

## "10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium" of the Helsinki University Collegium for Advanced Studies<sup>+</sup>

Kirill O. Thompson<sup>\*</sup>



The Collegium for Advanced Studies in Helsinki ranks among the most well-established and successful university-based institutes for advanced studies in the whole world. The Helsinki Collegium has developed effective ways to stimulate fruitful cross-disciplinary research and, moreover, sponsors fruitful dialogues between humanities and social science researchers and among social scientists. Importantly, they have shown that the humanities scholars bring a sense of human values, cultural perspective and historical vision to the social scientists, while the social scientists in turn challenge the humanities scholars to keep their eyes to the ground and back up their insights.

In this spirit, the panel sessions at the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium addressed two challenging questions: "What's the Use? The Human Sciences in Contemporary Society" and "Why Institutes of

Advanced Study?," respectively, on March 20 and 21. (Regarding the former question, the expression "human sciences" encompasses the humanities and the social sciences in European academia.)

The Symposium opened in the morning of March 20 with Prof. Paavo Hohti, CEO, Finnish Foundationns and Prof. Marja Makarow, Chief Executive, European Foundation, giving general explanations of "What's the Use?" In the afternoon, various Collegium fellows spoke on how they "Put Use into Practice." Their fascinating presentations, to mention just a few, included Sari Kivisto on "J. B. Schupp and a 17<sup>th</sup> Century Satirical Utopia of Useful Knowledge," Nikolay Koposov on "History and Democratic Citizenship," Kirill Postoutenko on "Social Asymmetries: How They Shape Our Lives," Peter Swirski on "Two Cultures... and the Twain Shall Never Meet," Thomas Wallgren on

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<sup>+</sup> The conference was held at the Helsinki University, October 20-21, 2011

<sup>\*</sup> Professor of Foreign Languages and Literatures, National Taiwan University / Associate Dean, Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities and Social Sciences at National Taiwan University.

"Search for Truth as Search for Oneself: Socrates and Gandhi on the Unity of Philosophy and Politics, and Sirpa Wrede on "Professionalism is an Inequality Regime in Globalizing Care."

At noon on March 21, Carsten Dose of FRIAS at Freiberg University, Kirill Thompson of IHS at National Taiwan University in Taipei, Aafke Hulk of NIAS at Waasenaar, Barbro Klien of the Swedish Collegium at Stockholm University and Bjorn Wittrock of SCAS in Uppsala held a panel on the rationales and contributions of their respective institutes of advanced learning. They mentioned the measures taken by their institutes to stimulate creativity and productivity as well as to foster substantial cross-disciplinary research. IHS at NTU was distinguished with its program-based research approach applied to topics and issues of regional concern and drawing on the strengths of the humanities and social science faculties at National Taiwan University.

In the afternoon, Arto Haapla, Sami Pihlstrom and Raimo Vayrynen all spoke on the formation and development, as well as the trials and tribulations, of the Helsinki Collegium in reaching its present highly successful and productive state.

This conference featured a very innovative approach to presentations. The presenters had to distill their presentations into *a five minute essence*. In this way, the audience could catch a vivid, clear picture of each presenter's main points and moreover there would be ample time left over for discussion. Since the audience was stimulated by the brief presentations—and not worn out as usual by long presentations—the discussions were animated and highly stimulating. Additionally, I had the pleasure of meeting the world-renowned Kant scholar, Kenneth Westphal, who is a Collegium board member

An important point arose from the discussions. Humanities scholars often have important insights that could inform and influence the work of social

scientists, who sometimes suffer from tunnel vision and a lack of historical sense. During a talk on the misuse of surveys and statistics in social science research, I was reminded of the similar critique of the social sciences made by Dostoevski in *Notes from the Underground* back in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, during a talk on asymmetries, the speaker mentioned the asymmetry between first-person reports and third person reports of experience, I recalled Wittgenstein's critique of this very distinction on the basis of how human beings learn and use language in the stream of life. For Wittgenstein the distinction is grammatical only, not philosophical.

Finland is a country that is deeply dedicated to the ideal of human equality, not only the rights of every person to interpersonal respect and the necessities of life, but the entitlement of every person to a good education and the employment opportunities they deserve. Every East Asian country, even the United States, should learn from Finland's egalitarian ideal, because it has brought 1) relative general prosperity to the country as a whole as well as to each of its citizens, 2) a balanced, fair and uncorrupt political system, 3) a happy, healthy, intelligent population and 4) a social harmony that underlies the inevitable social disputes. Amazingly, every elementary school, junior high school and senior high school is basically equal in quality, and the average standard is quite high. The tuition is free, so students from less affluent families have an equal opportunity to go on for further study if they have the talent. Moreover, people all enjoy mutual respect and a decent salary, no matter their standing on the social scale, so the public life and social discourse are more intelligent and better informed than in most societies. Every country can learn from Finland's positive example.

This egalitarian ideal in mind, Antti Arjava of the Finnish Cultural Foundation questioned the rationale for funding Institutes for Advanced

Studies when the elite scholars there can easily secure research funds *via* other channels and when the funds dedicated for the IASs could be better used to fund the general schools or even assistance to the low achievement students who really need assistance! Such arguments would rarely be heard in the United States or East Asia. However, the leaders of the Helsinki Collegium and of the other IASs present replied that although IAS funding might look like a substantial amount of money, in fact it is miniscule when compared to the overall budgets of the host universities and school systems. They argued, moreover, that the IAS provides unique occasions to bring together researchers of different disciplines in a setting slightly removed from the ordinary push and pull of university life. The IAS thus provides a unique laboratories for fruitful reflection and innovation. The presentations by the fellows on the previous afternoon provided ample evidence of the value and impact of the sort of work being conducted at the Helsinki Collegium and at other IASs, including NTU's IHS.

Personally, it was a great honor for me to attend this Symposium as a representative of IHS at NTU. In fact, the organizers of this Symposium invited me to be a presenter at this event on the basis of two earlier presentations I gave at 1) FRIAS's conference on UBIAS held at Freiberg University in the Fall of 2010 and 2) Trinity College's Long Room Hub founding conference of ECHIC in Dublin in the Spring of 2011.

After attending the Symposium in Helsinki, I flew to Copenhagen to visit a Sinology professor at Copenhagen University and the Kierkegaard Research Center there. I discussed cooperation and academic exchanges with Sinologist Bent Nielsen and developments in Kierkegaard research with Professor Jon Stewart. We discussed activities and possible cooperation in regard to the Kierkegaard Bicentennial to be observed in May 2013. Lastly,

I took the train to Hamburg, Germany where I met Sinologist Michael Friedrich who showed me their new Center for Manuscript Studies at Hamburg University. We also discussed possible paths of organizational cooperation. All in all, it was a short but fruitful journey to northern Europe.

