

# How Universities Can Help Create a Wiser World The Urgent Need for an Academic Revolution

## Chapter One The Basic Idea

### Global Crises

The future of humanity is threatened by grave global problems. There is the problem of war, over one hundred million people having been killed in countless wars during the course of the twentieth century (which compares unfavourably with the twelve million or so killed in wars during the nineteenth century).<sup>1</sup> And we have not done very well so far in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is the obscenity of the arms trade, the massive stockpiling of armaments, even by poor countries, and the ever present threat of their use by terrorists or in war, whether the arms be conventional, chemical, biological, or nuclear. There is the sustained, profound injustice of immense differences in wealth around the globe, the industrially advanced first world of North America, Europe, and elsewhere experiencing unprecedented wealth while something like a third of humanity live in conditions of abject poverty in the third world, hungry, unemployed, without proper housing, health care, education, or even access to safe water. There is the long-standing problem of the rapid growth of the world's population, pronounced especially in the poorest parts of the world, and adversely affecting efforts at development. And there is the horror of the AIDS epidemic, again far more terrible in the poorest parts of the world, devastating millions of lives, destroying families, and crippling economies. There is the problem of the progressive destruction of tropical rain forests and other natural habitats, with its concomitant devastating extinction of species. Humanity urgently needs to discover how to create a sustainable world industry and agriculture that does not wreak havoc on the environment; attempts do this have, so far, proved ineffective. There are problems of pollution of air, sea and earth, and problems of depletion of finite resources. And over everything hangs the menace of climate change, threatening to intensify all the other problems – apart, perhaps, from population growth. (As the climate warms, millions will die. They are dying already.)

Finally, there is what Ronald Higgins, decades ago, called “the seventh enemy”: our ingrained incapacity to do what needs to be done to solve our problems.<sup>2</sup>

But it is worse than that. It is not just that our efforts to tackle global problems seem pathetically inadequate. Far worse, much of our efforts seem devoted to *intensifying* our problems. We know that if we continue to emit carbon dioxide at anything like the rate we do at present, we are heading towards disaster. Does this mean we cut back on emissions? All sorts of measures are introduced, but CO<sub>2</sub> emissions actually increase – or only fail to increase because of the world economic recession. High up on the agenda of every government of every nation is economic growth; but it is economic growth, as conducted at present, which leads to higher CO<sub>2</sub> emissions – even if this need not be if power, industry and transport were run on different, more sustainable lines.

Governments seek security, built up their armies and defence in order to procure security, provoke suspicious neighbour nations to do likewise, and thus increase insecurity and the danger of war.

Banks seek wealth, and plunge the world into debt, recession and poverty.

Progress is eagerly sought, and the outcome is industrial, agricultural and population growth beyond what the planet can support. Natural habitats are destroyed, species annihilated, land and sea polluted.

We seem trapped in a vicious nightmare in which what we strive to achieve, our finest and most passionately sought aspirations and ideals, are transformed, as we draw closer to them, into ugly and dangerous monstrosities, threats to our very existence. What we love the most turns out to do us the most harm.

A key example of this nightmare twist is science. Modern science has been pursued, ever since its birth in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the passionate conviction that science will better the lot of humanity. Unquestionably, science has met with quite astonishing intellectual success in improving our knowledge and understanding of the universe, and ourselves as a part of the universe. And modern science and technology have been of immense benefit to humanity. In countless ways, those of us fortunate to live in the wealthy, industrially advanced parts of the world have had our lives enriched beyond the wildest dreams of people living only a couple of centuries ago. Modern science has made possible the modern world.

At the same time science has helped to create all our current global problems – or at least has made them possible. Science and technology have led to modern industry, agriculture, transport, armaments, medicine and hygiene. And these in turn have led to global warming, population growth, destruction of natural habitats and rapid extinction of species, the development of extreme inequalities of wealth and power around the globe, pollution of earth, sea and air, depletion of natural resources, the lethal character of modern war, the increasing threats posed by the spread of modern armaments, and even the AIDS epidemic – AIDS being spread by modern travel.

