

# **Pondering a Curriculum of Inquiry into Wisdom**

**Dean Nugent,**

**Adult Learning and Teaching**

**School of Education, AUT University**

We have to ask ‘what is to count as knowledge?’ The fundamental criteria are themselves in dispute.

*Ronald Barnett (1997)*

The aim of inquiry is to *explore* rather than to explain reality, for the purpose of enhancing human experience...

Teaching would not be something one does in addition to or instead of research but something one does through and in the course of research. Research would become a means of teaching rather than an end in itself. Thus, portions of both graduate and undergraduate curricula would emerge from postdisciplinary research. Since research programs would be dynamic and flexible rather than accumulative and progressive, curricula could change nearly as often as new inquiries. Indeed, the relationship between this “live” curriculum and faculty research programs would be two-way, since compelling ideas could emerge in the classroom and affect the course of faculty research.

*Roger Mourad (1997)*

Human beings write and talk all the more, the less they have anything essential to say. This is clear today.

*Martin Heidegger (2002)*

Human bondage is unique in the Earth-“world” — because human bondage is bondage to the language-based mind, and (in the Earth-“world”) the mode of language-based mind to which human beings are bound is (in its complexity, and in its aspiration to generate a comprehensive facsimile of the entire “self”-structure and “world”-structure) unique to the human species of primate mammals. Bondage to the human mode of mind is bondage to the language-game that the human brain invents...As a result, human beings are able to project themselves into a “world” of mere ideas (or brain-based mental constructs) — a virtual “world” of pseudo-Reality and pseudo-Truth. That virtual (or mind-based) “world” is the fundamental source of human bondage.

*Adi Da Samraj (2011a)*

## **Preparation**

We begin to clear space within the university for the consideration and practice of contemplative knowing.

We begin to contact and identify remnants of the fundamental transformational and emancipatory impulses of the university. These are impulses deeper than a simple belief that we can “think” our way out of our difficulties and entanglements.

Young people entering the university are in a transformational process as they negotiate moving fully into the ‘adult world’.

The university can present to the young adults for their consideration and inquiry the greatest forms and ideals of the ‘adult world’ conceived by humanity — the understood meanings, purposes, and truths of existence.

Older adults entering the university might appreciate their present conclusions about truth and reality being extended and challenged.

Can our various practices and modes of address be transformed to facilitate a transformative learning journey for all?

## **Plato’s Allegory of un-En-Lightenment**

In a lecture course that he gave in the winter semester of 1931-32 Heidegger (2002) inquires into the notion of truth that Plato presented in his allegory of the cave in the *Republic*. It is a beautiful and powerfully led consideration by Heidegger. I will make my own interpretation (from the perspective of a spiritual, or reality-knowledge, practice) of a small part of his inquiry.

Plato describes our ordinary human experience as one of being shackled, unable to move, confined in a cave. Our existence is limited to relating to the shadows we see reflected on the walls of the cave. We mistakenly take these shadows to be reality, or truth. We are unaware of the source-light that is casting the shadows.

Plato considers what would happen if one of the humans escaped the shackles and is able to find their way to the light that is generating the flickering shadows. Such a one might assume the role of liberator for the others and return into the cave. S/he is able to liberate by instructing about the source-light; showing to others the nature of their deluded conclusions about reality. However, Plato also considers that the cave dwellers will mightily resist such liberation and will even kill the liberator if they can.

Plato refers to such liberators as the “philosophers” (although his “philosophers”

would not much resemble, perhaps, the academic philosophers we think of today). And, as Plato is suggesting, it is a dangerous vocation — one's very life could be at risk. (Presumably, also, Plato's reference is to the fate of his teacher, Socrates.)

In the spiritual traditions such liberators are known as 'realizers' and 'revealers'. All the spiritual and religious cultures of the world began with such realizer-teachers. The supreme realizers have transcended the ordinary ways of being and are revealing a different state - by standing in and as the light. En-lightened. Teaching others.

Heidegger feels that the pre-Socratic philosophers' understanding of a fundamental truth, reality, or light was beginning to be lost even by the time of Plato. In particular, Heidegger is concerned to explore the difference between the ancient Greek notion of *truth* (aletheia) as the 'unhiddenness of beings' and the later notion of *truth* as the 'correctness of propositions' as it developed through the Middle Ages into modernity. He argues that there was a fundamental experience (which we might also describe as 'gnosis' or 'knowing') that the pre-Socratic philosopher/realizers referred to as 'aletheia' but which has been lost to us. It was a knowing of the totality and reality of being.

