

CIPSET: THOUGHTS ON SOCIALLY ENGAGED RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP: DIFFERENTIATING THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ENGAGED SCHOLARSHIP FROM 'COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT'.

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Introduction

This Note sets out CIPSET's ideas about socially engaged research and scholarship. Its purpose is to explain how such engaged scholarship is understood, how it might be advanced and its value to the university. We believe that these issues need to be discussed and debated more widely within the university and between the university and its constituencies so that the most effective approach is adopted towards building a relationship between the university and its 'communities'. We understand too that there can be no universal approach to this issue since contextual issues make any unchanging definition difficult. We know too that although some academics regard engaged social research and scholarship as axiomatic in any statement about the role of universities, some academics and administrators remain sceptical about its value. For many such academics and administrators, while engaged scholarship might have some limited value it is not intrinsic to the life and work of universities and is often regarded as a distraction from the 'core' activities of universities. From their perspective, and not unexpectedly, academics are likely to say things like – 'I think this work is important but it's not work that academics should do'.

Their skepticism can be attributed to several causes:

- a) The structure of rewards and incentives based on the funding formula for the national system of higher education makes it unproductive to be involved in engaged research and scholarship
- b) The criteria for upward mobility and promotion in higher education institutions is less favourably disposed towards this area of work relative to research and post-graduate supervision
- c) Engaged scholarship is often regarded as no more than 'development work' characterized by its applicative nature justifying the assumption that it is devoid of 'genuine' scholarship. In effect the weaknesses of some conceptions of 'community engagement' which are in fact

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devoid of any orientation to the scholarship implied in such engagement provides the argument in support of denying the value of all such engagement.

- d) Most academics have little or no experience of doing work in this way and are therefore unfamiliar with the scholarship implied in engaged research. Indeed there is a body of academic writings which is dismissive of the value of such work regarding it as less than rigorous relative to research which is more conventional and discipline driven. This is not to suggest that discipline-based knowledge is less useful. On the contrary such knowledge is of great value especially if it is to be understood relationally in situations which call for the diverse disciplines to be brought together in understanding a phenomenon of social and scientific complexity. But the debate about the value of relational knowledge raises questions about the value of inter and multi-or-trans disciplinary approaches to the analysis and resolution of social phenomena, greater connectivity between the domains of knowledge; attention to community based issues which are not bound within academic areas of knowledge or academics ways of knowing alone; requires careful attention to the complexity and diversity of the grounds and types of knowledge and their provenance; knowledge that is trans or multi-disciplinary; implies an awareness of the methods of research and enquiry best suited to the process of community engagement; assumes an interest in the life, languages, cultures, traditions, practices and prejudices of communities and also requires knowledge and expertise in finding the relationship between the disciplinary areas of knowledge – all of which are necessary to better understand that the complex issues facing communities – especially of the working class and poor, are examined in an integrated and multifaceted way.

The skepticism notwithstanding, the idea of 'community engagement' has been vigorously championed at the NMMU – especially through the office of the Deputy VC for Research. The university has developed policies to take forward its mandate relating to this area of work and envisages a more systemic approach to the relationship with communities. The NMMU's Vision 2020 document specifically asserts the importance of making the university 'a responsive and engaged institution that contributes to a sustainable future through relevant and critical scholarship'¹. It hopes to pursue this through wide ranging partnerships and collaborations whose purpose is to generate knowledge that will be useful to both its external and internal communities. The University's Vision is aimed, inter alia, at stimulating the development of a democratic culture and responding to the demands of the 'public good', while simultaneously clarifying the university's conception of its 'community' and 'publics' and strengthening the corpus of its scholarly activities more generally.

1. See the University's Institutional Regulatory Code and Policy on 'Engagement Excellence Awards' dated 10 08 2011

In more conventional approaches to the purposes of universities, the idea scholarship *through research* is the key to the conceptualization of higher learning. This idea has great merit and needs to be cultivated because research is critical to the life and work of academics and is useful for encouraging leading scholars in the field to seek employment at the university, for better academic networking and collaboration with other researchers. It brings prestige to the university and most importantly attracts increased funding through research outputs and post-graduate supervision.

At its most fundamental level the argument for socially engaged research and scholarship [SES] is based quite simply on the idea that publicly funded institutions of learning and research are morally, socially, philosophically *and* for good economic reasons obliged to ensure that the research and teaching they do has relevance and use for society.