But it is not just that modern science has made all our global crises possible. It is worse than that. The unprecedented success of modern scientific and technological research is actually the *cause* of our global problems.

At once it will be objected that it is not *science* that is the cause, but rather the things that we *do*, made possible by science and technology. This is obviously correct. But it is also correct to say that scientific and technological progress *is* the cause. The meaning of “cause” is ambiguous. By “the cause” of event E we may mean something like “the most obvious observable events preceding E that figure in the common sense explanation for the occurrence of E”. In this sense, human actions (made possible by science) are the cause of such things as people being killed by modern weapons in war, destruction of tropical rain forests. On the other hand, by the “cause” of E we may mean “that prior change in the environment of E which led to the occurrence of E, and without which E would not have occurred”. If we put our times into the context of human history, then it is entirely correct to say that, in this sense, scientific-and-technological progress is the cause of our distinctive current global disasters: what has changed, what is new, is scientific knowledge, not human nature. Give a group of chimpanzees rifles and teach them how to use them and in one sense, of course, the cause of the subsequent demise of the group would be the actions of the chimpanzees. But in another obvious sense, the cause would be the sudden availability and use of rifles – the new, lethal technology. Yet again, from the standpoint of theoretical physics, “the cause” of E might be interpreted to mean something like “the physical state of affairs prior to E, throughout a sufficiently large spatial region surrounding the place where E occurs”. In this third sense, the sun

continuing to shine is as much a part of the cause of war and pollution as human action or modern science and technology.

Some of our most noble efforts and endeavours have led us close to disaster. We strive to procure wealth and happiness for all via economic progress, security via defence, health and longer life via medicine, and a major part of the outcome is climate change, destruction of natural habitats and rapid extinction of species, pollution, depletion of finite natural resources, lethal modern war and the threat of war, and population growth beyond what the earth can sustain. We pursue scientific and technological research out of the noble quest to enhance knowledge and understanding, and to better the lot of humanity, and as a result facilitate all those enterprises that have created our current global problems. Put in even more stark terms, science is actually the *cause* of these problems – in one perfectly legitimate sense of “cause”.

No wonder many conclude, not just that we cannot make things better, but all our efforts to do so, however nobly and energetically pursued, are doomed just to make things worse. A typical example of someone who thinks along these lines is the very popular writer John Gray who, in book after book, article after article, has argued that progress is illusory, all our efforts to transform the human condition inevitably ending in nightmare.<sup>3</sup>

### **What Can We Do?**

Is there anything we can do to escape this nightmare of even our noblest efforts to make things better ending up making things worse?

There is. In order to make progress towards a better world we need to *learn* how to do it. And for that, in turn, we need *institutions of learning rationally designed and devoted to helping us learn how to solve our global problems, how to make progress towards a better world*. It is just this that we lack at present. Our universities are devoted to the pursuit of knowledge. They are neither designed nor devoted to helping humanity learn how to tackle global problems – problems of living – in more intelligent, humane and effective ways. That is the key disaster of our times, the crisis behind all the others: our failure to have developed our institutions of learning so that they are rationally organized and devoted to helping us solve our problems of living – above all, our global problems. Having universities devoted almost exclusively to the pursuit of knowledge is, as we have seen, a recipe for disaster. Scientific knowledge and technological know-how have unquestionably brought great benefits to humanity. But they have also made possible – even caused – our current global crises.

But is it really conceivable that changing *academia* would make the slightest difference to what goes on in the real world? One meaning of “academic”, after all, is “irrelevant”, “beside the point”. Academics might debate among themselves about what we should do in response to our problems, but why should we suppose they would come up with better solutions than people on the ground, with experience of the real world? Why should we expect them to agree? And even if they did agree, and did come up with good ideas, why should we expect anyone to listen? Would not politics, industry, trade, finance, war, continue on their way, regardless?

