Maxwell's defense of revolution, or how academia can help transform and save the world

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In his recent book[2], Nicholas Maxwell revisits for the most part ideas, arguments, and positions he has been defending quite forcefully for the past 40 years or so. These include his conceptions of what philosophy ought to be, about the nature of science and its progress-making features, how to best construe empiricism and rationality, his take on the history and philosophy of science, on philosophy and the history of philosophy, the nature of (academic) inquiry, and finally, his position about the role of education and the university more generally in view of his rather pessimistic yet compellingly realistic diagnosis of the problems and challenges confronting our world at this point in our history.

And the question that comes immediately to mind is this[3]: Why is Maxwell repeating himself over and over, in a desperate attempt to convey what he deems to be an urgent message, given the alarming and worrisome state of affairs currently prevailing in the world as we know it today? The obvious answer is, as he himself laments occasionally in his work, that he has so far failed to get the attention of the academic and philosophical community that he believes his work deserves. It behooves us therefore to inquire in a more focused manner into the possible reasons for such a failure in getting the recognition and support of the academic community. Are his ideas and proposals wrong or untenable and must therefore be rejected? Are they unoriginal and uncontroversial, and therefore not deserving of further attention? Or is the philosophical and academic community at fault in some ways for failing to recognize the validity and relevance of his ideas and proposals?

More generally, why do the ideas and proposals of some philosophers fail to gather the expected focus and attention in a timely manner, even though they are right and valid in so many respects? Does philosophy (in its institutional incarnation in the modern era) always come late to the party, so to speak? If the Owl of Minerva (philosophy) only takes its flight at dusk, as many philosophers have come to believe after Hegel, what are we to make of a new philosophy that claims instead that the Owl of Minerva must take its flight at dawn?

From the start, I must confess that when I first looked into Maxwell's work, I was inclined (possibly like some of his readers) to think that his ideas may be more accepted and widespread than he seems to be realizing. Perhaps even part of conventional

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[2] Maxwell, N. (2014) *Global philosophy: What philosophy ought to be?* Exeter, UK: Imprint-Academic, Societas – Essays in Political & Cultural Criticism. (Pb, pp.192. ISBN 9781845407674).

[3] The framing of this review in terms of this question is motivated by the thrust of Maxwell's own book.

wisdom and common-sense[4]. Progressively however, I began to see the qualitatively distinctive features of his proposal. He sets out, it now seems to me, an early-rising and forward-looking proposal about how humans can best save themselves from themselves, encapsulated in his call for a paradigm-shift in (academic) inquiry from knowledge to wisdom (1984, 2007). I hope merely to convey this reading to some extent in the brief compass of this review. Establishing its correctness in a definitive and conclusive manner is obviously beyond the present scope.

The five essays collected in the present volume are intended (once more) as an invitation to abandon our established and entrenched conceptions and transform our institutions of learning from primary school to university so that they devote themselves to helping us all create and bring about a better and wiser world. Because they have all been published previously in different contexts, they inevitably and unfortunately contain far too many repetitions which can be distracting and even appear annoyingly preachy. For this reason, and by virtue of my application of the principle of charity to interpretation (Davidson), my review proceeds in a slightly different way than usual conventions require. I single out a crucial thread in Maxwell's work which enables me to give a fair and accurate account of the main point in each essay (even if at times short), while hopefully laying the ground through and through for an overall critical evaluation of his work, especially with regards to the question raised earlier.

In due course, I consider a number of objections that could be made against Maxwell having to do with (1) his idealism, (2) his scientism, (3) the 'disciplinary matrix' of his work, and (4) the form and style of his writings, the idiosyncrasies of his philosophical temperament, as opposed to the content and substance of the work. I also examine (5) the apparently unfashionable characteristics of his project, and (6) the clash or dissonance between its politically radical dimension prima facie and its more sober or analytical formulation, as further possible hypotheses. Finally, I consider briefly (7) the often posthumous character of philosophical vindication, and (8) the possibly paradoxical nature of Maxwell's project.

Though Maxwell discusses a broad and diverse range of issues and topics, there is, he claims in the preface, one common underlying theme, and that is education (vii). For Maxwell, 'education ought to be devoted, much more than it is, to the exploration of real-life, open problems; it ought not to be restricted to learning up solutions to already solved problems – especially if nothing is said about the problems that provoked the solutions in the first place' (vii). [This is consistent, as we shall see, with his main argument about inquiry].

