

PLENARY SESSIONS

DAY 1 – Saturday, July 13, 2019

Neohumanist Responses to Global Challenges

What are the values and new ways of thinking needed to bring about the paradigm shift we now know is necessary for creating a bright future?

Neohumanism: Embodying Knowledge for a Better Tomorrow

Amal Jacobson

A new world demands a new worldview, but if such a worldview is to be more than just theoretical, then it must be lived and embodied. Neohumanism is unique as such a heart-centered philosophy. Rather than being a mere intellectual construct, it's a roadmap for how to live and love fiercely for universal welfare. This plenary will explore what it means to embody and enact Neohumanism. Far from being a one-size-fits-all approach, Neohumanism is a deeply personal and ultimately spiritual journey. By re-imagining the human, Neohumanism challenges each of us to re-imagine ourselves, along with our ultimate place in a mutually-enhancing world.

Amal Jacobson studied at the Center for Neohumanist Studies in Ydrefors, Sweden in 2004. Since then, he has taught and led classes and workshops on Neohumanism all over the world. Receiving his MA from the Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness program of the California Institute of Integral Studies, he continues to teach and write widely, with an emphasis on Neohumanism and Integral Ecology. He is currently an educational assistant at the Progressive School of Long Island, where he also teaches a daily meditation practice with its students.

A Philosophy of Education for the Anthropocene

Kathleen Kesson

We have entered a new era in human existence, the Anthropocene, signifying a growing awareness that we are in a phase of planetary development in which human impacts on the earth may cause or have caused irreversible damage. How do we assist the shift from Doomsday scenarios towards a future in which “Neohumanism will elevate humanism to universalism, the cult of love for all created beings of this universe?” (Shrii P.R. Sarkar). Education is a primary vehicle for cultivating the “new human”, persons who embrace this love of all created beings and align their actions with such deeply felt convictions. This talk will outline the contours of a philosophy and practice of education equal to the immense task before us.

Kathleen Kesson is Professor Emerita of Teaching, Learning and Leadership in the School of Education at the Brooklyn Campus of Long Island University. She is the former Director of Teacher Education at Goddard College in Vermont, and was the founding Director of the John Dewey Project on Progressive Education at the University of Vermont, a research and policy organization. She has written extensively in numerous academic journals about democracy and education, teacher development, teacher inquiry, critical pedagogy, unschooling, environmental education, and spirituality and the arts in education. Her books include Curriculum Wisdom: Educational Decisions in Democratic Societies, Understanding Democratic Curriculum Leadership, Defending Public Schools: Teaching for a Democratic Society, and most recently, Unschooling in Paradise. She is currently involved in exploring the connections between personalized learning, communities, social justice and democracy in Vermont. In her spare time, (and when the sun shines) Kathleen is an avid gardener, with a special passion for permaculture and pollinator plants!

DAY 2 – Sunday, July 14, 2019

Developing Inner Resources to Prepare for an Unknown Future

How can we build the inner resources and ecological wisdom of students and teachers to prepare for a rapidly changing world and unpredictable future?

Microscope Lab Lesson: “From Elephant to Ant: Zooming in from Macro to Micro”

Eric Jacobson

Microscope slide 1: Neohumanism

Questions to be answered: How did we get here? What is a human being? What is human nature? How do we define our progress as a species?

Microscope slide 2: Set your magnification to 100X

Questions to be answered: How does education look under the influence of Neohumanism? What are the three main pathways for neohumanist educators to follow?

Microscope slide 3: Set your magnification to 1000X

Questions to be answered: How does environmental science look now? How does it overlap with ethics? How is it guided by principles? What is best practice?