Is it even plausible to suppose that academics could agree about what needs to be done to transform universities so that they come to devote themselves to helping humanity learn how to create a better world? Would not right wing academics want one thing, left

wing academics another? Would not natural scientists disagree with social scientists, historians disagree with engineers, and philosophers disagree with everyone – above all, with each other? As things are, universities do serve a reasonably decent purpose. They establish facts and add to knowledge; and they train professionals: lawyers, engineers, architects, doctors, and so on. A radical change in the whole structure and character of universities – an academic revolution – would risk sabotaging the good that universities do now, for nothing more fruitful than sterile debate and hot air. The outcome would, in all likelihood, undermine, not assist, humanity in its efforts to make progress towards a better world.

Before I can answer these two objections properly, I must first spell out in outline what it is that I am proposing, and what the reasons are for the proposal.

### **Urgent Need for an Academic Revolution**

The central claim of this book can be put like this.

Academia, as it exists at present, devoted primarily to the pursuit of knowledge, is the outcome of efforts to create a kind of academic inquiry that is rationally organized and devoted to helping humanity achieve what is of value in life, solve problems of living, make social progress towards as good a world as possible. The idea that the fundamental social or humanitarian goal of rational inquiry should be to better the lot of humanity goes all the way back to Francis Bacon in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. And Bacon helped inspire many of those who created modern science. His writings were inspirational in the creation of the Royal Society in Britain. Natural science – or natural philosophy, as it was known in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – was pursued in part in the passionate belief that knowledge acquired would help transform the human condition for the better.

The idea was further developed by the Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, especially by the *philosophes* of the French Enlightenment. Voltaire, Diderot, Condorcet and the rest had the fundamental and profound idea that it might be possible to learn from scientific progress how to achieve social progress towards an enlightened world. This, correctly interpreted, is the key idea, incidentally, of the present book. In developing this immensely important idea, the *philosophes* took it for granted that, in order to put this idea into practice what one needed to do was to develop the social sciences alongside the natural sciences. Francis Bacon had already argued powerfully that, if we wish to achieve social progress, we must acquire authentic knowledge of the natural world. We must do natural science (or natural philosophy). To the *philosophes* it seemed obvious that, if we seek social progress, then it is, if anything, even more important to acquire authentic knowledge of the social world. We need to acquire knowledge of the laws of social development. We need to acquire knowledge of economics, history, and the psychological make-up of people. Knowledge of natural law governing natural phenomena may be important, but even more important is knowledge of social law governing human action and social development.

So the *philosophes* set about creating the *social sciences* alongside the *natural sciences*. They brought into existence, or developed, economics, sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, history, the study of law, culture and custom. What the *philosophes* initiated or developed in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, others – such as J.S. Mill and Karl Marx – further developed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, often outside universities until, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century social science was built into academic inquiry in universities all

over the world with the creation of departments of social science: economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, political science.

The outcome is what, by and large, we have today, academic inquiry devoted, in the first instance, to the pursuit of knowledge – or *knowledge-inquiry* as we may call it. There are two basic ideas inherent in knowledge-inquiry.

- (1) The primary task for academic inquiry is to acquire knowledge and technological know-how. First, knowledge must be acquired. Once acquired, it can *then* be applied to help solve social problems.
- (2) In order to be of value to humanity, knowledge must be objective, factual and reliable. This means only those considerations relevant to the assessment of knowledge can enter the intellectual domain of inquiry – evidence, valid argument, experimental results, factual claims, empirically testable theories and the like. Values, ideals, emotions, desires, human hopes and fears, human aspirations, expressions of joy and suffering, policy and political ideas, ideas about how to live – all these must be excluded from the intellectual domain in order to ensure that objective knowledge of fact is obtained. Almost paradoxically, expressions of human aspirations and suffering must be excluded from the intellectual domain, from scientific and scholarly papers, books and lectures, so that objective, factual knowledge is obtained, alone of human value. If this strict censorship is not observed, knowledge will degenerate into mere propaganda and ideology, and will cease to be of real benefit to humanity.<sup>4</sup>

