

Review of: "In the doing of science, what is the place for naturalistic philosophy? Implications for the teaching of science"

Nicholas Maxwell¹

¹ University College London, University of London

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Science as Natural Philosophy: Review of "In the doing of science, what is the place for naturalistic philosophy? Implications for the teaching of science"

Nicholas Maxwell

Science and Technology Studies, University College London

A few years ago I published a book that is highly relevant to the theme of this article, and should, I think, be taken into consideration. The book is *In Praise of Natural Philosophy: A Revolution for Thought and Life*, 2017, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal. Here is what I say about the book in the Preface:

"The central thesis of this book is that we need to reform philosophy and join it to science to recreate a modern version of natural philosophy; we need to do this in the interests of rigour, intellectual honesty, and so that science may serve the best interests of humanity.

"The book seeks to redraw our intellectual landscape. It leads to a transformation of science, and to a transformation of philosophy, so that these two distinct domains of thought become conjoined into one: natural philosophy. This in turn has far-reaching consequences for the whole academic enterprise. It transpires that we need an academic revolution. We urgently need to reorganize universities so that they become devoted to seeking and promoting wisdom by rational means – as opposed to just acquiring knowledge, as at present.

"Modern science began as natural philosophy. In the time of Newton, what we call science and philosophy today – the disparate endeavours – formed one mutually interacting, integrated endeavour of natural philosophy: to improve our knowledge and understanding of the universe, and to improve our understanding of ourselves as a part of it. Profound discoveries were made, indeed one should say unprecedented discoveries. It was a time of quite astonishing intellectual excitement and achievement.

"And then natural philosophy died. It split into science on the one hand, and philosophy on the other. This happened during the 18th and 19th centuries, and the split is now built into our intellectual landscape. But the two fragments, science

and philosophy, are defective shadows of the glorious unified endeavour of natural philosophy. Rigour, sheer intellectual good sense and decisive argument demand that we put the two together again, and rediscover the immense merits of the integrated enterprise of natural philosophy. This requires an intellectual revolution, with dramatic implications for how we understand our world, how we understand and do science, and how we understand and do philosophy. There are dramatic implications, too, for education.

“And it does not stop there. For, as I will show in the final chapter, resurrected natural philosophy has dramatic, indeed revolutionary *methodological* implications for social science and the humanities, indeed for the whole academic enterprise. It means academic inquiry needs to be reorganized so that it comes to take, as its basic task, to seek and promote wisdom by rational means, wisdom being the capacity to realize what is of value in life, for oneself and others, thus including knowledge, technological know-how and understanding, but much else besides.

“The outcome is institutions of learning rationally designed and devoted to helping us tackle our immense global problems in increasingly cooperatively rational ways, thus helping us make progress towards a good world – or at least as good a world as possible.”