THE MORNING STAR

Who should we listen to?

By Ephraim Radner

Who should you listen to? Who do you trust to learn something from? These are important questions for students, obviously. But they are important for everyone in a society like ours that is torn between hyper-criticism and the gullible consumption of what we now call "fake news." We are taught to mistrust teachers and experts because most of their views are driven by self-serving bias; yet we gravitate to a plethora of (mostly internet) claims about all kinds of goods and ills – medical, psychological, social, political – that have very little proven basis behind them. The sum of it is that we end up listening to those who already think as we do, or who stoke our unconscious proclivities and passions.

Our supposedly critical society, then, is also one of the most self-deceived. Self-deception is, of course, not just a great issue for our times, it has always been a fundamental challenge to the truth. The late philosopher Herbert Fingarette wrote a wonderful book on self-deception that focused on our responsibilities to avoid it, responsibilities that finally centre on our wills and the things that entice them to avoid our duties on this score. Fingarette explained self-deception's antidote in terms of continually "spelling out" why we believe this or that, and seeing if it makes any sense in the light of other people's judgments. If you can't or don't want to spell things out in this way, you are willfully deceiving yourself.

A problem

But there's a problem here: we all need help in just this task. It's not something that comes easily; in fact, it is something that is learned, and someone needs to teach us. So: who should we listen to? Who do you trust to learn something from – learn so that you do not live your life as the pawn of your self-deceiving will?

UPCOMING EVENTS

Mar 13, Fri
Workshop— Transhumanism: Ethical, Theological, and Moral Dimensions, p.3

Public Lecture— Transhumanism: Utopian or Dystopian Reality, p.3

Mar 18, Wed
St. Augustine Seminary and Wycliffe exchange, p.3

Mar 20, Fri
At Home, Wycliffe's Annual Formal, p. 3

The question is especially acute for Christians, in matters of faith. The "Gospel," after all, is "good news." As with any "news," it is as good as those who bring it. And "testimony" has always been central to the Christian faith – prophets, apostles, evangelists. Why listen? St. Paul often appeals to a "tradition" that he has received from others (e.g. 1 Corinthians 15: 1, 3). Should we trust it? Why believe another person's testimony? Why trust someone else's reading of the Scriptures (let alone your own)? "Trustworthiness" is a central issue here. And nowadays – perhaps always – we are prone to say that "trust is earned." What do we mean by that?

Going back to ground zero

There is a recent school of philosophy known as "conciliationism," that deals with the question of how we know something. Conciliationists make the bold claim that, if faced with someone we disagree with who is as smart as we are, knows as much as we do and so on, we should suspend all our own beliefs on the matter in disagreement, and take the other person's beliefs with equal seriousness. In a way, we should go back to ground zero in our reasoning. This holds for simple things like calculating a tip with a friend at the restaurant, all the way to belief in Jesus. If I disagree with my friend about the tip but know her to be as smart as I, I have no reason to believe that my own calculations are in fact better than hers. And so with matters of theology. The name conciliationists give to that other person, just as smart and knowledgeable as I, is my "epistemic peer" – my "peer in knowing." Conciliationists tell us that all our beliefs should be held in suspension in the face of contrary beliefs held by our epistemic peers; we should "trust" them as much as we trust ourselves.

The idea here is not far-fetched. Unfortunately, epistemic peers are hard to define, let alone find, as we move into areas of value and ultimate truth. No one shares our experiences exactly; not even closely. Consider what we "know": a sense of empathy; the sting of sorrow; the depth and tone of yearning; the long hours with a crying child; a career working with prison inmates; hours of rehearsals for singing the Fauré Requiem. How do we find a "peer" for knowledge of the soul or of the human heart, of the good, the beautiful, and the true? Even our friend calculating the tip at the restaurant is someone we have come to know only over time, to see in action, so as to gauge their numerical quickness. And until such trust is earned, as peer or superior, we are left to our own devices, searching for the trustworthy person who is beyond our ken.

What basis for trustworthiness?

