

CHAPTER 1

Wisdom Responses to  
Globalization: The Pedagogic  
Context

*To seek enlightenment by separating from this world is as absurd as to search for a rabbit's horn.*

Hui Neng  
Founder of Ch'an [Zen] Buddhism,  
Seventh century C.E.

*We are drowning in propaganda ... It's threatening our lives, cutting off our air.*

Mark Crispin Miller  
Professor of Media, Culture and  
Communication, NYU (2011)

*Distraction is the cause of the intellect's obscuration.*

Peter of Damaskos  
Eleventh-century Greek Orthodox theologian

*The wise are mightier than the strong ... (and) the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

Proverbs 24:5 and 12:18

*Wisdom is proven right by all her children.*

Jesus of Nazareth

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter is essentially a report on a graduate seminar I have developed at the University of Alberta over the past five years. The title of the chapter is the title of the current seminar course. Actually, the course began as two separate but consecutive courses, *Globalization and Education* and *Teaching as the Practice of Wisdom*. In the first, we studied the burgeoning literature on globalization that was seemingly omnipresent from the mid-1990s to the collapse of global markets in 2008. The second course was a kind of experiment to see if a collective reading and reflection on global ancient wisdom traditions (Buddhism, Taoism, Indigenous knowledge, Sufism, sapiential Biblical literature, etc.) could be made to speak directly to the practices of education in today's secular, materialist, and technocratic environment. Two years ago I collapsed the two courses into one to make a conversation between the two topics more direct, even urgent.

The financial crisis of 2008 exposed the fallacies of the dominant version of globalization, namely neoliberalism, a so-called philosophy whose genealogical godfather was, ironically, Friedrich Nietzsche, but whose more contemporary theorists in the realm of economics and social policy were Friedrich Hayek and his American expositor, Milton Friedman. The ideas of both men anchored the economic and social reforms implemented in Britain and the United States by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, respectively, beginning in the late 1980s. Under the logic of market deregulation, withdrawal of government support for a plethora of social services in the name of privatization, celebration of the autonomous self-interested individual, unfettered domestic and international competitiveness, and the reduction of education to the training of 'human capital' for the global market, neoliberalism has now found itself facing the inherent venality and unsustainability of its basic presuppositions, linked to its contemporaneous sibling, neoconservatism.

Neoconservatism was/is another so-called philosophy that saw the end of the Cold War and bipolar world as an opportunity for the world's last remaining superpower (so self-defined at the time) to assume unilateral control over the rest of the world, quite literally. This vision was articulated through such documents as *The Project for a New American Century* and a theory of 'Full Spectrum Dominance' (Engdahl 2009). The essential hubris of both neoliberalism and neoconservatism led the United States and its ally Great Britain into two disastrous wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, creating not just their mutual economic bankruptcy (a \$14 trillion debt in the United States), but, perhaps more important, leading to the exposure of their moral and philosophical bankruptcy.

The social and cultural implications of the failures of neoliberalism and neoconservatism have yet to be worked out, and currently a global vacuum in both philosophy and politics is emerging from the exhaustion, even death, of this former 'order', with no comprehensive global planning or strategizing possible under a condition now characterizable as civilizationally pluralistic, with Asian, African and Latin American countries seeing new opportunities for global leadership, or at least more autonomy within a reconfigured world order. The contemporary global space may in fact be in the midst of World War IV (the Cold War being WWIII), waged on four fronts: a paranoid Western civilizational campaign against Islam characterized as 'Islamofascism' (Podhoretz 2008); a U.S. war against Russia and China based on a struggle for global domination (Brezinski 2012); a global struggle for control of not only essential natural resources, especially petroleum, but also minerals such as coltan required for cell phone manufacture (Engdahl 2009); and a global war over currency, that is, over which currency (dollar, euro, yuan, etc.) will control the global market (Rickards 2011).

The 'neo' debacle, then, is symptomatic of a much larger problem, which is the erosion of the possibility of a unipolar world

dominated by only one 'civilization'. The question is, pedagogically speaking, how can the shape and character of education be reimagined not just in the aftermath of the 'neo' debacle, but, more specifically, in the face of the dissipation of its basic operating assumptions? This is no small matter, since neoliberal reforms in education have now become entrenched in most societies of the Western world, to say nothing of their cultural intertwining among ideological acolytes in countries such as South Korea, Zimbabwe (neoliberalism co-opted by a fundamentalist African nationalism, Mugabeism [see Hwame 2012]), and even the new China. Privatization, site-based management, funding tied to performance on standardized tests, teaching reduced to 'facilitating', economistic assessment of all human values, children viewed as an 'investment' in the future, education reduced to an 'industry' for global export (United States and British satellite campuses springing up everywhere), research and development geared largely for a chimerical 'new knowledge economy', the ascendant subordination of traditional understandings of pedagogy to new instructional technologies – all of these features of the contemporary educational landscape find their basic scaffolding in the economic philosophy of neoliberalism and the political charge of neoconservatism.

Part of the problem is that all of these developments have ridden on the rhetorical coattails of long-accepted philosophical tropes: democracy, freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. The fact is that these rhetorical flourishes have now been revealed as consistently operating as a mask to cover both global and domestic imperial venturing, most often today in the name of an Anglo-American constructed 'War on Terror', that what has been inspired is not just an epistemological crisis, but also a moral and indeed mental one. The epistemological crisis is a symptom of the War on Terror through the saturation of the public domain with false information (propaganda) to support it (see Harvey 2010; also multiple links on [globalresearch.ca](http://globalresearch.ca)). Under such a condition,

how can I any longer trust what I think I know? The moral and mental crises are inspired, at least in part, by the emergence of surveillance culture (Google Earth, the Patriot Act, tracking technology in vehicles, 'backdoor' monitoring chips in computers, etc.), itself a feature of the War on Terror, producing what is now understood as a 'Culture of Fear' (Fisher 2011), a symptom fully reflected in popular video games such as *World of Warcraft*, Hollywood movies such as *Enemy at the Gates* and *Independence Day*, and the preponderance of crime-show television programming. The moral crisis is reflected also in political cynicism and a sense of helplessness produced by the split between the rhetorics of possibility and the crushing realities of everyday life. Mental illness is now the fastest growing medical condition in North America (Whitaker 2010).

The point is, a schizoid situation has now been created for teachers, parents, and all people of goodwill, since the values of neoliberalism and neoconservatism, as dominant economic, social, and political ideologies, are largely unworkable and unsustainable in the context of localized communities, for which schools, classrooms, and families are the foremost expression. Insofar as both *neos* are also incipiently recipes for war, local communities increasingly find themselves faced with new forms of aggression in behaviourally defiant students, in self-interested client-service provider relationships, in the monetarization of human values, in the hyper-competitiveness of a dualistic axiology (I have to 'get' you before you 'get' me), and so on. What happens to practices of forgiveness, compassion, forbearance, generosity, and goodwill when these are defined in the new dispensation as human weaknesses, not worthy of serious support or consideration? Or is the situation today such that in public I need to be tough, self-interested, competitive, and paranoid, while in my family, school, or classroom I must shed all this and become sweet, gentle, accommodating, forgiving, generous, and supportive of others? Who can survive such a dichotomous understanding of the world?

Why should anyone be expected to accept this as 'normal'? What form of pedagogical insight can address this situation in a way that is genuinely helpful both for teachers and students? Is there not a way of seeing the world more comprehensively, more wholly (lit. healthily < OE *health*, 'whole'), indeed as holy, in a way of caring that is not naïve but wiser and more attuned to a deeper truth of things? A recent joint study by the Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto and the University of California, Berkeley, has revealed a direct relationship between excessive wealth accumulation and moral indecency: The rich are more prone to lying than the poor (Mittelstaedt 2012).

For those of us living within the Anglo-American nexus, a basic difficulty is that we are ignorant of the inherent rules of operation that define the conduct of daily life, with economics, since the nineteenth century, regarded as providing a transcendental logic deemed superior to all others for solving human problems (Polanyi 1944/2001). This ignorance does not mean that most people cannot parrot 'the Law of Supply and Demand', discuss the meaning of 'Market Share', or confidently declaim 'Let the Market decide!' What it does mean though is that when cognitive saturation by such clichéd understanding is taken as the real or true condition of our lives, an attendant disability also arises; namely, the failure or unwillingness to perceive or appreciate the deep human liabilities that accrue when economic determinism is deferred to as god. Most poignantly, the liabilities include (a) the inability to imagine life differently, (b) a contiguous difficulty in seeing the connection between philosophical pathology (as it might be termed) and pathologies in the social and cultural realm, and (c) an acceptance of human victimization as an 'unfortunate but inevitable' by-product of an operating paradigm that tolerates no criticism of itself. Political philosopher John McMurtry (2002) has summed all this up very well: Contemporary economic theory is embedded in 'an acculturated metaphysic that has lost touch with the real world outside of its value programme' (136).

