

FRIENDS OF WISDOM

NEWSLETTER

No. 3 July 2008

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Conference: London 2009

Wisdom and the University: How Can Universities Best Help Us Create a Better World?

Dear Friends of Wisdom,

At the mini-meeting of Friends of Wisdom in March of this year, it was agreed that I, Bruce Lloyd and Niall Scott should explore setting up a Friends of Wisdom Conference. It was agreed that I should see if this could be done at the London Institute of Education.

On Tuesday, 17 June, I met up with Professors David Watson and Ron Barnett about the possibility of holding the Friends of Wisdom Conference at the Institute of Education (London, UK). David Watson and Ron Barnett are Co-Directors of the Centre for Higher Education Studies at the Institute. The proposed Conference would be hosted by the Centre.

We discussed various ideas. Should we have keynote speakers? How can we arrange things so that there is as much general discussion as possible, and people have as much chance as possible to meet and talk? Do we split up into groups? Do we have parallel sessions? Might we invite those attending to contribute a 200 word mini-article, before the Conference,



saying what they would like the Conference to concentrate on, with the idea that we would gather these contributions up and send them to all those attending at least two weeks before the Conference begins? Should we have sessions, each devoted to some specific problem or theme, but instead of a talk, have someone chairing a discussion session, perhaps giving no more than a 5 minute introductory talk? What should we call the Conference?

After exploring ideas for about an hour, the three of us agreed that we should go ahead with the Conference. It would be, I imagine, under the joint auspices of the Centre and Friends of Wisdom, but open to anyone. It would be a two day event and will take place in May or June of 2009, at the Institute of Education, Bloomsbury, London, UK, and will have an upper limit of about 100 people. After various suggestions had been thrown around, the following possible title emerged: "Wisdom and

the University: How Can Universities Best Help Us Create a Better World?" When we come to advertise the Conference, there would be a brief rationale spelling out in a bit more detail what the Conference will be about. It was suggested that we should perhaps have two or so keynote speakers. There would be a registration fee, probably of the order of £125-135, which would include refreshments and a dinner. The publicity would be aimed at a wide possible set of participants, including institutional leaders of universities and relevant others (e.g., in Think Tanks and in policy making).

I explained that I would like to consult Friends of Wisdom about what shape the Conference should take. David, Ron and I will only begin organizing the Conference in earnest at the beginning of September. We have the summer to discuss possibilities.

Do please send ideas and suggestions to the FOW emailing list - to the full list, rather than the discussion, "D" list (unless a discussion of some detailed matter gets going). And it would be helpful if those who think they might want to attend the Conference could let me know, so we can have a provisional idea of how many Friends of Wisdom will want to attend.

At the Conference we might have a session devoted to Friends of Wisdom matters: the future of the organization, whether we should form ourselves into a Society, how we can increase our impact on the world, develop the pursuit of wisdom-inquiry, etc.

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UNIVERSITIES WITH A ROOM FOR WISDOM INQUIRY¹

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I VALUES: WHAT DIFFERENCE MIGHT WISDOM MAKE TO QUALITY OF LIFE?

I agree with Nicholas Maxwell that the overwhelming question that faces us is: What ought to be the aims of Friends of Wisdom? In this very context, he has rightly been urging us all to provoke debate about (i) what the aims of academia should be; (ii) how Friends of Wisdom might help those who attempt to put some aspects of wisdom-inquiry into academic practice; (iii) how Friends of Wisdom might pursue aspects of wisdom-inquiry; and, above all, (iv) what kind of inquiry should wisdom-inquiry be. In this article, I shall briefly try to indicate why such an inquiry is needed and how it might be conceived and planned at various levels and in different fields by turning universities around.

It makes sense to ask: What difference would wisdom make to our quality of life, whether considered in relation to the life-supporting ecosystems of our host planet Earth or in relation to the future generations who may have to bear the costs on account of the



present and past adverse impacts of human activity on environment? In relation to the current and the future global warming and climate change scenarios, the question assumes much greater significance. It cannot be answered either within science or within technology. This gives rise to the further question how is wisdom to be understood within the diverse cultures of our world, if it is rooted neither in science nor technology. There is no doubt that science and technology make man increasingly smarter. Think of our smarter and clever ways of taming and adapting to the forces of nature. Most of this is evident from mankind's accelerated domestication of nature and urbanization which science and technology facilitate with great ease and speed. They have only ensured his arrogant control over these forces without making him any wiser. On the contrary, their adverse environmental impacts, which are responsible for global warming and climate change, are themselves ample evidence how adversely absence of wisdom affects

¹ This article forms part of a larger research project on the human condition of our world.

the present and the future scenarios of our quality of life.

Where should we then look for wisdom, if science and technology on the one hand and human greed on the other are part of the problem? How can we as a species enhance our self-knowledge in order to deal with our host planet Earth in the wisest possible manner? If the roots of wisdom are to be found only in the depths of diverse cultures of our world, and not in science, it is reasonable to understand it, or its absence, as indicative of the quality of our life which we lead, whether as individuals or as responsible members of civil society. Given our varied activities in diverse fields and our plans for changing the world we live in, and given the alternative possibilities of carrying them out, it makes sense to ask how valuable they are to us or to nature. The imperative of wisdom-inquiry in this sense clearly originates from the following universally recognized crisis:

That, as a species, we must own, if for the first time in human history, our collective guilt, having ritualistically committed collective crimes against the host planet Earth and the future generations.

Thus, taken as a quality of life parameter (QLP), wisdom has to do with the ways and means of bringing values to bear upon all kinds of human activities with which we are so familiar. Consider, e.g., the following:

(i) Science and technology, more generally the search for knowledge without wisdom, the totalitarian claims about their problem-solving

effectiveness being made regularly and ritualistically on their behalf;

(ii) The political economy of sustainable development and environment;

(iii) Urbanization and industrial development;

(iv) Globalization of production and market;

(v) Domestication of nature and so on and so forth.

What difference might it make if in any of them we pursue one set of values instead of another set? As an example of QLP, let us consider individuals or groups at the fore-front of public debate, interrogating the fundamental purpose of those diverse things which human societies ritualistically seek to do or achieve, often in highly competitive yet dogmatic ways. Their way of life, when taken in relation to nature and the future generations, may be seen as more valuable than leading a way of life which is dominated by the attitude of shunning all such interrogation. The former, not the latter, would consequently be perceived as QLP-enriching. And, it would, therefore, indicate the wiser path to achieving harmony with nature and the future generations. The latter is best illustrated by dictatorships which still rule ruthlessly in many parts of our world. In a dictatorship you do not question what is handed out to you. You just accept it. Otherwise, you risk being killed or thrown into jail. Instead of learning to live with dissent, dictatorships suppress dissent. Fed on the government-vetted news, people are denied access to different

perspectives. In a nutshell, dictatorships remain pre-occupied with defending themselves instead of human dignity and freedom. Universal values of human dignity and freedom, seen more as an obstacle to governance than as QLP- enriching, take a back seat in the organization of society and economy, in domestic and international politics.

It is, therefore, reasonable to conclude from this that the fundamental aim of wisdom-inquiry should be two-fold: (i) to probe the QLPs on the widest scale possible; and (ii) to probe the merits, or demerits, of alternative ways of organizing our societies and economies with a view to finding out the most valuable way with the least adverse impacts on nature and on the future generations. But are our universities ready to institutionalize wisdom-inquiry in this sense?

II SETTING UP QUALITY OF LIFE STUDY CENTRES AND ETHICS CONSULTATION SERVICES

The universities worldwide, particularly in the developing world, are aging under their out-dated bureaucracies. Their crying need is innovative "bottom-up" restructuring. Most universities in the developing countries are notorious for their complaisant bureaucracies. It is the bureaucratic inertia and inefficiency which causes costly delays in planning and development on behalf of administration. In short, everywhere universities and schools are ripe for revolutionary and innovative restructuring. In many cases, their bureaucracies have a size which is unsustainable in terms of the annual budget. What is worse in the case of

the developing societies generally is this: There is an unholy nexus between an exploitative political class that patronizes sycophancy and a complaisant bureaucracy which derails good governance. This has impacted universities in these societies adversely.