1. SES and 'relevance'

It is important to differentiate this idea – the idea that public funds must be used for good public purposes – from the debate about whether the requirement of 'relevance' acts as a constraint on the intellectual freedom and 'independence' of the academic enterprise. In the orientation we adopt, intellectual independence is absolutely essential in relation to the corpus of the scientific endeavours undertaken by researchers in academia but is not a justification for avoiding the obligation to ensure that research and scholarship – even if it is 'blue sky,' is publicly accountable; that it is socially justifiable and does not avoid the responsibility to engage with the pressing social and scientific questions that arise in democratic societies and the choices that inform the utilization of public resources since resources for scientific work are never unlimited.

The debates about 'relevance' which raise questions about whether such relevance has to be defined by a dirigiste state and its agencies or some other 'client' is, to that extent, not an issue which should detract us in this note since we have no doubt in our minds that academics need to apply their independent and critical minds to the description, conceptual formulation, development and production of research unfettered by bureaucratic fiat. This does not mean the avoidance of engagement with state bureaucracies since we believe that in many instances engaging with policy makers and bureaucrats can have extremely useful purposes in engaging with the process of defining and conceptualizing research that has implications for public policy. And this can be done without sacrificing the integrity of one's scholarship.

2. SES and Critique

Thus the approach we adopt here regards *critique* as intrinsic to science – all science, whether in the natural, social or human sciences, since that is the lifeblood of its growth and development. What is the role of critique in scholarly research? The idea of critique has long been the subject of theorization and practice. It refers to how phenomena are investigated and understood and what the implications of understanding might be for practice. Kant's proposition that knowing and the conditions under which we come to know are inextricable from each other and are contextually bound underpins such a view of critique². Especially in the social sciences (but not only in them) critique is therefore intrinsic to intellectual enquiry. One elaboration of this idea suggests that

The task of critical theory is to subject ... concepts, received understandings, and cultural categories constitutive of everyday life and public discourse to critical theoretical reconsideration, in order to interrogate the prevailing order of social and political modernity through a method of immanent critique – to advance a systematic and radical critique of society, demystifying how power, position and privilege relate to class, group and personal inequalities.³

Another⁴ suggests that

In critique, however, we transcend the strictly technical or practical as we consider how the forms and contents of our thought shape and are shaped by the historical situations in which we find ourselves ... and how history itself will be shaped by our praxis.⁵

Burnett⁶ too argues that critique is not simply synonymous with the acquisition of knowledge – it is more than that. Although change might be grounded on knowledge the question to ask is to what extent is such knowledge 'critical knowledge' or as he says, 'under critical control'.

Has knowledge become simply the supplier of means to non-debated ends or are the ends up for debate too? We do not have to invoke an image of a worn out and

² For a discussion of this issue see Robert Paul Wolff, *About Philosophy*, Prentice Hall 306-340

³ Peter Vale Memo Circa 2004

⁴ Kemmis, S (1985), *Action Research and the Politics of Reflection* in Bond D, Keogh.R and Walker D (eds.) *Reflection: Turning Experience into Learning*, London: Kogan Page: 142

⁵ *Ibid*: page 42

⁶ R. Burnett, *Higher education: A critical business*, SRHE –Open University, 1997, page 1.

unworkable central control to ask whether society can be said to be, in any real sense, steering its changes with the maximum insight that might be available.⁷

3. SES and other forms of 'engagement'

Engaged scholarship must be distinguished from other forms of academic work which are contiguous to, but significantly different from it. In this regard we think it is necessary to think more carefully about how the practice of 'community engagement' is conceptualized and what role commissioned consultancy plays in academic work. The former, in our view, has not been properly understood despite the numerous declarations of positive intent signifying support for community engagement. In fact we think that this is an issue for broader institutional debate so that its relationship to engaged scholarship is deepened and clarified. In regard to consultancy, here too, it is unclear how such work relates to the core functions of the university in regard to its scholarly mandate although we are aware of the considerable benefits that accrue to both the university and its commissioning agents. We turn to both these issues.