Hence it is, then, that in the graduate seminar I collapsed the two themes of globalization and wisdom. I saw the necessity for careful deconstruction of the philosophical principles guiding the neoliberal and neoconservative globalization agenda along with an opening of ancient global wisdom traditions for their insight on what it means to live 'well' together on the earth as our planetary home. If globalization theory, and its base in market economics, is constructed as a form of philosophy, then, as educational philosophers, we must live up to our philosophical calling as 'lovers of wisdom' (Gk. *phileo*, 'to love' + *sophos*, 'wisdom') and not just live as passive enablers of a decaying worldview.

### UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER AND LIABILITIES OF A TRANSCENDENT MARKET LOGIC

It is not the place here to review all of the material that we read in the course to better understand how human values have come to be monetarized to the extent they have, a condition in which 'everything is for sale' (Kuttner 1999), even our emotions, which in the realms of both pedagogy and retail are prized only if we can show that we are relentlessly happy and upbeat (see Hochschild 2003). I will, however, draw attention to some particularly helpful material that we have read. Jerry Z. Muller's (2003) *The Mind and the Market: Capitalism in Western Thought* is a brilliant, beautifully lucid, and accessible genealogical study of the evolution of Market Logic in the Western tradition. The journey moves from the classical republican visions of Greece and Rome that stigmatize merchants as being involved in 'material' practices rather than the more elevated work that involves mind and spirit; through the age of Christendom under the Roman Catholic church when usury – lending money at interest – was regarded as a mortal sin; eventually to the radical (neo)liberalism of Hayek (1944/2007), the guiding mentor whose ideas led to the collapse of global financial

markets in 2008, a collapse from which there will likely never be a recovery to prior conditions, according to Mark Carney, former Governor of the Bank of Canada. I have summarized much of this evolution in a previous paper titled 'Can Wisdom Trump the Market as a Basis for Education?' (Smith 2011; this book).

One particular theme from Hayek is worth noting given the current exposure of the compensation levels of financial elites during the market meltdown. Like Nietzsche before him, Hayek believed in leadership by elites and that the gifted few should be entitled to the special privileges that their creative work has accomplished. Democracy is a problem for those Hayek called the 'Originals', the rare breed of truly creative thinkers whose ideas should be given free reign for the genuine advancement of society. Indeed, it is the dynamic and resourceful few who must force the less resourceful to adapt through what Hayek called 'impersonal compulsion'. This in turn creates what Nietzsche termed (Ger.) *ressentiment*, or resentment, among those 'who must be content with a smaller reward' (in Muller 2003, 358); hence today the Occupy Movement, articulating a revolt of 99 per cent of the population against the top 1 per cent.

Canadian philosopher John McMurtry has written a series of books that deconstruct Market Logic as a form of 'Moral Syntax'. In *Value Wars: The Global Economy Versus the Life Economy* (McMurtry 2002), he illuminates how the global market mindset is 'self-referential' to the point that 'facts do not deter its certitude' (12). The 'inconceivable is now normalized', contained in the paradox that we are 'destroying life to save it' (28) through, among other things, environmental plunder in the name of progress. The following is worth quoting at length:

Humans are value-bearing beings and their ultimate ground of value is life itself; but because the ruling economic order has no life-coordinates in its regulating paradigm, it is structured always to mis-represent its life-blind imperatives as life-serving

... Thus, the freedom of unfreedom, the terror of anti-terrorism, the peace-seeking of war are, like the life-endowing properties of dead commodities, contradictions which are generated by the global market system's syntax of meaning itself. (55)

In pedagogical terms, the problem with this 'fanatic value-set' is that it 'has no feedback loop whereby its life-destructive effects can register on its bearers' (51).

Clearly insinuated in McMurtry's work is the way that a transcendent Market Logic operates hypocritically, with a deliberate but hidden nonlinkage between its promises and its deliveries. This hypocrisy is well worked out by writers such as David Macarov (2003) in *What the Market Does to People: Privatization, Globalization, and Poverty*, which shows the Social Darwinism that is necessarily at work for the market to survive in its current form. Society *must* be constructed on a bifurcation between winners and losers. Losers in turn can *never* be allowed to win. Hence, the unrelenting continuance of poverty in African countries; the residual White Supremacist character of the International Banking system (now under challenge by organizations such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China [BRIC]) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization [SCO] of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan); Libya's Muammar Gaddafi's attempt to establish a Pan-African currency against the dollar and euro based on the Gold Dinar (Wile 2011) – which resulted in the NATO-led revolt against Gaddafi in 2011); and the ongoing use of Anglo-American models of education in so-called 'developing countries' with *development* a euphemism for the 'colonization of the mind' (Wa Thiongo 2011) etc.

John Perkins (2006) addressed this hypocrisy directly. In his bestseller, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, John Perkins tells of his life as a career operative of a shell company tied to the highest levels of the American government, in turn linked to the

world's largest corporations and financial institutions. In his own words:

Economic hit men (EHMs) are highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other foreign 'aid' organizations into the coffers of huge corporations and the pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet's natural resources. Their tools include fraudulent financial reports, rigged elections, payoffs, extortion, sex, and murder. They play a game as old as empire, but one that has taken on new and terrifying dimensions during this time of globalization. (xi)

The basic purpose and strategy of EHMs is to seduce world leaders into borrowing billions of US dollars to construct massive infrastructure projects in their home countries in the name of 'development'. This borrowed money is then paid back to US contracting companies such as Bechtel, Enron, and Halliburton, all of them linked to the deep sinews of Washington power. Debt becomes the key instrument of political control over the countries concerned. The new infrastructure then allows ease of access to and exploitation of desired natural resources.

Korean economic historian Ha-Joon Chang (2012) has written a whimsical yet serious book titled *23 Things They Don't Tell You About Capitalism*. He examined the splits between promise and reality within the economic globalization paradigm. For example, in common discourse about economics, even in university courses, we are *not* told that there is no such thing as a free market, that free market policies rarely make poor countries rich, that more education in itself is not going to make a country richer, and that good economic policy does not require good economists. The last point is relevant here to the extent that within a fuller

context of what is 'required', humanly speaking, economic matters might indeed be a very subordinate concern.

In the most recent offering of the course, we have used David Harvey's (2010) *The Enigma of Capital and the Crises of Capitalism* as a basic text for gaining understanding of some of the fundamental contradictions of capital's operation, including the creation of credit society to fund imperial wars, the politics of criminalization and incarceration of the poor as a way of dealing with unemployment, and an undermining of the meaning of work through the fetishization of technological and organizational innovation. Given the rhetorical urgency for teachers and professors to technologize their teaching practices, Harvey's words seem sagacious:

The 'fetishism' (of technologization and innovation) is fed upon to the degree that innovation itself becomes a business that seeks to form its own market by persuading each and every one of us that we cannot survive without having the latest gadget and gismo at our command ... Opposition arises because the more workers are positioned as appendages of the machines they operate, the less freedom of maneuver they have, the less their skills count and the more vulnerable they become to technologically induced unemployment. (91-96)

As a 67-year-old academic myself, whose research, writing, and teaching have most typically involved working with written texts and face-to-face engagements with students, the pressure to technologize most of these traditional aspects of professorial life into online learning, Moodle course management systems, and so on has inspired a certain crisis of identity, since having something to 'profess' (a quality of scholarly being that takes years to develop) has given way to skills of simple facilitation. Indeed, it can be argued that if learning means only the acquisition and accumulation of information, teaching in the traditional sense

becomes superfluous. Today, access to information is ubiquitous, and in many ways, if not most, this is a positive development, although the multiple ways the new technologies of information both frame and monitor what can be known is a feature yet to be investigated and theorized adequately. No, teaching and the teacher only matter if education is about something much more profound, which is the cultivation and embodiment of sagacity and discernment which in turn produce genuine humility (hence 'humanness' < *L. humus*), counterpointing our species-specific love of ignorance in the name of knowing. Paradoxically, it takes years of study to learn an essential and abiding truth: As human beings we don't really know very much. When knowledge and its production are reduced to economic interests alone, *qua* The New Knowledge Economy, the very concept of knowledge metastasizes into a commodity form that necessarily stands apart from any necessary embodiment in a knower. It need not make any difference to the 'I' that knows. 'I' can simply pick and choose anything I think I need to know to achieve predetermined 'ends' or goals that 'I' have predetermined to be necessary for the preservation and continued success of 'my' predetermined self-identity. Needless to say, this is all true of self-defined cultures, societies, tribes, and groups just as much as it is of individuals, and it speaks of how, in the name of progress, the new knowledge economy, often referred to as a 'knowledge revolution', is actually a very conservative development. Hence it is that in most wisdom traditions, problematization of the concept of the ego, or identity, is the highest priority, along with suspicion of the ego's use of knowledge as power. As Taoist philosopher Lao Tzu put it two and a half millennia ago, 'Whoever wishes to rule the country with knowledge alone will destroy the country' (in Henricks 1989, 32).

