

Rehabilitating the Value of Wisdom

by Ian Glendinning

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*(Follow-up to “The Tyranny of the Explicit”
workshop at ISSS#68 DC2024)*

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ABSTRACT: "Rehabilitating the Value of Wisdom": follow-up to the "Tyranny of the Explicit at ISSS2024" ... re-starting from a "**key linguistic point of agreement**" in ISSS email dialogue since then:

"Whatever their (definitive) properties, differences and relations between (so-called) **Science and Wisdom, they are *distinct things*."**

(So-called because we are here using these two words / names as **short-hand** for whole sets of Explicit/Formal and Implicit/Intuitive forms and processes of knowledge.

And we are **taking as given**, millennia of philosophy & philosophy of science, ontology & epistemology behind those forms & processes of knowledge in science & wisdom, and more.)

So having (trivially?) agreed they are distinct things (using distinct names / words):

Therefore, we value BOTH. We recognise **many relations** and overlaps between the two, so neither is entirely independent of the other, and neither is a sub-set or super-set of the other.

And, our knowledge of the world, and our ability to make and enact decisions in the world, are the complex & dynamic **integration** of BOTH.

So, we need to be careful if we use the language of one, that we are not accidentally dismissing or overlooking the other. We need **language inclusive of BOTH Science AND Wisdom**.

Just Two Words?

So far just **Science & Wisdom** (or science and not-science / *more-than-science*) but let's not forget these **stand here as shorthand** for many other knowledge-related words we started with.

“Science”

Explicit / Formal
Objective / Repeatable
Definitive / Specific / Individual
Rational / Logical / Analytic / Dialectic
Predictable / Quantifiable
Data / Facts / Evidence
Reductive / Causal
Conception / Model
Savoir / Wissen / Symbolic

“Wisdom”

Implicit / Tacit / Oblique / Fuzzy
Subjective / Intuitive / Instinct
Anecdotal / Narrative / Synthetic
Patterned / Abstract
Non-Predictive / Qualitative
Holistic / Synergistic / Emergent
Humanistic / **More-than-Science**
Perception / Immediate / Mindful
Connaitre / Kennen / Participatory

So – science has evolved and continues to evolve. How many of the concepts in the “Science” box are you prepared to lose, or add from the other, and **still call it science?** (And yes – “Social Sciences” have had to deal with mapping between such boxes for decades ... we agree already.)

What's the point of seemingly trivial agreement on one distinction?

- Why keep Science and “Something More than Science” ***distinct***?
- Original ISSS driver (over last ~3 years) was simply seeing Q&A around talks and presentations as “conversation killers”. An objectively scientific style of presentation unable to respond to *more than science* questions and vice versa, conversations moving to distinct threads in the chat – *talking past each other*. Tolerance without integration. We need real dialogue.
- In order to integrate two (or more) distinct things, you have to recognise them for what they really are, as distinct things. Simply “***flattening***” one to look like the other denies the distinction and obscures or misses the value. Dishonest.

Divisions, Dichotomies and Hierarchies? #GoodFences

Q? - Is my discriminating on the basis of a binary distinction, imposing a dichotomy, being divisive, opening up *a slippery slope* to old battles between modernists & post-modernists, between CP Snow's "two cultures" of science & humanities?

- No. I'm more Brockman's "Third Culture". I'm a *Post-Post-Modernist*. Honest **integration** of the science (modernism) with the more-than-science aspects (humanities). Simply flattening these distinctions – "post-modernism is dead, long live science" – loses the significance and value of *more than science*.
- "**Dichotomy**" **in the technical sense** is the natural basis of all ontologies – taxonomic distinctions between this and that, **this and not-this**. All such distinctions are binary, however many Triadic and 4-layer / 4-box / N-layer "models" we recognise or construct within our ontology. Similarly, however complex our ontological graph / network, each (of many, overlapping) taxonomy is "**Hierarchical**". It's careless, dishonest and politically divisive use in natural language that makes these "**dirty words**" eg in power-relations.
- The taxonomy of our subject area - **Complexity / Systems / Operations / Cybernetics** and **Science / Thinking / Engineering / Methods / General & Project Management** *distinctions* – as "competitive camps". Such distinctions will confuse politicians and populations who are our real audience – for enlightened commitment to the meta-crisis behind our poly-crises. An **integrated view of the whole**, something like Complex Adaptive Systems Thinking or *Psybernetics*?

(Thinking vs Engineering? Levenchuk) (#GoodFences? Valen-Sendstad / Frost / Chesterton)

Divisions *within* “complex adaptive systems thinking?”