Eric Jacobson founded the Progressive School of Long Island in 1985 and has been its Director for the past 34 years. The school now has 135 students K-8. His lifelong dedication to children and education includes 11 years previous work as a teacher and then a Director of a Montessori School. Eric has recently been recognized by Nassau County, the county in New York State where his school is situated, for 25 years of "selfless commitment to the community". As a global trainer for Neohumanist Education, Eric has conducted Teacher Training workshops and programs in Sweden, Australia, Venezuela, Mexico, Asheville, Portland and New York. In addition to his work in Neohumanist Education, Eric is also a student of the songs of Prabhat Samgiita, having been personally chosen by Shrii P. R. Sarkar to teach them. Regarding the Progressive School, Shrii P. R. Sarkar once said, "What is accepted in New York today will be accepted in the world tomorrow."

Reflective Teachers, Reflective Learners: Weaving permaculture principles into curriculum to develop neohumanist consciousness

Didi Ananda Devapriya

While many people equate permaculture with gardening, this is only one of the many ways that permaculture can be practiced. Permaculture at its core is a set of ethics and principles applied dynamically to daily decision making. It can be flexibly used to inform choices about the best combination of plants for a shady part of the garden, or for designing a process to make sure all children's voices in a classroom are valued.

As childhood is a critical time of life for the formation of lifelong world views and attitudes, it is an ideal period to introduce the permaculture ethics of earth care, people care and fair share in order to develop a neohumanist relationship with the surrounding world. Yet permaculture can sometimes seem sophisticated, abstract and difficult to access for the non-technically minded. Is it then even realistically possible to make it palatable for teachers and children?

Also, given the great and urgent need in modern society for a fundamental shift in how we relate to our natural world and each other, do we have time to wait for a new generation to mature and lead us towards sustainability? How can education provide a pathway to accelerate the understanding and application of permaculture principles by mainstream society? How can we successfully integrate these principles into existing kindergarten and school curriculums?

These were the very challenges that the Children in Permaculture (CIP) project undertook, bringing together experts in permaculture, neohumanism, and education from 7 organisations in 5 countries. Didi Ananda Devapriya was one of the three co-authors of the Children in Permaculture teachers manual "Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share in Education" published by the project. She will be exploring these questions and sharing the tools and methods that she helped to develop in the CIP project. She will also show how the CIP materials can be used to lead towards developing Neohumanist "awakened conscience" in children and teachers.

Didi Ananda Devapriya was ordained as a yogic nun of Ananda Marga in 2001, after 2 years of specialized training in Neohumanist philosophy, PROUT and Biopsychology as well as intensive practice of yoga and meditation at the "International School of Social Service Prashiksana Matha" in Yderfors, Sweden. The final stage of advanced training as an instructor in yoga and meditation practices took place in Kolkata, India.

From 2001-2005, Didi managed "Asilo Nido Giardino Del Sole", a nursery for 20 children from 0-3 in Verona Italy. In 2005 Didi Ananda Devapriya founded and continues as president of the Neohumanist Association in Romania (AEN) as well as the general director AMURTEL Romania, where she has supervised two Neohumanist kindergartens, an alternative family style children's home, an after-school center, a community supported agriculture project, and a social integration program for youth leaving care. Didi has also co-authored the Children in Permaculture manual "Earth Care, People Care and Fair Share in Education", as well as a Neohumanist Education Early Childhood Curriculum which has been submitted to the Romanian Ministry of Education. She is the author of numerous articles for the Gurukul Network, an international journal of Neohumanist Education.

Didi has broad experience as an international speaker throughout Europe, in Australia, Lebanon and the USA on topics related to Neohumanist Education, spirituality, biopsychology, PROUT, and yoga. She has been a trainer in inclusive, pro-diversity approaches through a 2 year funded project that reached more than 100 kindergarten teachers and over 1000 children. She has also offered trainings in "Children in Permaculture" around the world, "Yoga for Children," and annual teacher trainings on a wide variety of subjects at the Zonnlicht school in Holland.

DAY 3 – Monday, July 15, 2019

Integrating Science, Spirituality and the Arts

What role can spirituality and the arts play as vehicles of transcendence, social cohesion, and ecological wisdom in education?

