

Review of: "Does Philosophy Matter? The Urgent Need for a Philosophical Revolution"

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I have much sympathy with the general point of this article, and it is clearly well written. However, it reads more like an extended letter to a journal editor than a substantive article. Indeed, Professor Maxwell acknowledges that this article does not contain the arguments for his position. He writes, "I do not think I can repeat the argument here. The editors of this journal would not tolerate it. But I can indicate where the argument this to be found." Thus, the article does not stand alone *as journal article* and is far too dependent upon the reader's knowledge of other works. I have read and very much appreciated some of Professor Maxwell's work, for example, his analysis of the objectivity of values, but the current article makes a number of very strong and controversial claims with what to my mind is insufficient data and argumentation. I understand Professor Maxwell's frustration over the fact that the point of view he espouses is given lip-service but has not really impacted the profession, but at times the article overemphasizes this frustration. His complaint may be valid, but the article would benefit, in my opinion, if it were cast in less personal terms. One way of doing this might be to simplify the thesis to focus on philosophy's irrelevancy and to analyze the reasons for this and the factors that have inhibited change.

As the article now stands, it makes a number of very interesting generalizations, but raises a whole host of questions that may well be answered in Professor Maxwell's previous works, but are not answered here.

As a reader, it would be helpful if the author clarified the distinction between *knowledge-inquiry* and *wisdom-inquiry*. These ideas are central to the paper but in my reading were not adequately defined or described in the paper.

Professor Maxwell writes several times that "knowledge inquiry" is "profoundly irrational" because "it violates three of the four most elementary rules of reason conceivable." However, neither these rules nor the nature of the violations are described, and the reader is left guessing.

Professor Maxwell indicates that on some level pursuit of knowledge is necessary in order to adequately pursue wisdom, but the article does not clarify his view regarding this important relationship, and I was left without a clear understanding of why he believes that not only philosophy but that the entirety of academia do not nearly get this connection right.

There are a number of controversial claims in this article that could potentially generate fascinating discussion but Professor Maxwell needs to supply the reader with more background and substance in order to get the debate moving.

I think that his claim that universities do little or nothing to help humanity learn how to solve local and global problems of living is overstated. I'm not sure if it is even true for departments of philosophy in universities (think of John Rawls' impact

on political discussion or Peter Singer on animal rights). At any rate, some evidence for this thesis should be forthcoming.

The author suggests that the world would be different from 1990 onwards, if social science and humanities academics would have devoted “all their energies and professional work to engaging with the public to provoke improved understanding of what our problems are, and what we need to do about them.” Again, evidence and argument is required to substantiate this large generalization. It is, to say the least, both descriptively and prescriptively controversial

In today’s political climate, it would also be important for the author to at least briefly address those critics who claim that academia is *too* political, *too* involved with the liberal agenda of social justice, redressing inequalities, climate, change, etc. The author says that by keeping free of political engagement and adhering to the standards of knowledge inquiry “universities, betray reason, and as a result betray humanity.” As a reader, I might *imagine* why this could be so, but I need the author to articulate his argument.

I think the claim that that philosophy “is responsible for many of the worst ills of the world” and that “wisdom” philosophy has the potential to have transformed the planet to the point, for example, where Brexit would not have occurred and Donald Trump might not have become president is very much overstated.

While I believe that much of academic philosophy is vapid, some of it can be quite interesting, without necessarily addressing society’s or the world’s ills. For example, I recently completed reading the articles in J. Leslie and R. Kuhn, *The Mystery of Existence. Why Is There Anything At All?*(Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) and found them fascinating, regardless of whether the arguments have relevance to social issues. While I think that even a broad metaphysical issue like “Why does the world exist?” can be made socially and ethically relevant, I feel that those contemplating this question have no a priori obligation to do so. I think that there are many activities that are intellectually, aesthetically, or personally enriching that do not solve the world’s problems and I believe that that’s OK. In fact, some of these non-practical activities (and some philosophy may be among them) make life meaningful and fulfilling. If Professor Maxwell is correct in his “devoted all their energies” thesis academics would be barred from simply “playing around with ideas.” I believe that many would argue that they would thus lose the chance to make some of their most interesting and important contributions.

We could debate all of this, and it would be vital and interesting, but in order for this to occur on the basis of ~~this~~ article Professor Maxwell needs to make a better case for his point of view and not assume that the reader has knowledge of what he has written previously.