Given the widely acknowledged and growing yawning-gap between education, as it is currently dispensed (for the most part), and the real-world, it is hard to see how one could object to such a view. Maxwell is urging a reduction or an elimination of this gap. Furthermore, he is recommending that greater emphasis be placed as early as possible on learning how to engage in cooperatively rational and imaginative explorations of such real-life, open problems.

In Chapter 1, he points out that 'even five-year olds could begin to learn how to do this' (vii) through appropriately designed and tailored philosophy seminars in which the use of 'play' as an effective pedagogical device is demonstrated. Maxwell is certainly not the first or only philosopher to make a case for the pedagogical use of 'play' in

[4] Could it be that we are all somehow Maxwellian without knowing it – just as we could be Marxian or Freudian without knowing it? Could this be the mark of a compelling philosophy, which is internalized and adopted unconsciously?

education or even in 'philosophy for children' (see Lipman's project, Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children, 1974). But perhaps taken in the context of his wider claim about academic inquiry, it becomes qualitatively distinctive. He writes:

> [A]cademic inquiry ought to be the outcome of all our efforts to discover what is of value in existence and to share our discoveries with others. At its most important and fundamental, inquiry is the thinking we engage in as we live, as we strive to realize what is of value to us in our life. All of us ought both to contribute to and learn from interpersonal public inquiry. This two-way traffic of teaching and learning ought to start at the outset, when we first attend school (2).

What is often not appreciated enough, in his view, is 'the central and unifying role of philosophy in all of education' (3). Pursued as the cooperative, imaginative and rational exploration of fundamental problems of living, it could much more readily serve to 'bridge the gulf between science and art, science and the humanities' (3).

One may be tempted to object at this point that hardly anyone in academia or in the humanities would reject such a call to build bridges between disciplines, or even his view about the central and unifying role of philosophy. This objection would be premature however, and possibly unsustainable given that he puts forward as we shall see a different conception of science, philosophy, and inquiry more generally.

In Chapter 2, Maxwell turns to what is perhaps one of his most important and longstanding contentions: the fundamental failure of academic philosophy to properly conceive its main task. According to him:

> The proper task of philosophy is to keep alive awareness of what our most fundamental, important, urgent problems are, what our best attempts are at solving them and, if possible, what needs to be done to improve these attempts (11).

In his view, academic philosophy has failed disastrously to even conceive of its task in these terms. And the consequence is that it has not made any serious attempt to ensure that universities are devoted to tackling 'global' problems – in the double sense of the term i.e., 'global' intellectually, and 'global' in the sense of concerning the future of Earth and humanity.

Maxwell also claims that academic philosophy has failed to focus as it should on our most fundamental problem of all, encompassing all others:

> How can our human world – and the world of sentient life more generally – imbued with the experiential, consciousness, free will, meaning, and value, exist and best flourish embedded as it is in the physical universe? (13, 41, 48, 157-8).

This is, according to Maxwell, both our fundamental intellectual problem and our fundamental problem of living.

In Chapter 3, he goes to show how one could begin to address this problem, in a simulation-letter to an applicant for a new Liberal Studies Course. The fundamental character of the open, unsolved problem provides the opportunity to examine and explore a broad range of issues and related problems:

> What does physics tell us about the universe and ourselves? How do we account for everything physics leaves out? How can living brains be conscious? If

> everything occurs in accordance with physical law, what becomes of free will? How does Darwin's theory of evolution contribute to the solution of the fundamental problem? What is the history of thought about this problem? What is of most value associated with human life? What kind of civilized world should we seek to help create? Why is the fundamental problem not a part of standard education in schools and universities? What are the most serious global problems confronting humanity? Can humanity learn to make progress towards as good a world as possible? (47-48).

The course as conceived would be run as a seminar, driven for the most part by students' questions and proposals, with the teacher in the role of a facilitator or mentor. It would invite a sustained questioning of our current conceptions of education and its goals, science and its aim, as well as empiricism and rationality.

