

The Motivation for Global Harwell

*A draft by some members of
Global Harwell Collaboration*

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(<https://globalharwellgoal.org/Motivation/index.php>)

1. Where are we now, human?

Before the dawn of written history, humanity passed through a series of pivotal milestones. Archaeological research indicates that for a long period, humans survived by hunting and gathering. Since this nomadic way of life required constant movement, they could not settle permanently or accumulate possessions. However, around ten thousand years ago, agricultural revolutions occurred independently across the globe. The rise of farming and animal husbandry transformed human existence, enabling a transition from a nomadic lifestyle to a settled one. This new stability facilitated food surplus, wealth accumulation, and population growth, ultimately laying the foundation for urban civilization (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Human development timeline

The next great leap came with the emergence of writing around 5,000 years ago, marking humanity's entry into recorded history. The invention of written language greatly accelerated the transmission and preservation of knowledge, enabling the organization of increasingly complex societies. During this period, the first cities—such as those in Mesopotamia and Egypt—began to take shape. About 2,500 years ago, philosophical thought flourished across the Eurasian continent. In the West, figures such as *Socrates*, *Plato*, and *Aristotle*, and in the East, Confucius and Laozi, reflected on fundamental questions of existence, morality, and governance—how humans should live and how societies might best be ordered—laying the intellectual foundations of both Eastern and Western civilizations.

About 400 years ago, the birth of modern science further accelerated the pace of change. Pioneers like Galileo and Newton established rigorous methods of scientific inquiry, setting in motion an

unprecedented expansion of knowledge and technology. This scientific revolution paved the way for the First Industrial Revolution around 250 years ago. Since then, humanity has pursued the continuous improvement of life's essentials—food, clothing, shelter, transportation, healthcare—and the relentless accumulation of material wealth. Indeed, nearly everything we encounter indoors today—except the air we breathe and the water we drink—originates from manufacturing processes invented in this era. In the quest to improve human material life, we have achieved remarkable success.

Yet, this same technological drive has also revealed its darker potential. Over a century ago, the First World War (1914-1918) demonstrated the devastating power of industrial warfare. A mere 21 years later, 1939, a far more catastrophic conflict—the Second World War—engulfed the globe, culminating in 1945 with the detonation of the first atomic bombs. Eighty years have passed since then; fortunately, there has been no war on a global scale.

However, entering the 2010s—particularly in the past ten years—we have witnessed millions perish in a short span due to COVID-19, despite overall increases in human lifespan. Although digitization facilitates unprecedented global interconnectivity, it frequently coincides with profound societal divisions rooted in conflicting ideologies. Online gaming provides compelling interactive experiences, yet persistent concerns regarding addictive behaviors among children remain. Artificial intelligence (AI) presents opportunities to augment human capabilities but simultaneously poses ethical risks to human dignity and may result in severe unintended consequences. The emergence of the metaverse could either catalyze a prosperous new epoch or introduce complex, unforeseen threats. Even as technological progress garners widespread acclaim, humanity continues to confront systemic challenges—including economic inequality, social fragmentation, climate instability, depletion of natural resources, and accelerating rates of species extinction.

The current human situation echoes the opening of Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, written more than 160 years ago: “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times... it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.” His words remain a perfect mirror of our present condition.

Now, we witness the horrors of war in real-time, a daily reminder that intensifies a terrifying specter: a nuclear war that could end the world as we know it. In our modern era, a genuine fear has taken root—the fear that we, and our descendants, may not endure on this planet—fueled by the uncertainty of whether such a nuclear war might begin tomorrow, next month, or next year. In the long river of human history, will its waters continue to flow into the future? If we use our knowledge and technology—created to improve our material life—to destroy Earth within centuries, we will inevitably destroy any other planet we might immigrate to within decades.

Thus, we ask: Where do we stand now as humanity? If we are careening toward a nuclear holocaust, can we summon the collective will to reverse course and steer toward perpetual peace (see Figure 2)? At this pivotal juncture, we will also confront a deeper question: What, ultimately, is the meaning and value of human life? And as educators, we are compelled to ask: What is the true purpose of education?



Figure 2. The Wondering Humans

2. To educate is to humanize

A letter, believed to have been discovered in a Nazi concentration camp at the end of World War II, addresses teachers directly:

Dear Teachers:

I am a survivor of a concentration camp. My eyes saw what no man should witness: gas chambers built by learned engineers, children poisoned by educated physicians, infants killed by trained nurses, women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates.

So, I am suspicious of education.

My request is: help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human.

Why was the survivor suspicious of education? Why education? What is it for?

Before proceeding, it is useful to briefly review how the purpose of education has evolved across ages and cultures, drawing inspiration from the wisdom of historical sages. Given the current chaotic and dangerous world, this is not a sentimental appeal to tradition, but a call to reflection that society may have lost sight of education's enduring purpose.