- (Looked at several “CAST” Taxonomies in previous workshop
- Dupuy/Macy, Smith, Ramage/Shipp, Jackson, Snowden, Umpleby, Saratxaga)
- Mike Jackson – “Critical” Systems Thinking – all of the many different “schools” of thought and methodologies – different histories, different emphases, context dependent horses-for-courses. Ultimately, few hard and fast rules, essentially *Pragmatism*. Whichever “horse” you back, don’t leave you brain behind, remain **critical**, open-minded, open to the whole.
- Dave Snowden – “Cynefin” establishing the extents to which your situation is complicated, complex and/or chaotic – and applying *practical participatory approaches* (plural), to understanding, deciding, acting, learning, evolving, etc – minimal *prescription*.
- (Incidentally BOTH have quoted Pirsig - *coincidentally, independently* BOTH in 2003)
 - MJ - “This is the source of the trouble. Persons tend to think and feel exclusively in one mode or the other [*classical or romantic*] and in doing so tend to misunderstand and underestimate what the other mode is about To reject that part of the Buddha that attends to the analysis of motorcycles is to miss the Buddha entirely.” (Robert M Pirsig, ZMM, 1974)
 - DS – “Traditional scientific method has always been at the very best 20-20 hindsight. It’s good for seeing where you’ve been. It’s good for testing the truth of what you think you know, but it can’t tell you where you ought to go.” (Robert M Pirsig, ZMM, 1974)
 - ZMM = “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance – an Inquiry into Values” – the [1960’s] *conflict* between human values and technology - *Just sayin’...*)

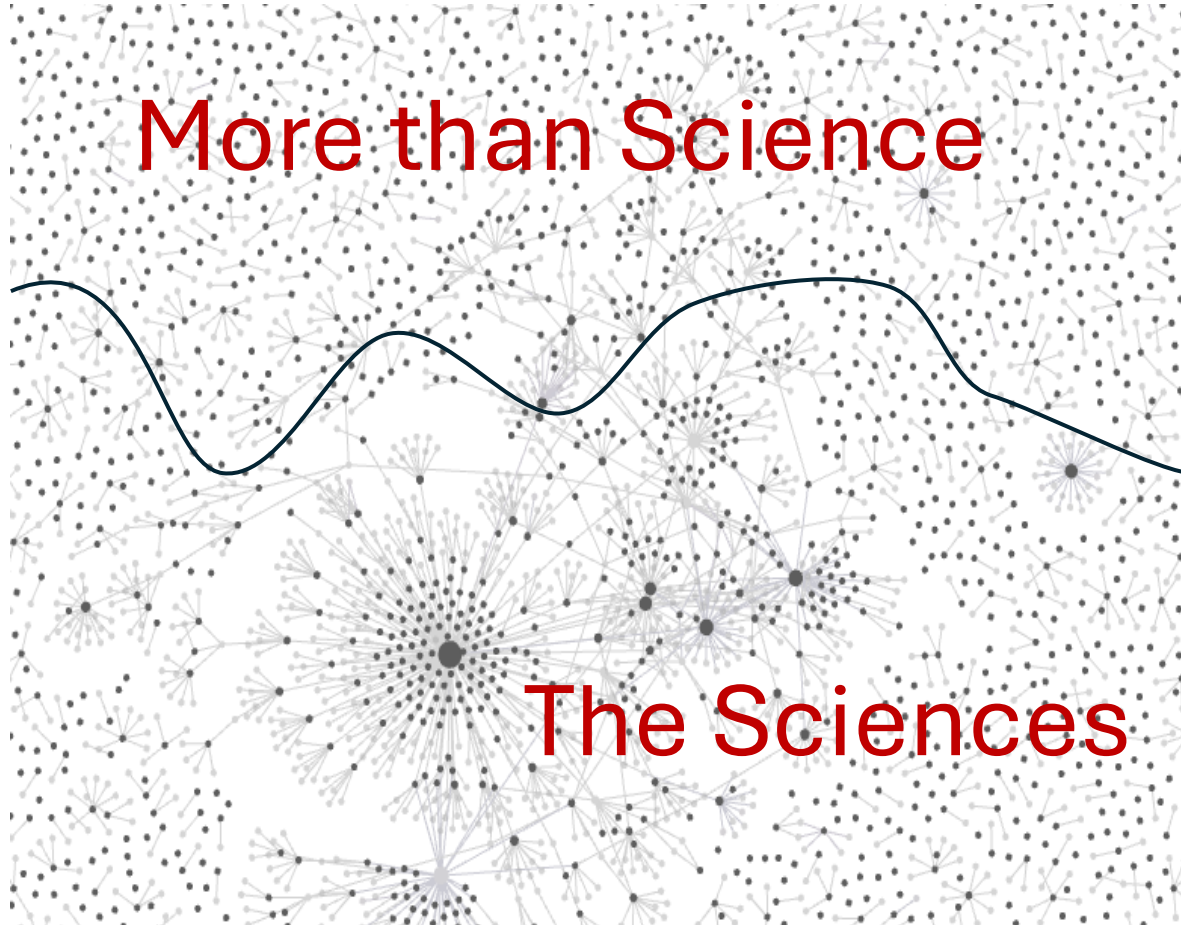
East<>West Thinking?