If, by philosophy, one means either (a) exploration and investigation of fundamental problems or (b) explorations or investigations of the aims, methods, tools, and techniques of diverse worthwhile but problematic or unconventional endeavors – as well as the philosophy of these endeavors, then in some real sense, students would be doing philosophy, and not just talking about philosophy and past philosophers, and interpreting the commentaries of commentaries, or commenting the interpretations of interpretations (64). But, according to Maxwell, academic philosophy today, on the whole, neglects scandalously to do either of these things, (a) or (b), in a clear and straightforward manner.

Suppose, to paint a picture in broad strokes, one could categorize some of the main proposals about the main task of philosophy as defending either one of the following positions: (1) Philosophy consists essentially in 'creating new concepts and conceptual persona' [French continental philosophy, e.g., Deleuze & Guattari (1994)]. (2) Philosophy consists essentially in the 'analysis of concepts' [Anglo-American analytic philosophy]. Then one could argue that Maxwell's conception does not fall in either category: neither (1) nor (2) is strictly speaking and effectively doing either (a) or (b), even though Maxwell can't obviously avoid creating and analyzing concepts, as he pursues (a) and (b), and his primary focus on solving real-life, open problems. Obviously, proponents of both (1) and (2) could object that they too are interested in the end in bringing to bear their respective approach on the solutions of problems[5]. But unlike Maxwell, they arguably seem to subordinate the latter to something else, deemed more important. In contrast Maxwell considers the latter as the primary task of philosophy.

Besides, while analytic philosophy is increasingly specialized and dominated by esoteric and arcane discussions of technical puzzles and language games (not just in Wittgenstein's sense) accessible to the initiated few, continental philosophy is, for its

[5] It has been brought to my attention that Deleuze's approach may be in fact far more congenial with Maxwell's than I seem to suggest. I am thus reminded that, for Deleuze, "concepts are only created as a function of problems which are thought to be badly understood or badly posed (pedagogy of the concept)," and that "(a)ll concepts are connected to problems without which they would have no meaning and which can themselves only be isolated or understood as their solution emerges" (1994: 16). I am further reminded that for Deleuze philosophical thinking should be understood as a concrete activity that "takes place in the relationship of territory and the earth" (1994: 85). Apart from figuring out how to properly interpret and understand these kinds of pronouncements, one could obviously question whether Deleuze's approach enables philosophy to be properly and primarily focused on solving real-life, open problems, as Maxwell suggests. But a more substantial discussion of these points is obviously beyond the scope of the present exercise.

part, far too prone to speculative flights, jargon-filled obscurantism and mystification, anti-rationalism, anti-scientific or anti-scientistic proclivities. In some sense, one could argue that they are both 'forms of anti-philosophy' (64). What the theoretical and speculative approaches to philosophy often neglect are the vital, existential, and practical dimensions of living.

In fact, if Maxwell's conception has any affinities, it seems to be with the branch of contemporary philosophy that in recent decades has come to be known as 'applied philosophy' (in some of its incarnations). Such an approach is primarily concerned with bringing to bear on a wide range of contemporary problems and issues all the tools and insights of philosophy broadly conceived in a non-doctrinaire fashion. After an initial bad reputation, such a field of inquiry has now come to be recognized and accepted for its contributions. It may have even contributed to the rehabilitation of the practical relevance of philosophy in the world today.

Concerning Maxwell's formulation of what he deems to be the single most fundamental problem confronting us, as self-conscious, evolved creatures in a physical universe, what could one possibly object? Unless one is more receptive to theological, metaphysical or pataphysical speculations about 'who and what we are', and what constitutes our predicament as humans-in-the-world, one must concur. In fact he is not the only philosopher to have discussed it (Whitehead), or who thinks so (far too many to list here). As for its being fundamental, from which a slew of other problems can be derived, it should be obvious, especially if we situate ourselves, as I presume Maxwell does, within the current scientific, biological-evolutionary framework that is ours today. Such a framework is admittedly defeasible and subject to possible corrections, and even outright subversions, but it is arguably the best we have so far. His originality, if any, lies perhaps in the claim that it ought to be placed at the center of (academic) philosophy's preoccupations.