In the East, in ancient China, both *Confucius* and *Laozi* offered visions of education culturally distinct yet philosophically resonant with Western thought. Laozi (571–470 BCE) provided a foundation for rethinking education through the lens of harmony. The principle of *dao*—following the natural order—encourages educators to respect the intrinsic rhythms of human growth and the interdependence between

individuals and their environment, fostering an approach that nurtures rather than coerces. His call to “return to simplicity” reflects the belief that learners possess an inherent clarity and goodness that require protection. Laozi’s insight that “the soft overcomes the hard” underscores the value of empathy, calmness, and relational wisdom. Education, in this light, becomes the formation of wise and balanced people capable of living harmoniously with themselves, others, and the wider natural world.

Confucius (551–479 BCE), who is said to have met Laozi and been impressed by his thought, believed that a harmonious society rests upon the moral cultivation of individuals—especially those who govern—for only the virtuous can lead others toward order and peace. Education, in his view, was not merely the acquisition of knowledge but a lifelong moral practice nurturing benevolence (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), and propriety (*li*). Through ritual, tradition, and reflection, it sought to shape persons of integrity and wisdom who act according to virtue rather than power. Confucius regarded education as both a personal and social transformation: a continuous process of learning (*xue*) and self-cultivation (*xiu shen*) through which one becomes a junzi (noble person), capable of extending inner moral order outward—first to the family, then to the state, and ultimately to the world—thereby fostering enduring harmony among humanity.

In the West, in ancient Greece, *Socrates*, *Plato*, and *Aristotle* —Plato was a student of Socrates, and Aristotle a student of Plato—conceived education as the means by which individuals attain virtue and wisdom, enabling the flourishing of both self and society. Socrates (470–399 BCE) believed that true knowledge lies within each person, waiting to be awakened through disciplined dialogue (*elenchus*). For him, “the unexamined life is not worth living,” and education was this very process of examination—an awakening of moral consciousness that nurtures justice and the capacity for ethical action. Plato (428/423–348/347 BCE) expanded this view, portraying education as a journey from illusion (*doxa*) to true knowledge (*epistēmē*), redirecting desire from transient appearances and utilitarian success toward the realization of the ultimate reality—the source of truth, knowledge, and being—through which individuals and the world find order, meaning, and purpose. By cultivating love for this higher truth, education forms wise guardians who govern not through desire or power but through understanding.

Aristotle (384–322 BCE) extended Plato’s vision, arguing that education cultivates human beings’ rational and moral capacities so they can realize their highest potential—what he calls *eudaimonia*, often translated as happiness, flourishing, or wellbeing. Eudaimonia is not a momentary feeling, but a life lived in accordance with reason and virtue, and education is the primary means for developing this capacity. Through the formation of good habits (*ethikē aretē*) and practical wisdom (*phronēsis*), education integrates intellectual and moral growth so that action accords with virtue. In this sense, education becomes the essential pathway to personal flourishing and to the wellbeing of the broader civic community.

Despite differences in language and expression, both Greek and Chinese traditions converge on a timeless insight: education is the deliberate cultivation of virtue, character, and inner equilibrium, aligning knowledge with moral purpose. Whether expressed through harmony in the Chinese tradition or through eudaimonic flourishing in the Greek tradition, ancient wisdom affirms that education aims to nurture whole human beings capable of contributing to a just, peaceful, and thriving society.

During the Age of Enlightenment (1687–1789), in England, *John Locke* (1632–1704) believed that the human mind was a “tabula rasa” (blank slate) and that education should shape reason, character, and

habits through experience and discipline. Emphasizing practical learning suited to real life, he valued moderation, self-control, and virtue as the pillars of personal development. In France, *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* (1712–1778) rejected rigid instruction, arguing that education should be an unfolding process following the natural development of the child. He emphasized freedom, self-discovery, and learning through direct experience with nature, aiming to preserve innate goodness against the corrupting influences of society. Both thinkers sustained classical emphasis on moral and intellectual formation while proposing their approaches.

The 19th and 20th centuries introduced a pragmatic turn. In the United States, *John Dewey* (1859–1952) asserted that education is fundamentally a social and moral endeavor tied to communal life. He argued that developing intellectual powers is necessary but not sufficient. Schooling must cultivate dispositions of reflection, cooperation, and civic responsibility, enabling students to live fulfilled lives as ethical citizens. For Dewey, every classroom carried a moral mission—to nurture thoughtful, responsible individuals for society.

In India, *Rabindranath Tagore* (1861–1941) envisioned education as the cultivation of harmony between the individual and the world—mind, body, and spirit in creative balance. He opposed mechanical, exam-driven schooling and instead promoted learning grounded in freedom, creativity, and joy. For Tagore, education was a process of self-realization through imagination, art, and communion with nature. True education, he believed, should awaken curiosity, empathy, and aesthetic sensibility, nurturing the unity of humanity with the larger universe. Through such holistic growth, students would experience truth and beauty as integral to life and contribute to a world of compassion, peace, and harmony.

