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CONFERENCE ON STATISTICS, SCIENCE AND
PUBLIC POLICY

QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY INTERNATIONAL
STUDY CENTRE

HERSTMONCEUX CASTLE, HAILSHAM, UK
18-21 APRIL 2018

PRIVILEGE, PRIVACY AND PRIORITIES

SUMMING-UP

Michael Kirby

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THE 22ND CASTLE CONFERENCE

This was a “vintage year” according to Professor Alan Merry (University of Auckland, New Zealand). We gathered once again at Herstmonceux Castle just as the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting of 53 member countries, decided that, on the demise of the Crown, Prince Charles, heir to Queen Elizabeth II, would assume the office of Head of

* Justice of the High Court of Australia (1996-2009); Commissioner, United Nations Development Programme, Global Commission HIV and the Law (2011-12) and (2018 -).

the Commonwealth, previously held by the Queen and before her by King George VI. We gathered in the year of the Armistice, which brought about the end of the war to end all wars, in November 1918.

This was the 22nd occasion on which Queen's University of Ontario had sponsored this conference in the magnificent setting of the Castle. As in previous years, the event was convened by Professor A.M. Herzberg of Queen's University. After an interruption of a year, the series began again with new zest. It took place between 18-21 April 2018. The concluding session occurs on Her Majesty's 92nd birthday. Having this week achieved her "sincere wish" that the Headship of community of nations that succeeds to the British Empire, should remain within her family, she will be well pleased. There is reason to think that so are we, the participants at this other Castle in her realm of England.

As usual, Professor Herzberg organised and launched the opening session of this year's conference. As usual, she resorted to alliteration to capture the main themes: Privilege, Privacy and Priorities.

The Castle conferences are multidisciplinary in design. Their purpose is to challenge the participants to think outside the silos into which education and professional lives too often confine highly intelligent people. This summation can capture only a few of the main memories as recalled by one participant. But is hoped that it will provide a record both for those who attended and for those who continue to follow the timely and challenging series of Castle conferences, of which this is the latest.

DISTINCTIVE TIMES

The year 2018 witnessed a number of distinguishing features, when earlier Castle conferences are compared:

- * The most noticeable were the clouds of foreboding that have come upon humanity since our last meeting. The vote of the people of the United Kingdom, in a referendum, to leave the European Union was divisive and unexpected. It involved turning away from internationalism in an attempt to restore the British “sovereignty” of earlier days. In the result, because Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales all voted to remain in the European Union, the outcome (still being worked out) has proved dangerous to the unity of the United Kingdom itself. Further, since we last gathered, an unconventional candidate has been elected President of the United States of America, Donald Trump. His words and actions have often been challenging and disconcerting. To many they seem specially dangerous at this vantage point of human history. This is because of the urgent need to confront major challenges dangerous to human survival: nuclear weapons proliferation; climate change; and missile development.

- * Another sombre note was marked at the beginning of our meeting. Exceptionally, we paused to remember five outstanding *alumni* of the Castle. The passing of so many highly talented participants in our meetings inevitably reminded us of our own mortality. And of the urgency of building peace, securing, human rights and

promoting justice in the world: as the *Charter* of the United Nations promised to do.

- * Yet, this year's meeting also had light and happy moments. The weather at the Castle was spectacular. The daffodils were in full bloom. The change of the Seasons brought hope and optimism. Many of the intellectual contributions also spoke of renewal and innovation.
- * One feature of this year's conference that stands out was the increased role played in our deliberations by women. At the first Castle conference in 1996 only 3 women were in attendance: Professor Herzberg (convenor) and Professor Conquest (who chairs this final session); and one other. For the first time, a session at the Castle was presented solely by women. Times are changing. From the success on this score, we must build other changes to reflect more faithfully the diversity of our planet.

