

Investing in Community Spaces

Fund the development of public spaces like parks, community centers, and libraries to foster social connections and a sense of belonging.

Prioritizing Early Childhood Education

Increase funding for high-quality early childhood programs like pre-K and Head Start to support cognitive and social-emotional development from an early age.

Subsidizing Lifelong Learning

Offer subsidies or tax credits for continuing education, skills training, and personal enrichment courses to facilitate ongoing growth and self-actualization.

Measuring National Well-being

Develop robust national indicators of well-being that go beyond just economic metrics like GDP and use them to guide policy making.

The key themes are reducing excessive work hours, providing economic security, investing in education and community, incentivizing sustainable living, and redefining progress using a well-being framework that prioritizes quality of life over mere economic expansion.

Conclusion

Climate change is a complex, multifaceted challenge that requires a holistic, systems-based approach. It is a symptom of a failed vision and worldview based on materialistic and reductionist thinking and a profit-oriented economy. Drawing from the philosophical perspective of neo-humanism, systems thinking, and alternative economics, this article has outlined a multifaceted strategy to address climate change through systemic change across different domains.

Most importantly, even without climate change, the planet would be facing serious systemic environmental and economic problems today. By accepting that our planet is potentially facing an environmental and economic tipping point, we need to weave together the above-mentioned threads to build a comprehensive approach to tackling the systemic crisis we are in. More importantly, even if there were no climate crisis, we are compelled to implement systems change for moral and philosophical as well as economic and environmental reasons. We have strayed too far away from what Aristotle considered a “good society.” Hence, it is time to address not just the symptoms but the root causes of our planetary predicament, so that we can envision and create a world where both people and the planet can thrive.

The article with its complete references is available at the journal web pages theneohumanist.com.

Two Reviews of Kathleen Kesson's *Becoming One With the World: A Guide to Neohumanist Education*

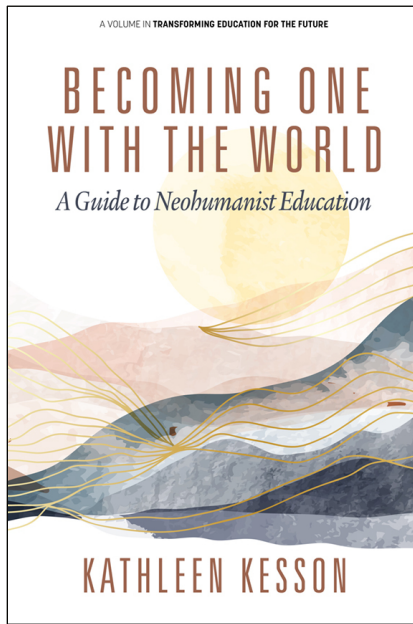
Beyond Humanism

Paul Freedman

IN KATHLEEN KESSON'S extraordinary new volume, *Becoming One With the World: A Guide to Neohumanist Education* (2024), the author takes us on a beatific journey of discovery. The text spans great distances progressing step by step from the philosophical and pedagogical foundations of holistic consciousness theory to the contemporary practice of neohumanist education. This book also plunges through many layers of depth reminding us of the deep spiritual connectedness of all beings as the rock-solid foundation of a worldview beyond humanism and the educational models that have emerged from it. This volume offers tools for individual reflection and personal and professional growth through its offer of probing questions compelling the reader to integrate these concepts into our own life and practice. Kesson's ambitious book represents both a challenge and a delight to anyone serious about reimagining and re-enchanting education from the roots up.

To readers of this journal, some of Kesson's chapters in Section 1 of *Becoming One With the World*, will traverse familiar philosophical terrain. She reminds us of many core principles of holistic education, while she simultaneously poses existential questions; “What does it mean to be human?” “What is the purpose of life?” “How do we come to know?” These questions drive an initial exploration of a humanist approach focused on the individual, towards the possibility of an ontological shift, from an absolute sense of being, epistemology and truth towards one that is more relational. Kesson identifies several prominent philosophical traditions that undergird specific approaches to contemporary education, namely, perennialism, behaviorism, romanticism, pragmatism and critical pedagogy. She then proposes a kind of post-humanist approach that is holistic and presupposes much deeper and more essential levels of mutuality and interconnection.

Kesson powerfully describes the need for teachers who embrace this more holistic worldview to be willing to work on developing themselves, unpacking the self in all its complexity and nuance and embracing a journey towards wisdom. Relational and connected teaching is not defined by technique but by being and presence. One must endeavor to see oneself before one can see and engage with learners. Indeed this is not a journey for the faint of heart.



