Wisdom and Knowledge

People tend to think that knowledge and wisdom go hand in hand; meaning that everyone who gets good education and acquires a good deal of knowledge becomes wiser. There is no doubt that knowledge contributes to making people more thoughtful and thus wiser. However, knowledge, just like technology, is a valuable, multi-task tool; it could be used to build houses or destroy villages. Caterpillar bulldozers, for example, are used in Dubai and India to build homes and high rise office buildings, while in Palestine they are being used by the Israelis to destroy Palestinian villages and uproot ancient olive trees. This means that what determines the role knowledge plays in societal life is not the quantity or even the quality of knowledge, but the ethics and integrity of the persons who have knowledge and the right to use it.

Education is a continuous process through which knowledge is taught and acquired; therefore, schools and universities bear a huge responsibility; they must ensure that people who come to them for education are taught not only how to acquire and retain knowledge, but also how to use it to help improve the quality of societal life, not to harm others or destroy life. The learning process starts at home as children are raised and continues at schools; parents, teachers and educators share the responsibility for teaching children and young men and women how to be responsible citizens. In addition, the way traditions are practiced, and how laws are enforced and perceived by the public contributes to shaping people's values and attitudes.

Knowledge without ethics and the right attitudes is knowledge either wasted, or left to harm rather than help people. The 2008-2009 financial and economic crises have demonstrated that smart people with advanced management degrees used their knowledge to invent new financial products that no one understood, and use them to cheat people, manipulate the poor and old, deceive governments, and enrich themselves at everyone's expense. While many of the talented computer experts are using their brains to develop new programs to make our computers more efficient and easy to use, some of them are using their knowledge to develop computer viruses to destroy people's lives.

Knowledge does help people become wiser in managing their affairs and using the knowledge they have to benefit themselves and others; wisdom, meanwhile leads people to appreciate the value of knowledge which encourages them to acquire more of it. So, knowledge and wisdom do go hand in hand, but neither guarantees that the other will behave responsibly. Nonetheless, the more knowledge people acquire, the wiser they tend to become; and the wiser people become, the more knowledge they tend to acquire. However, the best way to use knowledge is to share it with others; while some might use what is offered to them to harm others, the majority will use knowledge to generate social benefits that will eventually reach millions of people worldwide and contribute to making our world a better one for all.

Mohamed Rabie

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