Recent developments and future directions in the science of shaping and refining human experience

Sucharit Katyal

At the core of Neohumanist education is the idea that human experience and the living world are in an inherently synthetic relationship with each other. Here the world and experience are synthetic not only in their interconnected sense, but also in the sense of progressing towards more synthesis through gradual refinement of body and mind by means of spiritual practices. While Shrii P. R. Sarkar, the founder of Neohumanism and Neohumanist Education, presented these ideas at least four decades ago, recent progress in human scientific disciplines is propelling these ideas into mainstream via education research, and, in turn, public policy. Two overlapping disciplines of human sciences are noteworthy here: 1) cognitive science, with respect to how human experience is shaped by being based in a body and in an environment (i.e., 4e cognition), and 2) phenomenology, with respect to how human experience is experienced. I will give a basic introduction to these two disciplines and their current state of the art, as well as my ongoing work on cognitive and experiential refinement through meditation. The goal of the presentation is for educators to discover new tools and concepts for thinking about the shaping and refining of human experience for a bright future.

Sucharit Katyal is a cognitive neuroscientist by profession. He received his PhD in Psychology from the University of Texas Austin in 2013. His research includes studying the human mind and brain on various topics ranging from how humans perceive the visual world, to how human experience changes with meditation training. His recent project on the “role of brain oscillations in meditation” was awarded the 2019 Seal of Excellence Award by the European Commission.

Bringing Rationalistic Spirituality into Public Schools in South Tyrol

Christian Franceschini

We are living in an era of science, and thus in many countries, education has become entirely secular. While the separation of church and state in education has encouraged greater intellectual freedom in positive ways, at the same time materialist values have become dominant. This reflects in the increasing emphasis on dry academics, in particular the STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering, mathematics), in order to prepare young people for the modern job market. It also reflects in the increasing cynicism and depression that young people experience.

On the other hand, the cultivation of subtler human potentiality is often largely neglected. Yet, we are already witnessing how material science and its advanced technology, when used by those that have selfish, short-sighted interests can lead humanity towards its own destruction. How then to cultivate the wisdom and subtler sensitivities of young people so that they are inspired to use not only science, but all of their potential towards universal welfare rather than limited interests?

The eight elements of Astaunga Yoga offers a complete set of systematic and practical tools for holistic human development, and can be easily incorporated into the educational process. This system is based on a rationalistic, rather than religious, approach to spirituality. It sees spirituality as a universal aspect of our human experience, and one that leads humanity to its peak expression.

More than just yoga positions, Astaunga Yoga also includes universal moral values, developing and refining concentration, and expanding the heart with love. Indeed, Christian Franceschini has a wealth of experience in bringing Astaunga Yoga practices into the public school system of South Tyrol over the past 20 years. He will also be sharing the project “Yogasofia” which is already active in preparing educational strategies that bring the very efficient, effective tools of Astaunga Yoga into public schools.

Christian Franceschini was born in Bolzano (Italy) in 1964 and is an educator and trainer in the field of Yoga, Meditation and Naturopathy. He has practiced the holistic system of Ananda Marga Yoga since 1986. In 1989 he met Shrii Prabhat Ranjan Sarkar, founder and leader of the Neohumanist Education System. He learned and continues studying Rajadhiraja Yoga. In 1998, when a Ministerial Circular encouraged public schools for the first time to teach yoga to children, Christian Franceschini was already active through several courses in the city of Trento and then all over the region Trentino Alto-Adige (South-Tyrol). Over 10,000 children have attended his courses or workshops in Italian, German and English. He works with the schools superintendent of Bolzano as an expert for disabled children and children having different kinds of behavior problems. For the same provincial institute he has held training courses for kindergarten teachers. He holds training courses for adults in the field of Tantra Yoga philosophy and is the Director of the Italian National Yoga and Intuitive Sciences Academy (Yogis).

