Wisdom, Information, and Wonder: What is Knowledge For? *by Mary Midgley* (Routledge, London and New York, 1989), pp. x + 275, $US27.50, ISBN 0-415-02829-9.

We of the so-called developed countries live in a time when the sheer quantity of knowledge available to us at the drop of a hat is mind-boggling. 'Knowledge is Power', we are encouraged to believe, and this message has been carried to preposterous extremes, with knowledge (usually limited to information or data) flung at us from all quarters at all hours. We pride outselves on an ability to filter out the informational wheat from chaff, at a personal level, but as the title of this book suggests, the question "What is knowledge for?" often escapes us. Mary Midgley examines this issue from the point of view of a linguistic philosopher, and does it in a way that exposes many of the mindsets and hangups of scientists and philosophers who are still regarded as authorities. If for no other reason (and there are plenty) this book would be worth getting for that analysis alone.

If we wish to go further, and look at life — and knowledge — in its modern systems context, then we need tools and understandings that embody wisdom. These have the potential to go far beyond the reductionist, Cartesian framework that most of us (scientists or philosophers) were brought up with. Midgley deals firmly with the inadequacies of understandings gained from such narrow perspectives. In particular, she makes it very clear that science and the search for knowledge are not somehow specialised, and set apart from the rest of life. She proposes ". . . that none of us can study anything properly unless we do it with our whole being. A separate homunculus within, trained in the practice of an academic discipline, is not much more useful for these purposes than a performing flea" (p. 51). In other words, "It is sense we lack, not intellectual power" (p. 241).

In a convincing analysis, Midgley traverses the contributions of major philosophers since Plato, with particular emphasis on the contributions of Moore, Russell and Wittgenstein. She examines the roots of the conflict between specialisation and human wholeness. Her analysis of what we mean when we are involved in the quest for what we call knowledge reaches deeply into the philosophy of science as well as into the foundations of moral philosophy. "Philosophy is the formalisation of an ancient art which used to be called the search for wisdom, but we have got too prissy to use such words today" (p. 241).

The search for single, simple, universal truths has been the hallmark of much of the history of science and philosophy. Nowadays, it is becoming more and more clear that the most important intellectual search is for the ability to find the centre of a problem (p. 250). If we do our best to see a problem as a whole, rather than as a sum of fragmented parts, then we may reach the point of being able to say something useful about it. This book helped me to move towards that point.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given the analytical depth and rigour of the treatment, I found the book to be quite heavy going at times. The chapters are generally short and well-rounded, however, and provided the book is taken in easy bites, one does not suffer from mental indigestion.

What does one end up with, after reading it? Apart from a valuable resource text on an important topic, I gained a sense of relief that a great deal of the intellectual and professional baggage I have been carrying over the last 30 years

is probably irrelevant. It is marvellous how that conclusion helps to clear the mind, and lets one concentrate on what is really important!

The book is well-produced, with a clear type-face (important to those of us who are increasingly dependent upon our optometrist's skills) and easy to handle. I must admit to being faintly surprised at the lack of inclusive langauge.

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Trading Places: How We Allowed Japan to Take the Lead *by Clyde V. Prestowitz, Jr.*
(Basic Books, New York, 1988), pp. xvi + 365, US$19.95, ISBN 0-465-08680-2.

Between MITI and the Market: Japanese Industrial Policy for High Technology *by Daniel I. Okimoto*
(Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1989), pp. vx + 267, US$27.50, ISBN 0-8047-1298-0.

Japan is the largest trading partner of both Australia and the United States. It is, therefore, important for anyone concerned with the dynamics of the economies of either of these other countries to look closely at what it is that has brought economic success to Japan. These two books are both useful aids in this task.

The importance of Prestowitz's book derives from its forceful statement of the theme summed up in its subtitle: How we, i.e., the US, allowed Japan to take the lead. Indeed, the main title *Trading Places* is a pun which re-states the theme. In American slang, to trade places is to reverse roles — in this case, the role of world leader in industry, technology and finance. And, Prestowitz argues, this role reversal derives principally from the place of trade in the national consciousness: the Japanese nation and government attach central importance to trade and industry development, whereas in America these things are regarded as almost outside the realm of public policy.

He illustrates the role reversal of Japan and America by two chapters documenting developments in two strategic high technology industries: semiconductors and machine tools. In each of these, the US held technical and economic dominance for decades after World War II. But this dominance came from a host of fiercely independent and competing companies who saw each other as their main competitors. Neither the companies in those industries, nor the (mainly US) buyers of their products — which in both cases are intermediate goods used in making a wide range of manufactures — nor the US government saw any need to consider the health of the industry as a whole, but the Japanese did. More especially, the Japanese government saw that these intermediate goods were strategic in the sense that the performance of the downstream products, such as computers and cars, in which the big dollars lay, and in which the Japanese sought leadership, relies on these inputs.

The Japanese government — by which Prestowitz usually means the famous Ministry for International Trade and Industry (MITI) — therefore pursued a