To conclude this discussion of Market Logic and its vulnerabilities, a few final points need to be made.

1. As writers such as John Gray (1998) and David Harvey (2010) have argued, today it is no longer appropriate to think of 'capitalism' as a purely Western phenomenon, since countries around the world have taken up Market Logic but are reimagining or redeveloping it out of the context of their own historical and political experience. So Chinese capitalism, for example, still retains the residues of its earlier socialist revolution tied to the interests of 'the people' commanded by a strong centralized government. The political infrastructure of Japanese capitalism is still controlled by ancient warlord families such as Toyota, Honda, and Mitsubishi. More important though, lingering within these newer capitalisms are, on the one hand, remembrances of historical suffering under the foot of Western imperialism and, on the other, ongoing respect for ancient sources of traditional wisdom rooted, in the Asian case, in Confucian philosophy, itself a product of both Taoist and Buddhist insight. In the African context, the so-called 'African Renaissance' relies not just on commitments to economic development, but also on forms of traditional wisdom now generically termed 'Unhu Ubuntu' (see Battle 2009, Connell 2007, Swanson 2007). These Asian and African examples signal a point that I will develop later; namely, the importance of understanding wisdom as an immanent, indwelling reality rather than as just one more concept in competition with a global plethora of other concepts.
2. A second point is related to the first. David Harvey (2010) has astutely recognized that attempts at radical social reform usually founder because leaders fail to recognize the complexity of situations with which they are dealing. Certainly this is true in most attempts at curriculum reform. Specifically, Harvey (123 ff) suggested that seven clear 'activity spheres' that are



always in play need to be addressed comprehensively. These spheres are technologies and organizational forms, social relations, institutional and administrative relations, production and labour processes, relations to nature, reproduction of daily life and species, and, finally, mental conceptions of the world. What I and the graduate seminar attempt to do is place 'mental conceptions of the world' at the forefront of consideration, since how we imagine the world, the nature of reality, and the meaning of good living all lie at the heart of our intentions and actions on a daily, minute-by-minute basis, and they both inflect and infuse all other aspects of human activity. Hence, our 'mental conceptions' must be the first to gain our attention if we are to imagine the world differently. It is precisely here that wisdom traditions have the most to say, and their voice is virtually univocal: To heal the world I must engage in the work of healing myself. To the degree that I heal myself, so will my action in the world be of a healing nature. Presuppositions are at work here, of course, the most significant being of an essential dialogical co-creating unity between self and other. The concept of a pure, independent, autonomous ego (individual or collective) that lies at the heart of the Western tradition's self-definition is nothing but a grand illusion, to be held responsible for so much of the violence perpetrated in its name. The point here is that the Western conception of Reason, as *Logos*, is better understood to imply *dia-logos*, a process whereby no one person or group can ever claim possession of truth in its fullness. Something unknown and at work is in every knowledge claim. Hence it is then that, no matter where one finds oneself within the seven 'activity spheres', one lives and acts within a consciousness of one's essential openness and incompleteness. This, in turn, is the ground of human hope; namely, a recognition that the constraints of certainty are delusional, there being

always a Way that is fuller, deeper, truer, a condition that only 'we' can create, but a 'we' possible only to the degree each of us has relinquished our 'I'. How is this 'Great Relinquishment', as Chan master Hui Neng (1969) once called it, possible? I will explore this question later. Again, one implication of this is how authentic social change rests most effectively on the operation of immanent action rather than action 'upon' the world taken from a conception of the world as 'other' to myself. Authentic social reform is like leaven, intimately intermixed in the bread of life rising as a source of human nourishment.

3. One of the biggest challenges in taking on a transcendentalized Market Logic is to denaturalize it; it is not to be accepted as the natural basic condition of human life. Any reading of economic history quickly reveals this, although to raise a challenge today is often to invite ridicule. Part of the difficulty is that the preferred option of modern economic theory is to pose as a science, with science itself posing as the basis of secular certitude. In the nineteenth century, John Stuart Mill (1874/2010), like others of his time, looked for a 'scientific' basis for conceptions of human life. He argued 'in the abstract' that Political Economy must presuppose an arbitrary definition of man, as a being who invariably does that by which he may obtain the greatest amount of necessities, conveniences, and luxuries, with the smallest quantity of labour and physical self denial with which they can be obtained in the existing state of knowledge. (144)

Mill's point was later interpreted by economist Gary Becker (1992 Nobel Prize winner in Economics and recipient from George W. Bush of the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2007), as a celebration of the human being as 'self-maximizing' animal. This became part of the justifying rationale of radical free market economics (see Becker 1976). Social theorist Raj Patel (2009) has recently provided evidence for the inadequacy



of Becker's view, in particular on the matter of human generosity and altruism. He cited, for example, Martin Broken Leg's 1999 study of generosity amongst young people in Native American cultures compared to youth under the spell of consumer capitalism. Patel also noted preliminary neuroscience experiments that suggest that in fact humans have evolved 'complex behaviors that include in-built desires for altruism and fairness' and not just for selfishness and avarice (32). The point is that it is possible to imagine communities and cultures built on values other than self-maximizing individualism and that the time may be ripe for such imagining.

4. A fourth and final point marks a transition from our discussion of globalization, Market Logic, economic theory, and so on to a serious consideration of wisdom traditions. It arises from a recognition that Market Logic has its roots in the resolution of specifically religious concerns, thus it is very appropriate to resuscitate religious sensibilities, in the name of wisdom, to address our contemporary global concerns. Capitalism in its many forms (finance capitalism, merchant capitalism, asset trading, state capitalism, etc.) is intimately linked historically to the two great monotheistic traditions of the West, Judaism (see Muller 2010) and Protestant Christianity (see Weber 1920/1980, Tawney 1926/1960). What needs to be deconstructed, wisely, is how these traditions are plurivalent rather than monolithic, so that conceptual archaeological work can tease out the moral and ethical dimensions of both traditions that are still alive and well, serving in counterbalance to the hard-line greed and avarice that have come to be celebrated as indeed sacred virtues in contemporary times.

It needs to be recognized also that imperial conquest is written into dominant narratives of both traditions, from the military

conquest of the 'Promised Land' possibly ca. 1300 BCE ('Do not leave alive anything that breathes' [Deuteronomy 20:16]) to the Christian exhortation to 'make disciples of all nations' (Matthew 28:19), but so too do those same traditions preserve a deeper contemplative voice that actually indicts the narratives of domination ('My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples' [Isaiah 56:7]). The West can save itself and work to construct a more peaceful polyvalent world to the degree that its deeper heart of wisdom can be brought forward. I have tried to address this issue somewhat in my 2011 paper. Max Weber (1920/1980) in his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* argued that the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century overturned the spirituality of the Middle Ages by converting *orare est labore* to *labore est orare*. By this manoeuvre, the beginnings of entrepreneurialism were given spiritual meaning. Instead of prayer (*orare*) being a meaningful form of work (*labore*), work itself became celebrated as a form of prayer. Indeed, today 'work' is fetishized to the point that questions of its meaning and place in the development of human dignity have been supplanted and charged into an abstract concept of 'labour', identified as *human capital* within the paradigm of economic globalization. Can the practice of prayer, better understood as meditative or contemplative practice, be revived as being of legitimate assistance in the building of a more just, humane world? If so, how?

### THE TURN TO WISDOM

According to a Pew Research Center poll in December 2011, only 50 per cent of Americans now believe in capitalism, with 40 per cent reacting to the term in strongly negative ways. Only 25 per cent trust banks to do the right thing to solve the current financial crisis (Kristof 2012). Rick Groen (2011), film critic for Canada's national newspaper *The Globe and Mail*, noted the pervasive atmosphere of the films of 2011 to exude 'a pervasive sense of loss'.

