Afterwords Response to Nimrod Aloni's review of *Global Philosophy: What Philosophy Ought to Be*.

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I MUST STRAIGHT AWAY THANK Nimrod Aloni for the very generous things that he says about my book (see his review in this issue, pp. 209–214; see also Nicholas Maxwell, *Global Philosophy: What Philosophy Ought to Be* [Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2014]). In his enthusiasm for it, he does overstate its message a bit. I do indeed argue that academia devoted to the pursuit of knowledge suffers from a very damaging kind of structural irrationality, but I would never say, as Aloni suggests I do, that it is "completely irrational."

But Aloni's review is by no means all praise. At one point he says, "The book suffers from endless repetitions, self-referencing … and hardly any dialoguing with thinkers and philosophical traditions that have raised issues and arguments quite similar to those Maxwell raises in his book." Oh dear. What can I say?

It almost sounds as if I am completely self-obsessed, in a world of my own. It is not quite as bad as that. The index of what is quite a short book includes 149 people from a wide range of cultural and historical contexts: Aristotle, Samuel Beckett, Ingmar Bergman, Chekhov, Einstein, Condorcet, Kafka, Latour, Kant, D. H. Lawrence, George Orwell, Whitehead, Sartre, C. P. Snow, Bertrand Russell, Tolstoy — and many more. Nevertheless, Aloni may well have a point: I have not compared and contrasted sufficiently what I have to say with what some of my contemporaries have said. Instead of attempting to excuse and justify what may well be a failing of my book, let me rather provide an explanation.

Over forty years ago, I made what seemed to me — and still seems to me — to be a profoundly important discovery. I spelled it out in a book called *From Knowledge to Wisdom*, published in 1984 (Nicholas Maxwell, *From Knowledge to Wisdom: A Revolution for Science and the Humanities* [London: Basil Blackwell, 1984]). It was widely and favorably reviewed at the time, and received a glowing review in *Nature*, in which the author said, "Maxwell is advocating nothing less than a revolution (based on reason, not on religious or Marxist doctrine) in our intellectual goals and methods of inquiry.… There are altogether too many symptoms of malaise in our science-based society for Nicholas Maxwell's diagnosis to be ignored" (Christopher Longuet-Higgins, "For Goodness Sake," *Nature*, vol. 312, 1984, p. 204, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/from-knowledge-to-wisdom/reviews/#goodness).

Alas, my diagnosis — and, much more important, my proposed prescription — has subsequently been ignored. Ever since, in publication after publication, I have tried to get my discovery better known but, aside from a scattering of individuals, I have failed. That is why I refer to my previous work: I am still laboring to communicate my discovery of long ago.

And again I have failed. In his review, Aloni makes no mention of my discovery, even though it is expounded in *Global Philosophy*. What, then, did I discover?

In a nutshell, it can be put like this. The current orthodox conception of science, taken for granted by scientists and nonscientists alike, is untenable. This holds that the basic intellectual aim of science is truth, the basic method being to accept theories solely on the basis of evidence, *no thesis about the world being accepted permanently as a part of scientific knowledge independently of evidence*. But this, I realized, is false. Physicists only ever accept *unified* theories, even though endlessly many empirically more successful *disunified* rivals can always be concocted — rivals that are never considered for a moment precisely because they are disunified. This means physics makes a big, permanent, highly problematic metaphysical assumption about the nature of the universe: it is such that all disunified theories are false, however empirically successful they may be. It is such that there is some kind of unified pattern of physical law running through all phenomena. This influential, highly problematic metaphysical assumption needs to be made explicit within physics, so that it can be critically assessed, so that alternatives can be developed and

assessed, in an attempt to improve the specific assumption that is made. The aim of physics is not truth; it is rather truth *presupposed to be unified* — explanatory truth, in other words. We need a whole new conception of science — a new kind of science — that seeks to improve its problematic aims, and associated methods, as it proceeds.

But that, I realized, is just the start. The aim of seeking explanatory truth is a special case of a more general and even more problematic aim of science: to discover *valuable truth* — truth that is either of intrinsic interest or significance, or truth that is useful for the attainment of other worthwhile aims. And science seeks *valuable truth* so that what is discovered will be used by people, culturally or practically, ideally to enhance the quality of human life. Science has even more problematic social or *political* aims.

Then I had what seemed to me an immensely important idea. Just as Karl Popper had generalized his *falsificationist* conception of science to form a new conception of rationality, *critical rationalism*, which he went on to show has fruitful implications for a wide range of issues, so I could generalize my new conception of science (aim-oriented empiricism) to form a new conception of rationality, which I called *aim-oriented rationality*. This holds that whenever we have problematic aims — as we almost always do in personal, social, intellectual, and scientific life — we need to represent what we take to be our aims in the form of a hierarchy of aims, which become progressively less specific and problematic as we go up the hierarchy. In this way we create a framework of relatively unspecific, unproblematic aims and associated methods within which much more specific and problematic aims and methods may be improved as we act, as we live. All this is directly relevant to science. But above all it is relevant to the heartrending task: to make progress toward a good, civilized world. Such an aim is inherently and profoundly problematic. Here, above all, we need to put aim-oriented rationality into practice. Very specific implications for a revolution in academia emerge from this argument (for more on this point, see www.ucl.ac.uk/from-knowledge-to-wisdom/whatneedstochange).

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