In Chapter 4, he considers what he believes went wrong with the History and Philosophy of Science (HPS) as well as Science and Technology Studies (STS), under the misguided influences of various postmodernist trends, represented among others by the 'Strong Programme' and 'Social Constructivism'. Countering the often excessive and untenable relativistic, subjectivist and anti-rational interpretations and conclusions of proponents laboring under these trends, Maxwell seeks to correct the widespread misrepresentations of science and its basic aim (i.e., truth *per se*, factual truth and appeal to evidence, according to the standard conception of empiricism) and to promote a broader and richer conception of science and its basic aim (i.e., truth presupposed to be unified or explanatory), one that puts in practice an aims-oriented empiricism and rationality, that is at once more objective and capable of making progress in its apprehension of the real world (or parts thereof). He even seeks to find a way to generalize over the progress-making features of science (its aims, methods, tools, and techniques) to the entire social field and human world.

Under his conception, as I understand it, science (no differently than philosophy)[6] would more readily be prepared to acknowledge, disclose, and critically evaluate the assumptions that it may be making implicitly or explicitly (e.g., metaphysical, epistemological, social, cultural, and even political assumptions) about its aims and methods. In addition, it would be committed to applying consistently what he calls the 'four elementary rules of reason':

[6] In some sense, Maxwell seems to be calling for the revival of some form of 'natural philosophy' in which the distinction between science and philosophy was not made or assumed to be meaningful.

(1) Articulate, and try to improve the articulation of, the basic problem to be solved.
(2) Propose and critically assess possible solutions.
(3) If the basic problem we are trying to solve proves to be especially difficult to solve, specialize. Break the problem up into subordinate problems. Tackle analogous, easier to solve problems in an attempt to work gradually towards the solution to the basic problem.
(4) But if do specialize in this way, make sure specialized and basic problem solving stay in touch with one another, so each influences the other (99-101).

Furthermore, such a conception of science would arguably make a distinction between 'constitutive and progress-making features' and 'contextual and possibly obstacle-generating factors'[7]. First, one must get clear on the progress-making features of science (aims and methods). Second, one must correctly generalize these features so that they are potentially applicable to any worthwhile, problematic human endeavor. Third, the correctly generalized progress-making features must be extended to the entire social and human world.

In Maxwell's view, in order to get to step one, one needs to adopt an aim-oriented empiricism (AOE), and in order to get to step two, we need to generalize AOE so that it can be applicable in a potentially fruitful way to any problematic, yet worthwhile human endeavor, and not just science. In this way, we would also endorse a rationality that helps to improve aims especially when they are problematic. This is what he calls aims-oriented rationality (AOR). Finally, in order to get to step three, we need to apply AOR, arrived at by generalizing AOE, i.e., the progress-making features of science, to all other worthwhile, problematic human endeavors, besides science (104-5, 120-124, 164-175).

All of these features would enable inquiry (into the natural or social & human world) to acquire a self-corrective mechanism, a kind of positive feedback loop, through which obstacles and contextual factors can be identified and neutralized, failures can be turned into successes and successes into even greater achievements, and thereby achieve in the long run relative yet substantial progress.

It is in this context that one could perhaps best understand Maxwell's call for a paradigm shift in inquiry – namely, from the established and dominant knowledge-inquiry pervasive in Universities around the world since the 18th century to a new and more enlightened wisdom-inquiry. Obviously, such a shift has yet to take root and spread widely in the academic world, even though there are here and there hopeful clusters with such a focus (see for example Sternberg, 2001; Ferrari and Potworowski, 2008¸ Mengel, 2010; Wisdom Initiative at University College London, Maxwell's own institutional affiliation). Maxwell's proposal could have benefitted over the years from acknowledgement of and interaction with the works of like-minded scholars around the academic world, and beyond.

While we may all readily grasp what is meant by knowledge-inquiry, this may not be so with regards to wisdom-inquiry. Here is how Maxwell characterizes the contrast:

> Knowledge-inquiry has two quite distinct fundamental aims: the intellectual aim of knowledge, and the social or humanitarian aim of helping to promote human

[7] Such a distinction is by now very well established and accepted among historians and philosophers of science. See for example Longino (1990).

> welfare. There is a sense in which wisdom-inquiry fuses these together in the one basic aim of seeking and promoting wisdom – wisdom being the capacity, and perhaps the active desire, to realize what is of value in life, for oneself and for others; wisdom thus including knowledge and technological know-how but much else besides (103).