DEPARTED ALUMNI

Normally an attitude of reserve and modesty about personal things has restrained all but quiet, personal mention of the death of much appreciated Castle participants of earlier years. But because in 2018 there were five *alumni* who had died over the preceding two years, exceptional permission was granted to mention, and reflect upon, the colleagues who had died. Their distinction reminds us of the diversity and congeniality of those who have been privileged to participate in our conferences:

- * Dame Margaret Anstee (UK) died aged 90. She was a leading diplomat, a considerable UN leader, a pioneer in women's equality and a witty and thoughtful participant in our events.
- * Professor John Bailar III (USA) died at 84. He was a chemist turned statistician. He mixed these disciplines to demonstrate the importance of concentrating, in the human response to cancer, upon strategies likely to have the biggest impacts.
- * Peter Cavanagh (Canada) was a passionate CBC broadcaster. A lifetime victim of poliomyelitis he three times learned to walk. He shared his experiences, uncomplaining, with us, and through media; with millions of others.
- * Professor David Strangway (Canada) was three times a university president. He worked in mighty projects including lunar mineral recovery; reporting on underground weapons tests; and engaging with friends from Africa in the indigenous diseases of that continent.
- * Richard Taylor (Canada) was a Nobel Laureate for this work on small particles (1991). He was brainy, and he knew it. He showed the importance of setting and maintaining high intellectual standards.

Just to mention the diverse and splendid careers of these colleagues of the past is to identify the unique and unusual features of *Castle alumni*. And of our own good fortune, which continues, in participating in this place.

OPENING KEYNOTE WITH A DREAM

Dr Mark Lachman (University of Toronto) delivered the keynote address on the first day. Fifty years after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jnr, he demanded that our minds return to reflect upon this master spirit. Like the play within the play in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Dr Lachman recounted one of Dr King's most notable speeches, when delivering his own. Because, in the rush of events, most people have only heard or seen short extracts of the speech he delivered from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C., Dr Lachman enriched us all by reading, with proper solemnity, the poetic language of the speech in its entirety. It was a precious gift to us. It taught the importance of poetry as well as prose in the communication of great thoughts. Its central message was one of love and equality for all. It added a certain musical cadence to the opening session of the conference. Yet it captured the mood of the present times because of the uncertainty and fear that is abroad.

Dr Lachman encouraged the participants in 2018 to add to the alliteration chosen by Dr Herzberg the words "Perseverance" and "Progress". Through national and international efforts since the "Dream" speech, the world has seen progress alongside the perils of the current time. It was a moving address on a timely topic.

SECOND DAY: ON PRIVILEGE

The subject of Privilege and its consequences attracted a powerful cohort of speakers. Professor Frank Berkshire (Imperial College) described privilege and its dual aspects. It can accord opportunities unfairly denied to others. Like being chosen, as he had been, to study at

Cambridge University. Or as we all have been, to engage at the Castle. Yet consciousness of privilege can often be the first step towards repaying that debt.

The speech was going well until Professor Berkshire made an unkind allusion to “sandpaper”, a stratagem used by a cricketer whom he was kind enough not to identify, whose goal had been to win the Privilege of victory, without the Perspiration of earning it.

Professor Emma McCoy (Imperial College) recounted her experience in the growing improvement in the recruitment of women in academic life in the UK. She recalled the need to overcome unfair privilege and the perception of it. After the birth of her first child she had rushed back to work after only four weeks leave, in a belief that this was necessary to maintain the privilege of her appointment. Later she was shocked to hear that female colleagues (and to a lesser extent male) were taking much more protracted periods of leave. Was this privilege abused? Or was it reality and human experience overcoming past prejudices?

Roger Scott-Douglas (National Research Council Canada) illustrated the abuse of privilege in wealthy societies: including the case of “affluenza” that led a young, spoilt miscreant to blame his crime on excessive privilege and parental indulgence of him. He described research funding in Canada and the central importance of pure science. This is not just a privilege for the clever. Investing in pure science may pay huge dividends. He mentioned, in this regard, the research of Professor Gerhard Herzberg, a Canadian Nobel Laureate in 1971 and father of our convenor.

