UNIT 9: NATURALISM AS A SCHOOL OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIT STRUCTURE

9.1 Learning Objectives

9.2 Introduction

9.3 Meaning of Naturalism

- 9.3.1 Fundamental Principles of Naturalism
- 9.3.2 Forms of Naturalism

9.4 Naturalism and its Influences on Educational Thought and Practice

- 9.4.1 Difference between Idealism and Naturalism
- 9.4.2 Contribution of Naturalism to Education

9.5 Let Us Sum Up

9.6 Further Reading

9.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

9.8 Model Questions

9.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- define the meaning of naturalism as a school of philosophy
- explain the forms of naturalism
- describe naturalism and its impact on education

9.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces you to another school of philosophy which is known as Naturalism. This philosophy considers nature (or matter) as everything. Like Idealism, Naturalism has also influenced educational theory and practice to a great extent. In this unit, you will be able to learn the philosophy of naturalism, its various principles and its different forms.

- Naturalism advocates education according to the nature of the child.
- Man creates values according to his own needs.
- There is no possibility of any supernatural being such as soul spirit, God etc.
- Naturalism believes that man creates society only to meet some of his needs.
- Naturalism emphasizes only on the present life of the individual. Therefore, man must try to make his life, happy and comfortable.

9.3.2 Forms of Naturalism

Naturalism manifests itself in three major forms and you must be familiar with these forms.

Physical Naturalism: Physical naturalism explains human actions, individual experiences emotions and feelings on the basis of physical science. It seeks to explain the entire universe in the light of the principle of physical sciences. Thus, it interprets the man just like the facts of the physical world is interpreted.

Mechanical Naturalism: This type of naturalism regard the entire universe as a machine made of matter. It possesses self driving energy which ensures its functioning. The human being is also conceived as an active machine which is activated by certain environmental influences.

Biological Naturalism: Biological naturalism believes in the theory of biological evolution. It holds that man is the highest form of creation in the long history of biological evolution of life on earth. Man is never a machine. Man's original nature consists of innate endowment and always strives for natural and spontaneous development from within.

- **Survival of the Individual:**
  Naturalism believes that the fittest alone should survive. Education must prepare the child to struggle for existence and ensure his survival. It should help the child to adjust himself physically and mentally to the changing circumstances of life.
- **Autonomous development of Individuality:**
  According to some naturalists, development of individuality is the supreme aim of education according to some naturalists. Rousseau and Nunn are the main exponents of this view.
- **Education for Leisure:**
  Proper utilization of leisure time occupies an important place in the naturalist scheme of education. Leisure time may be devoted to painting music, sculpture, poetry and recreation by natural sciences. These arts are to be developed through education.

Naturalism and Curriculum:

Naturalist Herbert Spencer has described curriculum according to natural activities of the individual. Every individual has to protect his life, therefore, he should be given knowledge of body and health. We should give training of vocational subjects for self- preservation, home science for family life, social science for social and political life and art and literature for utilization of leisure. Thus, naturalists give prominence to subjects like nature Study, Agriculture, Gardening, Art, Craft, Chemistry, Physics, Botany, Geology, Geography, Astronomy, Teaching of sciences as they are concerned with nature. History is also included in the curriculum because it helps in transmitting the past experiences of the race to the children. Rousseau's curriculum for the child is based on the principle of 'negative education', which demands greatest possible freedom for the child in his movements and activities. When the child grows up, training of intellect should be given through experience. Accordingly, the curriculum should be experience-centered. At the higher stage, the naturalists stand for sciences rather than for arts

punishment as he believes that this gives rise to undesirable conflict in the child. Spencer, an extreme naturalist says that discipline should be through natural consequences of one's action only. If a child goes wrong, natural reaction is the proper punishment for him.

