing of Plato. Idealist is born out of Plato’s theory of ideas.

Man has two facets- spiritual and material. When the emphasis is on the realization of spiritual life, it is called idealism. An idealist does not have considerations for material values of life. He believes that material or physical universe is not complete expression of reality. Idealist claims that this reality is spiritual in nature rather than physical, mental rather than material.

To the idealist, man is a spiritual being who exercises free will and is responsible for his action. Because man is free and spiritual, his essence eludes us if we study him simply as an object.

FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF IDEALISM:

1. **Spirit and mind constitute reality:** the physical world is of less importance than the world of the mind, ideas and experiences. Reality exists in the mind of man and not in the physical world. The physical and material world is not the complete expression of reality.

2. **Man being spiritual is the supreme creation:** idealists maintain the distinctiveness and superiority of man’s nature which is apparent not only from his spiritual capacities denied to animals, but also seen in his power and control over the environment. He also has the power of controlling the spiritual and cultural environment and values.

3. **God is all source of knowledge:** Revealed knowledge is supposed to be the worlds of God and is the only reliable source of knowledge.

4. **Values are absolutely and unchanging:** Truth, beauty and goodness are the spiritual values. These spiritual values are undying and permanent. Realization of these values is the realization of God. For achievement of these values all the capacities of the man are to be harnessed to the full.

5. **Man is not the creator of values:** man cannot create values. This philosophy believes that ideals are not made by man rather they already exist in the world. Man only discovers through his efforts.

6. Idealists provide full support to the principle of unity in diversity.
CHIEF EXPONENTS OF IDEALISM:

Idealism as a school of philosophy is represented by Plato, Barkley, Fitch, Hegel, Kant, Froebel, Socrates, Aurobindo Ghosh, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi.

IDEALISM AND EDUCATION:

Idealism and aims of education: following are the aims as advocated by idealists.

- **Self realization or exaltation of personality:** it involves full knowledge of the self. It means to fulfil one’s individual nature in all its aspects. The highest potentialities of self must be realised in a social and cultural environment provided by the home and school.

- **Development of intelligence and rationality:** according to idealists there is a purpose in all objects and natural phenomena. The universe is planned and organised. Education should aim at helping the pupil to direct his efforts towards understanding these laws. Out of these principles the idealists lay greater importance on the principle of unity in diversity. Highly developed mind can understand these principles.

- **Conservation, promotion and transmission of culture:** the spiritual and cultural inheritance of mankind must be preserved and imparted to students in the school. Education should aim at providing the means of acquainting the student with great achievements in literature, arts, mathematics and sciences. Man should not merely learn culture but should be able to invent and transmit to the next generation.

- **Education for all:** idealists hold that every human being must receive a chance to get education. They believe in universal education. However according to Plato education should be imparted according to the needs of the individuals being educated. He recommended that
  a. Slow learners have to be educated and trained for the job market.
  b. Average learners for the specialist’s job.
  c. The very bright students may be provided higher education.

- **Cultivation of moral values:** it is related to two aspects
  a. Duties to self: cleanliness, punctuality, regularity, self control. Desire to work hard, sincerity and perseverance etc.
b. Duties to others: virtues of modesty, respect for the opinion of others, cooperativeness, liberty and generosity.

- **Idealism and curriculum:** according to idealists education must make available to each child vivid acquaintance with the created order of God, human history, cultural and spiritual heritage. Plato advocated that
  i. Languages, history, literature, geography. Maths, astronomy, science etc should be taught for intellectual development.
  ii. Arts and poetry for aesthetic development.
  iii. Athletics for physical development.
  iv. Religion, philosophy, ethics for moral development.

- **Idealism and methods of teaching:** no single method has been advocated by the idealists as important method.
  - Froebel insisted upon play way method.
  - Socrates used discussion method
  - Plato advocated lecture method
  - Aristotle emphasised inductive and deductive method. Inductive means concrete to abstract, particular to general and deductive is the reverse of it i.e. from general to particular.

- **Idealism and the discipline:** Froebel believes that control over the child is to be exercised through knowledge of his interests and expression of love and sympathy.
  - Idealists attach importance to impressionistic discipline which emphasises the importance of teacher in guiding the students.
  - With due freedom, the idealists believe in strict discipline. The students are required to submit to the laws and regulations. It is through hard and rigorous life they will learn higher values is the opinion of idealists.

- **Idealism and the teacher:** ideal personality is exclusively the product of teacher’s efforts. In the words of Ross “the educator constitutes the special environmental factors whose function is to lead the child nearer reality, to guide him towards his utmost possible function.
  - to the idealists the school is a garden, the educand a tender plant and the educator the careful Gardner.
- Task of the teacher is to provide congenial environment in the school.
- The tasks decided by the idealists to teacher are guide, friend and philosopher.
- The wise direction on the part of the teacher is essential. It includes guidance, control and creating stimulating environment.
- Must be an ideal person to influence the personality of the students.

**Strengths of Idealism in Education:**
- Supported by great philosophers
- Importance to human personality
- Importance to past culture
- Provided concept of mass education
- Advocated clear cut guidelines for all aspects of education—aims, curricula, methods of teaching, discipline and role of the teacher.
- Importance to the role of teacher in personality development of the students.
- Emphasis on moral character of the students.
- Recognises school as a place for thinking and creating beautiful environment.

**Weaknesses of Idealism:**
- Idealism may be criticised as being out of tune with the prevailing scientific world view and recent trends in education.
- Concepts like spirit, soul, cosmos, and mind have little relevance in modern class rooms.
- Pays more importance to teacher than the students.
- Idealistic education stresses imitation of model but younger generation prefers invention and originality rather than imitation.

*Note:* This is the brief sketch of idealism philosophy. Go through the books also for more clarity of the philosophy. Feel free to discuss anything in between 11:30 am to 12 at night. God bless you all.

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