The notion of truth as the 'correctness of propositions' can only rightfully function in the context of 'aletheia' or the 'unhiddenness' of being. Otherwise, there can only be propositions made in the context of the illusionary shadows.

By the time Plato is writing, truth, understood as the 'correctness of propositions', was beginning to take on a life of its own, no longer 'intertwined' with aletheia, and thus, no longer functioning in its rightful context of fundamental or unhidden being. From Heidegger's point of view, "Western philosophy takes off on an erroneous and fateful course." (2002 p.12)

What if the knowledge and propositions we concern ourselves with today are referring to the insubstantial shadows on the cave walls, unconnected to the fundamental experience of the truth of existence? Thus, bereft of this connection, we would not know how to relate rightly to the shadows before us. Nor would we be aware that we are in fact in bondage to illusions.

This is what Heidegger is suggesting. This is what we might inquire into as we study (and participate in) the wisdom traditions of humanity (including the various art-forms of these traditions as well as their philosophies). A reflexive university, it seems to me, would be one that provides learners with the opportunity to undertake such study and participation, including, of course, inquiry into our current modernist and post-modernist epistemology and aesthetics.

I would suggest that such study could be significantly transformative if it also has the

‘space’ to go beyond some of the often-uninspected conventions of the university. For instance, I use the term ‘participation’ to indicate a possible movement beyond the usual mode of mind that is encouraged in the modern university. That mind is often chronically one of ‘doubt’, ‘abstraction’, ‘separation from’, and ‘objectification’ and can represent a limit on our capacity to fully participate in any moment, to be fully ‘in relationship’.

### **Transcending Mind**

The abstracted mode of mind is an aspect of ‘ego’. Wisdom traditions indicate the importance of transcending the ego-mind in order to continue to grow. Such mind has its appropriate time and function but it is not to be indulged continuously and obsessively. It will limit the development of other capabilities associated with the body-mind-complex.

The activity of ‘ego’ (which we can define as the moment-to-moment presumption and act of separateness and separativeness) effectively cuts us off from the realizing or ‘really knowing’ unity and connectedness or the reality of existence.

To participate in existence with the presumption of prior-unity is essential instruction about how to live our lives given by the Realizer. This is no easy attainment. It is understood that the separate and separative ego is a mighty force. Our usual condition is one of recoil and reaction to life and existence. We are identified with the body-mind-complex and its mortality.

Identifying ourselves as this separate entity we are disturbed and in fear in the depth of our present state of being. This is an aspect of our shackled bondage. This motivates us in an ultimately unsatisfactory search for knowledge, others, and things – a fruitless search for relief amongst the ‘shadows’. This motivation to search can be inspected and understood and gone beyond – according to the wisdom traditions.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Realizer, Adi Da Samraj (2011b), describes some of the qualities of those who would live a contemplative life turned to the conscious light of being.

They would create,

“According to the aesthetic logic of Reality and Truth, and (thus) they turn all of their living into limitless relatedness and true enjoyment.

They constantly remove the effects of separative existence and restore the inherent form of things.

They engineer every kind of stability and intrinsic beauty...

Their eye is always on the integrity of inherent form, and not an egoically fabricated (and, necessarily, false and exaggerated) notions of artifice.

Their sense of form is always integrated, stable, and whole, and always in present-time, rather than gesturing toward some 'other' event.

They do not presume the present 'world' is merely a symbol for 'higher' and 'other' things...

(They) always serve the necessary (and not the merely possible) and they always affirm the Inherent Reality (and not the merely possible reality).

(They) make only economic and wise use of instrumental means and technology.

They are not motivated by the search for mere invention (or conditional possibility)...

(They) do not pursue any kind of utopian victory for humankind..."

The study of and participation in the wisdom traditions, I would suggest, can relieve the universality of over-determination by the present economic-social system and its form of rationalism. It can open us out into greater processes of inquiry, learning, work, and life. And, I venture, change everything!

## **References:**

Adi Da Samraj. (2011a). *The aletheon. Volume 3*. Middletown, CA: The Dawn Horse Press.

Adi Da Samraj. (2011b). *The aletheon. Volume 7*. Middletown, CA: The Dawn Horse Press.

Barnett, R., & Griffin, A. (1997). *The end of knowledge in higher education*. London, UK: Cassell.

Heidegger, M. (2002). *The essence of truth*. (T. Sadler, Trans.), London, UK: Continuum.

Mourad, R.P. (1997). *Postmodern philosophical critique and the pursuit of knowledge*. Westport, CT: Bergin & Garvey.