Community engagement

At the recent Talloires Network Leaders Conference,⁸ (or TNLC 2014) held at Stellenbosch co-hosted by the Higher Education Community Engagement Forum and the Cape Higher Education Consortium, the issue of community engagement (CE) was in the spotlight. As Robert Hollister, executive director of the Network said the overall goal of CE was to "reinforce university leaders from around the globe who're moving their institutions beyond the ivory tower – to chart future directions and to build support for them. I feel very good about what we accomplished together on these aims."⁹

And as the authors of the report in the newsletter of the World University News say, the Conference set the stage for debating the role of community engagement in

(E)ducating economically successful global citizens, expanding access to higher education, measuring the impacts of work with communities, influencing university rankings, incentives for engaged academics and a greater role for students.¹⁰

Participants spoke of the need to think of CE by developing a better informed theoretical and

⁷ Ibid:Page 6

⁸ Rebecca Warden 03 December 2014, Tackling the great social questions of the day – Talloires, WUN, Issue No:346

⁹ Ibid : 1

¹⁰ Ibid: Page 2

conceptual approach to the universities social role, about the problem of funding such engaged work, its integration into the mandate of teaching and research and stressed the need to reflect on the 'fundamentally social role of universities and their mandate for engaging with the communities they serve'. This role was exemplified by reference to a number of concrete examples drawn from issues relating to the 'spread of infectious diseases', jobs, climate change and other such issues of social import, pointing also to the tensions represented in the diverse interests in society.

These ideas are hardly new. Throughout history, and long before the ascendancy of western science, natural philosophers and pre-western experimentalists and observers like Aryabhata, Brahmagupta, Alberuni, Ibn al Haytem, Avicenna, the many Chinese inventors and others,¹¹ (and incidentally without the necessity of peer review) adopted an orientation to knowledge production (and its dissemination) that was invariably shaped by the context of their lives and by the impact of social questions. In Western Science itself the methodological prescriptions of Baconism have been wrongly interpreted as the 'obsessively inductive, essentially experimental methodology' inspiring the research programme of the Royal Society. Bacon did not (nor did Descartes for that matter) see the most productive scientists as analogous 'to the theory-spinning spider' or the 'data amassing' ant. Nor was his contribution to the scientific revolution about 'myopically inductive methods', - but about a bold and open-minded free ranging attitude to enquiry. The history of the Royal Society is similarly eloquent confirmation that it is not possible to speak of science without reference to the public purposes and the choices that define the interests it embodies.¹² Issues of social equity are inseparable from considerations about the effects of science since even the most stupendous achievements in science can have negative consequences for particular social groups. This is the case for instance in the dam construction projects for hydro-electric power in several countries. Science and its progress is, after all, inseparable from the prevailing relations of power in any society. That is why in thinking about the potentially humanizing capabilities of *publicly supported and funded* activity of any kind, there can be little justification for arguments that such activities are unaffected by considerations of *public account*. The important discussions about 'the public good' that have taken place in

¹¹ This is referred to in the monumental work of Joseph Needham on Chinese Science and several other writers on Arabic and African epistemologies in particular. See for instance, Winchester S, 2008, *The Man who loved China*, Harper Collins and Morgan M.H, *Lost History* 2008, National Geographic, Washington D.C

¹² The members of the Society – some of the most recognizable names in science (Wren, Hook, Boyle, Petty, Newton were amongst these) came to their craft with a strong inclination to address the problems of the day as any reading of the history of science will show. And this was also the preoccupation of the Academie Royale in Paris.

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this country were also about this issue, and are hugely instructive for all of us and although we do not delve in to it here it is worth studying in its own right.¹³

SES and Consultancy

Regarding the question of consultancy, academics in some institutions have turned to the business of consultancy in personally rewarding ways – often using the infrastructure and time paid for by institutions to attract very consultancy contracts for themselves. This has led to a rush into consultancy type report writing or research, initiated largely at the behest of outside firms and corporations and impacting mainly on those parts of the academy whose work is in some or other way related to the activities of such firms - business and commerce, law, engineering, and even some social sciences. In fact this has been a huge growth area and in in some cases – especially in the developed economies - it has resulted in the creation and development of business related ‘innovation’ hubs where universities exploit the possibilities presented by legislation like the US’s Bayh-Dole Act on intellectual property to support the development of businesses ventures.