Knowledge-inquiry, as summarized in (1) and (2), dominates the academic enterprise today.<sup>5</sup> Not all academic work accords with the edicts of knowledge-inquiry, and by no means all academics agree with these edicts – a point to be discussed below. Knowledge-inquiry is, nevertheless, massively influential. It is the dominant paradigm for academia, the only well-known idea as to what constitutes rational inquiry. It is almost unconsciously taken for granted by most academics. It is important to note that knowledge-inquiry does allow that academia may well discuss the *application* of knowledge to help solve social problems. Medicine, biology, engineering, geography, sociology, economics, psychology, political science, the study of international affairs, even though primarily concerned to acquire knowledge, all have applications to human life. Departments of public policy, peace, environment, risk, development, global governance do explore social problems and how they are to be solved. Discussion of what may be called “problems of living” is not excluded from academia, but it has only a secondary role, in accordance with (1) and (2). The primary task of academic inquiry is to solve problems of *knowledge*, not problems of *living*.

Knowledge-inquiry is, however, an intellectual and humanitarian disaster. It is damagingly irrational in a wholesale, structural way. This is the key disaster of our times. It is the gross, structural irrationality of academia that is, in the long term, responsible for the development of our current global problems, and responsible for our incapacity to solve them.

It all goes back to blunders made by the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment. As I have already said, the *philosophes* had the magnificent idea that it might be possible to learn from scientific progress how to achieve social progress towards an enlightened world. But in developing and putting this idea into practice, they made disastrous mistakes, and it is

from these mistakes, built into the intellectual/intellectual structure of universities today, all over the world, that we still suffer today.

In order to put the Enlightenment idea properly into practice, the following three steps need to be got right.

*First*, the progress-achieving methods of science need to be correctly identified. *Second*, these methods need to be correctly generalized so that they become fruitfully applicable to any worthwhile, problematic human endeavour, whatever the aims may be, and not just applicable to the endeavour of improving knowledge. And *third*, the correctly generalized progress-achieving methods then need to be exploited correctly in the great human endeavour of trying to make social progress towards an enlightened, wise, civilized world.

Unfortunately, the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment got all three steps wrong. They failed to appreciate that the basic aims of science are profoundly problematic, it being important for science to try to improve its aims and methods as it proceeds. Having failed to capture the progress-achieving methods of science correctly, they naturally failed to generalize them properly, so that they become fruitfully applicable to all worthwhile problematic endeavours, and not just the one endeavour of acquiring knowledge. It is not just in science that basic aims are problematic: this is true in life too. In life we need to try to improve problematic aims, and associated methods, as we act, as we live.

But most disastrously of all, the *philosophes* got the third step wrong. They failed completely to try to apply aim-improving methods, generalized from science, to the immense and profoundly problematic enterprise of making social progress towards an enlightened, wise world. Instead, they sought to apply a seriously defective conception of scientific method to *social science*, to the task of making progress towards, not a *better world*, but to better *knowledge* of social phenomena. They developed social inquiry, not as social *methodology*, designed to help humanity achieve what is of value in life, but rather as social *science*, designed to help academic experts improve knowledge of social phenomena. And it is this ancient blunder, developed throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and built into universities in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with the creation of departments of social science, that is responsible for what we have today, knowledge-inquiry in part responsible for the generation of our global problems.<sup>6</sup>

What do we need to do now, in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to correct the three blunders of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment?

First, we need to adopt and put into scientific practice a new conception of science which acknowledges the real, highly problematic aims of science. This involves formulating scientific method at what may be called the *meta-methodological* level. Meta-methods specify how the aims and methods of a specific science – or science as a whole – are to be improved in the light of improving knowledge, and other factors. Science adapts its nature, its aims and methods, to what it finds out about the natural world.

