

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

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Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

The author rightly critiques much modern philosophical writing as uninspiring and opaque, but rather than dismissing the field of philosophy, as some do, he appeals to the reader to reject what he calls mere 'knowledge inquiry' in favour of 'wisdom inquiry'. He has spent much of his life trying to persuade people to accept his insights and seems very upset that more attention has not been paid to his own writings on the subject. He attributes almost all the ills of the world today to a failure to understand the difference between these two forms of inquiry with much or all of the focus being on the former rather than the latter. Some other philosophers have found themselves similarly frustrated. Isaiah Berlin said that he turned to study the 'history of ideas' because his approach to philosophy was not appreciated or valued by academic colleagues when he was a young man. However rather than complain that he was ignored, Berlin found another route to recognition and to the promulgation of his ideas which later became deeply appreciated and remain of political and intellectual significance after his death. I was interested to read Dr Maxwell's paper because I share his disenchantment with much modern philosophy, though I would not be so all-encompassing in my negative assessment of the field. I confess to being somewhat disappointed by the paper, not only because of what felt like an overwhelming negativity about academic life, but also because I found little exposition of what a 'wisdom inquiry' looks like. I suspect that he might quite reasonably refer me to his many other writings, with which I confess I am not familiar, but the problem is that this paper did not entice me to search out any of his other papers and books. Perhaps if he had said more about the epistemology and the positive characteristics of 'wisdom inquiry' rather than concentrate on the negative aspects of 'knowledge inquiry' I would have been enthused to set aside the other as yet unread volumes on my desk in favour of obtaining some of his, and maybe some day I will do just that.