Becoming One With the World: A Guide to Neohumanist Education, by Kathleen Kesson.
A volume in *Transforming Education for the Future*.
Information Age Publishing, Charlotte, NC (2024)

In Kesson's chapter on child development, we see an example of the courageous approach the author takes to questioning and rethinking everything related to our ossified understanding of the educational mission. Here we are encouraged to look through a worldview lens as we consider such "sacred cows" as stage theories of development, our norms-based approach to teaching and assessment, and even the nature of child development as rooted within and focused upon the individual. In every case we are stretched and challenged to wonder, might there be a different way? Could child development be considered relationally, true to our holistic understanding that everything happens in context and in relation to the surrounding beings and the cosmos?

The final two chapters of the book's Section 1 embark on a thorough deconstruction of the ideology and power structures undergirding the contemporary system of mainstream education as well as exploring a radically contemplative alternative perspective. Specifically a chapter on decolonizing school systems lays bare the power structures that are served by school systems, while contemplative approaches are presented as a tangible decolonized alternative.

The author encourages even deeper presence and a kind of reciprocity from and with the reader by the inclusion of prompts for guided reflection at the end of each chapter. In this way, the journey does

feel guided as the author walks beside the reader in a way that mirrors and models her understanding of the relational nature of learning.

If Section 1 offers a more familiar and philosophical foundation needed for holistic education, Section 2 is a departure into new terrain. In these chapters, Kesson asks us to consider what kind of education embodies these holistic values and understanding of the world. What sort of educational practice might promote, kindle and nurture this most needed worldview shift, one that re-animates our understanding of life lived in deep connection with the cosmos? It is in this context that the author leads us to take a meaningful look at the practice of neohumanist education.

These chapters constitute the bulk of the text. They are a true gift to those of us who have not had the opportunity to visit a neohumanist school in person. Kesson allows us to examine the process of curriculum development in a neohumanist school, where the term "curriculum" itself takes on new and profound meaning. We get to see and feel the way in which yoga is practiced, taught and integrated into the beautiful holistic pedagogy of a neohumanist school. We get to see and feel the many ways arts are incorporated in these schools, from fine art to movement to music. There is a visceral, textured and practical approach in these chapters. Together they allow the reader to experience the essential practice and beauty of neohumanist education.

In these urgent times, as we find ourselves on the brink of crisis and the prospect of the degraded planetary ecology leading inexorably towards an impending Holocene extinction, education must be reclaimed as holding the potential for evolution and transformation. Educational reform efforts have been woefully inadequate to effect the profound worldview shift that is so desperately needed. *Becoming One With the World: A Guide to Neohumanist Education* offers an opportunity to contemplate humanity's most existential questions and to reimagine our system of education based on a truly holistic consciousness. This approach to educating the new human, neohumanist education, already exists. Kathleen Kesson powerfully and comprehensively makes the case that this is the shift we have been so desperately needing.

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Myriad Ways To Becoming One

Shakil Ahmed

HAVING WORKED WITH education systems over the past 15 years, I do know that addressing some of the complex challenges of today cannot be done with the type of thinking that created these challenges to begin with. Traditional education systems have been complicit in perpetuating the challenges of a world dealing with pollution, violence, inequality, etc. It is not enough to try to improve these systems through technical and technological solutions. There has to be a reimagining of the beliefs and assumptions of “why education” itself.

With this interest I started reading *Becoming One With the World: A Guide To Neohumanist Education*, in search of an alternative worldview and with that, an alternative education. Will a neohumanist education be able to bring the changes necessary to address the complex challenges of today and tomorrow?

Acknowledging Biases

Becoming One With the World is aptly titled, since the essence of the neohumanist movement is to bring out the universal interconnection that all living beings share. The author, Kathleen Kesson, ensures that this point is brought to the fore in each of the chapters of this 400 page guide.

I’ll admit a personal bias towards writers who reference Paulo Freire and Ivan Illich; thinkers who have shaped my own thinking. In the spirit of acknowledging biases, I do appreciate the author acknowledging the reader’s right to know how an author’s ideas are shaped. It is good to see that Kesson has been exposed to a diversity of thinkers in education, including a diversity of cultures.

In that spirit, I should remind readers that my native Bangladesh recently went through a “revolution”, or a regime change of sorts, depending on who you ask, and is currently going through a phase that I personally have mixed feelings about. I know that the status quo of education will not help our people much in navigating the challenges ahead. A result of the recent political change has been to pause a curriculum reform and revert back to the old curriculum. We can now only hope that curricular reform will be thought about again.

How can any country think about developing a living curriculum that is not affected by the political regime and random decisions of bureaucrats and technocrats, and instead embedded culturally for the benefit of all its people? This question was another reason of mine for exploring the thinking reflected in this book.

Embracing the Spirit of Plurality

Now, if one is looking for all the answers in any particular book, then that would usually not be the point of reading. Rather, a book should provide a few answers and numerous fresh questions. *Becoming One With the World* does serve as an introduction to understanding what neohumanist education is and its possible implementations in the real world.