Second, we need to generalize this aim-improving, meta-methodology of science so that it becomes fruitfully applicable to *any* worthwhile human endeavour with problematic aims, and not just applicable to the one endeavour of improving knowledge. For, of course, it is not just in science that aims can be problematic: this is the case in life too.

Third, and most important, we need to try to get this aim-improving meta-methodology into the immense and profoundly problematic enterprise of making social progress towards an enlightened, wise world. The aim of such an enterprise is notoriously problematic. For all sorts of reasons, what constitutes a good world, an enlightened, wise or civilized world, attainable and genuinely desirable, must be inherently and permanently problematic. Here, above all, it is essential to employ methods – meta-methods – which help us improve our aims and make progress when basic aims are problematic.<sup>7</sup>

It is above all our failure to build these aim-improving methods into our social world, into individual, institutional and global life, that is responsible for the generation of our current global problems. Global warming, rapid population growth, destruction of natural habitats and extinction of species, depletion of natural resources, pollution of earth, air and sea, the lethal character of modern war, the spread of modern weaponry, intensification of the gulf between the world's wealthy and poor – all these have arisen because of our failure to improve problematic aims of industry, agriculture, politics, finance, the military, trade, international relations. Even the world credit crunch of 2007 and subsequent world economic difficulties fit this pattern. It is not just that we have failed to build into institutions, social fabric and our way of life aim-improving methods, where aims are inherently problematic. We have not even seen the need to do this. Worse still, we have not even had the *idea* that this is what we need to do. Academia, instead of struggling hard to get the idea understood and implemented, has been preoccupied with quite a different task: the pursuit of knowledge.

As we shall see in the next chapter, the outcome of correcting the three blunders of the *philosophes* is a kind of academic enterprise very different from knowledge-inquiry – what, by and large, we have at present. It would be a kind of academic enterprise more *rigorous* than knowledge-inquiry, of greater *intellectual integrity and value*, and far more *effective* in helping humanity solve problems of living, and make progress towards a better world. I shall call this new kind of inquiry *wisdom-inquiry*. It is what emerges when the basic Enlightenment idea is developed and put into practice correctly, without the disastrous three blunders made by the *philosophes*.

I repeat: *the* crisis of our times, the crisis behind all the others, is our failure to have developed a kind of inquiry rationally designed and devoted to helping us solve our problems of living, make progress towards a good, wise, enlightened world – or, at least, towards as good a world as possible. Instead of creating *wisdom-inquiry*, all we have managed to do is create *knowledge-inquiry*, a botched version of wisdom inquiry.

It is important to appreciate, however, that academia as it exists today, the outcome, by and large, of putting knowledge-inquiry into practice, is a defective version of what we really need: wisdom-inquiry. The task before us is not to create something entirely new, untested, with nothing more to guide us than an abstract philosophical argument. We do not need to leap into the dark blindfolded, as it were, hoping for the best. Rather, our task is to correct quite definite blunders in the structure of academia that we have inherited from the past – blunders we have failed so far to get properly into focus and so put right. We already possess a kind of inquiry created to help us make progress towards a wise, enlightened world: our problem is that we fail to see that the design is defective, and urgently needs to be put right.