Again, it is as if an old order is dying; but what can or will unfold from its expiration? Is it possible to turn to the sages of the past and present for a voice of wisdom to guide the way forward, if indeed forward, with its links to ideological understandings of progress, is something to be desired? One option must not be chosen, even though it seems to be the preferred option of so many today who are calling for a return to wisdom: We cannot begin by trying to escape our circumstances; we must find new life in the middle of our circumstances, *in medias res*, as hermeneutical philosophers like to say. As British social theorist Glenn Rikowski (in McLaren 2006) has insisted, 'We are capitalism' (78), capitalism-is-us. It has taken up residence in our bones, our brains, our muscular tissues, and in the structures of everyday life, from commuting, to eating, to playing, to how and why we 'educate'. It cannot be run away from, only better understood so that new dreams may emerge from the fetters of the taken-for-granted.

It is not easy to speak about wisdom without insinuating that one knows what it is. Any such insinuation is itself simply foolish if not highly dangerous. 'If you meet the Buddha, kill him' is an adage well known in Buddhist circles. In other words, if you think you have finally found what you have been looking for, let it go; otherwise it could quickly turn into another illusion to cling to in the name of enlightenment. In the Western tradition, from the pre-Socratics to Plato, wisdom was understood as a unified understanding of 'the highest principles of things that function as a guide for living a truly exemplary human life' (Delaney, in Audi 1999, 976). Later, Aristotle split this into a distinction between theoretical wisdom (Gk. *sophia*) and practical wisdom (Gk. *phronesis*), the former an ability to see into the true nature of things, and the latter an ability to use the mind (Gk. *phren*) to discern appropriate modes of action in specific situations. All of these understandings have certain parallels as well as divergences in other global traditions. In the Hindu and Buddhist 'Ways', wisdom is equated through the term *prajna* (Sk.) with 'consciousness'. In Hinduism,

*prajna* denotes the condition, whereby Self-Consciousness (Sk. *atman*) unites with Ultimate Consciousness (Sk. *brahman*), producing the deepest composure in all experience, since the basic alienation inhering in a conceived separation between Self and Other is transmuted into a singular unified field of unselfconsciousness or self-forgetfulness. Through such experience one is genuinely free to act without guile or self-interest.

In Mahayana Buddhism, *prajna*, as wisdom, is one of the six 'perfections' (Sk. *paramita*, lit. 'reaching the other shore') indicative of full enlightenment, marked by insight into the true nature of things; namely, their nonreducibility, or emptiness (Sk. *sunyata*), with no human concept able to contain things in their essence. Hence, here, emptiness does not mean void or vacuum, but indeed full potentiality, since, the certainties of Western science notwithstanding, life exists nonconditionally; it simply is.

The earlier remark about composure is important across a wide range of global wisdom traditions, because it points to how stillness/peace is both the mark of wisdom and the ontological state out of which appropriate (wise) action arises most effectively. In early Gnostic Christianity (second–fourth centuries C.E.), salvation (Gk. *soteria*) was interpreted as 'being at rest'. Indeed, Jesus, as a messianic wisdom teacher (Borg 2008), explicitly declared 'Come to me ... and you will find rest' (Matthew 11:28–29). In Taoism, human effort is directed to finding the 'still point' from which all of life radiates and attuning oneself with it. In Islam the Arabic word *waqf* conveys much the same meaning. The various Orthodox traditions (Greek, Russian, etc.) emphasize *hesychastic* experience, the experience of stillness that implies not quiescence or passivity but, rather, openness and deep, active listening (Gk. *hesychia*). In the Hebrew tradition we are exhorted to 'be still' to 'know' life more comprehensively (Ps. 46:10).

What is implicit in these various calls to stillness or composure is an appreciation of how *distraction* lies at the root of our deepest human ills. Within the operation of capital, cultivating

distraction is foundational to all marketing psychology, and the maintenance of distraction is an absolute requirement for product innovation and production. If people could learn to be happy with the car, the clothes, the house, the spouse, the school, the neighbourhood, and so forth that are currently part of their lives and not find them somehow unsatisfactory or disposable in very short order, even though still perfectly functional and of ongoing value, well, the whole economic system would fall apart without much delay. Manufacturing would decline, retail services would shrink beyond current comprehension, engineering sciences, most of the trades – indeed, every single product or activity that relies on *demand* turning into the cultivation of *supply* would fall into much more limited use. Economic historian J. K. Galbraith once remarked, perhaps tongue in cheek, that the entire field of contemporary psychology rose to prominence when it became more difficult to *sell* an automobile than to make one. The point is, learning how the human mind operates, its suggestibility and capacity for fantasy, and indeed its delusion lies at the epistemological heart of capitalism – in other words, knowing how to keep people constantly dissatisfied with their lives and in search of fulfilment through an endless chain of inherently unsatisfying yet full-of-promise material, aesthetic, and even ‘spiritual’ objects. Hence, the call to wisdom is also a call to mindfulness, to the end of distractedness, a form of ‘recollection’, as Benedictine spirituality names it, a recovery of oneself in deeper unity with the essential nature of the world. This recovery or finding of one’s deepest self is at the same time a form of losing oneself in the fullness of Being, or what in Buddhism is called the ‘Ocean of Dharma’. *Dharma* (Sk.) can be translated as ‘the Law of Life’, but also ‘that which carries and sustains us’. To become mindful is to learn to be sustained by Life in its truest sense, the sense that lies beyond language, culture, and tradition. In effect, becoming mindful is the ultimate condition of our freedom as human beings. It also identifies the way in which a turn to wisdom is a deeply political

act, an act of cultural insurrection, because it refuses to take seriously the seductions of secondary gods.

One key aspect of cultural life certain to diminish under a condition of less distraction is an obsession with formal health care. This is because mindfulness is intractably linked to the welfare of the body’s central organ, the heart. In Chinese, heart and mind share the same word, *h’sin*. In the Greek tradition too this link is well understood. Noted at the beginning of this essay is a quotation from eleventh-century Greek orthodox sage Peter of Damaskos. Peter’s work can be found in Volume Three of the *Philokalia*, a compendium of Orthodox spirituality from the fourth to fifteenth centuries (see Palmer, Sherrard and Ware 1990). *Philokalia* literally means ‘love of the beautiful, the true’. Peter declared, ‘Distraction is the cause of the intellect’s obscuration’, ‘forgetfulness is the greatest of evils’, and ‘stillness (marks) the beginning of the soul’s purification (and is) the first form of bodily discipline’ (182). When Peter referred to the ‘intellect’s obscuration’, he used the Greek word *nous* for intellect rather than *dianoia*, which refers to the functioning of the intellect to formulate abstract concepts and then arguing on the basis of this to conclusions reached through deductive reasoning. The intellect, as *nous*, on the other hand, is the highest human faculty through which a person begins to ‘know God’; that is, the reality that transcends all concepts, hence enabling perception of the inner essences or principles of created things, and our participation in them. Even more important, *nous* also constitutes the innermost aspect of the *heart* and is sometimes called the ‘organ of contemplation’, the ‘eye of the heart’ (for further discussion see Palmer, Sherrard and Ware 1990, 360).

‘Distraction is the cause of the intellect’s obscuration.’ Is it possible to grasp the utter importance and relevance of this elusive saying? *Obscuration* literally means ‘darkening’ (L. *obscurus*, dark). So, when our minds have become darkened through ‘distraction’, we are in deep trouble. When our highest human

faculty has become subjugated and dominated by nonsensical phantasms perpetrated by intense and powerful media, when education reigns as a project of human engineering to serve only the material prospects of the market, when we invite violence into our minds and imaginations as a form of entertainment – in short, when distraction rules – we become ‘forgetful of Being’, as Heidegger put it, and there is only one possible consequence as a long-term phenomenological reality: We start losing our minds. And when we have lost our minds, ‘darkness covers the earth, and gross darkness the people’ (Isaiah 60:2), as the Hebrew prophet Isaiah declared sapiently some two and a half millennia ago. In North America, antipsychotic drugs now outsell all other medications, including those for heart disease and stroke. There is a now a psychosis at the heart of Western ‘civilization’, induced by the lies and duplicities the corporate and financial elites use to protect their interests, even in universities. In my own university, *Prozac*, an antipsychotic drug used to treat depression, and *Viagra*, a cure for sexual dysfunction, are the top prescribed drugs in the university health system.