The question of scholarly and critical research is of course related to the role of consultancy. What is the distinction between consultancy report writing and scholarly research? Of course there are instances of good consultancy to which many of the criticisms here would not apply but it is disingenuous to argue that consultancy work does not, in general, have the characteristics which fall short on a number of important criteria.

This is not unusual given that it is commissioned in the first instance to achieve closely defined outcomes. Consultancy work is often driven by the demands of immediacy, is not given to detailed analysis of the theoretical assumptions on which it is based nor a clear theorization of the research issues. It is also often empirically weak, superficial and perfunctory and does not proceed beyond document analysis. It does not provide comparative analysis nor does it evince knowledge of the literature on the subject. In addition – to state the obvious – client-driven research is invariably strongly influenced by the ideological and practical agendas of the agency which funds such research, as anyone who has had to draft research proposals and contract will tell you. It is also given largely to quantitative data gathering as its primary method of enquiry, adopts methods uncritically, and often has little orientation to the ethics of research. In general, there is little scholarship required in the production of Consultancy reports.

¹³ See Refs

4. Issues that need deeper consideration

In our view neither the declaratory pronouncements at the recent Talloires Network Leaders Conference about 'community engagement', with the historical affirmations referred to above nor consultancy driven work now very much a part of university life, tells us about how these activities can enhance socially engaged scholarship - i.e. the forms of scholarship that reach beyond 'responsiveness' to the demands of clients or 'service learning' and 'community engagement' as it is presently understood.

How indeed will such 'engagement' build on the attributes of knowledge to enhance research and post-graduate supervision; produce new knowledge which is useful for theorization and in practice; be useful to meet the demands of citizenship, intellectual and cultural output in its own right? And how will it be useful for the development of the curriculum, teaching and learning and the further development of research. What and how would it contribute to the development of research methods beyond the conventional ways of research which is not 'socially engaged' and how will it assist the development of the pedagogical strategies necessary for the dissemination of knowledge. How will it develop the dissemination of ideas and debate inside and outside the academy and beyond the limits of accredited publication. How will it assist as Diane Hornby has argued,

Going beyond the "good deed" approach to occupy a more critical and strategic role of enhancing scholarship, development, social cohesion and social transformation.¹⁴

And how as Badat says, will it enhance and enrich 'teaching and research that has mutually beneficial results ----(to) ensure that the knowledge acquired by students is contributing to the broader society.'¹⁵

How, in other words, will it contribute to the democratizing of knowledge since in our view socially engaged scholarship is very much implicated in the democratic project.

We think that these issues are of singular importance in any university that seeks to deepen access to knowledge – widen the reach of its community and provide ways of learning which are inclusive and inviting, rather than exclusive and forbidding. We do not believe that these questions have been explored sufficiently.

¹⁴ Dianne Hornby *Community Engagement: A Critical Pillar*, Rhodes University Newsletter on Community Engagement: 1

¹⁵ Referred to in Hornby above.

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We believe that some at least of the austere conventions of producing academic knowledge have to be re-examined for the purposes of SES and some extended beyond the present conventions which limit its possibilities. The question is – how can these things be done without a re-examination of the present conventions that defined the nature of academic work since SES is neither ‘charity work’ nor simply an ‘extension’ of the services of the university to ‘outsiders’ such as through additional classes for math and science over the vacation period or other similar activities. What are the scholarly attributes of the work of academics which genuinely advance the characteristics of engaged scholarship?

We believe that several issues might have to be considered more fully in providing a useful understanding on the concept of SES – besides the overwhelming idea that its strong aim is to democratize knowledge through the process of scholarly engagement with the constituencies of the university and engage with some of the most intractable challenges facing societies.

The first concerns a more purposive elaboration of the constituencies of the university’s ‘community’. The literature on this issue suggests that public universities are increasingly bent to the will of the market and are increasingly subservient to the pressures of knowledge commodification, its private usages and sale-ability for profit –all of which at the behest of corporate interests alone. These interests continue to define the agenda of university life - in some areas more than in others - without a coherent discussion of whose interests dominate in the corpus of university activities. Yet a proper exploration of this is necessary because of the heterogeneity of the composition of South African society, of its diverse and contradictory interests, of the large differences in the capacities of parts of this community relative to other parts and indeed to the privileged nature of groups, social classes, men and women, geographic spaces and such other characteristics which make speaking of ‘university community’ less than helpful. Beyond these industry related links and the courses and research they give rise to, very little it seems has been done to evaluate the needs and aspirations of other potential communities – especially not communities that are most socio-economically , politically and culturally marginalized. This requires serious consideration so that the specificities and criteria for the determination of a particular institution’s ‘community’ are delineated thoughtfully.