Drs John Gerard and Paul Dufour together combined to recount the importance of political choices that affect the privileges for the few or the many. Erstwhile politician, Dr Ian Gibson (UK), spoke of the role of privilege in political advancement. This includes through the ongoing privileges shared by London clubs that play a continuing part in distributing advancement and favouring qualities that were not necessarily those most needed in political leadership.

SECOND DAY: PRIVACY

From the issues of Privilege, both negative and positive, the conference turned to the subject of Privacy. It did so in a session that was opened by three women colleagues. Professor Sheila Bird recounted her experiences in Scotland in the conduct of a survey of prisoners about HIV. Issues of privacy were intensely important to the incarcerated participants in the survey. When a fear arose that prison authorities would breach the walls of privacy by retrieving fingerprints from the survey forms, and so identify the respondents, an organiser, one step ahead of potential invaders, revealed that he had smeared the forms to smudge the fingerprints. Not all subjects are so canny or self-protective.

Dr Sally Merry (New Zealand) described high levels of mental ill health and suicide in modern society and the way in which mobile phones can sometimes provide immediate access to help, as well as counselling and private advice. Whilst society needed to be protected from big data, it also had to realise that such data can sometimes lead to improvement in social outcomes.

Dr Mary Thompson (Waterloo University) explored the logical means of replacing the previous passwords that are so readily forgotten, not least because of their very number and variety. Biometrics, involving eye scans and fingerprinting may shortly replace numerical passwords, that, it seems, are often easily overcome.

These diverse instances of contemporary technology provoked many contributions from participants. Mark Lachman derived a conclusion as to the increasing importance of trust. Ian Gibson (UK) addressed the new privacy regulations being developed in the European Union. He asked why, in respect of social media, subjects should not be entitled to 'opt out' of, or 'live down', the indiscretions of earlier data.

SECOND DAY: PRIORITIES

Lord [Julian] Hunt (University College, London) explained holistic solutions to complex problems. He recounted the forgotten role of Jan Smuts in 1925 in inventing holistic approaches. He distinguished "integrative solutions" and went on to apply these competing concepts in the context of his own special interest: the protection of the global environment.

Dr John Stone (Carleton University) developed the environmental controversies into the need for a political and social consensus in responding to global climate change. He told of how investors in many corporations that have significant implications for climate change are now demanding responsibility on the part of corporations and their directors, so as to protect the planet.

John Burris (Burroughs Wellcome Fund) laid emphasis on the importance of education, including college education. He suggested that the key to improving personal capacity was to insist on educational flexibility, particularly in responding to rapid technological change. He pointed out that of the ten jobs now in top demand amongst university graduates most did not exist ten years ago. Flexibility of education and attitude was the key to taking advantage of change.

Professor Henry Dinsdale (Queen's) suggested a number of possibilities and priorities for the human species, concerned about its future. These included peace; trade and investment; control of population increase; response to climate change; and protection of universal human rights. He suggested that the answer to the question 'what makes God smile?' was: the sight of human beings making their plans for life. Chance and luck play an inescapable role. Planning priorities are necessary and understandable. However, anticipation was all too likely to unravel because of the underlying and unpredictable changes in the world.

SECOND DAY: ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE PANEL

A post prandial panel examined, under the watchful eye of Hon. Peter Milliken (Queen's), issues arising from the advance of artificial intelligence and its likely impact on society, employment, professions and human culture.

David Hand explained the operations of algorithms. In his usual lucid way, he concluded optimistically about the potential of artificial intelligence to aid humanity, including by supporting the human response to perceived problems.

Andrew Thomson (Bailly School & International Studies) took the audience into an understanding of the responses by the Canadian Department of External Affairs to the challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence in the complex global role of that department.