No, a new epistemology is needed that begins with an understanding of the essential unity of the world, an understanding to be gained through piercing the superficial veils of difference into a comprehension of our lived interdependence within a unified field always lying anterior to anything you or I might say about it. This is the mystical vision that underwrites virtually all wisdom traditions of the world, articulated in the *coincidentia oppositorum* (coincidence of opposites) of medieval philosophy and the Taoist intuition of *yin/yang*.

How is this comprehension to be cultivated? If composure is the mark of wisdom, meditation or meditative sensibility is its *modus*. Unfortunately, the common stereotypes of people engaged in meditation include monks sitting for hours in a meditation hall, or a practitioner perched on a mountaintop in a yogic position, or someone in a trance disengaged from the realities of everyday

life. These stereotypes are unfortunate because they hide the deeper meaning and purpose of meditation behind a misunderstanding of meditation as a form of detachment. In *The Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Practice of Meditation*, Vietnamese Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh (1999) illuminated the ways that meditative practice needs to be cultivated as a practice of ordinary daily living, a form of mindful attention to the objects and conditions of life that are always ready at hand, from dishes in the sink, to peeling an orange, to sitting in a traffic jam. The basic truths of life are revealed in the simplest, most common details of living, not (just) in cataclysmic events that in any case are themselves simply culminating agglomerations of seemingly incidental events over time. Hence, Hui Neng, the seventh-century C.E. founder of Chinese Ch’an Buddhist, could declare, ‘To seek enlightenment by separating from this world is as absurd as to search for a rabbit’s horn’ (34). Rabbits don’t have horns: Searching by disengagement from the world is not just a futile exercise, but also misguided.

In English the word *meditation* has an interesting Proto-Indo-European etymological root, *-med-*, which is linked to many other Latin words lying in the heart of English, such as *medicus*, a physician; *mederi*, to heal; and it links also to meter and measurement (see [etymologyonline.com](http://etymologyonline.com)). In the practice of meditation, there is, therefore, a triple linkage: mindfulness as an act of healing gained through a taking stock of oneself, one’s culture; an act of ‘measurement’ that begins by a kind of ritual ‘stopping’ (Trungpa 1988, 78) of the ordinary flow of consciousness to attend to the things of the world as they arrive in consciousness Now. In a way, meditation is the practice of facing oneself and one’s culture precisely in the things and events of the world that lie at hand. There is a parallel insight to this in the Hebrew tradition of prayer, with the Hebrew word *l’hitpalel* translatable not just as ‘to pray’ but also ‘to judge oneself’. As Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin (1980) has expressed it, ‘All prayer is intended to help make

us into better human beings' (5). Even more profoundly, in the Hebrew *Mishnah* of the Talmudic interpretation of Jewish law, the term *mav'eh* is used as a synonym for a human being, which is derived from the same linguistic root as 'to pray'. In other words, as Nosson Scherman (2011) has said, in the Talmud the human being is 'the creature that prays' (xii).

Attention to the material body as the site of one's salvation (composure, healing, self-facing, etc.) is well understood in the Hebrew tradition as a preliminary requirement of prayer, of being human. The garment that the praying person puts on, the *tallit*, is composed of stringed fringes, with each string representing 'my two hundred and forty eight organs and my three hundred and fifty-five sinews' (Scherman 2011, 4–5), each organ representing a positive commandment, each sinew a negative one. To wrap oneself in the *tallit* is therefore to signal a recognition that whatever salvation might mean, it takes place through my body, my embodied being. Certainly, salvific events might take place 'outside' of me, in other places and persons, but for salvation to mean anything *to me*, somehow it must register in my body, my materiality.

Hence it is, then, that in the graduate seminar one of the assignments is to engage in *encounter studies*. Students are encouraged to consciously stop and take notice of daily encounters that register on the body and then mindfully unpack what is personally 'at work' in the encounter, and also to explore how the encounter fans out into broader cultural implications. Ordinary daily encounters are emphasized rather than grand or earthshaking ones, although those can be important as well, constructed as all grand events are from the minutiae of daily, largely unnoticed phenomena. Examples of encounter studies include losing one's keys, being approached by a homeless person, standing at the cashier line in the grocery store, sitting in one's car in a traffic jam, a teacher's experience of being 'talked back to' by a defiant student, etc. etc. In each of these cases, through class *dia-logos* (lit. submitting our individual reasoning to a collective attunement to a more

transcendent Logos [or Word, or Tao, or Way] – that is, the very manner of the world that makes individual reasoning possible) we are able to consider them not defensively, ideologically, or from the point of view of self-interest, but phenomenologically, how they simply register in experience. But equally important, as the phenomenological experience arises, so too arise questions of experiential origin and queries as to why we live in this specific way, materially speaking, and considerations about living differently. Being stuck in a traffic jam on the way to school invites one to consider the many political, economic, and cultural interpenetrations that are involved in such an experience – the domination of public space by the automobile and its links to global wars over petroleum resources, to name obvious examples. One student happened to be stuck behind a school bus on the way to school, and the question arose, 'What do students learn from being bussed to school?' 'They learn how to commute' was one response.

If the actualities of the encounters put us in touch with the material arrangements (political, economic, cultural) of our personal and collective situation, equally important from a wisdom perspective is how we respond to them affectively, mindfully, and hence, in a way, pedagogically. What is to be learned about our human nature from such experiences – and it is on this matter that the wisdom of millennia can come into play – and not just leave us abandoned to personal subjectivity? Buddhist theory identifies three 'poisons' to which we most commonly fall victim: greed, anger, and delusion (see Loy 2003 for further elaboration). Greed is about always wanting 'more', but always within the same psychic grammar as one's current conditions, so that instead of satisfying desire, it only intensifies it. In Seoul, South Korea, traffic jams are a perpetual problem. One proposed solution has been to build a second level of highway on top of existing ones. Similarly, if one form of punishment fails to change a defiant student's behaviour in desired directions, another form of punishment may be

tried, perhaps in the name of 'behaviour management'. In both examples, for any true healing to take place, it is the fundamental assumptions that need to be examined, the very desire for 'more'.

Anger is the most typical response of ego frustration and can be caused by other people or circumstances that get in the way of the ego's desire. This is the foundation of war perpetrated by those who believe in the possibility of their own pure identity. "The world would be a wonderful place if I could just get rid of you!" Stuck in a traffic jam on one's way to school is likely to produce anger that arises from the frustration of not being able to fulfil one's sense of parental or professional responsibility. "The whole class is waiting for me!" "I don't want Jason to miss his math test!" Wisdomly, by putting the ego to rest, one can see more clearly that the situation isn't actually about oneself at all and, out of the ensuing sense of relief, one can also see more clearly the absurdity of what is occurring. Laughter might even be the result. Wisdom teachers are known for their sense of humour.

Delusion refers to the condition that pervades all unmindful experience and is sometimes called simply 'ignorance' (Sk. *avidya*). Primarily, ignorance is the result of being trapped in cultural and parochial understandings and accepting them as universal truth. Aristotle defined this as 'bad infinity' (Gk. *pleonexia*), a seduction into infinite desire incapable of restraint. Today I received in the mail a glossy magazine celebrating the 'good life'. Pictures of beautiful young women and men draped in the finest clothes, images of expensive cars, exotic vacation locales, and so on – all of these put forward as something to be desired by anyone wishing to call themselves successful in life. What is important is not to simply dismiss this as delusional per se (recall the long, deep, philosophical respect for the link between truth and beauty), but to underscore its oneness, or better, its incompleteness. In the same mail arrived letters soliciting financial support for an Alzheimer's disease care facility, for assistance for War Amputees, and for the Big Brothers/Big Sisters organization, which assists

children in difficulty. These letters serve to remind us that the truth of life, indeed its beauty, has to be found somehow in acknowledging and embracing such human suffering as well if life is to be appreciated in its fullness. In fact, by acknowledging such suffering, one can turn it back on the images of success in the glossy magazine. Who in fact are these 'beautiful people', and what are their lives really like? Perhaps they may best be viewed as modelling the duplicity of the image.

The Buddha began his life as a young prince, having everything of a material nature that he might desire, yet he knew intuitively this could not possibly encompass the full range of human possibility, so he felt compelled to leave his environs and embark on a long search for the deeper truth of things. The purported failures of public schooling might have something to do with this understanding of delusion. If educational theory and practice cannot articulate this multidimensional nature of reality, celebrating only successes of a culturally parochial kind, schools become places of suffocating oppression, both for successful students and for those less so. For the latter, the oppression is obvious. Less obviously, successful students may be oppressed by their ignorance of, or ignoring of, the 'other' side, which ignorance they may have to face later as they encounter life's inevitable paradoxes and difficulties.