Secondly, research that is socially engaged requires an orientation to methodological questions which have not been debated or explored more fully. For instance, the idea of participatory and action based research is often frowned upon as being ‘subjective’ and unreliable as if to suggest that there can be any social research which is free of contention. Here the approach adopted by physicists following the Heisenberg principle is salutary even if it is not about the social sciences, since its essential premise is about the impossibility of absoluteness and certainty, providing the space for conjecture and speculation and laying bare the assumptions which underpin any

investigation. While such approaches to enquiry have received increasing recognition in research worldwide, it remains marginal to the work of especially those institutions still bound within conventional approaches to research and enquiry.

The manner of engagement with communities differs quite considerably one from the other. For instance, engaging with a community of academic peers is very different from the practices of social analysts working inside or outside of the legislative bodies of the country. And of course both these are quite different from the mode, purposes and forms of engagement with local communities, themselves having differences based on geographic location, levels of organization, languages of communication, levels of literacy, local histories, traditions and practices, issues of particular relevance to social science research largely avoided in conventional academic research whose mandate for engagement is more narrowly defined. This raises important questions about the relationship between research and its methodologies because of the dangers of 'objectifying' communities in research an issue dealt with by other scholars too.¹⁶ Increasingly scholarship must engage with the possibilities and value of ethnographic approaches to research, to satisfy the criteria of 'non objectification', to understand subjectivities and to integrate the methodologies of enquiry in mutually enriching ways.

We are mindful too of the conflicting research traditions in the sciences in general and in the social sciences in particular. Popkewitz¹⁷ refers to this conflict of intellectual traditions. For him, understanding this conflict requires

One of the ironies of contemporary social science is that a particular and narrow conception of science has come to dominate social research. That conception gives emphasis to the procedural logic of research by making statistical and procedural problems paramount to the conduct of research. This view eliminates from scrutiny the social movements and values that underlie research methods, and which give definition to the researcher as a particular social type. As a result, the possibilities of social sciences are at best limited, and at worst mystifying of the very human conditions that the methods of science were invented to illuminate.¹⁸

The necessity to engage and to construct methodologies for such engagement also leads to many questions about the *how* and *what* of dissemination. And these questions are compounded by the overt and other relations of power which pervade the publication of research more generally. This in turn has a decisive influence on the form of publication and writing that results

¹⁶ Dani Wadada Nabudere, TOWARDS AN AFRIKOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION AND AFRICAN REGENERATION Mpai2005@Yahoo.Co.Uk;

¹⁷ Popkewitz Thomas S, Paradigm and ideology in educational research, The Falmer Press, London 1984 page ix.

¹⁸ Ibid page 2

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from such research. In fact these modes are demanded by the very process of engagement. In addition to the production of written work for the research process itself (training and induction of researchers, to clarify the objectives of the research for communities) there can be a wealth of other writings emanating directly from the research. These could include reports and policy briefings for decision-makers, media and 'popular' writings, monographs and advocacy materials, discussion documents, conference presentations and academic writings¹⁹.

Thirdly, the criteria that require research to be subjected to the scrutiny of 'peers' and that it abides by the required normative scientific conventions about approved publication need to be extended to include the role of research in the stimulation of *public* dialogue and enquiry, public accountability and critical knowledge, disputation and debate – encouraging intellectual heterodoxy. These encompassing approaches arise much more from the Socratic tradition of and in the agora than the tradition of the relatively closed society of academia. For the social sciences in particular this also means that the ostensible separation between academic, intellectual and 'activist' in the discourse of *social policy analysis* has to be problematized since social policy research requires the production of systematic, analytical and sustained reflection *and critique* of the nature of public policies and their implications for and effects on society as a whole or on social classes and groups or communities.