In his recent book *A Large and Liberal Education: Higher Education for the 21st Century* (2007), Donald Markwell poses the most basic question:

"In thinking about what one gains as a university student, we speak of knowledge and skills and sometimes values: why is it that we do not so often speak of wisdom? In our universities, as throughout society at large, it seems to me that there are far more clever people than there are wise people. No doubt it has always been so: it is nearly four centuries ago that Orlando Gibbons wrote in a beautiful song, 'The Silver Swan', 'more geese than swans now live, more fools than wise'. "You are undoubtedly a person of greater knowledge"

Markwell further asks,

"and of greater skills than you were when you started your studies. But are you wiser? And, on the new journey of learning and of life which commences today, what will you do to gain wisdom?" (p. 178)

In a nutshell, the question is: How can the universities and society at large ensure that those who have earned their degrees are not only better informed but wiser also? Since knowledge is fallible, it will keep changing, at times so quickly that it may not be easy for everybody or

every society to keep pace with new knowledge or new technology which it promises. This implies that the education which is imparted in schools and in the universities at best gives its receivers tools to gain new knowledge. And, obviously, that is not enough to make room for wisdom-inquiry.

What is then the way forward? Sooner or later there have to be policy decisions on the kind of framework within which schools, universities and other institutions of higher learning must be reformed. Two kinds of consideration are most important, if reforms, instead of being just decorative, have to empower them to meet the challenges of the 21st century. One of these has to do with the question how to meet the challenge of bureaucracy. Here the main task is how to cut it down to a minimum size which is sufficient (a) to manage the educational systems and (b) to keep these systems from becoming subservient to the ever-expanding mechanisms of bureaucracy. The other considerations have to do with the question which new centres of study deserve priority in the developmental planning of the universities and schools. I think that it is imperative to set up Quality of Life Study Centres (QLSCs) as integral parts of the education systems. Immediately, however, the question arises how are QLSCs to be conceived, planned and made to deliver. What kind of study are they to be entrusted with? Here I would like to suggest the following steps to begin with. QLSCs would take charge of studies whose aim would be the following (1-18):

1. To study how self-knowledge is central to wisdom, if we take wisdom to involve a sense of what is right and

what is wrong, including the judgment about which courses of action are or are not valuable (Markwell 2007: 179)

2. To study how we can place the expert skills and knowledge we possess in particular fields in wider epistemic and cultural contexts in order to gain holistic perspectives on alternative courses of action and their possible impacts beyond the scene of action.

3. To study cultural diversities and the values they foster, particularly the values which bring issues of ethics and justice in the forefront of public debate on matters of policy and decision-making.

4. To study the values which science presupposes but which science cannot provide, science itself being a fruit of the tree of knowledge which is nourished by values.

5. To study and promote inculcation of values which must bear upon quality of life in every society.

6. To study values with a view to generating alternative models of organizing society and economy so that there is greater freedom of choice where organization of individual and social life are concerned.

7. To study values, including the value of wisdom, with a view to re-defining the global human development index and impacting the UN's global development network.

8. To study values with a view to re-defining the UNMDGs.

9. To study values with a view to generating alternative perspectives as to how we might wisely deal with our

environment and learn to treat the planet Earth differently.

10. To study values with a view to re-defining children's well-being, taking note of the recent findings by the UNESCO citing negative correlations between the well-being of children and the economic status of individual countries.²

11. To study values with a view to distinguishing more sharply between human greed and human need.

12. To study values with a view to bringing them to bear upon domestic politics and international relations.

13. To study values with a view to bringing them to bear upon good neighbourly relations and bilateralism as a foundation for multilateralism in international relations, since there can be no sound multilateralism without a healthy and good neighbourly policy, i.e. bilateralism. Today's international system, with Africa neglected, Tibet ignored and good neighbourly relations getting a back seat, the dilemma is how to empower it with values.

14. To study values with a view to bringing them to bear upon the industrial relations, labour market, trade-unions, global market forces and the corporate world as a whole.

15. To study values with a view to promoting regulation by the Ethics Consultation Services (ECSs) at the core of every publicly or privately funded institution.

16. To study values with a view to impacting political-economical models of development which create forms of exclusion and which give rise to structural violence.

17. To study values with a view to distinguishing high quality liberal education from purely vocational education (Markwell 2007:29-33).

18. To study how the rural poor can contribute to knowledge economy? This question is particularly relevant in the context of India's rich tradition of Ayurveda, Siddha and Unani medical practices which need to be researched and standardized, if India's or world's ailing healthcare system is to improve. India has one of the largest number of HIV/AIDS infected people in the world. Its traditional medicines can come to her rescue.

Apart from these preliminary steps, what ought Friends of Wisdom to do in an attempt to fulfil the goals it can realistically set for itself? The best answer is that it is of fundamental importance for Friends of Wisdom to have feedbacks from major crises-spots of our world, if we want real and long-term impact. For example, how are we going to respond to the human situation of those who are in distress because of massive human rights violations and forms of exclusion which are fostered by the policies of governments and politicians around the globe? What about those who need urgent support, morally, politically and economically? Friends of wisdom

² Pandit, G. L. (2007a): "Ethical Tasks of Media Advocacy in the 21st Century", *Philosophie der Informationsgesellschaft / Philosophy of the Information Society*, Beitrage des 30. Internationalen Wittgenstein Symposium (5. - 11. August 2007), Band **XV**, edited by Herbert Hrachovec, Alois Pichler and Joseph Wang, pp. 169-173. Kichberg am Wechsel: Austrian Ludwig Wittgenstein Society.

must gain insights regarding how to foster its own goals from interactions with such communities and groups.

MAKING FRIENDS AND INFLUENCING PEOPLE

By David Morey

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In the second Friends of Wisdom Newsletter Nick Maxwell sets out the aims of this group:

...to help transform academia so that its aim becomes to seek and promote wisdom –wisdom being the capacity to realise what is of value in life, for oneself and others.

So far so good. Yet there is no doubt that such an aim is revolutionary, will be strongly embraced by some, strongly resisted by others, and will be very difficult to achieve. Such an aim suggests that awareness, examination and assessment of values are keys to acquiring and using knowledge to attain valuable ends. It places values at the heart of reason (or Reason) and our attempts to make sense of our lives, our experiences and the world that we live in and our attempts to sustain and even improve our lives, communities or, if you prefer, our civilisation. On its face value, this may seem an unexceptional point but this would be to ignore a lot of intellectual history and why we find ourselves struggling with our present predicaments.

But values do not sit easily within our approach to knowledge, as Maxwell has explained in his vast output of



books and articles. But it seems to me strategically essential that FOW members go out of their way to recognise that Maxwell is not the only person to diagnose and point out some of the problems resulting from this exiling of values, whether it is characterised as positivism, rationalism, instrumentalism, materialism, atomism, modernity, reductionism, Platonism, subject-object metaphysical dualism, the fact-value distinction, scientism, or whatever. There is much other valuable work that we can be drawn on.

My own favourites include: Robert Pirsig's two novels, these can be very useful primers to thinking about the relationship between reason, science and values for the philosophically inexperienced. Much of Continental Philosophy starting with Heidegger suggesting that there is no experience that is not some form of 'care', or any activity that does not imply some form of 'project'. Then there is American pragmatism that has valuable things to say about the learning process and the aims and methods of education.

Charles Taylor's *Sources of the Self* makes clear what is reasonable in romantic criticisms of the Enlightenment. And Roy Bhaskar's school of critical realism seeks to overcome the misunderstandings between natural science and social theory.

Many others schools of thought and ideas could be mentioned. But the point I wish to make is that FOW needs to be able to show how its criticisms and suggestions relate to others that have already been made and are valued by other people. This is not to say that where there is disagreement with others also seeking change these should not be understood and discussed or that there is not anything about FOW that is not new and able to open up new possibilities, but care must be taken to find as much commonality and common purpose as it is possible to find.

For example, Maxwell (FOW Newsletter No 2) expresses concern about those critics of knowledge-inquiry who take an anti-rationalist stance, opposing the rationality of knowledge-inquiry, whereas he suggests that knowledge-inquiry should be criticised for its irrationalism. I believe this is a very good idea, it says let's hang on to the value of the call to reason and points out that there can be more to reason than some rather narrow versions associated with standard empiricism and positivism. But to suggest that other critics are proposing some kind of irrationalist alternative is a far too general and loaded suggestion.

On the one hand, I would agree that there has always been much critical excess indulged in by powerless and

disappointed intellectuals but we should make an effort to recognise the more balanced approaches of many other thinkers and schools of thought that are clearly seeking to challenge the limitation of certain approaches to reason and address issues of value. Clearly, where we are being presented with objective knowledge and facts by an irrational version of reason without values, some of us are going to cry reason foul, but where such criticisms are presented with argument they are clearly offering some revised form of reason to do this.