In China, *Cai Yuanpei* (1868–1940) envisioned education as a driving force for societal transformation. He rejected the exam-centric, rote learning system, believing true learning should enrich character, and argued that exposure to art and beauty refines one's emotions and curbs selfish impulses, thereby cultivating the personal integrity and civic spirit essential for virtuous citizens. This marriage of ethics and aesthetics creates enlightened individuals capable of uplifting their communities and building a better future.

What is education for? From the sages of ancient China and Greece to the voices of the Enlightenment—Locke and Rousseau—and to modern reformers such as Dewey, Tagore, and Cai, education has never been merely the transmission of knowledge. Rather, it is the intentional cultivation of the human heart and mind—awakening virtue and reason, nurturing personal wellbeing and social harmony, and guiding human beings toward full flourishing. Across thousands of years, classical and contemporary perspectives converge on a timeless insight: to educate is to humanize.

3. The root cause of today's global crises

If we are to move forward wisely, and if education is to become humanity's most powerful—and most humane—vehicle for redirection, we must pause and ask: What are the deeper roots of the current

global crisis? We argue that, from a broader ethical and historical perspective, the underlying cause is *the imbalance between material wellbeing and humanistic wellbeing—and the resulting absence of harmony*.

3.1 The imbalance between material wellbeing and humanistic wellbeing

Material wellbeing is the satisfaction derived from tangible resources and financial security, which together provide comfort and safety, and the accessibility needed to function in society. Its core components include reliable access to necessities like food and shelter, essential utilities, transportation, financial stability, and quality healthcare. Material wellbeing is often quantified by economic indicators and the possession of physical assets that collectively define and underpin an individual's standard of living.

Humanistic wellbeing—often linked to psychological, subjective, and eudaimonic wellbeing—describes the entire range of non-material attributes that allow individuals to live fulfilling, meaningful, and flourishing lives. In contrast to material wellbeing, which centers on physical comfort and external resources and needs, humanistic wellbeing focuses on the inner life: emotional balance, moral development, meaningful relationships, and a sense of purpose. It highlights emotional health, social connectedness, and the continual development of one's potential.

As discussed in the first section, the current surge in material wellbeing has its origins in the First Industrial Revolution roughly 250 years ago, when mechanization and new energy sources transformed production and daily life. Since then, material progress has advanced at a historically unprecedented pace. Economic expansion, scientific breakthroughs, and rapid technological innovation became the dominant aspirations of modern societies, shaping how nations defined progress and how individuals pursued success. Within this paradigm, the constant striving for “more, faster, and better” gradually overshadowed the quieter, slower cultivation of inner balance, ethical discernment, meaningful relationships, communal bonds, and cultural continuity. Consequently, while the engine of material advancement accelerated, the development of humanistic wellbeing lagged behind, creating an ever-widening gap. This growing imbalance between external prosperity and the deeper dimension of human flourishing reveals a structural misalignment at the heart of modern development.

3.2 The systemic erosion of harmony

The widening gap between material wellbeing and humanistic wellbeing has produced not only individual distress but erosion of harmony across personal, social, cultural, and ecological domains, shaping patterns of life at every level.

At the individual level, the pressure of intensified competition in education, work, and daily life has sharply increased psychological burden. Although material conditions have improved, rates of anxiety, depression, and self-harm continue to rise. This reveals a fundamental truth: without inner harmony—emotional stability, self-coherence, and psychological safety—material wealth alone cannot generate genuine wellbeing.

At the level of family and close relationships, the pursuit of material success often compresses time for shared life and emotional interaction. Parents and children spend less time together; intergenerational tension increases; and many societies report growing loneliness and social isolation.

Human relationships, once anchored in trust, care, and reciprocity, are increasingly shaped by utilitarian or transactional logic. When families and interpersonal networks weaken, a crucial foundation of humanistic wellbeing is compromised.

Social and cultural harmony has also become fragile. As performance, productivity, and material achievement dominate societal value systems, the common good is frequently overshadowed. Social trust declines, inequality widens, and communities fragment along ideological, economic, and cultural lines. Polarization—now visible in many societies—signals a deeper disruption of shared meaning and collective purpose. Without cultural continuity and mutual understanding, societies struggle to maintain cohesion.

At the national and global levels, economic growth has become the primary indicator of success. Nations compete intensely for resources, technology, and geopolitical influence, often at the expense of long-term cooperation and global stability. Instead of cultivating shared values, the international system increasingly behaves like an arena of rival material interests. Without a global ethic of harmony, peace becomes precarious.

Finally, the environmental dimension of harmony has deteriorated sharply. Modern material civilization has expanded by extracting vast environmental costs. Climate change, biodiversity loss, and ecological degradation demonstrate the breakdown of human–nature harmony. Instead of coexistence and stewardship, the relationship has increasingly become extractive and exploitative.

Taking together, these layers reveal that today’s global crises are, at their core, a crisis of harmony. Without restoring balance between the material and humanistic dimensions of life, no society can secure long-term wellbeing. Education must therefore assume a renewed mission: cultivating the capacities to create, sustain, and repair harmony at every level of human life.