In the contribution of this reviewer an explanation was given of the difficulty of formulating legal regulation of technology, based upon the experience of designing laws to respond to the challenges of computers to privacy and personal integrity. One reason why ordinary citizens were concerned about AI was that highly intelligent commentators, including the recently deceased Stephen Hawking, had expressed concern that, unless humans retain active supervision of AI, robots may take over the world, or at least decision-making in very dangerous areas of activity.¹

The writer reminded participants of the occasionally critical intervention of human judgment to preserve human society. A Soviet military officer in 1983 during the period, when Leonid Brezhnev was ruler of the USSR, had the responsibility of initiating the first steps in a Soviet response to an ‘attack’ by Western missiles and atomic weapons. When the alarm sounded it was later found that it was responding to sunlight on clouds, and not advancing American rockets. The officer, Stanislav Petrov,² applied human intelligence to the computer warning. He reasoned that if the US intended to send rockets, it would not be the small number supposedly on the way. He therefore overrode the automatic procedures. But in the current moves to greatly upgrade both

¹ Drawing on three insightful special reports in *The Economist* newspaper, “The Return of the Machinery Question” (special report artificial intelligence, June 25, 2016); *Technology Quarterly: Brain-Computer Interfaces*, “Brains and Machines – Thought Experiments”, *The Economist*, January 6, 2018; and “GrAI Expectations” special report: AI Intelligence, *The Economist*, March 31, 2018.

² Obituary, *New York times*, 18 September 2017; *The Economist* “midnight and counting”, 30 September 2017.

the Russian and United States' nuclear weaponry, would a sensible officer Petrov still have relevant functions to perform? Interposing common sense and preserving human judgment, experience, wisdom and sensibility are not necessarily attractive to those who talk of "upgrading" to "thinking machines". There may therefore be further wisdom in Stephen Hawking, when he speaks to us on this subject from the grave.

THIRD DAY: EQUALITY AND ETHICS

On the third day Dr Alan Merry (New Zealand) led the conference through explanations of the deep scars left on indigenous communities, including the Maori in New Zealand, by their interface with settler societies. The awakening of indigenous consciousness followed shocking statistics of deprivation, incarceration and social disadvantage. Urgent solutions to these problems were needed and these would not start without proper engagement with the indigenous communities themselves.

Dr Andrew Thompson examined internet values and the increases in fraud and the ways society can respond. Professor Gerald van Belle (University of Washington) analysed the problems of informed consent and the difficulty of observing survival techniques for cardiac arrest. He recounted cases of low survival if established techniques were observed. But Dr Merry described his own application of such techniques on three occasions, in each of which the subject recovered. Which perhaps shows the impossibility of creating absolute ethical rules and procedures in many activities addressed to human subject.

THIRD DAY: ECONOMICS

The ensuing session examined the dismal science of economics. Despite its forbidding reputation, it was this session that produced the best humour of the conference. Dr Alan McHughen recounted the last time that he had been invited to attend a Castle Conference. That was 17 years ago. When he tentatively asked Professor Herzberg why such a long interval had lapsed between invitations he was reminded that he had failed to wear a tie on the previous occasion. So, tieless, he suggested that his next invitation might come in 2035.

He then gave an insightful address on the struggle of Monsanto Corporation with the opponents of GM foods. He condemned the power of irrationality in argument. This became an important theme of the banquet address that followed on the same day on the part of the former German Ambassador to Canada, W.N. Wnendt. There was a natural coalescence given that the subsidiary of the German corporation, Bayer AG, had now acquired Monsanto. But according to Dr McHughen, the growth of the human population is such that, without new sources of food and water, the human species will not be able to survive. That is why the irrationality factor must be kept under firm control by organised society.

Professor Keith James (Queen's) enlivened scant enthusiasm when he declared that the participants were mostly "in the autumn of their years". But he turned from this melancholy reflection to give an excellent analysis of how the burden of financial inequality had increased in many countries. And what could be done about it.

Professor Paul Allin (Imperial College) analysed the “happiness index” and asked whether this was a useful social tool. Professor David Hand declared that it was perfectly possible to measure reports of wellbeing. And that such reports would have a value. Dr Ian Gibson questioned the objective measurement of wellbeing. In his opinion “wellbeing” was the feeling that comes over good citizens when the home team wins at football.