It might also help to know how Maxwell defined 'wisdom' when he first introduced his 'great idea' (118) in 1984:

> [Wisdom is] is the desire, the active endeavor, and the capacity to discover and achieve what is desirable and of value in life, both for oneself and for others. Wisdom includes knowledge and understanding but goes beyond them in also including: the desire, and active striving for what is of value, the ability to see what is of value, actually and potentially, in the circumstances of life, the ability to experience value, the capacity to use and develop knowledge, technology and understanding as needed for the realization of value. Wisdom, like knowledge, can be conceived of, not only in personal terms, but also in institutional or social terms. We can thus interpret [wisdom-inquiry] as asserting: the basic task of rational inquiry is to help us develop wiser ways of living, wiser institutions, customs and social relations, a wiser world (118, 1984: 66; 2007: 79).

One may think, as I have initially, that the use of the term 'wisdom' to characterize what should be of primary concern in inquiry in his view diminishes somehow the novelty, or radical nature of his proposal as it evokes readily various traditional conceptions and connotations associated with the term itself. It is perhaps best to take his construal as a re-definition of the term for our times.

In order to motivate and justify his call, Maxwell revisits a crucial turning-point in the history of Modern Philosophy, and that is, the so-called Enlightenment in the 18th century, especially the French variety. According to Maxwell, *les philosophes* had a magnificent and correct idea: it should be possible to learn from the progress-making features of science and acquire actionable knowledge about how to make social progress and bring about a better and more enlightened world. However, they made a serious and consequential mistake in the implication they drew from their brilliant idea. Rather than ascertaining and confirming the progress-making features (aims, methods & methodologies, protocols, tools, and techniques) of science and seeking to generalize them over the entire social field and human world, they mistakenly assumed that the task incumbent upon them was 'to develop the social sciences alongside the natural sciences'. And of course, it is this assumption which has been institutionalized and entrenched within a knowledge-inquiry paradigm throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, up until the present.

A properly construed genealogical history of this period could probably provide the grey-on-grey, fine-grained details and multifactorial reconstruction of how arguably this process unfolded. And admittedly, there may be room here for competing and even clashing perspectives. But it seems plausible to assume, as Maxwell does, that an opportunity was crucially missed by the Enlightenment philosophers, that we must seek to re-capture now more than ever, and that is, the opportunity to embrace wisdom-inquiry – instead of knowledge-inquiry as we have done for the past couple of centuries. One in which 'our capacity and active desire to seek and promote what is of value in (or to) life, for oneself and others' (103) becomes the main driving-force of inquiry, now

conceived very broadly as social inquiry, in that 'it is intellectually more fundamental than natural science itself' (102).

In Chapter 5, titled 'Arguing for Wisdom in the University', Maxwell undertakes 'an intellectual autobiography' (108) in which he seeks to tell the story of how he came to argue for 'such a vast, wildly ambitious intellectual revolution' (108), namely, that we urgently need to bring about a revolution in academia so that the basic task of inquiry becomes to seek and promote wisdom, rather than knowledge.

I have always found such an exercise to be very tricky and treacherous, indeed: how could or should one talk about oneself, in what language, and to what degree of intimate disclosure? How self-conscious could or should one be? How self-critical or not? How self-aggrandizing could or should one be? How much self-deprecating humor to engage in or not? How could or should one strike a balance between all such considerations? Etc.

Regardless of his success or failure in these regards, I have found his reconstruction of his intellectual odyssey (from 'genius child' to 'emeritus professor') as he sees it from his current vantage point to be illuminating in many respects, if only as a window into the mind of a philosopher (peering into himself) assiduously and stubbornly pursuing his quest and inquiry into the human predicament. I can nevertheless understand those who might feel irked or bothered for some reason by his narcissistic and self-aggrandizing tendencies tempered by self-deprecating humor. Maxwell concludes his account by stating what he finally realized:

> Every branch and aspect of academic inquiry needs to change () if it is to be what it is supposed to be: rationally organized and devoted to helping humanity achieve what is of value in life. I was then confronted by five revolutions (that needed to happen before my program could become a reality). First, a revolution in the philosophy of science, from standard to aim-oriented empiricism. Second, a revolution in science itself, so that it comes to put aim-oriented empiricism explicitly into scientific practice. Third, a revolution in social inquiry and the humanities, so that they come to give intellectual priority to problems of living, themselves put aim-oriented rationality into practice and take, as a basic, long-term task, to help humanity feed aim-oriented rationality into the social world. Fourth, a revolution in academia as a whole, so that it takes up its proper task of helping humanity realize what is of value in life. And fifth, the revolution that really matters: transforming the human world so that it puts cooperative problem-solving rationality and aim-oriented rationality into practice in life, so that we may all realize what is of value as we live insofar as this is possible (171-2, additions in parentheses).

Needless to say, Maxwell's proposal is wildly ambitious and idealistic, as he is himself ready to admit. It is hard enough bringing about one revolution, let alone five (comprising disciplinary, institutional, social and political revolutions). Besides, apart from specifying some of the necessary conditions for such revolutions, he does not fully articulate the practical guidelines we could follow to make them happen. As a result, one may fail to see how Maxwell believes that they can be achieved in practice and what we should actually do in order to facilitate their realization. In short, Maxwell does not seem to give us much advice about how these revolutions can actually be achieved in real life and how we should go about restructuring the university and research in order to accomplish his objectives. Perhaps the best place to look for such details would

be the Wisdom Initiative implemented under his leadership at University College London, his alma mater.

But that a program is idealistic and ambitious (and even still highly unspecified) does not entail that it is not desirable and to be desired, does it? In fact, it may well be based on very cogent and compelling analyses and solid arguments, which make it not only tenable and desirable but correct and relevant. What philosophical program, worth its salt, is not more or less idealistic, seeking to bring about what should be, rather than perpetuating what is? It is more often than not a multi-generational, collective and collaborative effort that is required to bridge or close the gap between the latter and the former.

What other possible objection could one readily make to Maxwell's proposal? Obviously, one could argue that Maxwell is somehow committed to some kind of 'scientism' (i.e., the assumption or belief that science and only science (and its progress-making features, properly identified, assessed and generalized) can provide us with the best possible explanations and problem-solving tools required to bring about a better world. Maxwell would, I believe, bite the bullet in this regard, and admit to some form of scientism, as long as it is understood that his proposal countenances a much broader and corrected conception of science than the one commonly held. It is, let's recall, underwritten by aims-oriented empiricism and rationality, properly inscribed within wisdom-inquiry, in which there would not be much of a distinction left between science and philosophy (as in the 'natural philosophy' of yesteryears), and natural science is itself subsumed under a broader and much more encompassing social inquiry.

Maxwell is not however committed to a naïve form of scientism. He recognizes that most if not all of our global problems have come about in large part because we have been able through the extensive application of science and technology over the past couple of centuries to pursue goals with great success that seem highly desirable in the short term, but quite disastrous in the long term. It is for this reason that he thinks 'we urgently need to learn how to improve our aims and methods in life, at personal, social, institutional, and global levels' (61-2). And for that, he argues, we need a new conception of rationality – aims-oriented rationality – specifically designed to facilitate the improvement of problematic aims and the progressive resolution of problems associated with partly good, partly bad aims at all levels, in all human endeavors (62).

Suppose that one believes, as Simon Critchley recently put it in an essay with a catchy title "There is no Theory of Everything" (2015) that there is a fundamental and irreducible gap between nature and society, that while the former lends itself to explanations, the latter may not, and may only require descriptions, clarifications, or elucidations, and furthermore that the mistake, for which "scientism" is the name, is the belief that the gap can or should be filled. He also characterizes it as a risk, i.e., the belief that natural science can explain everything, right down to the detail of our subjective and social lives. All we would need then is a better form of science, a more complete theory, a theory of everything. He concludes however that there is no theory of everything, nor should there be. Critchley adds that one huge problem with scientism is that it invites, as an almost allergic reaction, the total rejection of science, and often leads to obscurantism (e.g., among climate change deniers, flat-earthers, and religious fundamentalists). We need not however run into the arms of scientism in order to confront the challenge of obscurantism, he argues. Yet surprisingly, he seems to view the task of philosophy as merely consisting in "scratching our itches," over and over again, to paraphrase Wittgenstein. "Philosophy, he writes, scratches at the various itches

we have, not in order that we might find some cure for what ails us, but in order to scratch in the right place and begin to understand why we engage in such apparently irritating activity." Further, he adds: "What we need are multifarious descriptions of many things, further descriptions of phenomena that change the aspect under which they are seen, that light them up and let us see them anew"[8].