On the other hand, I would suggest that there is another aspect to the claims of those that might be labelled as irrationalists that is saying something else. Here the point being made is about life rather than knowledge: there is more to life than reason. This is a subject explored by the philosopher Robert C Solomon in his book *Spirituality for the Skeptic* (OUP 2002). Reason and science have their limits. Life will always be unpredictable, science best handles what is repeatable, it is much easier to analyse experience than to create a convincing synthesis of our fragmented knowledge, our experience is local, limited and incomplete, feelings and experiences have irreducible qualities, etc. Realising what is of value can only be undertaken in the context of life as a whole, and that includes a wider context of difficulties and tragedies where we will find it challenging to realise what is of value, so that we have to accept and live with a certain level of failure and limits to what we can realise, and perhaps some contribution from luck where things do turn out well or even better than we hoped.

So let's understand and make connections with our fellow critics, they probably have some wisdom to share. We also need to understand those we criticise. Values have been kept out of the academy for quite obvious historical reasons. Once upon a time in Europe both reason and science had to set themselves apart from religion and other holders of social authority, and this in a context of religious division, wars and conflict. The isolation of knowledge from values and social issues proved to be a good strategy to gain influence and acceptance. Putting aside difficult issues about what we value and how we might realise what we value proved to clear away certain difficulties and allowed the academy to establish itself and get to work.

And so certain progress and goods have been achieved but at a cost as Maxwell has set out for us to realise. These achievements need to be retained and valued. As such our criticism should continue to remember these goods and achievements, whilst facing up to the undoubted difficulties of putting values back into reason. If the direction and approach to science is going to include examining and recognising the values involved then this opens up these areas to debate by the whole of society and not just scientists. This is likely to make some scientists very uncomfortable, challenge their self-image and break open decisions currently restricted to a privileged few. If FOW wish to win over those they criticise they will need to understand their fears, anxieties and make a good case for the benefits of change. Above all by opening reason to the necessity of taking account of values we also open values, particularly religious values, to the

scrutiny of reason, and we can only hope that more dialogue will reduce misunderstanding and excess.

Maxwell talks about learning from the success of science. He is right to do so. When people talk about the success of science they are often inclined to talk about its empiricism and there is no doubt that checking your knowledge against experience has considerable value and there is much else to understand regarding the creation and selection of theory as Maxwell and others have taught us. But there is even more to science that may offer us some lessons. We should also learn from the way science organises and communicates. Science requires much teamwork and co-operation. At best, consensus is sought, common ends and unity is valued, disagreements are analysed and examined and not simply dismissed, resolution is valued, and alternative solutions are with an open mind sought and tested. In the end common solutions and opportunities are required because we flourish or flounder in common.

The call to explicitly bring the discussion and examination of values back into the academy and the pursuit of learning and knowledge seems to me a good one. Where others have equally valid criticisms, Maxwell at least offers us an alternative to our current failings and a possible way forward. But he is not making this call alone. In *A Very Short Introduction to Continental Philosophy*, Simon Critchley calls Continental Philosophy to account for its obscurity and Analytical Philosophy for its scientism. These differences reflect, he suggests, a gap in our understanding of knowledge, a gap that can only be

filled by recognising that seeking wisdom also requires us to examine what we value and what we understand to be the good life.

THE CREDIT CRUNCH, WISDOM AND MONEY

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Max Weber stated over fifty years ago that:

“Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life.”

It is a sad but in many instances only too apparent and recorded fact that this remains one of the most salient constants in Western and now predominantly world wide Capitalism. As in Weber's day and recognised by him it is universal from Business to Public Sector and through to Charity and Church. It is either a life giving power which has given us the wealth we now have, or it is an almost demonic intrusion of adversarial power into the ordinary human lives of average citizens. The validity of it as an underlying assumption is often dependant on the cultural stance taken and values used to assess it as either an ordained societal religious rite or a scientific method. However, for many, both of those are too high an esteem, since for them it is too often simply accepted in naivety as a natural given. Ultimately it could be argued to have resulted in what is now termed “The Credit Crunch” which must surely be a capitalist illness in this century



comparable to that of Aids in the last century.

Surely there is a need for the average person to gain increased Wisdom in their Financial Affairs. This is at a time when the ‘friendly piece of flexible plastic’ has become brittle. It will no longer come to the rescue of their cavalier attitude to money or it simply fuels their financial demise into bankruptcy.

Wisdom has many facets and many attributes. In latter years it was a highly esteemed and revered essential of the often notably civilised Societies of those times. Indeed many would point to other so called less Technological Societies in the history of humans as being more civilised. It is likely that the core element giving them this kudos is the acceptance and seeking of Wisdom as a main stay to their civilisation.

Max Weber goes on to say:

“Economic acquisition is no longer subordinated to man as the means for satisfaction of his material needs. This reversal of what we should call the natural relationship, so irrational from a naïve point of view, is evidently as definitely a leading principle of capitalism as it is foreign to all peoples not under capitalistic influence.”

Far from being the outright proponent of Capitalism and Bureaucracy, Max Weber has very deep concerns and questions regarding its natural validity and hence benefit to humankind. Indeed if he were residing in our culture he is more likely to have used his leading academic intellect and ability to be at the forefront of discovering the real meaning of business life and organisation at our time in the 2000s. It is suggested he would be a leading academic and developer of the need for Wisdom in Academia as an academic leader in the Business Science of his own day.

Instead his critique became a misused and abused unfortunate condoning of all that was humanly adverse in human affairs at the time and for some one hundred years many people have suffered unnecessary deprivation. Deprivation of Work Place Bullying, Ageism, Misappropriation of Wealth in the unfair distribution of income, so called Market Forces destroying good ideas and initiatives as well as bad and so on. It is possible that the misuse of his ideas and good work was a resulting self-fulfilling prophesy that despite his apparent “no-emotion” stance Max Weber would cry buckets if he were able to see the misuse of people generally in sad malaise, the overuse and total deterioration of our natural resources and our environment and the hard cold “iron cages of Bureaucracy” inherent in the universally accepted form of our organisations largely based on the premise of greed for money. It is suggested that this is inclusive of most organisations, whether they are private enterprise, blue chip quoted groups, Public Sector, charity and, especially ironic since Weber studied the religious aspects of business, Church.

He acknowledged the money centred aspect of religion in his own day. The saddest aspect of Church life now can be the bureaucratic money and business centred approach to our Christian Institutions which can all too often hide and mask the real ‘see how these people love each other’ truth of Christian Fellowship.

Wisdom is needed by individuals, by Society and hence by Academia and it is surely needed to be taught by Academia to solve the now very individual economic woes that people, companies, governments and society are suffering. The prognosis on a daily basis on the News Bulletins is that we are all facing even harsher economic deprivation in the future.

That there is a need for a sea change in society, and organisations, is underlined by Schumacher from his *Small is Beautiful*:

“Big business and big consumption led to “soul destroying, meaningless, mechanical, monotonous, moronic work that was an insult to human nature which must necessarily and inevitably produce either escapism or aggression, and that no amount of ‘bread and circuses’ can compensate for the damage done – these are facts which are neither denied nor acknowledged, but are met with an unbreakable conspiracy of silence – because to deny them would be too obviously absurd, and to acknowledge them would condemn the central preoccupation of modern society as a crime against humanity.”

This leads to the need to find again a structural basis for incorporating Wisdom as a reverential postmodern treatment of the past to attempt to

alleviate the woes being foretold by politicians and the media.

The known environmental and human problems in the world at this time are so large and burdensome even threatening the end of humanity's existence that it is suggested that Nick Maxwell's decades of crying out for Wisdom in Academia can no longer afford to fall on deaf ears. Wisdom in Academia could be a catalyst to the evoking and permeating of Wisdom into wider society at a time when it is already a much needed basic commodity.

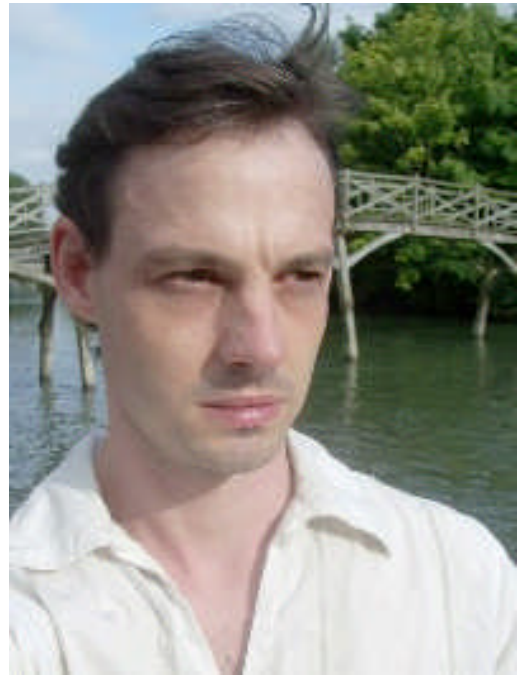
FRIENDS OF WISDOM: TAKE UP YOUR PLACARDS!