Each chapter provides questions about relevant aspects of education and of neohumanist education in particular, while also offering choices, without being slavishly instructive. Being singularly instructive would have been antithetical to the book’s description of how neohumanist education strives towards epistemological pluralism. Each chapter, while sharing certain principles on neohumanist education, also provides a multitude of choices, whether it is of discussing curriculum design, teacher development, the integration of arts and sciences into the classroom, pedagogy, and so on, and even is pluralistic on the notion of the space and time in which learning takes place.

The exercises at the end of each chapter provide opportunities to explore aspects of that chapter in depth, which would be of particular service to those who will read the book together as a collective endeavour.

My question on how to prevent curriculum-at-scale being influenced by the whims and fancies of the few, could be answered by having a pluralistic approach to where and when learning is taking place. Schools are only one site for learning and thus, neohumanist educators can reflect on sites beyond the school.

Of course, when it comes to making choices about education, which philosophy to follow, what kind of curriculum, what kind of pedagogy, etc., another lesson that neohumanist education would teach us is the integration of different educational philosophies, such as perennialism, behaviourism, romanticism, pragmatism, critical pedagogy and holism. A neohumanist approach is an attempt to identify the strengths of each school of thought, and encourages us to be flexible in using lessons from each in various contexts.

In a way, it does feel like being Avatar the Last Airbender—an attempt to embrace the powers of different ways of knowing. Kesson readily introduces concepts from multiple languages and discourses, but she has not made use of the concept of *Sadvipra*—an archetype, suggested by Sarkar, who embraces multiple ways of knowing—but it does feel that a neohumanist education is an education to nurture *sadvipras*.



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On the Philosophical Foundations

Besides introducing the reader to the philosophical foundations of neohumanism and neohumanist education, the Introduction and Part 1 highlight essential concepts of the curriculum and its pedagogy. The introduction can be read as a digest of the book, while the rest of the content indeed provides exposure to issues of each aspect necessary for a deeper immersion.

The Introduction does start with the idea that conventional education and by implication, conventional modes of thinking, have not worked, especially modes that are ego-centric and strictly humanistic in approach; where humans alone remain at the centre. As such, the Introduction serves as a primer for understanding the spirit of neohumanist education, attempting to explain any apparent contradictions—such as that neohumanist education may be systematic but not standardized, and that such education can prepare for a neohumanist future and at the same time engage learners to live in the present.

The neohumanist approach emphasizes relationality, that all humans are connected with all other creations whether animate or inanimate. Love for all created beings is at the core. Reading about it reminded me of a Facebook post I once wrote on the importance of universe-loving leaders, that patriotic leaders are not enough. It is reassuring to see this issue being brought up. However, at the same time neohumanist education is meant to be rooted in local culture and place. To nurture this point, such education needs to be value-driven, character-based and non-colonial in nature.

Chapter 1 introduces us to the philosophical foundations of neohumanism—its cosmology/metaphysics (the origin and nature of the universe), its ontology (the nature of reality), its epistemology (the nature of knowing) and its axiology (its approach to ethics and aesthetics). The core idea is that all matter is generated from Cosmic Consciousness and that the ultimate union of the human is with this Infinite Consciousness. Accordingly, the ideal of neohumanist education that emerges is one

of young persons growing to expand their circle of love, connecting in meaningful ways with all beings and embracing a compassionate universal outlook throughout their journey in the world.

Thus, the opening pages did make me think that although one may at first be somewhat uncomfortable with having to work within an educational system that one has not yet seen in actual context, if only one remains authentic to the philosophical foundations and principles, it would allow for neohumanist education to manifest in various forms.

Chapter 2 offers reflections on what a neohumanist teacher should be like. While mastering of subject matter is expected, the teacher's interdisciplinary understanding of connections between the subjects taught is equally important. In order to engage learners properly with subjects, teachers need to know their learners and their social context, and at the same time aspire to know themselves—placing emphasis on knowledge about both the outer and inner world. This introspective-cum-extrospective syncretical trend made me think whether facilitators of transformative futures thinking should either be neohumanist educators or at least, be epistemo-logically open to learn from neohumanist education.

Chapter 3 and 4 make us think about the context of the learner and how learners learn. In the pursuit of a new kind of education, conventional child development theories are limited and new theorizing on child development is encouraged. While Kesson mentions that Sarkar is not fixed on any particular theory of child development, a main principle of his is that education cannot be imparted through fear. Rather, the thirst for knowledge needs to be awakened among learners. The understanding of what should be required for learners may be nurtured through intuitive observation, and not by holding tightly onto a theory—a theme that runs throughout the book.

Given that most of our educational models have been inherited, not just through the colonial project but even by the nature of colonization that exists today, it is indeed refreshing to note that the decolonization of education has been highlighted in a separate chapter. Kesson makes it clear that universalism does not mean to bring everyone together under the umbrella of a Western lens. Rather, the author recognizes the importance of sustaining local languages and local knowledge, through diverse universalism.