Shrii PR Sarkar's Aesthetics of Life

Didi Anandarama

"Beyond the periphery of material mobility, there is the world of aesthetics." According to Shrii PR Sarkar all beings have their intrinsic sense and drive of creative expression and longing for perfect balance in the physical, psychic and psycho-spiritual realm. What are the aesthetic avenues that have been offered to humanity to become complete so far? How can we help and contribute to support this inherent characteristic aspect in individual and collective life? Dwelling on these questions and searching for answers will be the focus of this presentation.

Didi Anandarama was born in Slovenia and entered the order of Ananda Marga yogic nuns in 1975. She has been teaching meditation and related practices and philosophy in SE Asia, Europe, and North America ever since. Didi has been working with Gurukula since 2000 as a global coordinator based in Egypt where she established the Nile River School in a village. She founded the "Moja Prva Knjiga" project in Croatia that is an on-going country-wise contest for children to write and illustrate their own stories. She wrote, illustrated and edited several stories for children, edited 'Documentation on Neohumanist Education', 'Foundations of Neohumanist Education' and a book 'I Love Yoga' for children. Presently she is working on a Women's College and model primary school in India.

DAY 4 – Tuesday, July 16, 2019

New narratives and alternative visions

How can we generate new narratives and visions that lead us towards positive futures?

From Theory to Policymaking: Gaming Neohumanism

Sohail Inayatullah and Satya Tanner

The presentation is in four parts. First, we will assess how the world is changing (hegemonic shifts, technological disruptions, ageing, climate change, the new technologies of the mind, and the rise of global fascism). Second, we will develop implications of these shifts for neohumanism. Third, we will create a neohumanist checklist, as a way to decide what Neohumanism is and what it is not. And fourth we will use the checklist to explore policy proposals from the floor.

This will be done in an interactive gaming style, so that insights are co-created and emerge from group discussion. The intended conclusion is an embodied understanding of neohumanist policy, and a greater and deeper understanding of contending global narratives and the possibility of a planetary shift toward neohumanistic futures.

Professor Sohail Inayatullah is the UNESCO Chair in Futures Studies at the Futures Institute. He is a political scientist/futurist at Tamkang University, Taipei; an Associate at Melbourne Business School, the University of Melbourne; and Adjunct Professor at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Australia. From 2011-2014, he was Adjunct Professor at the Centre for policing, counter-terrorism and intelligence, Macquarie University, Sydney. He is the co-director of Metafuture.org, a global think-tank.

Inayatullah has authored and co-edited twenty-four books/cdroms, including: Asia 2038 (2018); Transformation 2050 (2018); What Works: Case Studies in the Practice of Foresight (winner of the most significant work for 2016, the Association of Professional Futurists); and, CLA 2.0; Transformative Research in Theory and Practice (2015). Inayatullah has written more than 350 journal articles, book chapters, encyclopaedia entries and magazine editorials. His articles have been translated into a variety of languages, including Catalan, Spanish, Urdu, Hindi, Bengali, Italian, Japanese, Russian, Indonesian, Farsi, Arabic, and Mandarin. Inayatullah gives addresses and conducts foresight workshops around the world for a range of groups and organizations, including research institutes, governmental divisions, foundations, and private and public corporations.

Satya Tanner had a 16-year career as a pilot and aerospace engineer in the Royal Australian Air Force, leading people and managing projects. In recent years she has been working for the energy sector in Denmark, primarily Offshore Wind. Satya has worked extensively with setting up learning organisation principles in teams and has a passion for neohumanist leadership development. Satya has a Master of Leadership, Master of Training and Development, Bachelor of Aeronautical Engineering and is a registered Project Management Professional.

DAY 5 – Wednesday, July 17, 2019

Closing program followed by orientation for the afternoon's Nature Outings and Strategic Planning Meetings

Dada Shambhushivananda , Didi Ananda Devapriya, Christian Franceschini and Sid Jordan