It should be clear by now that Maxwell would take issue vehemently with such a conception of philosophy and its primary task, not to mention the dubious and certainly questionable assumptions made by Critchley in his tirade against a particular (straw-man) construal of scientism, beginning obviously with the underlying conception of 'science' at work in his remarks which is radically different from Maxwell's. It is also worth pointing out that the irreducible gap discussed by Critchley is one big assumption for which more argumentation is required, and that Maxwell, as a matter of fact, discusses at length (in reference to "our single most fundamental problem"). In Maxwell's conception, 'science' could yield explanations (causal or probabilistic, and otherwise, say, functional, teleological explanations) as well as descriptions, clarifications, and elucidations, and thereby lead to different forms and degrees of validation or rather falsification. Furthermore it would be subsumed along with philosophy, as mentioned earlier, under a broader and richer conception of inquiry, i.e., wisdom-inquiry. It need not however be a complete theory, a theory of everything, as Critchley presumes. Those who reject science totally, rather than constructively and critically on specific problems and issues, do so at their own risks and perils, obscurantism being the least of them of all. Those who embrace science in any form blindly, irrationally, and uncritically also do so at their own risks and perils, scientism being the least of them.

What other reasons could one possibly give or consider for why Maxwell's views and proposals has so far failed to get the attention and recognition they deserve?

[8] It may be interesting to note that Critchley's remarks are made in the context of his fond recollections of one of his undergraduate philosophy teachers who seems to have left a mark on him and his thinking, Frank Cioffi. According to Critchley, "Frank's core obsession turned on the relation between science and the humanities," more specifically, "with the relation between the causal explanations offered by science and the kinds of humanistic descriptions we find, say, in novels or in sociological descriptions." "His conviction was that our confusions about science and the humanities had wide-ranging and malign societal consequences." In Critchley's view, Frank's point is that "society is deeply confused by the occasions (…) when we need a causal explanation and when we need a further description, clarification or elucidation. We tend to get muddled and imagine that one kind of explanation (usually the causal one) is appropriate in all occasions when it is not." For Critchley, what is at play here is the classical distinction (made by Weber) between 'explanation' and 'clarification,' in other words, between causal or causal-sounding hypotheses and interpretations. And he goes on to add that "Weber's idea is that natural phenomena require causal explanation, of the kind given by physics, say, whereas social phenomena require elucidation –richer, more expressive descriptions." He concludes: "In Frank's view, one major task of philosophy is to help us get clear on this distinction and to provide the right response at the right time." In order to further illustrate and crystalize his point, he recounts a story told by Frank at the end of his book (*Wittgenstein on Freud and Frazer* (1998)) about a philosophical paper (imagined or real, it is not clear) titled "Qualia and Materialism –Closing the Explanatory Gap." The premise of the paper is twofold: (1) there is a gap between how we experience the world –our subjective, conscious experiences (qualia)—and the scientific explanation of the material forces that constitute nature. (2) Such a gap can potentially be closed through one, overarching theoretical explanation. According to Frank, if we can imagine such a paper, then we can also imagine papers titled "The Big Bang and Me – Closing the Explanatory Gap" or "Natural Selection and Me—Closing the Explanatory Gap." There is here quite a bit of leap in reasoning, but why not imagine such papers and endeavors on all counts? In the present context, it shall suffice for me to point out that it is precisely at such kind of views and their underlying assumptions that Maxwell's entire work takes aim in very forceful and compelling ways.

Suppose for the sake of argument that one can draw meaningfully a distinction between form and content, i.e., between (1) the manner in which Maxwell presents his ideas and defends his views, his writing style and rhetorical flourishes, and all those idiosyncrasies having to do with the 'philosophical temperament' of the author and (2) the actual substance of his statements and arguments, i.e., the proposals he is actually putting forth and defending. Can we make the case that one or the other is to be blamed for the relative of lack of attention and recognition of his work?

