

The Wisdom Page

***Matters of Consequence* by Cophorne Macdonald**

Reviewed by Tom Lombardo

Creator and editor of *The Wisdom Page* on the World Wide Web, Cophorne Macdonald presents an integrative vision of important ideas of the past, contemporary issues and trends of today, and a philosophy and action plan for future in his book, *Matters of Consequence: Creating a Meaningful Life and a World That Works*. He attempts to pull together the subjective and objective, science and spirituality, theory and practice, fact and ethical value, and philosophy with politics and economics into a comprehensive proposal for how to transform our present world into a “wisdom culture” for tomorrow. Many of his ideas resonate with other theories of the future, including those of Ken Wilber, Paul Ray, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Eastern philosophy, and Holistic Evolution. Macdonald is especially concerned with facilitating both a global social movement and a transformation of individual lives.

The central theme in Macdonald’s writings is wisdom. In his earlier book, *Toward Wisdom*, he states that the development of wisdom is critical to the creation of a better world in the future and that the lack of wisdom and its application is the main cause of contemporary world problems. According to Macdonald, wisdom is a complex, multifaceted set of capacities. It is a holistic quality reflecting the total psychological make-up of a person. He highlights certain key features of wisdom, such as a reality-seeking attitude (a desire to know), a non-reactive mode of behavior and acceptance of reality, a holistic perspective that goes beyond the immediate here and now and the personal, a realization of the oneness of reality, and a disposition to act for the benefit of others and the whole. The wise person sees things clearly, is prudent in action, possesses a deep understanding of the human/cosmic relationship, and, through the application of wisdom to life, achieves happiness and peace of mind. Macdonald also argues that the self-actualizing personalities described by the psychologist Abraham Maslow are paradigm examples of the wise person. Maslow describes self-actualizing individuals as creative, inner-directed, detached, more concerned with things outside themselves, able to give love, and living by a unique set of values, including truth, playfulness, beauty, and self-sufficiency.

In *Matters of Consequence* Macdonald focuses on “deep understanding,” which is a particular kind of wisdom. Deep understanding has three fundamental components: A comprehensive intellectual understanding of reality, an inner directed and intuitive self-awareness and understanding, and a capacity for significant “doing” or action. The first two components roughly correspond to scientific and spiritual-psychological perspectives on reality – the objective and the subjective – and, according to Macdonald, both are necessary for deep understanding and, consequently, wisdom. He believes that the insights acquired through these two perspectives can be aligned and integrated into a coherent whole – science and spirituality are not incompatible. For Macdonald, science in general provides answers to factual questions, whereas spirituality provides answers to questions of meaning and ethics. But he also repeatedly states that a deep understanding of the subjective and the objective realms will lead individuals to insight regarding what is ethically correct and what needs to be done to improve the world – a deep understanding of “fact” generates an understanding of value and a call to action. Macdonald connects this theory of deep understanding with the future in arguing that the pervasive development across all humanity of deep understanding (and consequently wisdom) is the next step in human evolution.

In laying the groundwork for his theory of deep understanding and the creation of a positive future, Macdonald provides a comprehensive overview of reality, of both the objective-scientific and the subjective psycho-spiritual. He discusses philosophical ontology (the nature of Being), evolution, complexity, the nature of mind and consciousness, cosmology, culture and society, economics, and biology and ecology. He not only includes reviews of contemporary and classical theories for each of these areas, he also critiques, along the way, various dominant belief systems and practices and proposes fundamental values and principles to guide humanity in the transformation of existing social institutions and modes of behavior. In so doing, he provides a critical analysis of contemporary human problems and creates a set of fundamental principles for transforming the world.

Macdonald believes that it is exceedingly difficult to predict the future of human society. Hence, he suggests that we should focus on envisioning what we believe is a preferable or ideal future and then work toward realizing this vision. In this regard he provides a detailed “Year 2050 Vision,” which includes an extensive list of transformative principles and actions for achieving this vision. First, he envisions humanity developing a much greater cosmic and global understanding and appreciation of reality (following from his concepts of wisdom and deep understanding). He foresees an upswing in the quality of life for humanity and much less of a concern with material possessions and consumption. Sustainability will continue to increase in importance as a fundamental value of human life. There will be an increase in creativity, learning, and psycho-spiritual development. In general, we will do more with less and increasingly pursue a “full rich life of mind.” Also, Macdonald foresees the universal provisioning for all people and a more equitable distribution of wealth. In general, he argues that the pursuit of wealth is one of our most problematic contemporary values and needs to be significantly diminished in importance. He questions the need for continued material growth –has it bought human happiness? – and argues that our overall sense of the quality of life needs to incorporate more psychological, social, and spiritual values with less of an exclusive emphasis on economic and technological development. There will be a new balance of work and leisure, with ample time for the pursuit of individual interests and self-development. Our economy will move more toward a focus on the inner life and inner experience, and eventually human transformation. For Macdonald, the ideal world of 2050 will be much more politically stable, with the emergence of world governance, “pooled sovereignty” among nations, and a dominant spirit of cooperation and collaboration over war and competition. He envisions the continued replacement of dictatorships with democracies and increasing equality and general human rights for all people. Macdonald even suggests that intellectuals, philosophers, cultural leaders, and writers should pursue political careers, for our future needs wise leaders who possess deep understanding, highly developed ethical characters, and a capacity for seeing the long view of things. As another basic point, Macdonald supports Rabbi Michael Lerner’s contention that the main world problem is the “globalization of selfishness” and that the ideal future should involve a “globalization of spiritual consciousness.” For Macdonald, we live in a “spirit-denying society” and this attitude needs to change. Finally, Macdonald wishes to emphasize that his envisioned world transformation needs to occur at both the individual level and the collective global level – in essence, a combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches.

Following from his ideas on wisdom and deep understanding, Macdonald clearly supports certain fundamental values in both his critique of contemporary times and his vision of an ideal future. He values cooperation and concern with the whole over selfishness and self-centeredness. For Macdonald, we must identify with the “ONE” and the “ALL.” He values a balance of spirituality and the inner life with science and materialism, though he is highly critical of the excessive materialism of the modern world. He values expansive and deep understanding as an absolute necessity in guiding our actions and creating our future. He speaks of a “mind-directed”

evolution for humanity. For Macdonald, the human mind needs to evolve. Although he argues for the value and importance of science, ultimately he sees humanity as “spirit” – a manifestation of the cosmic spirit in evolution. Finally, he strongly argues for “massive change” in our present world if we are to realize a positive future.

For comprehensiveness at both a theoretical-philosophical and practical-applied level, this is a superb book.