**By Tom Milner-
Gulland**

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I have come back home from a short holiday, arriving to find, predictably, the world has moved a little deeper into silly season, this being the time when stories are hard to find and the news desk is replete with frivolity. You would think that there was plenty of serious news to report, what with pressing global issues being alive in our consciences. Evidently, much of that ilk was exhausted before the holiday season. In some cases, an extra dash of a rather bitter ingredient had been added, though it's not one that will be mentioned by any newsreader, pervading as it does the media, as all Gramscite Marxists know. However, what has, this year, struck me is the starkness with which it has crept into main, television news, its veil is now only paper thin. It is the subtle manipulation of the mindset of the masses in accordance with corporate and political agenda.

Those in government, involved in advising policy relating to science, might very well assure you that the so-called 'terminator genes' have never been used; and furthermore, that the Americans have been eating GM food for years with there being no established link with cancer whatsoever; if there were, there would surely be law suits, no doubt about it.



Still, in my mind, it is not the establishment, or otherwise, of correlations in the field of health that should be the first cause for concern for the wisdom seeker. Rather, it is the fact that the manipulation of genetic structures branches into broader kinds of manipulation, one such being of corporate power structures operating in the market, and, inevitably, in scientific research, and the other such, of a range of specific biological constructs that propel us all sharply into the unknown, and it is not difficult to find reading matter that elaborates on the grave health-related concerns – supported by indicative evidence – of a great many distinguished scientists. To take a broader perspective, however, there remains a fundamental issue in that adverse consequences of modifications to existing legislation are, increasingly, liable to be sustained across the social and geographical map. For example, precocious puberty, with its associated maladies including cancer, is on the rise and nobody knows why (hormone-

mimicking chemicals in food, water and consumer goods have been imputed). We are bound together, not only by a physical environment, and with it a food chain that is ever vulnerable to contamination, but also by a technologically integrated way of life. With ever more intense feedback systems operating in both these spheres – the environmental and the technological – they have come to depend on one another in such complex ways that analysis of correlations in medical statistics becomes all but impossible.

It is easy to imagine the kind of arguments, citing turning-points in history, that will be put to us, as they always are when major decisions are looming over us. Ten years ago the debate as to Britain's membership of the European Union was frequently presented as a battle of Europhobes versus sapient citizens, the favourite reference being the fear among the British public of joining the Common Market a quarter of a century earlier. No-one, it was said, would ever consider that we should not, now, be part of the Common Market. Possibly. But here, we can indulge in a bit of counter-factual deconstruction: the analysis of what would have been. Wisdom seekers ought to probe on a deeper level than the mere dismantling of economics as we know it. Let us consider a challenging question that can be asked in regard to any major political decision made by a nation's government of the time, in history that, in hindsight, is generally viewed favourably: Are we genuinely a *better* society for having made the decision? To arrive at any specific answers is beyond the scope of this account, but being fully objective one's outlook being *a priori* influenced by one's

social and economic inheritance is not easy. It is indeed surely time that the question was addressed most fundamentally in relation to mindset, as it is mindset that feeds into the most fundamental structures of society, structures that Gramsci, and before him, Marx brought to the attention of the masses many decades ago.

The way in which the GM news item had been presented on British television was in essence, so it seems to me, an advert, not a news report, with its showing images of Americans happily consuming GM food as an everyday activity, coupled with the insinuating comments that only Europe doesn't allow its production and that GM food offers one viable solution to the problem of global poverty. This kind of news casting would stir cries of protest from Gramscite Marxists: they would see it as the an attempt to remove social grievances at the cost of strengthened hegemonies, themselves poised to consolidate their hold over cutting-edge biological research more generally. I was, for a short time, involved with a charity the focus of which was developing hydroponics, a simple but effective technology that could in theory constitute a means by which areas of desert may be reclaimed as agricultural land; those of involved with the charity knew that the only reason any such full-scale desert reclamation project had yet to be given the go-ahead was a lack of political will. A recent study found that genetic modification of crops actually cuts yields of soyabean; details of exactly how GM technology could benefit the planet remain sketchy at best. If opportunism counts for anything in news casting, we witnessed it in force with that lapdog

of industry, the World Bank telling us – or, so it seemed, telling the BBC to tell us – that high oil prices will sustain a high food prices for the next ten years. Just as the UK government gave a swift nod for a new nuclear power programme when our defences had been worn down by repeated, alarming reports about global warming, so our media-menu serves us ever more that relates somehow – from obsession with Islam and associated geopolitics, to the GM crop debate – to the oil theme. Kept well out of our view is the peak oil crisis, which surely spurs the arrival of the next course faster than we can properly peruse the choice of dishes.

The popular misconception that the only realistic alternative to petrochemicals is nuclear power has always been alarming to me, as one who had through some of my time in sixth form aspired to be an alternative technologist. Indeed, just like the field of medicine (where, recently, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill has presented the possibility of our own, human DNA being subjected to engineering), a veritable treasure trove of alternative technologies exist, the very real feasibility of many such known, in the broader specialist fields, to but a very few, for what they are or they have the potential to be. But even those who are unusually open-minded among individuals who have worked their way through the route of funded research, very often nevertheless maintain a patch of their own intellectual territory that they consider to be strictly out of bounds to the dissident's argument. It should come as no surprise, then, that even in intrinsically abstract fields of research, it is considered by many, in for example that association of dissident

physicists, the Natural Philosophy Alliance, that the clutches of vested interests are so tight that the next major breakthrough in theoretical science will arise from outside the academic sphere. One might very well envisage a pyramid of interest groups, representatives of many of which sit on the same advisory boards, belong to the same leisure clubs, and are basically all friendly with one another; the academic, living in a Twenty-First Century world where intellectual insight is becoming synonymous with commercially applicable knowledge, was more, now, an implement of this species than ever it had been.

It would be naïve to think that the same uncomfortable questions don't arise in any other arena. Even disregarding the feeble response, of the internal regulatory process, to the corruption scandals of its incipient stages, those who investigate the inner workings of the European Union will realise that, behind the facade of humane co-operation, at its essence this is one institution that seeks to undermine the kind of democratic structures that empower dissenting voices in Europe, the agenda of the European Commission being determined, fundamentally, by a little-known group of immensely wealthy industrialists calling themselves the European Round Table of Industrialists. With such power structures comes the purveying of falsehoods that serves to steer debate over future courses of action away from the kind of options that truly ought to be presented to the masses. The obsession the mainstream media has with comparing the UK's stance on topical issues with stances taken in other European countries seems to parallel the ever tighter restriction of

civil liberties (such as the 2007 ban on smoking in public places), the top-down pressure on MPs to vote in line with EU objectives, and, worryingly, the growing sense of the ineffectiveness of democratic protest, particularly on matters of principle as opposed to the packaged, pragmatic solutions that tend to be presented to us. In our fast world of issues that require fast solutions, such a voice falls on deaf ears. General apathy and ignorance on political manoeuvring, combined with a worsening divorce of the people from, and their disillusionment with the decision-making process very nearly had the UK thrust into acceptance of the Lisbon Treaty, as though the attitude among those in power is that constitutional change is not a matter that we, the ever-reluctant voters, should be troubling ourselves with.

If, by ‘the purveying of falsehoods’ I meant ‘being economical with the truth’, then the agents that are the media, academia and industry are being used by one another together like never before. We might very well suppose that the interdependency of interest groups has reached such a point that even if the Green party were in power, we in the UK would all be subjects of system that is in no way recognisably different all the way, perhaps, to the highly dependent military and economic relationship of the UK with the US. As if the ubiquity of CCTV were not enough, it now seems as though identity cards storing genetic information may sooner or later be introduced, thence to mould us into a society of people fearful of stepping out of line, whether deliberately or otherwise. Abolition of cash, bringing with it the option only of leaving, with every transaction, a

trail of electronic footprints, may follow. Thus, in these days when undergraduates have shrugged off their badge-laden overcoats and kicked away their Dr Martens, does it fall to us, the pensive friends and lovers of wisdom, to pursue as best we can the spirit of protest? Wisdom defers both to higher principle and also to pragmatism, but I propose that, in its current state, the modern word needs above all a strong prescription of awareness of the former – itself the bedrock of sound mindset – above the latter. It is time to take up our placards and stave off the threat of becoming a terminally myopic society, replete with spoon-fed, easy-for-all solutions, that will, via a concoction of ignorance, idle habit and self-centredness, enslave our children and grandchildren in a world where ‘wisdom’ is spoken *to*, and not *by* the agent.