Evaluation of Naturalism:

Now, we have gone through all aspects of naturalism. We must have realized that it has made immense contribution towards modern educational thought and practices by giving importance on psychological and scientific concept of education. We shall make a note of some of its contributions in the following line:

- The naturalistic conception of education is essentially psychological. It gives importance on understanding the nature of the child and planned education. Child centric education is the gift of naturalism.
- This thought gave incentive for the study of child psychology; a special branch of psychology that gives special attention to the mental and physical development of the child.
- Philosophy of Naturalism has given education truly the status of a science subject. As a consequence, all the aspects and areas of modern education are now examined objectively and studied on the basis of science for its appropriate application.
- This philosophy gives the highest priority to development of inborn and inherited qualities of the child. It has been able to serve the nature and inherent needs and requirements of the child.
- In the method of teaching, Naturalism emphasized learning by doing, i.e., learning through experiences instead of words or books.
- Play way method in education is another contribution of this thought. Naturalism has proved that play is natural and essential.
- "Back to nature" is the main slogan of this thought. Beside this "self expression", "auto education", "Follow nature" are some of the characteristics of naturalistic education.
- Role of the teacher has been made indirect but more responsible by this philosophy. Teachers have been described not as the lesson-maker, but as the guide and director of the students.

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Q3: Explain the method of teaching which has been adopted by the philosophy of Naturalism in education.

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Q 4: List the subjects that have received importance in a naturalist curriculum.

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Q 5: Explain the role of teacher in a naturalistic setting of education.

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Q 6: Mention the grounds on which the philosophy of naturalism has been criticized.

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9.4.1 Difference between Idealism and Naturalism

Idealism and Naturalism are the two schools of philosophy that seem to be quite opposed to each other. Some of the vital points of difference may be analysed below:

- Idealism holds that final truth lies in the nature of mind and not in the matter. Matter is only a part of the truth and not the entire truth, whereas naturalism maintains that final truth rests in the nature of matter and not in the mind or soul. It believes that mind is also constituted of matter.
- Idealism gives importance to knowledge acquired through spiritual power rather than through physical senses. It is of the view that material universe known to science is only an incomplete aspect of the reality, whereas naturalism believes in knowledge acquired directly through physical senses. Method of acquiring knowledge should be based on observation and

- Naturalism brings to light the significance of progressive methods of teaching like 'learning by doing', 'learning by observing' and 'learning by inductive approach'.
- Naturalism has given birth to new movements and new types of educational institutions like A.S Neill's Summerhill School and Visva Bharati.



9.5 LET US SUM UP

- According to naturalism, education should be according to the nature of the child, and it is very essential from a psychological standpoint. It emphasizes on learning through experiences and the play way method, which is a notable contribution towards educational thought and practice.
- The chief advocates of this philosophy were Democritus, Epicurus, Bacon, Comenious, Herbert Spencer, Nunn, Hurley, Rousseau, Locke, Kant etc.
- Naturalism manifests itself in three major forms- Physical Naturalism, Mechanical Naturalism and Biological Naturalism.
- The method of teaching and learning in Naturalism is guided by the activity principle. It is known as 'learning by doing'.
- The naturalist philosophers oppose the traditional concept of discipline and advocate allowing maximum freedom to the child.
- Naturalists give prominence to subjects like nature Study, Agriculture, Gardening, Art, Craft, Chemistry, Physics, Botany, Geology, Geography, Astronomy etc. Teaching of sciences as they widely deal with nature.



9.6 FURTHER READING

1) Aggarwal, J.C. (2006) *Theory and principles of education*, Vikash publishing house, New Delhi.

- Self-government and self-effort are another two methods which are adopted by Naturalism as method of learning. These methods provide a direction to the children to get the direct experiences of social life.

Ans to Q No 4: Subjects are nature study, agriculture, gardening, art, craft, chemistry, physics, geology, astronomy.

Ans to Q No 5: In a naturalistic scheme of education, the teacher cannot interfere in the process of learning. His duty is to create a favourable environment for learning and he will remain as a facilitator of learning.

Ans to Q No 6: Naturalism has been criticized on the grounds that:

- To find out a naturalistic setting for education is very difficult to obtain for all children.
- To learn everything from nature without having books or other aids seems to be impossible in the modern day world.
- The child is immature; therefore, absolute freedom may be harmful.



9.8 MODEL QUESTIONS

A) Short Questions: (Answer each question in about 150 words)

Q 1: What is meant by Naturalism?

Q2: Mention the fundamental principles of Naturalism.

Q3: What are the different forms of Naturalism?

B) Long Questions: (Answer each question in about 300-500 words)

Q 1: What is mean by Naturalism? How does it influence the theory and practice of education?

Q 2: What are the salient features of Naturalistic philosophy? Discuss.

Q3: Point out the difference between Idealism and Naturalism.

Q4: Mention the contribution of Naturalism to Education.

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