

**Contemplative Inquiry and Action:  
Discovering the Place of the Spiritual  
in Higher Education**

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We in the colleges and universities of the United States – teachers, researchers, deans, and administrators – are poised for what I consider to be an important, even crucial, development. It has the potential to be as significant in our time as the emergence of the university from the womb of the cathedral schools of 13<sup>th</sup> century Europe. In that distant era the university was called upon to define itself for the first time. Caught between the powerful forces of Christian theology and the newly recovered secular philosophy of Aristotle, it required an Aquinas to resolve the so-called Scholastic Controversy. He and other scholars and teachers struggled to forge a synthesis suited to their time. Today we find ourselves considering the possible re-integration of the spiritual with the, by now, mature culmination of the secular university. We are called on once again to re-imagine the nature of university, and also to consider carefully the reasons for the inclusion of the spiritual, and the means by which we might accomplish this end.

I am convinced that society and the mainline academic institutions will ultimately reject older ways of resolving the split between secular knowledge and the spiritual. I agree in part with the critics; it is inappropriate and insufficient to leave the disciplines as they are and simply bring in clergy or monks to handle the moral and spiritual dimensions of life. While I support religious pluralism and religious life, another and more radical re-conception is called for. We need to search out appropriate ways of integrating the spiritual directly into the disciplines. While we can learn much from our Christian, Buddhist and other religious colleagues, we must find way of transforming the disciplines themselves: physics, medicine, education, the humanities, business and economics.... The implications will be large, because this is no mere academic transformation. The world we live in reflects our modes of understanding; what counts as real and as unreal is often decided upon and promulgated within our classrooms.

In 1644 Harvard's founders took the single Latin word VERITAS or Truth as their motto. We will be asked, what can the inclusion of the spiritual contribute to the search for Truth? This is the question my college president asks me when the conversation turns to the spiritual in higher education. What can its inclusion contribute to the core mission of a liberal arts school such as Amherst College, whose motto is "Terras Irradiant," Illuminate the Earth. If the pursuit of truth and larger goals of higher education are rightly understood, I believe that we have much to give in reply.

### **Symptoms**

Already academics around the country are seeking ways of bringing the contemplative and spiritual into their teaching and scholarship. The symptoms are many [SLIDE]. Conferences such as this one have occurred at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst (2000) and Wellesley (1999). Over the last six years

the American Council of Learned Societies and the Center for the Contemplative Mind in Society, have awarded 100 Contemplative Practice Fellowships to professors who seek to include meditation in their teaching. Institutes such as the Mind and Life Institute and the Kira Institute have explored the relationship between modern science, values issues, meditation, and ways of knowing. The list could be multiplied, but the symptoms are clear. There is a longing by many competent scholars and teachers to integrate the spiritual into their vocation, and – to use Parker Palmer’s phrase – to lead an “undivided life.” For the last thirty years, ever since I was a graduate student in laser and atomic physics at the University of Michigan, I have sought ways to appropriately integrate my spiritual and scientific interests. If we are candid, we will confess to some uncertainty as to how to proceed. What follows, then, is an outline of my way of addressing the integration of higher education and the spiritual. I begin with a description of the obstacles we confront along the way.

## **Barriers**

[SLIDE]

The barriers to integration of the spiritual into higher education are several. They include legal and institutional ones, which I will not discuss; but they also include two I would like to consider at least briefly. They are what I term the “wrong map” problem and the “epistemological challenge.”

When confronted with the issue of how to integrate the spiritual into higher education we automatically revert to a well-established division between two realms of life: the worlds of facts and values. [SLIDE] On one side are ... This view whose origins go back at least as far as Martin Luther, found considerable reinforcement from the Protestant theologian Karl Barth, and most recently from the Harvard evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould in his book *Rock of Ages*. Gould principle of Non-Overlapping Magesteria or NOMA is a perfect expression of the conventional mapping of responsibilities. Scientists and real scholars deal with facts, and on the basis of reason discover truths about the world. By contrast the meaning or values dimension is handled by religion, which operates by entirely different principle, namely faith and authority. Knowledge and values are radically separated within this view. While a useful distinction if taken within limited contexts, NOMA creates nothing but trouble when we consider how to integrate the spiritual into the academy. Clearly *Veritas* is on the science/knowledge column, and with it the whole of the university project. Instinctively we place spirit on the left in the religion column, and therein lies the problem. The spiritual is considered, at least in the West, as entirely in the province of religion and faith, and separated radically from knowledge, reason, and facts. My central task this morning is to challenge this view. I maintain that in important and justifiable ways the spiritual is very much part of the knowledge

project also, and so part of the university project as well. The false dichotomization of the world in this way offers us a wrong map, one that only confounds us when attempting a sensible integration of higher education and the spiritual.

## **Knowing**

Howard Gardner writes compellingly concerning multiple intelligences. We in the academy primarily educate only one: critical reasoning and writing. Within this impoverished framework there is again no place for the spiritual. By neglecting other modes of inquiry, declaring them in fact out of existence, we grant no basis for the introduction of contemplative and spiritual modes of inquiry. We therefore must first admit at least one other way of knowing into the academy. If reality it has been there all along, but in the post-Enlightenment West it has been as embarrassment, and therefore while essential to our lives both as researchers and teachers, we refuse to admit its presence.

## **Outline**

1. Types of knowing Grk and asia
2. How do we get more of other?
3. First, understand the place and limitations of analysis. Idolatry, Goethe quote.
4. Alternative, beholding or contemplative inquiry.
5. Phenomenological, Goethe
6. Participatory and embodied
7. Insight, apercu, direct perception
8. Bildung: Goethe and Schrodinger.
9. Arts: Cezanne
10. Applications: art history, science, medicine/ Polanyi
11. Free-action from center of contemplation, moral intuition. Overcomes NOMA divide.
12. Compassion at hand of participation makes sense. Cannot with Objectification
13. Aquinas ending as student under Magnus at Paris in Streets of Straw