What is meant by the term *wisdom traditions* when it is used in the context of appealing to wisdom as a source for pedagogical, indeed social and cultural, insight? The question pulls us into some very murky water, as issues arise regarding the commensurability of meaning across massive differences of historical and geographical experience. Is it possible, or even realistic in any sense of that word, to talk about Taoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Sufism, sapiential Biblical literature, Indigenous knowledge, the African *unhu ubuntu* renaissance, to say nothing of the Western traditions of wisdom from ancient Greece through writers such as de la Rochefoucauld (1681; see Willis-Bund and Friswell 1871),



Schopenhauer (1851/1973), and Nietzsche (1878/1996), all in the same breath, as if they each speak with the same essential voice? In a way, the question invites a further one, whether the commonalities in human experience in the world outweigh the differences, and it might be true to say that the contemporary period is unique in providing access to wisdom traditions from around the world through textual translations and enhanced mobility of persons, so that articulating the commonalities may become increasingly possible. Even though persons, groups, and cultures find themselves at different times and places on the planet and hence have different material bases out of which experience of the world arises, it is still the same planet for everyone, an insight only recently reinforced through images of earth from outer space. Likewise, while living in a desert is a very different experience from living in a tropical environment and an urban life is quite different from a rural one, human struggles reveal a remarkable commonality across the entire range. How can I be happy? What do I do about feelings of jealousy and ill will? How to deal with relationships among both friends and 'enemies'? What is a moral life, and how might I live it? What is my responsibility to the common good in the midst of immense political corruption? How might future civic leaders be 'educated' to serve well? These are all questions that global wisdom traditions try to address, each in its own way. The point is, there is indeed great commonality across wisdom traditions, and, historically, there has been widespread intermingling of the same, as the desire for practical guidance bears its witness across time and space.

As biblical scholars have noted, for example (see Herbert 1963), most of the sapiential literature of the Hebrew bible can also be found in the wisdom literature of ancient Sumeria, Babylonia, Egypt, and Ugarit from as early as the third millennium BCE, thus forming a commonality of tradition not claimable by any one tradition alone. Again, this speaks to the fact that wisdom, as basic human prudence and the power of discernment into the

true nature of things, is actually no unique respecter of any one particular tradition, even though different traditions make their own interpretations out of their own circumstances. As Jesus of Nazareth expressed it, 'Wisdom is proven right by all her children' (Lk. 7:35). The remark was a response to a query as to why, in his personal lifestyle, he was not more ascetic, a common stereotype assigned to people pursuing wisdom. Jesus' point is that wisdom practice is not about asceticism or nonasceticism, but truth seeking and one's collective life with others. The Tibetan teacher Chögyam Trungpa (2001) spoke of honouring 'crazy wisdom' – that sometimes the face of wisdom seems crazy, absurd, wild, even conspiratorial. Today, many of our best wisdom teachers may in fact be 'conspiracy theorists' who have seen through the charade of propaganda surrounding 9/11 and the War on Terror, scholars such as David Ray Griffin (2011) and Peter Dale Scott (2010).

In the biblical tradition of the West, wisdom is sometimes regarded as 'God's Consort', with the Greek translation of wisdom as the feminine 'Sophia' naming the Wisdom of God. Philo, the Hellenized Jewish philosopher of the first century C.E., equated Wisdom with the *Logos* – in a sense, the mind of divinity active in the world and present in human beings as they 'think through' the *Logos* to solve their problems (lit. *dia-logos*, 'dialogue'). In one of the creation stories of Genesis (there are actually two), an oft-neglected aspect of a famous verse implies quite directly the masculine-feminine unity of both divinity and humanity. Genesis 1:26–27 reads, 'Let us make humankind in our own image, ... so God created male and female.' I like to think, therefore, that the call of wisdom in the biblical tradition is, in fact, a call for the feminization of that tradition against hyper-patriarchy and masculocentrism. The call of wisdom is the call for balance in human affairs, as the Taoists have always insisted, and this is most poignantly revealed in the profoundly intimate interdependence between men and women as co-creators of human experience. It



is an unfortunate historical turn that gave precedence to the other creation story of woman, with Woman taken from Man's (lit. Heb. *Adam*) rib, to become a perpetual 'side issue' of the masculine agenda (see Genesis 2:18–23).

When we look at the various modalities of wisdom literature, it is possible to see that the *way* the questions are taken up is quite different from the usual analytic and hyper-rationalistic formality one usually finds in the social science and humanities disciplines of the Western academy, for example. Whether it be the ancient morality tales of *Aesop's Fables*, using the character traits of different animals to illustrate the virtues and foibles of human beings, or the stories and ceremonial practices of Indigenous people that reveal the continuity between material and spiritual realms, or the aphoristic guiding of Hebrew *Proverbs*, the paradoxical puzzles of Zen koans, or Taoist principles of harmony and balance – all of these speak in a way unique to wisdom; namely, as a *call* to consider the auspices of our living. If the existential questions of capitalism are, 'How can I/we become rich?' 'How can I/we gain a competitive advantage over others, and maintain the same?' 'How can I/we secure the material resources of the world before anyone else?' and so on, the responsibility of wisdom is to emphasize the narrowness and existential poverty of such preoccupations and point to something deeper, something more nurturing and mutually sustaining.

In the graduate seminar no attempt is made to harmonize all of the different traditions into a single voice, but simply to allow each tradition to speak to us as directly as possible. I like to use the analogy of a person lost in the desert and dying of thirst. Imagine yourself in such a condition. As you are about to die, a stranger appears who offers you a drink. What are you going to do? Of course, you are going to accept the drink! If someone offers me a drink when I am dying of thirst, I do not ask, 'Are you a Jew, a Christian (Catholic, Orthodox or Protestant?), a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Taoist?' No. First I accept the drink. Questions of

origin, politics, interpretive contestation, and so on can all come later, but only after the fact of my resuscitation.

When I began teaching of wisdom traditions in my own faculty of education, I described the inaugural course as 'Teaching as the Practice of Wisdom', emphasizing the matter of practice in the sense of both practical action and trial and error experiment. Wisdom is both a product of teaching (one learns over time how to teach well), just as wisdom is a convenient guide for the teacher based on years of experience. Teachers are *always* practising, with perfection an ever-elusive goal that teaches true humility. In the Greek Orthodox tradition, humility is the true mark of wisdom. Indeed, no one is exempt from the true difficulties of trying to live a more ethical, disciplined, and mindful life. One can study and practise for a lifetime but still 'fall' into habits of thought and action that diminish human life rather than dignify it. As the *Philokalia's* Peter of Damaskos noted of the biblical tradition, most of the exemplary figures, from Moses through king David to Peter, the first Christian Pope (< Gk. *pappas*, 'father'), displayed serious weaknesses of character at certain points in their lives. More important, though, is that they struggled to the end of their lives to overcome their weaknesses to be able more faithfully to fulfil their respective human callings. To 'fall' is not the issue; to rest complacently in one's fallen condition out of pride, stubbornness, self-justification, or even inordinate guilt is a greater missing of the point of life, which is the literal meaning of 'sin' (< Gk. *hamartia*). In the sixth century C.E. when Benedict of Nursia (later 'St. Benedict') was developing his first monastic communities in Italy, as one way of dealing with a rotting-out Roman empire, curious passers-by would often ask, 'What do you and members of your community do all day?' Benedict would reply, 'We fall down, then we get up. We fall down again, then again we get up, fall again, get up, fall, get up, fall, and still try to get up' (see deWaal 1989). According to contemporary Buddhist teacher Sayadaw Pandita (1992), the mark of maturity on the spiritual path is not

whether one falls or makes mistakes; maturity is marked instead by increased speed of recovery time. In other words, it is important not to nurse grudges, hold anger internally for long periods, or engage in unconstructive behaviour as a matter of habit. Learn to read one's responses quickly, for what they are; learn from them and, by so doing, redeem them through more positive action.

