

Editorial

David Lorimer

"The business of the Royal Society is: To improve the knowledge of natural things, and of all useful Arts, Manufactures, Mechanick practices, Engynes and Inventions by Experiment - not meddling with Divinity, Metaphysics, Grammar, Rhetoric or Logicks".

This quotation comes from Robert Hooke, the curator of the early Royal Society, writing a draft preamble to the statutes of the Royal Society in 1663. It is cited in "The Wisdom of Science", reviewed elsewhere in this edition of the newsletter. It clearly indicates the wish of the early Royal Society to dissociate itself from values in order to concentrate on the observable, impersonal, objective and measurable aspects of nature. We all know the benefits and emerging hazards of such a focus. Scientists themselves, as well as philosophers like Schweitzer and Radhakrishnan, have pointed out the discrepancy between knowledge and wisdom, between technical and moral progress. Bridging this gap is increasingly recognised as the greatest and most urgent challenge facing mankind today. At the heart of this challenge lies the need for a spiritual understanding of the nature and destiny of man; and the application of spiritual and ecological values to our problems.

This process will inevitably involve the kind of meddling eschewed by the early advocates of the Royal Society, although perhaps not in all the proscribed areas. "Divinity" will come into focus in discussions at such gatherings as the Science and Religion Forum, whose conference on Freud, Jung and God I hope to report in the next issue. There is also a budding organisation of ordained scientists. "Metaphysics", whose airy speculations were lampooned by Voltaire in the ridiculous figure of Dr Pangloss, is now considered somewhat more respectable, even in largely positivist Oxford. Morals and politics cannot now be separated from the implications of scientific research and technology. As for Grammar, rhetoric and logic, the first two have all but disappeared as separate disciplines, while the last has been refined into near-inaccessibility by mathematicians. In its Aristotelean form, however, logic now faces the challenge of wave-particle complementarity where the straight law of contradiction simply cannot be applied in the old way. The language of mystical experience also suggests categories transcending the duality of everyday terms.

The holistic, spiritual and ecological world-view now needs to be articulated through and across different disciplines. An enormous amount of work remains to be accomplished. Various institutions such as the Institute of Noetic Sciences and the Elmwood Institute in California, as well as the International Holistic University (described in a Notice) have made a start. I feel that the Network has a distinct contribution to make to the discussion in this country. It is in this light that one might regard the May Lectures on "Emerging Models and Values in Western Science". I would welcome suggestions for the arrangements of seminars covering other relevant areas such as health, ecology, economics, politics and education. Much of the discussion will centre on discerning the implications of the holistic world view for a particular field, and formulating practical proposals for implementation. Nor can we afford to neglect contact with official channels, where there are many people also searching for new ways of thinking and acting. It must be a common exploration and a co-operative effort.