ESSAY: MATTERS OF LIFE AND DEATH

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Unable to deal adequately with both sets of Nick's "fundamental interrelated problems" within the allotted space, I shall confine myself to the first – the disparity between the world as experienced and the world as portrayed by contemporary physics. Not only is this the more fundamental, but, unlike the second, it is 'convergent', admitting of a precise, rationally coherent, empirically grounded, solution.

In one of the earliest, and arguably the most eloquent, of the great texts advocating the systematic application of the empirical method, we find these wise words: "Nor shall we be led to the doctrine of atoms, which implies the hypothesis of a vacuum and that of the unchangeableness of matter (both false assumptions)"¹ It is only fitting that at the very outset of the scientific venture the wisest of mankind² should have put his finger on what was to prove the most stubborn obstacle (I call it The Fatal Trap³) to obtaining a rationally coherent, empirically grounded conception of the world. It is immediately obvious that it presents us with two baffling problems. The first is that it is wholly unable to account for change: the atoms, by definition, are unchanging, and change is totally inapplicable to a vacuum – itself, as spatially extended nothing, an



absurdity, as many of the Greeks, Aristotle among them, saw. The second is that there can exist no causal ground for attractions and repulsions between the atoms across empty space. And the attempt to resolve this by postulating a plenum merely creates further insoluble problems. Fewer than seventy years on saw the publication of Newton's 'Principia'⁴ the magnum opus which undoubtedly was to have the greatest single effect on the future course of science. Later, in his "Opticks" of 1704, Newton left us in no doubt as to his advocacy of the reality of the undifferentiatedly enduring 'billiard ball' atom; but though he saw no objections attaching to the transmission of momentum by impact among atoms, he emphatically rejected action-at-a-distance through a void,⁵ such as was inescapably implied by his empirically substantiated theory of gravitation. It is worth noting here that one great physical thinker, Newton's contemporary Gottfried Leibniz, never accepted Newtonian ontological theory, describing space considered as an ontological ultimate, as "a fancy".⁶ He proposed instead a world-ground composed of ones and zeros, but was never able to develop this idea into a coherent theory.

Newton accepted Galileo's theory⁷ of primary and secondary qualities, and confined his own theory entirely to the primary qualities: those postulated as belonging to the perceived bodies themselves, as distinct from the secondary qualities which were wholly confined to the mind of the perceiver. And until the mid-nineteenth century, devotees of this Newtonian world-view, by now deeply into assimilating chemistry and the "subtle fluids," were content to relegate mind to an inexplicable 'ghost in the machine', and all mental events to the status of mere epiphenomena, an inexplicable play of feeling associated with material processes, but without the smallest causal efficacy.

The year 1859 saw the publication of Charles Darwin's "On the Origin of Species" the effect of whose revelations on the scientific world-view were second only to that of the "Principia". It had a significant influence on matter theory highly relevant to our present theme. That the general trend of biological evolution was to produce ever more mentally complex beings, culminating in humans, implied that mind had a more important place in nature than a mere epiphenomenon, though scientific orthodoxy still refused to grant that the causal factors at work in living organisms were anything but more complex instances of those operating in physics and chemistry. Then, again, the most basic activity of mind is memory, but if the substance of the world consists of changing configurations of intrinsically unchanging atoms, any such configuration must cease to exist in order to make way for its immediate successor – which renders memory impossible. Such considerations as

these tended to promote *process*, as distinct from solid intrinsically unchanging bodies, to the ground of the universe, thereby elevating change of some kind to an essential ingredient of the world-ground. Neither atoms nor space had an independent existence; they existed only as abstracted parts of some process, and it was this which was truly fundamental. This conception of the world-ground, though extremely vague, seemed both more in accord with reality and more intellectually sophisticated than any advanced hitherto.

But against all such processes as science has postulated as possible candidates for the world-ground there exists an insuperable objection. In every case, the ultimate changes are envisaged as motions of some kind, and that necessarily implies space. And this, as an ultimate existent, is no more intelligible today than it was in the days of Newton. This insuperable objection may be expressed in another way. Physics invariably attempts to explain intrinsic change in terms of spatial change. *But this is to stand the world on its head.* Put simply: the ubiquitous error of physical thinking from the outset has been the attempt to account for intrinsic change in terms of spatial change, instead of the converse. The ultimate 'particles' *are* processes, but processes which involve only *intrinsic* change.

We are therefore seeking a fundamental, purely intrinsic process. Where are we to find one? It is a ubiquitous ingredient of experience, pre-eminent in the Arts, that an intrinsic or absolute one gives rise to a contextual or relative many by existing in many different experiential

contexts. We say that these contexts differently *qualify* the intrinsic one. It is natural to ask: What is the smallest number of absolutes required to create an indefinite number of relatives? The answer is one, which we term The Absolute (X). This *creates* absence of the Absolute^{8,9}, which, for notational convenience, we equate with Nullity (0) qualified by the Absolute (X). We write this as $X \rightarrow 0$. Since this is different from both X and 0, it gives rise to two further relatives: $X \rightarrow 0 \rightarrow 0$ and $X \rightarrow 0 \rightarrow X$. Each of these, in turn, gives rise to two further, and so on indefinitely. With each qualified addition defining one instant of time, the ontological ground of the universe after n instants will consist of 2^{n-1} qualification sequences. These qualification sequences are our ultimate ‘particles’. Since, in effect, the Universe is the Absolute One unfolded (the Absolute One being the Universe enfolded) we define the Absolute One as ‘That which becomes Itself’ or Self-Becoming as such. It is this which accounts for the hedonic tone of experience, without which life would be devoid of all significance!

How does distance, the root ingredient of ‘space’, arise in this conception?

Although the number of X/0 sequences is doubling at every instant, this is clearly not the case in “our universe”, or Cosmos, the number of whose ‘particles’ at any time increases or decreases by a minute fraction *at most*. This implies that, at every instant, the vast majority, at least, of our Cosmic (*qua Cosmic*) sequences do not bifurcate: *either* a presence or an absence being selected. Since the mode of this selection in effect defines the Cosmos it must be made by the Cosmos itself, taking the form of some

unifying law or laws which all its constituent sequences obey. The X/0 selection at any instant on any Cosmic sequence is a resultant of all the selections made by some one instant on every Cosmic sequence. The relative effects of these individual selections are not, in general, equal in magnitude, but are inversely proportional to the square of the duration between selecting and selected instants. We call this particular duration, or number of instants (n) between selecting and selected instants, the distance, or number of points (n) between them. Since orthodoxy measures distance and duration in independently defined units, (metres and seconds, say) there must be an arbitrary constant of proportionality between them, so that, measured distance (r m) equals ‘universal’ constant (c) x measured duration (t s), or $r = ct$. Mechanistic orthodoxy calls c (= 1 point per instant) the speed of light. All physical phenomena can be no less rationally accounted for in this conception. For example, electrons (positive and negative) are our qualification sequences, the two opposite types of charge arising from presence/absence preponderance; likewise periodicity arises from rate of consecutive presence/absence alternation, with absolute speed fixed at one point per period. As a consequence of these constant laws acting on the Cosmic qualification sequences (i.e. electrons), there is a tendency for small groups of them to maintain their mutual relations over long periods. These localised rhythmic entities, grounded ultimately upon repetition, are the atoms and molecules of conventional physics.

But the structural feature that utterly distances this conception of the universal process from that of orthodoxy is that it is not *commutative* but *cumulative*. The content of each instant is not *substituted* for that of its predecessor, but *added* to it. Not only does it not require the demise of its predecessors: its individual uniqueness positively requires their continued existence as providing a unique context of qualification. So that what, very broadly speaking, mathematico-mechanistic orthodoxy sees as the Universe, in actual fact is only the temporal surface of a cosmos, the overwhelming bulk of which lies in the past! In a word, it mistakes the hide for the living animal.

Clearly, there must exist law governed processes in addition to the laws of physical association touched on above: those which govern the connections between past and present physical experience. Sympathic Association, grounded in the experiential togetherness of present physical unities and past similar unities is the most fundamental. Only less so, because deriving directly from it, is Mnemic Causation, which governs the selective effect exerted by past physical unities upon the physical present, making for a repetition of that past. And, finally, there is Paraphysical Causation, which, as a consequence of Sympathic Association and Mnemic Causation, gives rise to associations between present physical and non-physical qualification sequences. It is these laws, then, that operating in conjunction with physical laws, are responsible for the whole biological, and eventually human, levels of existence.¹⁰

Finally, this truly *rational* world conception with its eternally persisting past - Yeats' "spiritus mundi", the "mother sea" of William James, the unconscious of the depth psychologists, the Akashic record of the occultists - is able to establish without strain the basic truth of beliefs that the naively *irrational* 'scientific world-view', with its crackpot notion of memories stored in brain cells, has long since relegated to the realm of superstition. I allude to so-called psychic phenomena - telepathy chief among them - and, above all, to individual survival of bodily death, and reincarnation.