Contemporary Chinese scholar Zongjie Wu of Zhejiang University has recently published a stunningly brilliant piece on the problems of teaching Confucianism in today's Chinese schools (see Wu 2011). A neo-Confucian renaissance is taking place all over China as part of an effort to recover a deeper sense of authentic Chinese identity in a globalizing world. As Wu pointed out, however, educational theory in China today has fallen victim to the precepts of Western modernity, based primarily on linguistic theories of 'representation' whereby language is taken to represent the 'real' world and students are required to learn what is real. Hence, in Chinese classrooms today, students are required to memorize and recite Confucian sayings, but in a way that completely violates the spirit and truth at the heart of Confucianism itself. There is a reason that Confucian literature, like most wisdom literature in the world, is mainly in the form of aphorisms, brief conversations, axioms, verses, and stories rather than complicated and convoluted arguments: because the aim is to be suggestive, hinting, and open, rather than pedantic and heavy handed. The point is to open a space where students can begin to consider the auspices of their lives, and this is best done through a simple remark or point that offers itself for reflection in the context of the students' life situation. Wisdom language points to the much larger and fuller 'remainder' of everything that is 'said'; it opens out into the authentic silence beyond formal language, to where the actual possibility of finding one's self might be found, paradoxically in the very way that one can be liberated from it. It is appropriate to quote Wu at length here, given the importance of the point:

For Confucius, learning is a constant modification of self by day-to-day engagement towards a *Junzi* (good person), a process of gradually becoming shining but silent. However, a discourse that constitutes today's pedagogic practice is dominated by the concept of learning as accumulation of representational language, which makes learning a process of collecting facts and propositions – as many as possible. For the Chinese ancients, the purpose of memorizing the classics is to catch spiritual enlightenment by removing the shadow of language. Memorization is to make language ready for decoding meaning in everyday life. What is memorized is not the ideas, facts, theses, or truths, but the nets, the traps which have to be fore-taken, fore-grasped so that the fish and rabbits could be caught. Once a rabbit is caught, the trap is forgotten. Forgetfulness is the only reason that students have to memorize ... [Today] the memorization of language is no longer for its ancient use of uncovering the ineffable, the secrets of life, but to grasp the illusion, the false consciousness residing entirely in the signification of signs [i.e., things only seemingly made 'real' through processes of representation]. (566)

I indicated earlier that there is no attempt in the seminar course to harmonize all traditions into a single unity. We read primary sources such as the Tao te Ching, the Confucian *Analects*, Indigenous knowledge such as that found in the work of Dooling and Jordan-Smith (1989), and feminist Buddhist scholarship such as that of Charlotte Joko Beck (2007) and Pema Chodron (2004). However, today we can increasingly find sources that helpfully attempt to pull together multiple traditions in a way that can speak of Wisdom's commonalities. Jack Kornfield's (2001) *After the Ecstasy the Laundry: How the Heart Grows Wise on the Spiritual Path* is a text I have used to great benefit over the past several years, and to which students have responded very favourably. In a concluding statement of my own, I simply identify here

seven characteristics of Wisdom traditions as I have come to learn them after years of study, and then I will attempt to relate them to the practice of pedagogical wisdom. I have worked out some of these themes more fully in Smith (2011); unfortunately, there is not enough space to elaborate them here in detail, so in brief:

1. *Wisdom acknowledges the inherent unity of birth and death.* While Vietnamese master Thich Nhat Hanh (1988) once remarked that 'birth and death are fictions, and not very deep' (10), our mortality is encoded in the very fact of our birth, so that if we choose to live as if we will never die, our living will be somehow dishonest, just as a preoccupation with death will also produce just a half-life. Living in the inherent unity of birth and death means always accepting one's situation in the 'now' as the site in which the fullness of human experience is always already present. There is an ancient Buddhist saying, 'Life cannot be made more perfect', which means not that life is without difficulties and problems, but that the full range of its possibilities is always present, immanent in every present moment. A culture obsessed with 'progress' such as that of the West, easily pathologizes death and dying as a problem, when actually acceptance of one's mortality is the key to wholesome living. Ironically, the two defining features of human experience, birth and death, both reveal the limits of human choice and hence render the 'Choice Theory' favoured by the Western liberal tradition of education somewhat illusory. Pedagogically, inducting children into a belief that life is a matter of will, and willpower, under the guise of clichés such as 'You can do anything in life that you want to do if you work hard and put your mind to it' can be a recipe for despair in the face of failed dreams. Similarly, preoccupations with goal-setting, curriculum-by-objectives and so on are not ill-advised in themselves

but quickly become so if they evolve into blinkered constraints against the fullness of life's beckoning.

2. *Wisdom contradicts values of power by revealing the paradoxical nature of experience.* This theme reveals itself in many different forms and ways. Here is one example: In classical Christian theology is a term, 'The Happy Fault', that respects the relationship between the breaking of a taboo, or law, and the foundation of love in mercy and forgiveness. The primary example begins with the *Genesis* myth of Adam and Eve (Gen. chs. 2 and 3). The Creator God tells them they are free to do anything except eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, lest they die. Of course, they succumb to temptation, ironically because, among other things, the tree was 'to be desired to make one wise' – an important caveat against seeing wisdom as an object of desire; also to be noted is the link between death and the assumption of power in moral reasoning. Instead, somehow, the story implies, the free life of the genuinely human resides not in the power of judgement, but in faith in a prevenient order never fully transparent to human 'knowing'.

The *Genesis* story attempts to account for the origin of the human experience of alienation from perfect existence, from paradise (hence, for example, the ordinary but universal experience of frustration and anger), and the embarkation on the long journey to return 'home', *the myth of eternal return*, as philosopher of religion Mircea Eliade (1954/2005) called it. This hope for a return to perfect life provided, and still provides, the messianic vision of Judaism, eventually taken up in the Christian tradition of Jesus being the messiah, literally, 'the anointed' (Heb. *masiah*), with the act of anointing denoting kingship within a new dispensation marked by mercy, forgiveness, generosity, and so on. Jesus' words such as 'Judge not...'

and 'The rain falls on both the just and the unjust' (Mt. 7:01 and 5:45, respectively) is a form of call back to what is formally termed the *prelapsarian* (before the lapse) human condition, life before the breaking of the taboo. 'The Happy Fault', therefore, names the paradox that breaking a taboo provides the necessary condition for the revelation of mercy, forgiveness, generosity, and so on. Without breakage there can be no reconciliation; a mistake is the requirement for rectification.

This paradox is widely understood by teachers who can stand the test of time. Rules, regulations, expectations, standards even – all of these are an inevitable part of any human community made up of diverse personalities, histories, and ethnic and cultural origins. However, any rule, law, or taboo will eventually be broken. But such breakage also provides the necessary condition for reconciliation under a broadening of understanding, a bearing of witness to authentic compassion, and a sharing of mutual forbearance. Under neoliberal/neo-conservative policies the rising calls for 'zero tolerance' regarding aberrant student behaviour is deeply regrettable as a sign that the adult world is losing a sense of its own complicity in the construction of youthful difficulties and the subsequent collapse of compassion as an essential element of human dignity. Ironically, paradoxically, tolerance itself easily slips into dogma when taken as a literal code, thereby losing its character as a 'field' through which the complexities, ambiguities, and uncertainties of life can reveal themselves for mutual edification between teachers and students of life's deeper meanings.

3. *Wisdom fractures the temporal enframing of conventional interpretation.* The Western tradition has two basic concepts of time, *chronometric* and *kairotic*. The former is derived from the Greek god Chronos, famous for eating his own children lest

they grow up to usurp his power. Chronometric time is the measured time necessary for scheduling, planning, and anticipating and is most commonly experienced through an instrument called, tellingly, a 'watch'. Chronometric time is the principle form of time for the operation of capital and efficient labour/productivity ratios. Under capital, 'Time is money', so time is not to be 'wasted' on tasks not related to production. In educational circles, even today, one hears of students' 'time on task', as if overt behaviour 'on task' were the most important measure of pedagogical efficiency, rather than dreaming or wondering.

What is occluded under the reign of chronometric time is kairotic time (< Gk. *kairos*), which can roughly be translated as cosmological time, which is always everywhere in operation behind the scenes of ordinary human action. Think of the million-year frames of geologic time, for example, or the light-years of space. More experientially, kairotic time registers when we speculate that something happened when 'the timing was right', a moment not measurable to a single source by any instrument, but intuitively understood as arriving when various elements converge to give cause.

Under the reign of kairotic time, many things might seem to be dead, inert, or inconsequential, when all of a sudden there may be a bursting forth to reveal dimensions of their nature heretofore ignored. I used to teach in Southern Alberta, Canada, a semi-desert area where a certain flower blooms only every 60 years. For 59 years the plant lies dormant, almost invisible, and seemingly dead. Kairotic time provides a reminder that much of life is like this; it lies hidden, dormant, awaiting its appropriate moment. Teaching mindful of kairotic time appreciates how many gifts of young people are sensitive

to conditions of revelation; the gifts will not reveal themselves if the conditions of the time are not right. This is one reason that wise teachers constantly discipline themselves to a kind of 'karmic attunement', attending to the young not according to a 'watch', but according to a sensitive attunement to life's broader rhythms, paradoxes, and indeed mysteries.

