

What the study of pluralism and paradox urgently require

While you are free to raise any issue you wish, I have indicated below where I think I can be of most help to you. It looks as if the book coming out by Wendy and Marianne in late summer is likely to do well and put paradox on the map. HBS Publishing is not simply the best business book publisher in the world, it starts trends and gives credibility to what it backs. The question then becomes are we ready for a surge of academic and public interest in paradoxical phenomena? Judging by the newsletter, the recent on-line conference and my talks with several PhD candidates in the field many of us are far from ready. One reason that paradox is such a late-comer is that people are afraid of what is contradictory and is mind-blowing. Indeed, phenomena regarded as evil and dangerous are paradoxes all and we are very vulnerable of being accused of resurrecting a vampire. Wicked people set out to destroy, by using paradoxes or “double-binds.”

Putin, for example, assures several world leaders that he is not going to invade Ukraine and then does precisely that. In *Sophie's Choice* a mother is asked to give up her daughter or son for immediate execution. The Nazi officer seeks her complicity in the death of her child. The Mafia chief will hug you and give you the “kiss of death” as an accomplice stabs you in the back. We survive by distinguishing life from death. A ghost which juxtaposes one with the other is therefore a source of terror and maddens us. This explains why the KKK dress themselves in white sheets to haunt black people and why they set fire to crucifixes, images of compassion. All these are paradoxical in form and unless we are careful, we could be accused of abetting them. We are actually talking of phenomena that *resemble* paradoxes but are capable of being reconciled and will damage us *unless* reconciled. Quantum physics is full of paradoxes but all have been resolved and no human rationality has been sacrificed in the process. Hence a paradox is a challenge to which we can rise and when reconciled makes us more healthy, more wealthy and wiser.

I have read two dissertations and talked several PhD candidates on-line and it is clear that they are struggling with the formulation of their problems and that their supervisors, in two cases, were still asking them to predict and control dependent variables with independent ones. This is not even 20th century physics but 19th century physics and totally unsuited to a paradoxical world. That black and white object I see in the grass *looks* like a football, so I give it a powerful kick. If it turns out to be a pit-bull, I could get a very nasty surprise! We “cause” dead objects not live creatures to do our bidding. These have a preference for not being kicked. What we do with living beings is *trigger* their values and then resolve any paradox that emerges. We need to show that resolved paradoxes create wealth, build science, help us learn, sustain the eco-system and develop societies.

In my view we do not have to search out paradoxes through interviews. These are everywhere. For a start, all value judgements come in contrasting pairs like red and green traffic lights. If you *love* your partner, you will *hate* any infidelity, likewise if you love a child, you will hate him/her running into a busy road. We cannot even define *competing* without using *cooperating* as a contrast. In science we *doubt* in order to *verify*. In business we risk *losing* in order to *gain*. In continuously improving we *err* in order to *correct*. Evolution alternates *luck* with *selection*. A *rule* is tested and revised by counting *exceptions*. An *individual* is fulfilled through serving a *community*. I could continue indefinitely. Virtue is assured when these contrasts harmonize. Dysfunction occurs when they polarise and attack each other. In fascism the *fascies*, or rods, are tied together so as to beat outsiders. The solidarity comes from assailing enemies and scapegoats. Relationships are shoulder to shoulder, not face to face. I have designed several questionnaires where opposites either harmonize or polarize so that values that create wealth/wisdom can be distinguished from those that destroy it. Fons has used these successfully in his consulting for fifteen years or longer. My book *Maps of the Mind* described sixty paradoxes posed by great thinkers as early as 1981.