I append a table summarising the differences between the implications arising from the particulate and the sequential conceptions of matter. (See below)

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. The New Organon. Francis Bacon (Pub. 1620). Book 2. Aphorism 8.
2. "The wisest brightest meanest of mankind" Alexander Pope. An Essay on Man, Epistle IV, lines 281-2.
3. See www.geoffreyread.com ebook & papers: The Fatal Trap
4. The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy. Isaac Newton (Pub. 1687).
5. "... That one body may act upon another at a distance, through a vacuum, without the mediation of anything else through which their action may be conveyed from one to another, is to me so great an absurdity that I believe no man who has in philosophical matters a competent

faculty of thinking, can ever fall into it.” Letter to Bentley (Feb. 1693).

6. Third letter to Clarke §§ 4, 5.

7. Derived from Democritus.

8. “not-being is not mere nullity but ‘otherness’.” (Plato, *The Sophist*, quoted by G.R.G.Mure, *The Philosophy of Hegel*, Oxford University Press, 1965, p.13).

9. “the non-possession of any given attribute is also an attribute ...” (John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, 1843, Bk 1, Ch. II, §6).

10. “At present, even in these days of ‘molecular biology’ there is still not one inferential chain which leads from anything important in physics to anything important in biology; despite decades of concerted effort by some very clever people biology forces physics to transform itself, perhaps ultimately out of all recognition.” (Professor Robert Rosen, *Essays in Honour of David Bohm on his 70th Birthday*, 1987).

RECOMMENDED READING

William James on Psychical Research. Compiled and Edited by Gardner Murphy and Robert O. Ballou. *VII, The Last Report. The Final Impressions of a Psychical Researcher* (Chatto and Windus, 1961)

R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford University Press, 1945)
 Herbert Dingle. *Science at the Crossroads* (Martin Brian and O’Keefe, 1972)

Ian Stevenson, *Children who Remember Previous Lives* (The University Press of Virginia, 1987)

Peter Hewitt. *The Coherent Universe* (Linden House, 2003).

TABLE:

PARTICLE THEORY (death)	SEQUENTIAL THEORY (life)
Originates in naïve realism (phenomena)	Originates in philosophical analysis (noumena)
Classical atomism	Future foundation of physics?
Universally accepted (basic to science)	Virtually unknown
Unsuccessfully attempts to explain intrinsic change in terms of spatial change	Successfully explains spatial change in terms of intrinsic change
Time and space as existing independently of matter	Temporal and spatial relations adjectival to material process
Past obliterated	Past wholly preserved (the akashic record, the unconscious, etc.)
Implies a materialistic world conception	Implies a spiritual world conception
Biology not arising logically out of physics	Biology logically implied by physics
Accounts for a few aspects of human experience	Accounts for all aspects of human experience

PERSONAL REFLECTIONS:

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“Whenever I reflect on the problems of today’s world, whether they concern the economy, society, culture, security, ecology, or civilization in general, I always end up confronting the moral question: what action is responsible or acceptable? The moral order, our conscience and human rights—these are the most important issues at the beginning of the third millennium.” – Vaclav Havel¹

In the second Friends of Wisdom newsletter, Nicholas Maxwell called for a fierce debate about wisdom-inquiry. According to Maxwell, one of the basic faults of knowledge-inquiry is that it does not embody “a kind of inquiry rationally devoted to helping us learn how to make progress towards a good, civilized, wise world.” For the purpose of contributing toward the development of wisdom-inquiry through vigorous debate, I would like to raise and respond to a claim that could be made in defence of knowledge-inquiry as practiced in United States universities and colleges. I will conclude by briefly discussing the implications of this analysis for wisdom-inquiry.

A basic social problem that many people would expect wisdom-inquiry



to address is the problem of poverty. Poverty is commonly recognized by progressive-minded scholars to be an undesirable condition that could and ought to be overcome through social change. What about the role of higher education toward ameliorating poverty? One defence of the status quo in American higher education is that its role is properly actualized by providing access to higher education for more people.² The assumption behind this position is that in a democracy, an educated citizenry can better recognize the causes of poverty and act upon this knowledge in the public sphere in some way, whether through political action, social action, or both.

In particular, great effort is made by universities and colleges to recruit members of social groups who have been historically discriminated against and socioeconomically disadvantaged. Given the opportunity to pursue a college education, students can learn about the structural, ideological, and practical constraints that impede social progress and become engaged citizens who will contribute toward change. Students can also gain entry into realms of power by pursuing professions that require advanced education. Some students eventually become scholars engaged in knowledge-inquiry that generates

evidence to support social change. As scholars, they can also serve as mentors to new generations of students, thereby expanding the number of intellectually empowered members of society.

Thus, in American higher education, the standard basis for broadly addressing poverty as a social problem is to make a college education more available to more people, with a special emphasis on recruiting disadvantaged students. What does the quantitative data reveal? In 2005, total enrolment in American universities and colleges reached a record level of 17.5 million.³ Between 1995 and 2005, the number of full time students increased by 33 percent. Undergraduate enrolment rose 21 percent between 1996 and 2005 and graduate enrolment rose about 60 percent between 1985 and 2005.

Between the years 1974-2003, the percentage of people who *participate* in American higher education (enrolled with at least two years completed) increased at a statistically significant rate for traditional college-age students (18-24 years old) across all gender and ethnic categories except Hispanic males.⁴ In 2005, the number of people under age 25 who were enrolled was 32 percent higher than it was in 1990. Enrolment of persons age 25 and over rose by 19 percent during the same period. These increases in participation occurred not only during periods of increase in the overall size of the traditional college-age population (1995-2005) but also during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the size of this demographic sector declined.

Women and minorities have made significant gains in postsecondary educational enrolment and attainment in the last thirty years. Between 1995 and 2005, the number of women enrolled rose 27 percent, while the number of men rose 18 percent. Since 1984, the number of women in graduate schools has exceeded the number of men. The proportion of American college students who are minorities more than doubled between 1976 and 2005, from 15 percent to 31 percent in 2005. In this period, the African American proportion of total college enrolment increased from 9 percent to 13 percent, the Hispanic proportion rose from 3 percent to 11 percent, and the Asian proportion increased from 2 percent to 6 percent.

It is projected by the National Centre for Education Statistics that compared to their 2005 levels, by the year 2015 college enrolments will rise 11 percent for persons under age 25, and 18 percent for persons age 25 and over.⁵ There have also been substantial increases in the number of degrees awarded annually. Between 1994-95 and 2004-05, the number of associate degrees that were awarded annually increased 29 percent, bachelor degrees increased 24 percent, master degrees increased 45 percent, and doctoral degrees increased 18 percent. The number of first-professional degrees that were awarded in 2004-05 was 15 percent higher than it was in 1994-95.

However, at the same time that there been growth in enrolment, participation, and graduation rates in American higher education, there has also been growth in poverty in the United States.⁶ The raw figures are staggering: almost 37 million people were living in poverty in America in

2005.⁷ According to data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the percentage of the population below the official poverty level was 12.6 percent of the population. This number is almost 1 percentage point higher than the figure in 1976.⁸ “If being poor means being a long way from the society-wide average (or median), the percentage of Americans who are poor has almost certainly risen over the past two decades.”⁹

In fact, there has not been a sustained decline in poverty rates since the 1960s in the U.S. even though there were major economic expansions in the 1980s and 1990s.¹⁰ Almost one-half of the nation’s poor are African American or Hispanic American. About one-quarter of the population of each of these groups is in poverty, while the rate for Asian Americans is about 12.5 percent and for non-Hispanic whites is below 10 percent. For the elderly, the poverty rate doubles when out-of-pocket medical spending is counted. One-third of families that are headed by a woman, whether single, divorced, separated, or widowed, live in poverty.¹¹

Thus, at the same time that access and participation in higher education have increased, the level of poverty has remained high over the same period. If poverty is a social problem and higher education is a social institution that is fundamentally concerned with the well-being of people in society, the data that I have summarized provides an empirical basis for raising the question of how higher education can justify business as usual.

One way that some defenders of knowledge-inquiry might respond to these points is to argue that although

access to higher education is higher than ever in the U.S., the solution is to increase access to higher education even more than it has increased. However, the record of the past 30-plus years that I have summarized does not support the idea that increasing access will reduce poverty. In fact, at the same time that there has been significantly increased access in higher education, there has been a persistent poverty rate over that same period, even during sustained economic growth. It is not apparent that even a very massive increase in national investment to greatly enlarge higher education would greatly diminish poverty in this country.