This speculation was followed by an eloquent panel chaired by Professor van Belle. A star contribution to that panel was made by Dr Mario Pinto. He made many fresh and valuable contributions to the 2018 conference. He gained the respect of all because, on his watch as Director of the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Government had announced a 25% increase in its investment on pure scientific research. All participants, especially those deriving from outside Canada, wanted to know what Dr Pinto’s secret had been in persuading politicians to such a wise conclusion.

As usual, the banquet dinner was an occasion of elegance enlivened by an excellent address. The former German Ambassador to Canada spoke about privacy protection in the age of *Facebook* and other social media. But he cautioned against too much pessimism. And he acknowledged progress that had occurred for humanity by the invention of the internet, with all of its problems and challenges.

FOURTH DAY: SECURITY AND LAW

On the final day of the 2018 conference, the session on Privacy, Privilege, Security and Law was led by Dr O. Güvenen (Bilkent

University, Turkey). He described the decision systems in international and transnational organisations. He reflected on social changes that are rehashing in Turkey and its region. He insisted on the importance of analysing the way in which decisions on security matters and otherwise are actually made in modern societies. He offered his address against the background of long-time experience in international agencies.

Dr Alan Merry (NZ) described the importance of team work in medical decision-making. Outcomes achieved in work performed collectively were almost inevitably improved by comparison with individualistic approaches. Debra Robinson (Department of Justice, Canada) spoke on hacking. She described the *Panama Papers* saga involving disclosure of data stolen from owners to the embarrassment of data subjects, sometimes possibly deserved. She profiled the typical faces of criminal hackers intruding into Western information systems. Many of them derive from the “usual suspects” including the Russian Federation, Iran, North Korea etc. She then explored the appropriate responses to hacking. The participants reflected on the likely continuance of this issue given the strong suggestion that hackers authorised by the Russian Federation had seriously and effectively intervened in the outcome of the 2016 United States presidential election, resulting in a decisive shift in favour of the successful candidate, Donald Trump.

The concluding session that followed was a blended panel session. It was led off by Dr J.H. Beall (Johns College). He reminded the participants of the ideals of the founders of the United States, many of which ideals were derived from intellectual leaders in Britain and France at the time of the American Revolution.

His address was followed by the usual wise, stirring and empathetic speech by Dr Ian Gibson (UK, former MP). In a confection of witty stories, always with a point, he brought together instances from his political life and experience and the lessons he had learned from it. Those lessons included that one should never allow evidence to get in the way of good policy; that in political life, progress was occasionally made when cleaners in the course of their duties moved the filing of documents on ministerial desks to another place. By his good humour and grace he demonstrated once again the wisdom of those who had repeatedly elected, and re-elected, him to the House of Commons.

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Probably in keeping with the rather sombre mood of 2018, the humour at the 2018 conference was, unlike the daffodils, thin on the ground. Sir David Cox had at earlier meetings, always contributed, in his whimsical way, to the wit and wisdom of the Castle. When we were mid-session, Professor Herzberg and this reporter telephoned him to report on the session and to express the hope that he would return in 2019, and not just for his humour. He interrogated us on the deterioration of humour and declared that this was a very serious development indeed.

Despite the thin pickings, the winning humour of 2018 was awarded to A.G. McHughen (University of California). His explanation of his 17 year banishment from the Castle was a whole lot more humorous than if he had been confined to a dungeon in the Castle. So, he must rely his blessings and count upon mercy in the handing out of invitations before 2035. And wear a tie.

The musical session was, as usual, graceful, elegant, civilised and memorable. The rich mezzo soprano voice of Louise Winter could be heard throughout the Castle. The personal favourite of this reviewer were the songs of Schumann that she executed in grand style, accompanied by Julius Drake.

The year 1919 was the year of the peace conference at Versailles, with the treaty of that name that planted the seeds of the Second Great War. But also, the foundation of the League of Nations whose failure eventually led to the United Nations. A century on will be a good time for another gathering of interdisciplinary speakers, and those who rejoice in their insights in 2019.

To Agnes Herzberg, to her supporters at Queen's University, to those who record and those who report on these busy days, our thanks. The 2018 conference was indeed a "vintage" one. Those who were privileged to be there express their gratitude, as they look with confidence to the future.