Examined from the perspective of its public purposes, scholarship has several important attributes which go beyond the limits of the production of publications in a peer reviewed accredited journal. The measure of academic outputs (such as a fixed number of approved journal publications for a year) is inadequate to evaluate or understand the attributes of scholarship which must be viewed on a continuum between the varieties of research available for publication, post-graduate teaching, dialogic processes, public engagement and most importantly, critique. The implication of this is that Universities in particular need to carefully rethink their attitude to socially responsive scholarship and the criteria of scholarship. They need to think of how to support socially responsive scholarship without diminishing the value of academic and publishable work. More discussion and complex and nuanced criteria are required to take in the various forms of scholarly work. It is salient to remind ourselves that if all scholarship was judged only by its academic merit then we would be bereft of the great body of human knowledge acquired over many millennia in the great exchange of ideas throughout human history, since very little of it was produced within the conventions of academic publishing.

Perhaps most importantly – from the point of view of what is realistically achievable in the university at present – universities need to take serious note of the disincentives suffered by

¹⁹ For an example of popular writings see booklets produced by the in relation to its Education Rights Project

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academics who pursue such engaged scholarship. This affects their ability both from the perspective of the validation of their activities and their prospects for academic advancement. And critical to this is the problem of funding for such research that is 'outside the mainstream' and not properly accredited. These barriers ultimately shape the character and content of what is implied by the concept of SES.

Conclusion

The critical constitutive element of the life of universities through teaching, research and post graduate supervision can be fostered *together with* activities directed at the stimulation of a democratic culture through socially engaged scholarship. This requires a wider conception of the idea of scholarship as associated with the public mandate of the university. Boyer's view that scholarship should encompass not only the scholarship of research (discovery) but also the pursuit of *scholarship of integration, application, and teaching* should be amplified to include the *scholarship of public and socially meaningful engagement*. This implies not only the *ex post* 'application' of knowledge, but also an understanding of how knowledge is generated, to what purposes, in whose interests and about whose knowledge is privileged and whose excluded. As McLellan and Powers have pointed out (referring to the limits of conventional academic scholarship)

Simply put, we do not generally write for an audience beyond our academic associations and academic peers. We, and rightfully so, pursue what will help us keep our jobs.... (However) scholars among us as well as our professional academic associations have repeatedly called for making our research more accessible to the field. Yet, critics within our ranks have argued that doing so lessens the quality of our scholarship. Believing that our legitimacy is predicated on a new knowledge advancement platform akin to that of the natural sciences, we simply have not been able to break from Newtonian stasis.²⁰

Writing in a similarly critical vein Jean Dreze a regular collaborator with Amartya Sen on works dealing with public action by community groups in India, has this to say:

...social scientists are chiefly engaged in arguing with each other about issues and theories that often bear little relation to the world.... The proliferation of fanciful theories and artificial controversies in academia arises partly from the fact that social scientists

²⁰ [Rhonda McClellan and Joshua Powers](http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/05/04/essay-how-scholars-higher-education-can-be-more-relevant#ixzz1ttc4i4wt), May 2012, *Open Letter to Higher Ed Scholars*
<http://www.insidehighered.com/advice/2012/05/04/essay-how-scholars-higher-education-can-be-more-relevant#ixzz1ttc4i4wt>

thrive on this confusion (nothing like an esoteric thesis to keep them busy and set them apart from lesser mortals). To illustrate, an article in defense of rationality (vis-à-vis, say, postmodern critiques) would fit well in a distinguished academic journal, but it is of little use to people for whom rational thinking is a self-evident necessity – indeed a matter of survival.... It is no wonder that 'academic' has become a bit of a synonym for 'irrelevant' (as in 'this point is purely academic').²¹

Dreze is not at all dismissive of the value of academically rigorous study but insists that scientific pursuits can be enhanced even further if grounded in "real-world involvement and action". This implies the need for wider conceptions of scholarship in social settings where scientific knowledge is necessary to address the seemingly intractable issues facing democratic societies. It requires academics to reach beyond the responsibilities of conventional scholarship associated with the production of peer reviewed articles, teaching and post-graduate supervision. Academics can amplify their roles by participating in scholarship by making their intellectual outputs more widely available to the university's 'publics,' engaging with its many challenges intellectually and practically, building the relationship between the university and its community, relating academic knowledge to its application and producing new conceptualizations and theories by engaging with the critical issues that face society. It can support the production of scientific knowledge which is anchored in a deep and enduring approach to the 'public good' while it simultaneously interrogates commonly held ways of knowing by engaging with the wider range of the sources of knowledge and its epistemologies. This approach would enrich the university's capacity to engage with the direct experiences of society since; in these experiences too are deep reservoirs of understanding and local ways of knowing and acting which can often be relied upon to solve some of the seemingly intractable dilemmas facing society. By doing this the university can avoid the pitfalls of knowledge that ignores the possibilities of learning from social experience, relying solely on academic knowledge as *the only* and 'objective' basis of scientific understanding. As Susan Haack says in her book *Defending Science: within reason*, the idea that there is a universal and singular approach to science is not tenable because