While principles around decolonizing education were mentioned, throughout the book I was looking for more local examples. Of particular note, whenever holism was being discussed I was hoping for examples of Bhutanese education, given how

they have embraced holistic education, following from Gross National Happiness, and even from Chinese scholars. However, the writer has mentioned her biases and even then, she does bring in examples from other contexts, not just the Western context, and does mention Tagore once.

Chapter 6 complements Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 in advocating for the importance of contemplative inquiry, a practice embraced by neohumanist educators. Kesson does make the bold claim that the child is an endangered species, providing examples of how children are being robbed of their childhood. Contemplative, descriptive inquiry is an attempt to make the child visible. This perspective would enable educators to make better learner-centred decisions. I note that Kesson does not use “learner-centred” or “child-centred” as much, since that may also again put the human in the centre; however, the child is indeed a co-creator of their education.

On Pedagogy and Practices

The chapters in Section II are devoted to the reality of educators regarding decisions that may have to be made when implementing neohumanist education. Chapter 7 provides several resources on how to go about designing curriculum and lesson plans for neohumanist learning.

The tension between educating for a neohumanist future while providing learning that is engaged with the present, reminds me of prefigurative politics to some extent; the idea that what we desire in the future should already be practiced in the present. It is progressive that Kesson takes this broad view of curriculum being the whole experience of the person, preparing the ground for discussing hidden curriculum and null curriculum as well.

The aims and purposes of neohumanist education are reiterated, and reflections are made on subject matter, organizing curriculum, designing activities, and assessments. The author provides useful templates at the end of the chapter, instead of the end of the book, which I think is a useful placement.

Chapter 8 reverts to the art of teaching, parts of which have been highlighted in Chapter 2. However, this chapter takes a deeper dive into metaphors of schooling and the kinds of instructional methods teachers have at their disposal. Again, this chapter is also another example of how Kesson does not want to dictate exactly what the neohumanist teacher should do. Instead, she illuminates the sea of options available while embracing neohumanist principles.

Whereas Chapter 9 shares the importance of embedding the arts in curriculum, Chapter 11, 12, 13 and 14 show how visual arts, music, creative movement/dance and theatre can be embedded in

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neohumanist education. Chapter 10 addresses how literacy should also be viewed pluralistically. Chapter 15 addresses how yoga and mindfulness should be taught to children. Chapter 16 aids educators in reflecting on how the social context around learners should be explored. Chapter 17 describes the limitations of science and how science can be thought of in a neohumanist perspective and thus, addresses how STEAM¹ can be approached. Chapter 18 provides more context on STEAM in conjunct with neohumanist pedagogy. Accordingly, it can be noted that Part 2 really provides educators, irrespective of their disciplinary backgrounds, a playground to reflect on how they can play a part in implementing a neohumanist education.

An Invitation to Keep Searching

In the Conclusion, Kesson mentions that the book should be a work-in-progress, given that neohumanism does not preach fixed thinking. Rather, there is need for continuous experimentation, learning, adapting and evolving. Educators thirsty for reflection on a different paradigm of education will enjoy reflecting on the questions and approaches in the book. It is also an invitation for anyone to keep building on the discourse on neohumanist education and education in general. Business-as-usual will not help us in our effort towards an education that we need for a world that works for all its beings. We long for something different, and this book has it in itself to be a companion to teachers in their journey, if they so choose, to be part of making this difference.

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¹ STEAM is an educational approach that combines the arts with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). The author reconceptualizes the STEAM acronym to stand for science, technology, ethics, arts, and mathematics, emphasizing the central role that ethical development plays in neohumanist education.

A Call for Rational Visionary Writing

Neohumanist Review invites submission of articles for publication in its bi-annual (March and September) issues. The journal comprises multiple disciplines to address the most vexing planetary issues, such as social and economic inequality, ecological collapse, war and peace, mass immigration, and technological transformations, from the joint perspective of art, science, philosophy, and spirituality.

Our aim is to bring together academic writings using the filter of the philosophy of neohumanism, focusing on the transcendental, trans-disciplinary and transformative, in order to promote the liberation of all.

Neohumanist Review aims at:

- Exploring optimistic visions for the world;
- Educating the world about the relevance of neohumanist philosophy as it is applied to diverse areas of existence;
- Offering pragmatic views as guides towards a post-capitalist world;
- Reporting on exemplary progressive initiatives undertaken by anyone anywhere in the world;
- Sharing scholarly in-depth articles on themes of popular interest;
- Publishing research reports that further peace, freedom, prosperity, justice and progress of the society;
- Encouraging rational, scientific and compassionate thinking in solving the problems of humanity.

Interested writers may contact the editors at theneohumanist.com