## Is All This Old Hat?

It may be objected that there is nothing new whatsoever in these criticisms of the Enlightenment, of Science and Rationality. Such criticisms have been voiced for centuries. They go back at least to the Romantic movement of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Long ago, William Blake declared that "Art is the Tree of Life. Science is the Tree of Death" and complained of "single vision and Newton's sleep". Keats lamented that science will "clip an Angel's wings" and "unweave a rainbow". The 18<sup>th</sup> century Romantic movement quite generally found science and reason oppressive and destructive, and instead valued art, imagination, inspiration, individual genius, emotional and motivational honesty rather than careful attention to objective fact. Much subsequent opposition to science stems from, or echoes, the Romantic opposition of Blake, Wordsworth, Keats and many others. There is the movement Isaiah Berlin has described as the "Counter-Enlightenment" (Berlin, 1979, ch. 1). There is existentialism, with its denunciation of the tyranny of reason, its passionate affirmation of the value and centrality of irrationality in human life, from Dostoevsky, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche to Heidegger and Sartre (see, for example, Barrett, 1962). There is the attack on Enlightenment ideals concerning science and reason undertaken by the Frankfurt school, by postmodernists and others, from Horkheimer and Adorno to Lyotard, Foucault, Habermas, Derrida, MacIntyre and Rorty (see Gascardi, 1999). The soul-destroying consequences of valuing science and reason too highly is a persistent theme in literature: it is to be found in the works of writers such as D.H. Lawrence, Doris Lessing, Max Frisch, and Y. Zamyatin.<sup>8</sup> There is persistent opposition to modern science and technology, and to scientific rationality, often associated with the Romantic wing of the green movement, and given expression in such popular books as Marcuse's *One Dimensional Man*, Roszak's *Where the Wasteland Ends*, Berman's *The Reenchantment of the World* and Appleyard's *Understanding the Present*. There is the feminist critique of science and conceptions of science: see, for example, Fox Keller (1984) and Harding (1986). There is Paul Feyerabend's critique of scientific rationality in his *Against Method* (1978) and *Farewell to Reason* (1987). And there are the implications of the so-called "strong programme" in the sociology of knowledge, and of the work of social constructivist historians of science, which depict scientific knowledge as a belief system alongside many other such conflicting systems, having no more right to claim to constitute knowledge of the truth than these rivals, the scientific view of the world being no more than an elaborate myth, a social construct (see Barnes and Bloor, 1981; Bloor, 1991; Barnes, Bloor and Henry, 1996; Shapin and Schaffer, 1985; Shapin, 1994; Pickering, 1984; Latour, 1987). This latter literature provoked a counter-attack by scientists, historians and philosophers of science seeking to defend science and traditional conceptions of scientific rationality: see Gross and Levitt (1994), and Gross, Levitt and Lewis (1996)..

This debate between critics and defenders of science came abruptly to public attention with the publication of Alan Sokal's hoax article 'Transgressing the boundaries' in a special issue of the cultural studies journal *Social Text* in 1996 entitled *Science Wars*: see Sokal and Bricmont (1998).

For a period, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the debate became rather widely known as "the science wars" and in its turn received academic attention: see for example, Koertge (1998) and Segerstrale (2000).



There is, then, nothing new in the Enlightenment, science and reason being subject to critical attack. What does this book have to add to the long-standing debate?

I must stress that the criticisms made here of The Enlightenment, of science, orthodox conceptions of reason, and knowledge-inquiry differ dramatically from the long tradition of Romantic criticism of science and reason just indicated. It is the very opposite of those views and arguments which object to scientific rationality, its scope and influence. My objection to knowledge-inquiry is that it is *irrational*. It is a very damaging kind of irrationality masquerading as rationality. What we need to do is not oppose science and reason, as Romantic criticism would have us believe, but the very opposite, free science from irrational philosophies of science, strengthen and enhance the influence of scientific rationality so that, appropriately generalized, it comes to influence all that we do, all aspects of life, personal, public, institutional and global. Instead of opposing science, we need to learn from scientific progress how to achieve social progress towards a wiser world. Correct the blunders of the Enlightenment, and the Romantic opposition would become wholly unnecessary: wisdom-inquiry, as I shall show in the next chapter, becomes a kind of synthesis of traditional Rationalism and traditional Romanticism, and a great improvement over both. We suffer, in short, not from too much reason, but from not enough.

The theme and argument of this book is thus diametrically opposed to the long tradition of Romantic opposition to science and reason, from Blake down to today. But it is also at odds with those who defend traditional conceptions of science and reason against Romantic attack. All too often, those who loudly proclaim the virtues of science and reason defend the indefensible, defend irrational conceptions of science, irrational conceptions of reason. They take some version of knowledge-inquiry for granted and fail to see just how damagingly irrational it is.