I want to draw attention to another defence of the status quo in the U.S., although a meaningful discussion of it is beyond the limits of this essay. This defence would be that even though knowledge-inquiry is the predominant paradigm for the structure of inquiry, there are many initiatives pursued by scholars in applied fields such as education, social work, and public health who, with funded support, intervene directly in localities throughout the globe to help people overcome socioeconomic and educational barriers to their well-being. It should also be pointed out that there are many significant partnerships between universities and communities to put the results of social research into action, particularly in impoverished urban areas. Finally, the last ten years has seen the emergence and rapid expansion of the service-learning movement nationally as an integral part of the curriculum. These courses involve action by students and faculty to directly help people overcome obstacles to their well-being. I will only note here that

while each of these types of social engagement may in fact reflect an orientation toward the role of higher education that is consistent with wisdom-inquiry, the extent of these efforts and their effectiveness in fostering lasting change relative to the overall work and resources in American higher education has not been widely demonstrated at this time.

Most importantly, I believe that the scope and persistence of poverty even in the wealthiest of countries calls for wisdom-inquiry that is far more energetic than Professor Maxwell's conception. In the very first chapter of *From Knowledge to Wisdom*, Maxwell grounds his plea for intellectual revolution on massive suffering. Yet he states repeatedly that wisdom-inquiry has the task of *gradually* developing a more cooperatively rational world by discovering what is of value and proposing possible solutions to their realization. I would assert that the full ramifications of Maxwell's plea must go well beyond his focus on a reformation of Enlightenment rationality to include values inquiry. Gradual movement toward a better world is simply not enough for the millions of people who are suffering *right now* due to social conditions beyond their control. Indeed, gradual movement describes the unacceptably limited degree of progress that *knowledge-inquiry* has produced.

Thus, given the extent of global suffering in all of the forms that Maxwell identifies, his prescription for intellectual revolution does not sufficiently measure up to the urgency of his call for intellectual revolution. This statement is not intended to suggest that suffering can be

overcome overnight. It is meant to emphasize that wisdom-inquiry must be developed *organizationally* with an orientation toward collective *action* by like-minded scholars worldwide, and vigorously enacted on a wide scale, if it is to begin to confront the massive suffering that has continued and even increased in the wake of knowledge-inquiry.

NOTES:

1. V. Havel, "Our Moral Footprint," *New York Times*, September 27, 2007, p. A31
2. Another defence of the status quo would be based on the amount of research that is produced from knowledge-inquiry in the U.S. From the years 1975 to 2005, federal funding for research at universities has increased by over 275 percent in constant dollars, to 32.6 billion dollars. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2006*. National Centre for Education Statistics, U.S. Dept. of Education 2007-017 July 2007, Table 362. As I show in this essay, poverty rates increased during this period.
3. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2006*, Chapter 3
4. *Postsecondary Participation Rates by Sex and Race/Ethnicity: 1974-2003*. NCES Issue Brief, U.S. Dept. of Education 2005-028 March 2005.
5. *Digest of Education Statistics: 2006*.
6. G. Burtless and T. Smeeding, 'The Level, Trend, and Composition of Poverty', in S. Danziger and R. Haveman (eds), *Understanding*

Poverty, Cambridge: Harvard University, 2001, p. 31.

7. Poverty is a multidimensional concept and forms of deprivation other than economic hardship should be considered (*Ibid*). The official definition of poverty is a matter of considerable dispute. The standard that is used by the government is based on a measure of income that originated in 1955. This figure is adjusted annually based on changes in the Consumer Price Index. *Ibid*, p. 42

8. U.S. Census Bureau, Historical Poverty Tables,
www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty/.

9. *Understanding Poverty*, p. 28

10. *Ibid*, pp. 44-5.

11. Different racial and ethnic groups continue to experience very different poverty rates, and this fact remains the case under a variety of poverty definitions. *Ibid*, pp. 57-60.

BOOK REVIEW OF NICK MAXWELL'S “FROM KNOWLEDGE TO WISDOM” SECOND EDITION

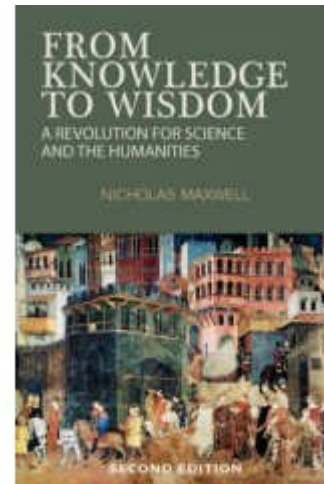
A REVOLUTION FOR SCIENCE
AND THE HUMANITIES

Pentire Press, 2007, pp. xii+470
ISBN 978-0-9552240-0-3

By Niall Scott

A Reflection and Review:

There have been quite a number of reviews and critical responses to Nicholas Maxwell's first edition of his book/project from *Knowledge to Wisdom*. He thus gives us a generous offer in providing readers with a second edition including a thoroughly comprehensive reply to his critics and a rethinking of some of his ideas in light of these. In most cases it involves a shoring up and a staunch defence of his position, and the aims of promoting Wisdom enquiry. The most challenging includes a reworking of his contention that the problems of induction can be resolved. Rather, one should say additional arguments are presented that extend his proposed solution to the problem of induction. Previous attempts to solve the problem have failed according to Maxwell because they fail to recognise the underlying metaphysical assumptions in standard empiricism and standard empiricism is assumed in trying to



http://www.amazon.co.uk/Knowledge-Wisdom-Revolution-Science-Humanities/dp/0955224004/ref=pbbs_sr_1?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1206376823&sr=8-1

solve induction. Maxwell's solution involves a shift in thinking, criticising the way in which the problem of induction is formulated and instead asks for a shift in thinking about science in its entirety. The problem of induction suggests that there is a serious problem in science as a whole and the response is to change science so that the problem ceases to arise. In the second edition Maxwell adds an attempt to change the method of science, through his theory of Aim Oriented Rationalism. A bold statement appears in chapter nine where he claims that Aim Oriented Rationalism be able to respond in all nine objections to standard empiricism, which had not been possible in the first edition. This confidence must be read with humility as Maxwell admits that the wisdom revolution argued for in the 1984 edition didn't really get going as quickly as he had hoped. However he

gives room for optimism in the small changes that are occurring in the academic world. Two chapters are devoted to quite a personal reflection on the revolution being underway, where Maxwell gives the reader an insight into his soul and passion for this important project. What comes across though from his responses to critics and an assessment of the potential for wisdom enquiry in the latter part of the text is a humility and openness to dialogue, yet based on standing the wisdom ground quite uncompromisingly. And this is a good thing. Why compromise when you are confident that you have a good idea that is worth promoting?

The cover of the second edition gives an insight into how long others have aimed at a similar approach- it is a section of the Ambrogio Lorenzetti's fresco on good and bad government from the town hall in Sienna. It is a hint to the reader that there is a long tradition of the need to incorporate, even ground human (scientific) enquiry in wisdom, in line with Aristotelian and Thomistic endeavours, where good government is based on the pursuit of the common good. Not only this but that Maxwell's work can be placed as much as political critique as a philosophico-moral one, and thus has its place, as a colleague suggested to me, in the tradition of Marcuse's work as well

In the pursuit of wisdom oriented enquiry rather than knowledge oriented enquiry, Maxwell's task for science and academia is to be more focussed on solving *the* problems confronting human living- to grow into a more civilised state of affairs. This we have yet to reach and it has strong resonances in my own area of

work, ringing true in the field of Bioethics. In Bioethics much problem solving is led by a purely instrumental approach to knowledge, where Utilitarian ethics is predominant. There is little wisdom at work, and a great deal of means-end justification paired with the can implies ought approach, based on the accumulation of more and more genetic evidence/knowledge. This is contrasted with recognition of what the proper goals of genetic research could be. The question of what would constitute being human in the light of much more serious concerns facing our species rather than the pursuit of enhanced bodies and perfection needs more widespread attention. This sentiment is captured in the goal of the wisdom argument (and indeed the part of the book that stands out for me) in chapter nine's preamble to the argument refuting standard empiricism. This is the notion that we need to rediscover our childish awe of the world and capture its openness that is sorely missing in knowledge inquiry pursuits. Maxwell writes:

"According to the philosophy of wisdom, the basic task of rational inquiry and education is to help us strengthen and deepen this precious childish rawness and openness to the experiential dimension of reality. The task is to help us develop our childish capacity to realize what is of value so that it gradually becomes more sensitive and realistic, more knowledgeable and understanding, more creative, cooperative, responsible, more loving." (p. 226)

Although this work is multifaceted, Maxwell's project in my reading covers two areas- One is a significant critique of the philosophy of science and a well reasoned solution in his proposal for an Aim Oriented

Rationalism and the second a general lament concerning the current mess of academia, science, government and policy with regard to the very serious problems facing human living, locally and globally, for which scientific endeavours have yet to direct themselves to well grounded solutions. Again, Maxwell aims to provide solutions to this in his demand for the pursuit of wisdom. One could conceive of this work splitting into to complementary texts- one for the general reader and one specifically aimed at scientists, although he has already done this elsewhere. As an argument in the area of the philosophy of science and the foundations for the method of science, this text ought to have a prominent position on the science and philosophy curriculum in universities. Perhaps it is time for a wisdom enquiry handbook- a short pocket sized version to keep this revolution in thought and practice going.