So, for example, can we plausibly argue, as some of his critics have done on occasions, that his narcissistic and self-centered tendencies, albeit tempered by hints of self-deprecating humor (Chapter 5), or his disposition to make absolutist and categorical judgments, especially when criticizing and dismissing other philosophers' views (Chapters 3, 4 & 5) help to explain why his work did not have the "explosive impact" he had hoped and expected in the philosophical and academic community at large? I doubt it. First of all, it is our job to be able to sort out the wheat from the chaff, and to disregard or put aside those elements that may distract and prevent us from grasping and appreciating the core-substance of the work. Besides, these tendencies and dispositions seem to have characterized more or less acutely the so-called philosophical temperament over the ages. What philosopher of any weight and importance does not seem to think that his or her work constitutes a crucial hinge in the history of thought, delineating thereby a before and after?

I am more inclined to consider a number of other hypotheses, focusing on the content, his ideas and proposals, as to why his work has so far not met with the kind of reception and recognition it deserves. Given the radical and unfashionable characteristics of Maxwell's propositions and views, it is not surprising that they have run against various trends and fashions in philosophy (dominant schools of thought and movements, as well as institutional elevations of some approaches over others in philosophy). In this case, they have run counter to the established Anglo-American analytic approach, whose focus on the arcane, esoteric and technical analysis of concepts has all but rendered it useless in the eyes of Maxwell. They have also run counter to the established *doxa* in history and philosophy of Science, to the postmodernist trends which had come to dominate the field of Science & Technology Studies, as well as the various approaches in Continental (French) philosophy which had taken certain quarters of academia by storm (e.g., Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Structuralism, Post-structuralism, Deconstructionism, Archeology of Knowledge, Genealogy of Power/Knowledge, Critical Theory, Neo-Marxism, Speculative Realism, Dialectical Materialism, Hedonism, etc.).

In this context, could a more likely explanation for the relative neglect of Maxwell's work be due to the institutional inertia and entrenched (disciplinary) conservatism of the academic world and the philosophical community in particular? Is it possible that too many bad habits of thought and entrenched prejudices prevent most academics and philosophers from escaping the very coordinates of the frameworks and sets of assumptions under which they labor, making it difficult for them to appreciate the bold and innovative character of his proposals? Is it possible that, before we can learn how to do what Maxwell proposes, we may have to engage first and as a precondition in some fair amount of unlearning, so as to throw off our conceptual and theoretical shackles, so to speak? If this were to be case, then his proposal would certainly qualify as original and controversial. The readers would have to decide for themselves on these questions.

Could the 'disciplinary matrix' within which Maxwell's articulated and developed his views and proposals also serve to explain at least in part why his work has so far failed to get across? As we know, his views and proposals are squarely situated within the History and Philosophy of Science at the intersection with Science & Technologies Studies. Both of these fields are characterized by a specialized technical jargon in addition to the already challenging philosophical one. This may arguably make Maxwell's views difficult to access and perhaps impenetrable, or in any case help to explain his failure to reach a larger audience or readership –even within the field of philosophy. But such considerations are hardly convincing given that his writings are for the most part straightforward and clear, rigorous and pedagogical when need be. They should therefore be accessible to anyone (moderately educated and literate) who wishes to read through them and ponder their merits for themselves.

Perhaps a more compelling explanation can be found in the clash or dissonance between the politically radical dimension of his proposals and their more sober and analytical formulations due to his original 'disciplinary matrix.' Can this factor condemn his work to a posthumous recognition, as is unfortunately often the case in philosophy? Ideas may be recognized as true and valid, relevant and worthwhile, but acting on them (to turn them into reality) is beyond what can be countenanced by the current system in place. Perhaps we are here confronted with a paradox in that his failure may be due to his success: his ideas and proposals are in fact more widely accepted (at least in principle, theoretically) than he seems to realize. Are we more Maxwellian than we think we are?

Whatever the case may be in the final analysis, Maxwell's latest book as well as in his work for the past 40 years (see detailed bibliography, 180-4) are certainly relevant to our efforts in successfully confronting and solving some of the major (global/glocal/local) problems afflicting our world. And philosophy, properly re-construed and re-constructed, has a crucial role to play in bringing about the necessary changes in the university, in education more generally, in society, and in the world at large.

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