4. *Wisdom understands the natural world as pedagogical.* To be natural means to 'be born' (< L. *nasci nat*), so in a sense every human being is part of nature. It is a conceit of Western self-consciousness to conceive of a human-nature separation, a situation that turns nature, under the exigencies of capital, into either a romantic love-object (e.g., eco-tourism or exotic travel) or a brute object that requires domestication, exploitation, or both. The cultural loss is the pedagogical wisdom only a mindful attending to human nature in its unified sense can produce. The recovery of this wisdom has a number of requirements, one of which is related to my suggestion above about kairotic time. Learning to let nature speak to us means silencing any predisposition to speak before plants, animals, mountains, and rivers have spoken to us. This may sound absurd, but it is best understood through the practice of silence in non-human settings. One may go into the woods to commune with nature only to find it silent, without realizing that such a perception is only a symptom of the noise already existing in one's own head or a feature of the way the noise of one's simple presence forces everything else into silent hiding. Instead, sit down, be silent, be still, be patient, and learn to be amazed.

To learn from nature means to be present to it, both within oneself and in relation to everything else. Under conditions of illness, attending to the body mindfully can produce forms of insight into those same conditions not available to conventional

interpretation. Observe how a tree bends to accommodate a neighbour, and learn something about generosity. Listen to birdsong, and hear how every song is a response to someone else's song, and learn the inadequacies of the concept of personal autonomy. Sit around a campfire on a romantic evening, and suddenly observe the eyes of a mountain lion gleaming in the summer moonlight, focused directly on your beloved, and from your terror learn respect for the territory of others.

The death of multiple species, to say nothing of the demise of languages and cultures under the juggernaut of Western theories of 'development', is a form of speaking back to those same theories. If the speech is not heard, beware of the consequences. When the Western powers first invaded Iraq in 2003, I asked one of my Chinese doctoral students what he thought of such action. He was also a Taoist Tai Chi Master, quite famous in his homeland. His response? "The West is digging its own tomb." Of course, given the inherent unity of life and death, this prognosis can be taken as another example of paradox: The more one tries to secure one's interests, the more insecure they become, and the so-called war on terror becomes itself a form of terrorism.

5. *Wisdom honours the intermingling of implicate and explicate orders.* In a way, this is implied in everything that I have discussed so far. More deliberately, the continuity of implicate and explicate orders has been articulated by Bede Griffiths (1989), a Benedictine monk who went to India in 1955 to search for the common ground of spirituality between East and West. The explicate order is easily understood as the world that lies at hand, available for empirical investigation and comment. The implicate order is everything else that is 'implied' in the explicate order. Needless to say, the implicate order is vast, infinite,

incapable of human measurement; yet still, it is 'here', in this thing or that, explicitly. Even more important though is how the relationship between the orders is deeply political, insofar as the explicate is always subordinate to the implicate. In Hinduism this lies at the heart of the Sanskrit understanding of language: The Word (Sk. *vac*) lies subordinate to Silence, the uttered to the yet-to-be-uttered (see Padoux 1990).

By honouring the continuity between these orders, wisdom finds its voice in the *politics* between the said and the unsaid, the visible and the invisible. It does not rest in an easy acceptance of conventional interpretations, in the awareness that no matter what is said, there is still more to be said, waiting in the wings, so to speak. Hence vigilance and wakefulness are common hortatory terms in wisdom literature. A true teacher is one who honours not just the child who is 'present', but also the human being who is yet-to-come.

This theme has another connection, which is to the importance of Place in the unfolding of Wisdom's call. Earlier here I noted distraction as a cause of human emotional and intellectual darkening. Phenomenologically, in terms of experience, constant motion and moving are deeply contributive to such distraction. This can be called the condition of *placelessness* and explains why operations of displacement and destabilization are common military strategies in contemporary warfare. In the Benedictine tradition, on entering the order, every monk makes a 'Vow of Stability', a commitment to *this* place as the place where the journey into truth will occur. The understanding is that indeed *any* place can suffice for the work of such a journey when it is appropriately understood as containing, paradoxically, in its singularity everything that is necessary for truth's fuller unfolding; that is, for the revelation of the implicate in the explicate. It is interesting to note in the contemporary resurgence of Indigenous knowledge the

importance attached to Place, not simply as political possession of land, but as the necessary condition for sacred understanding. As Indigenous scholar Keith Basso (1996) expressed it, 'Wisdom sits in places'. How might schools be such places?

In closing, the following remarks may be appropriate. According to Thai teacher Ajahn Chah (2002), the primary vision of wisdom is for us to become 'fearless', which involves the long and difficult work of learning to know 'phenomena as they are' (93). As noted earlier, Michael Fisher (2011) has characterized the pervasive atmosphere, particularly in Western societies, as a 'Culture of Fear'. It may be, therefore, that the first responsibility of wisdom work is, as Chah suggested, to examine the phenomenon of fear itself, and specifically what it is that is feared, the specific sources of fear. In the context of this chapter, fear of the consequences of the collapse of Market Logic as a recipe for human well-being is understandable, since the failure of Market Logic (see Kevin Mellyn's [2012] *Broken Markets*) inspires a fear of loss of everything promised through utopian market rhetoric, from more efficient schools, better health care, more individual wealth, more celebration of personal autonomy, firmer, more secure global dominance in the name of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law, and so forth. Following Chah, I suspect the way forward lies in two unified paths. One is the urgent need to rethink economic theory around, not profit taking and wealth accumulation, but what economic historian Robert Heilbroner (1999) described as 'the art of human provisioning', a work that under positive interpretations of globalization will necessarily involve what Pasha and Samatar (1996) have called 'intercivilizational dialogue'. A starting point for this, I believe, will involve a recognition of the respective *poverties* of every civilizational tradition, rather than starting from triumphalist national and ideological affirmations, which only put others on the defensive. To begin by affirming our mutual poverty inspires an openness to the relative contributions of others, as well, importantly, openness to mutual criticism.



A second path may be the one that confronts fear itself, and its existential auspices. This is the work of wisdom that I have tried to articulate, stumblingly, here. The primary human fear, said Freud, is the fear of insignificance, or self-annihilation. Ironically, this very condition of human insignificance relative to the vastness of cosmic realities, and the loss of self within the interpenetration of all phenomena – it is recognition of this very conditionedness that is the necessary starting point of sagacious living. ‘Reverence for the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’, says the Hebrew writer of *Proverbs* (1:7). This language can be de-theologized to name the phenomenological experience of an immanent transcendence in life that inspires both wonder and genuine humility in the face of all-that-is. Japanese Zen scholar D. T. Suzuki (1994) decried the ‘homocentric fallacy’ (65) lying at the heart of the West’s self-narrative. Learning to live together on the planet, in peace, may require a relinquishment of this fallacy in the name of a more comprehensive view. Maybe there are signs of progress. Nietzsche’s ‘Death of God’ in the nineteenth century could only result in Foucault’s “End of Man” in the twentieth, since the death of an anthropomorphic god merely announces the death of an anthropogenic self-fantasy. Constructively, this may mark ‘the end of the world as we know it’ in the twenty-first century, as the REM song says. The best sentiment may lie in the remainder of the song’s line, ‘and I feel fine’. That the end of the world as we’ve known it is at hand may be true, arguably, depending on who the ‘we’ is. It is the world yet-to-be-known, however, that is the source of our hope, insofar as the sages say, ‘that which you seek, you already are’ (Loy 2000, 228).

## CHAPTER 2

## Can Wisdom Trump the Market as a Basis for Education?

*The wise are mightier than the strong.*

(Proverbs 24:5)

*The tongue of the wise brings healing.*

(Proverbs 12:18)

### INTRODUCTION

On the morning of 17 February 2009, a distinguished professor of business at one of Canada’s leading research universities made a remarkable suggestion. Market regulators, he said, would do well to practise Buddhist philosophies. His comment came after his keynote speech, ‘Why Markets Fail’, during a symposium sponsored by the university and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The symposium was designed to help people better understand the contemporary collapse of global markets and perhaps to allay their fears for the future (see Morck 2009).

As a professor of education who has been studying global wisdom traditions, including Buddhism, for over 20 years, my ears suddenly pricked up. Buddhist philosophies might be helpful, the professor surmised, because the Buddha spoke of the impermanence of life, of the dialectical relation of pleasure to suffering, and because markets might be analogous to the Buddhist concept