A REVIEW OF NICK MAXWELL'S “IS SCIENCE NEUROTIC?”

**Imperial College Press, 2004, pp. xx+240,
ISBN 1-86094-500-7**

**By Mohamed Yunus
Yasin**

I began reading Nicholas Maxwell's new book, "Is Science Neurotic" being new to the area of philosophy of science, in fact, what is worst, I am an Engineer! However I do know that Nietzsche once said "The fact that science as we practice it today is



<http://www.amazon.com/Science-Neurotic-Nicholas-Maxwell/dp/1860945007/>

possible proves that the elementary instinct which protects life have ceased to function". He argued that in scientific research findings, what we call "explanations" are no more than "descriptions" and although science advances with better descriptions of nature, we cannot explain anything more than those who lived many years before us. In other words, we may now know the world better, but we still do not understand it. What we have today is lots of information, some knowledge, but little wisdom. Lastly Nietzsche made an important observation when he said "too much information causes indigestion" to the extent "we choke on our own reason". If this is true, the world is going through a very bad case of diarrhoea.

To begin with, the title is very provoking. Neurosis is a medical terms which is "a mental and emotional disorder that affects parts of the personality and is accompanied by a distorted perception of reality...". In his book, "Is Science Neurotic?",

Maxwell argues that science suffers from a damaging methodological disease which he calls rational neurosis. This is because science cannot proceed without making the metaphysical assumption that the universe is physically comprehensible. However, this assumption conflicts with its other fundamental view that 'nothing being permanently assumed independently of evidence'. But science represses the notion that any such assumption was made. The book also argues that science makes value judgement, since science is pursued in social, cultural, political and economic context although science claims to be above these considerations, a discipline free of values. Considering that neurosis is a condition caused by an aim pursuing process, and when we consider that the aims of science are problematic compared to its claims, Maxwell develops his argument that science is neurotic. However this argument can also be used for many inquiries of knowledge and so Maxwell argues for a whole revamp of academia, from a 'knowledge based inquiry' to that of a 'wisdom based inquiry'.

Maxwell argues his case passionately with many examples and I will leave the reader to read the book and draw his/her own conclusion. However, in a nutshell, one could say that the neurotic condition is caused by science inability to be honest and assumes itself to transcend presupposition. It assumes to be the "ultimate and fundamental truth" of the universe; like the smallest component in the atomic structure of the building blocks that make up what we call knowledge. However presuppositions in science is almost as

old as science itself, for example, Leibniz said "Reality cannot be found except in One single source, because of the interconnection of all things with one another...". However science aims to discover factual truths about the Universe without having presuppositions about its nature independent of evidence. What science calls evidence is empirical, which is used to build theories. However, theories comes with its own set of 'preconditions'. Precondition like simplicity and unity then does not commit to the fact that the Universe is simple, Unified and comprehensible. So for example we can have many theories that can challenge and predict as Newton theory of motion but they are not selected because theories are not accepted on empirical evidence alone. Unity and Simplicity are presuppositions, which are used to reject the 'other' theories. Furthermore, Science also presupposes that its theories and laws should have an explanatory power or as some scientist say "well-substantiated explanation". Theories should serve as intellectual frameworks that link and make sense of what would otherwise be a dissociated collection of facts and figures. Associated to the explanatory power would be the predictive powers of a particular theory. Both explanatory power and predictive powers of theories varies in the sciences where physics have a better fortune at predicting natural behaviour as opposed to the biology. Therefore, some of the more honest biologist no longer claim that scientific truths as ultimate truths, but the best truth to date, based on the scientific evidence collected and collated up to the date of analysis.

To make sense of all this, it requires science to be viewed as a hierarchical process. For example, some say that ultimately, the theories which form the intellectual frameworks of science will have explanatory value although much of the work that forms the foundation of these theories does not. Younger fields do not yet have a body of data that's sufficient to build a generalized model and so these fields mostly generate descriptive data. Maxwell, in this book argues for the adoption of 'aims oriented empiricism', AOE to replace the traditional 'standard empiricism' which is only evidence based. In AOE, he argues for a systematic hierarchical scientific inquiry methodology consisting of 7 levels, which are:

1. Empirical data/phenomena
2. Accepted testable fundamental physical theories
3. Best blue print – a specific or best current version of physicalism
4. Physicalism – the thesis that the universe is physically comprehensible with a some kind of physical entity that exist in all places
5. Comprehensibility – thesis that the universe is physically comprehensible in some way with some explanation for the diverse phenomena of the universe.
6. Meta-knowability – the universe is such that there is some true, rationally discoverable thesis which is accepted allows us to improve our understanding of the universe.
7. Partial knowability – the thesis that the universe is such that we can acquire some knowledge of our local circumstances, sufficient to at least make life possible,

Finally a compelling observation by Maxwell is that science has increased our capacity to act. We can now change the landscape of the planet with our construction, the air which we breathe with our action (pollution), the water which we drink with our industrialisation, the food which we eat with our genetic manipulation and our capacity of our destruction with our weapons etc. Thus there is a need for wisdom in our action because action today carries severe repercussions, not only to us, but to the future generations that will inhabit the planet. Thus Maxwell argues for a revolution in our academic inquiry as Nietzsche said "There are many things I do not wish to know, wisdom sets a limit to knowledge".

To summaries, the book is a powerful and complex critique of standard empiricism and offers aim-oriented empiricism, AOE as a metaphysical cure to the neurosis that modern science suffers. Maxwell claims that AOE, if adopted, will help deal with the major survival problems such as environmental degradation, World poverty, and weapons proliferation. He proposes to do so by making science itself to become wisdom-oriented rather than knowledge-oriented. The book has a large appendix which gives us details for his arguments with succinct examples. Maxwell's aspirations are very ambitious and one has to admit that for the academic revolution to happen a lot of 'pre-conditions' has to be present. However we hope that this book maybe one small step for our social progress towards wisdom.

Editor's Endnote:

The nineteenth century Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin considered science to be the means by which we could liberate ourselves from scarcity, toil, and superstition. But, he insisted that science should remain subordinate to considerations of the particularities and practicalities of human life, even though science provides universal knowledge about natural laws. He warned that a society governed by scientists (even if inspired by the love of truth and deciding policies solely on the basis of scientific knowledge) would inevitably become monstrous if only the minority understood science. In such a society, scientists would be forced to act as the intellectual elite and impose policies on a scientifically illiterate majority. This would result in a mass society of passive and irrational citizens, all conforming to dictates based on knowledge only known to the elite. Such a society would tend towards an authoritarian technocracy, wherein the scientists would have to resort to propaganda to instruct citizens. This would result in a society of mindless brutes, and, by granting scientists absolute authority, would corrupt the critical and emancipatory nature of science itself.

Bakunin argued that science can only liberate human beings if developed in an open society – an enlightened democracy, wherein the intellectual virtues of science are valued by society. In addition, when scientists attempt to change public policy, they must do so *as equals* with their fellow citizens, relying upon persuasion and discussion. Citizens must learn about science and decide



upon its truth for themselves. Citizens and scientists must learn to cooperate and share core values and ideals, such as the liberty, equality, and solidarity of all human beings.

In the open society, as envisioned by Bakunin, scientific knowledge and education would be public property and freely distributed throughout the population. All citizens could develop a practical and critical understanding of science: its knowledge, methods, values, and tradition. Through public and reasoned deliberation about science and its implications, citizens would be better placed to democratically decide how to further develop it, understand what its limits and priorities should be, and guide the implementation of its discoveries. Arguably, within the open society, AOR, 'wisdom-inquiry', and 'rational cooperation' would be the basis for all democratic and reasoned deliberations. If this is the case, Nick Maxell's 'intellectual revolution' requires nothing less than the transformation of contemporary society into a genuinely democratic and open society.

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