Far from being old hat, the argument of this book, against knowledge-inquiry and for wisdom-inquiry differs dramatically from both sides of the rather well-known “science wars” debate. It is very different from Romantic opposition to science and reason; and it is very different from the views of those who defend orthodox conceptions of science and reason from Romantic attack. We urgently need a new way of thinking, a new vision.

All this will be developed in much greater detail as the argument of the book unfolds.

### **Preliminary Replies to Objections**

This summary of my argument that there is an urgent need to bring about an academic revolution may not convince, and may raise more questions than it answers. The argument will be spelled out in more detail in the next chapter. For the moment, suppose that the argument is valid. How does it meet the objections raised at the end of the section before the last one? I now answer those objections, one by one.

**Objection:** Is it really conceivable that changing *academia* would make the slightest difference to what goes on in the real world? One meaning of “academic”, after all, is “irrelevant”, “beside the point”. **Reply:** This objection, apparently against the significance of transforming academia, actually implies exactly the opposite. Why is academia held to be irrelevant to what goes on in the world? Because, as a result of being shaped and developed to accord with the edicts of knowledge-inquiry, it is all-but specifically designed *not* to interact with and help change the rest of the world. The basic intellectual task of the social sciences and humanities is to improve knowledge of social

and cultural phenomena. It is not to help people make progress towards a better world. Knowledge-inquiry requires that the social sciences and humanities should *study* the social world, but not *interfere* or *interact* with it so as to change it. In so far as there is a basic stipulation as to how academia should be related to the rest of the world, it is that the intellectual domain of inquiry should be shielded from the social world so that the pursuit of knowledge is not corrupted by politics, public opinion, and other social pressures and sources of irrationality.

All this would be transformed if wisdom-inquiry was put into practice. The central task of academic inquiry as a whole would be to engage with the rest of the world, with the public, the government, the media, industry, etc., so as to promote more cooperatively rational tackling of problems of living. From the standpoint of wisdom-inquiry, what really matters is the thinking that goes in the great world beyond academia, guiding personal, institutional, social and global life. It is this wisdom-inquiry seeks to help improve, academic thought being but a means to that end. Public education, intelligently conducted by means of argument and discussion, not high-handed instruction, becomes the central concern of universities. Academic inquiry would seek to siphon up good ideas about how to solve problems of living, and good real-life solutions, wherever they are to be found, and then broadcast them as widely as possible, so that they become available to all. Far from primarily seeking to protect the intellectual domain of academia from the corrupting influence of the irrational social world, wisdom-inquiry seeks rather actively to help the social world to become more cooperatively rational.

That academia is at present regarded as somewhat “irrelevant” or “beside the point” is a symptom of its current damaging irrationality. It is a striking indication of the need for change.

**Objection:** Academics might debate among themselves about what we should do in response to our problems, but why should we suppose they would come up with better solutions than people on the ground, with experience of the real world? **Reply:** Why indeed? As I have already remarked, it would be a primary task of wisdom-inquiry to siphon up good solutions to problems of living wherever they are to be found, and make them as widely available as possible. Knowledge-inquiry demands that one needs to have a Ph.D. before one can make a contribution to academic thought. Wisdom-inquiry carries no such stipulation. Anyone with a good idea can make a contribution, whatever their qualifications, whether educated or not. It is a primary duty of wisdom-inquiry to separate out good ideas from dross, wherever they are to be found, whether within universities or without.