- *NOT about geography / points on a compass / global hemispheres*
- Again, just ***two words as short-hand for another distinction***, between “aboriginal” living, human understanding by recognising our direct dynamic *participatory relations* with ourselves & our ecosystem, as opposed to indirectly via *intellectual models* of such relationships, derived from ancient Greek & Arabic scholars via “modern” European enlightenment - “footnotes to Plato”

*[More North Atlantic v The Rest Snowden would say.
More Classical / Romantic Pirsig would say.]*

Predictive Layers of Abstraction – *Work-in-Progress*

“As scientific as possible, but not more so.”



2

Non-Predictive Space

All “science-based” - the **How** and the **Why** all explicable by science.

The **emergent What** only predictable-in-kind at meta-levels of patterning and abstraction.

Specifics not predictable.

(“20:20 Hindsight” – experience at the specific level only)

3

Corollary:
This space recognises the value of its science grounding.

1

Predictive Space

The **What, How** and **Why** all **causally** explicable by science. The What (specific entities and behaviours) **all predicable** at individual and population levels) and objectively repeatable (in principle, constrained only by “physical” practicalities.)

4

Corollary:
This space tends to be blind to “*more than science*” in the space above.

Not forgetting ...

- **Flattening** - Requisite Diversity? And Words with Baggage?
 - losing entirely or replacing with euphemisms, important distinctions lost in the right contexts / levels-of-abstraction
- **The “Against” book-title meme.**
 - Against Method / Against Criticism / Against Empathy
 - How about, Against Systems / Against Complexity / Against Cybernetics / Against Diversity?
 - (Ditto “X is dead, long live X” or “News of my death is exaggerated.”)

Take-aways?

- “*Whatever* their definitions, properties, differences & relations
- **Science and Wisdom are *Distinct Things*.**”
- *Even if that seems trivially true*, let’s not forget we value Wisdom and recognise that it’s “***More Than Science***”. We really do need to care about BOTH, the whole.
- The Invitation to Collaborate - **#GoodFences**
– we draw lines of distinction in order to properly integrate the value in our diversity. We need to be careful not to flatten them. We therefore also need to draw them at *the right levels of abstraction* but not let them be “divisions” in our engagement with the real world.
(Thinking about our thinking >> Thinking about real world problems & solutions >> Models & Methods >> Engineering / Planning / Doing)

Supplementary Slides

- Ian Glendinning - Bio / Background
- Slides from Previous Workshop
- Key links to dialogue following that workshop

My Career / Systems Trajectory

- **1970's to 1990's** - Aeronautical & Process Plants Engineer – Industrial (from Need to O&M)
 - Physical Systems - Fluid, Pressure, Energy, Structural, Process & Control AND
 - Human Systems - People, Behaviour, Organisation, Process, Methods, Procedures
- **1988-1991** - MBA - *Cultural* Aspects of Managing Organisational Change.
- **1990's to 2010's** - ICT Systems Engineer – *Solutions Architecture* & Implementation – Users & Providers
 - Focus - Information Architecture & Semantics for Digital Twins, etc - **NOT** the technology
 - International Standards (eg ISO15926) on Ontologies and Libraries - Generic "System Engineering (Meta)-Language"
- **2010 - 2022** independent Information Management Architecture Consultant.
 - Most recently in UK Nuclear projects - "Systems Thinking" *as a response to complexity*.
 - And eg using BIM / CDBB (Centre for Digital Built Britain) - exploiting ISO Systems Language Architecture Standardisation.
- **2000 to Today** - Epistemological Research – Large-scale human decision-making "going wrong".
 - **"What, Why and How do we Know?" as Psybertron** www.psybertron.org under a "Cybernetics" umbrella (Wiener). True/original cybernetics ie from 1946 Macy Conferences onwards - post-war **organisation of human society** as a whole, (with engineered "homeostatic control" systems (ie "first cybernetics") as ONLY EVER a small subset (Maruyama et al)
 - Philosophical > Increasingly Metaphysical - Ontology and Epistemology involves "more than" reductive science of a 4D deterministic world. (Strong Emergence, Evolved Autonomy, Affective Perception, Ergodicity, etc) Too many sources to name.

My engagement with Systems “as a Discipline”

Working with "smart" systems thinkers along the way.

- with BCS – Cybernetics SIG (2004) w Peter Rowlands (2007)
- with INCOSE Members
since 2007 in Russia via Viktor Agroskin and Anatoly Levenchuk and
since 2017 in UK Nuclear including Fusion with Rob Black
 - *explicitly Systems Thinking as a response to complexity*
 - general & project management UK conferences adopting ST
- with Hull CSS
in 2021 on Bogdanov via Rovelli & Mason w Mike Jackson & Orsan Senalp
and Mike Jackson Annual Lectures since – Dave Snowden, Charles Foster
- with AI (Active Inference Institute) Daniel Friedman
since 2021, via Friston, Solms, Fields and Levenchuk)
- with EEMI (Russian ex-INCOSE / Management School, via Levenchuk)
- with ISSS (only since 2022 via Dennis Finlayson et al)