Societies often provide certifications to ease such trust: degrees, teaching credentials, diplomas in mechanics, a published CV. But in our critical culture, these are questioned in any case. Having a doctorate in some subject is often viewed as a recipe for narrowness and distorted self-confidence, rather than true knowledge. Some organizations, especially churches, seek to discern a person's "character" as the basis for trustworthiness. But character turns out to be hard to discern in any stable way; it is often hidden and takes time to emerge or to prove itself; and, too, it often disappoints. The church, again, has seen this over and over. It is best when certification and character come together somehow in a person, in a way that experience can demonstrate over the long haul. Often, we call this "wisdom," and such a person "wise." If we are to trust anyone, it is just such persons. Who should we listen to? Not experts, not peers; but the wise. Those who "spell things out" in a way that dissolves our self-deceptions, puts our own beliefs into the light and opens us to truth... *(due to its length, please visit our blog at* wycliffecollege.ca/blog/who-should-we-listen *for the full article.)*

Wycliffe College Student Events

ST. AUGUSTINE'S SEMINARY / WYCLIFFE COLLEGE EXCHANGE— THE FUTURE OF THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION PROCESS

Wednesday, March 18, 2020, 3:15 p.m.—7 p.m. at St. Augustine's Seminary of Toronto, 2661 Kingston Road (at Brimley Road), Scarborough

Join us at this special Wednesday event with speaker Fr. David Reilander, President, Catholic Missions In Canada. Dr. Alan Hayes will preach. Wycliffe Students and Faculty are asked to **RSVP by March 11, 2020** to Karen Baker-Bigauskas at principalsoffice@wycliffe.utoronto.ca , or 416-946-3521.

Here is the schedule of the day:

3:15 p.m.   Gathering and refreshments
3:45 p.m.   Lecture followed by Q&A
5:15 p.m.   Evening Prayer
6:00 p.m.   Dinner

THE ROARING TWENTIES - WYCLIFFE AT HOME

Friday, March 20, 2020, 6:00 p.m.—11:30 p.m. at Wycliffe College

Wycliffe's Annual Formal (At Home) is on March 20th. Dinner, drinks and dancing. The theme this year? The Roaring Twenties! It is 2020 after all. Wear your favourite 1920's fashion finds, learn a new dance (swing dancing) and enjoy some thoughtful delicacies and desserts. The party begins with dinner and ends with a dance. Buy your tickets at the front desk or online at https:// www.eventbrite.com/e/the-roaring-twenties-wycliffe-at-home-tickets-97328372783. For those that find the price of the evening challenging, please talk to Karen Baker-Bigauskas as there are bursaries available for students who need it.

Public Events with Stephen Williams

WORKSHOP — TRANSHUMANISM: ETHICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND MORAL DIMENSIONS

Friday, March 13, 2020, 9 a.m.—11 a.m. in Leonard Hall, Wycliffe College

In this workshop with Dr. Stephen Williams, we will discuss the ethical, theological, and moral dimensions of transhumanism. This is a free event and no registration is required.

PUBLIC LECTURE — TRANSHUMANISM: UTOPIAN OR DYSTOPIAN REALITY?

Friday, March 13, 2020, 7 p.m.—9 p.m. in Leonard Hall, Wycliffe College

Join us at this public lecture with Dr. Stephen Williams: *Transhumanism: Utopian or Dystopian Reality?* This is a free event and no registration is required.

From the Registrar's Office

Barbara Jenkins
Registrar, Director of Enrolment Management

TST SCHOLARSHIPS

Applications are now being accepted for the TST Board of Trustees Scholarships, Bursaries and Awards. Applications must be submitted by 4:00 p.m. EDT, Thursday, March 26, 2020.

A general flyer and individual award flyers are posted to the notice board. More information and application forms are available on the TST website at https://www.tst.edu/academic/scholarships-and-bursaries. (Select "TST Board of Trustees Scholarships, Bursaries and Awards").

There are two awards open to non-Ontario residents/international students. These are the Marjorie Watson Powles Award and the David Cameron Memorial Award. All the rest are for students who are Canadian citizens, permanent residents or Protected Persons, and are residents of Ontario.

Please note, only currently registered TST students may apply, incoming students are not eligible.

KEY ACADEMIC DATES

- **Apr. 1, 2020 - Registration opens for summer courses.**

- For more academic dates, visit https://www.tst.edu/academic/key-academic-dates.

Job Opportunity with the Graham Library

Student assistant positions in the library for 2020-21 are open. You may apply online at https://www.trinity.utoronto.ca/discover/about/working-at-trinity/career-opportunities

Applications will be accepted until Tuesday, March 10, 2020.

Lenten Devotionals

Lent is a time of solemn reflection leading up to the celebration of Christ's resurrection at Easter. As a tradition, Wycliffe College reflects on the self-sacrifice of Christ together as a community through weekly Lenten devotionals written by our students.

You receive them in your email inbox only if you sign up specifically for these devotionals. Sign up at https://www.wycliffecollege.ca/newsletter and check the "Weekly Lenten and Advent Devotionals" option.

Merchandise

Purchase your Wycliffe College crewneck sweater for $39.99 each! You may order them at the front desk or at the UofT bookstore. Go to *wycliffecollege.ca/merchandise* for more details!