**Objection:** Why should we expect academics to agree? **Reply:** One of the great responsibilities of wisdom-inquiry academics would be (a) to arrive at some kind of consensus as to what our most important problems of living are, and what we need to do about them, and at the same time (b) to carry on a sustained, lively, imaginative and critical, intellectually responsible debate about these matters. It is just this that science manages to achieve. On the one hand, there are the agreed results of science – that which is acknowledged to constitute knowledge, observational, experimental and theoretical, by all scientists. On the other hand, there is the arena of lively debate, where hypotheses are aired and attacked, and even accepted knowledge is severely criticized, everything being subjected to scrutiny. Much of the intellectual success of science is due to the fact that it manages to maintain these two arenas – one of accepted results, the other of furious

debate – even though to do so almost involves maintaining a contradiction. A major task of wisdom-inquiry is to establish something similar in connection with ideas about what our problems of living are, and what we need to do about them. I shall have more to say about this in subsequent chapters.

Even if academics failed to reach much agreement, wisdom-inquiry could still be of great value in keeping alive imaginative and critical discussion about what our problems of living are, and what we need to do about them.

**Objection:** Even if academics did agree, and did come up with good policy ideas, why should we expect anyone to listen? Would not politics, industry, trade, finance, war, continue on their way, regardless? **Reply:** As I have already remarked, academia as conducted today, along the lines of knowledge-inquiry, is all but organized in such a way as to ensure that it has little impact on the rest of the world. Transforming academia so that wisdom-inquiry is put into practice would radically alter this situation. Academia would have, as a central task, to learn from and engage with the rest of the world; academics would no longer be primarily concerned to talk to each other.

**Objection:** As things are, universities do serve a reasonably decent purpose. They establish facts and add to knowledge; and they train professionals: lawyers, engineers, architects, doctors, and so on. A radical change in the whole structure and character of universities – an academic revolution – would risk sabotaging the good that universities do now, for nothing more fruitful than sterile debate and hot air. The outcome would, in all likelihood, undermine, not assist, humanity in its efforts to make progress towards a better world. **Reply:** In the next chapter I will argue that the pursuit of knowledge can be conducted in a more rigorous way within the framework of wisdom-inquiry than it can be within the framework of knowledge-inquiry. This is because wisdom-inquiry science makes explicit and so criticizable and improvable problematic assumptions concerning metaphysics, values and politics, inherent in the aims of science, that knowledge-inquiry science fails to acknowledge. As a result, wisdom-inquiry science promises to be of greater intellectual and human value than knowledge-inquiry science. To suppose that wisdom-inquiry would produce nothing more worthwhile than sterile debate and hot air is perhaps to overindulge just a bit in cynicism.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Pinker has argued that violence is steadily decreasing over the centuries, if one takes into account that more and more people are around to kill and be killed: see Pinker (2011). This may be true. Nevertheless, our record of numbers of people killed in war in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries is nothing to be proud of, and the rate at which people are killed goes down all too slowly.

<sup>2</sup> Higgins (1978).

<sup>3</sup> See for example, Gray (2004).

<sup>4</sup> For a very much more detailed exposition of knowledge-inquiry (or “the philosophy of knowledge” as I have called it) see Maxwell (1984 or 2007a, ch. 2).

<sup>5</sup> In my book *From Knowledge to Wisdom*, first published long ago in 1984, I looked at six aspects of academic inquiry to see to what extent knowledge-inquiry dominated the scene. These six aspects consisted of: literature about universities and higher education; the philosophy and sociology of inquiry; pronouncements of scientists; science abstracts;

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social inquiry; and philosophy: see my (1984, ch. 6). I found that in all these six aspects of academic life knowledge-inquiry was, overwhelmingly, the dominant paradigm. For the second edition, published in 2007, I looked again at these six aspects, and I found that, although there had been some changes, still knowledge-inquiry dominated: see Maxwell (2007a, ch. 6). Since then, I have discussed some recent changes that have taken place in universities that move things a bit in the direction they so urgently need to go, in my view: see Maxwell (2009; 2012b).

<sup>6</sup> For a more detailed formulation of this argument see the next chapter and Maxwell (1984 or 2007a, ch. 2). See also Maxwell (2004a).

<sup>7</sup> See works referred to in the previous note.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Frisch (1974) or Zamyatin (1972).