Science is a thoroughly human enterprise, messy, fallible, and fumbling: and rather than using a uniquely rational method unavailable to other inquirers, it is continuous with the most ordinary of empirical enquiry, "nothing more than a refinement of our everyday thinking, " as Einstein once put it²².

²¹ Dreze, Jean, 2002, "On Research and Action", *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 2, 37 (9). New Delhi

²² Haack S, 2007, *Defending Science: within reason*, Prometheus Books, New York, page 7

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In our view science without a wider social purpose i.e. in the reductive²³ way that the idea of the 3rd mission of universities is sometimes conceived - does not orient itself sufficiently to the broader aims of scientific enquiry and the production of knowledge as envisaged by many of the greatest thinkers through the ages who have pronounced unequivocally on the social (and spiritual) purposes of knowledge; of knowledge as essentially about the resolution of social and human issues (even if these relate to the physical and cosmological environment inhabited by humans) and as inextricable from the purpose of addressing the lives of humans as conscious beings.

The implication of this is that we are enjoined by the very nature of our roles in academia to reflect on the social value and uses of knowledge, on the responsibility of public bodies and its academic faculty, and the relationship between knowledge and the power of the unexamined dominant ideas that hold sway in society. As scientists (social or otherwise) we are obliged to raise a number of questions about the nature of our undertaking, its social purposes and its value to society. We cannot avoid questions about how the emerging democratic state is reconfigured in this phase, whose interests are served by it, the orientation of the state to issues of class and gender, urban-ness and rurality, to social rights and individual choice, the powerful and the weak, the articulate and the subdued, about the effects of global corporate capitalism in relation to developing societies and the multifaceted range of factors which present a daunting complexity of intersecting issues for our scholarship.

Similarly, we should take serious account of the arguments against the commercialization of knowledge at the behest of powerful and intertwined military-corporate interests, not subject to the processes of public and democratic accountability. A critique of the commercialization of knowledge, its commodification and the consequences for research bodies remain important because through it we are reminded about democratic accountability in the use of public resources. The commercialization of knowledge regards practical knowledge (practical solutions to pressing social issues) as subsidiary to its primary purposes - profitability, military capability and supremacy. Commercialization is consequently largely disdainful of, and has little regard either for serious theorization or for knowledge which serves a public purpose. Good scholarship entails the production of socially useful knowledge and for that it must surely adhere to the idea that, like any other knowledge worthy of such a description, it must have coherence and integrity based on the criteria for its validation which is not self-serving.

²³ But see Robin Dunbar for how the concept of ‘reductionism’ in science is misunderstood. Dunbar – The Problem with Science Faber and Faber

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We need to think of how the university might properly support such socially engaged scholarship without diminishing the value of academic and publishable work. More discussion and complex and nuanced criteria are required to take in the various forms of scholarly engagement. If all research was judged only by its academic merit then we would be deprived of the great body of human knowledge acquired over many millennia in the great exchange of ideas throughout human history, since very little of it was produced within the conventions of academia.²⁴

We believe that SES can enhance the work of universities and extend the quality and content of its scholarship. Such work can raise a number of theoretical questions about the very nature of knowledge construction, its premises, methods and purposes; shape scholarship through engaged practice, interrogate public policy critically relative to its social effects through the process of engagement, develop a dialectical relationship between action and theory, ultimately augmenting the relationship between knowledge and the democratic society.

²⁴ Of the great ‘natural philosophers’ and scientists of the past it would be surprising to find any who produced scholarship by the conventions of academic research. See also See also Conner C.C, *A People’s History of Science*, Nation Books, New York, 2005, in which it is argued that nearly every significant advance in science was attributable to the prior experience gained from artisanal, seafaring, navigational, midwives, mechanical, blacksmithing, craft related and other ‘ordinary’ endeavour.