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# Journeys to Oxford: Nine Pragmatic Inquiries into the Practice of Values in Business and Education

\$ 24.95

*Journeys to Oxford* tells the story of the development of principles and methods of American pragmatism and their application to management science. Nahser's work is especially welcome since economics in theoretical and applied forms, such as management practices and business education, is vital to guide decision makers in meeting the challenges of globalization and sustainability.

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Businessman, philosopher, educator, and author of *Learning to Read the Signs* (Butterworth-Heinemann; May, 1997), Ron Nahser has emerged as one of the leaders in a revolution taking place in America today--a return to pragmatic inquiry and values in business, education, and politics.

In this new book, Nahser explores the uniquely American roots of pragmatism in democracy, the implications of the broader philosophy of pragmatism, founded by Charles Sanders Peirce, the historical context that gave rise to the American pragmatic philosophy, and how pragmatism resolved the eternal conflict between individuals and society. From Adam Smith through Abraham Lincoln, John Dewey, Peter Drucker and hundreds of other thinkers in business, religion, and politics, Nahser traces the development of ideas laying the foundation for a moral universe of competing and sometimes conflicting business, educational and religious interests.

Based on his own extensive experience as head of the Nahser Agency, a Chicago-based advertising agency founded by his father in 1939, which in turn evolved from his grandfather's engraving business founded in 1889, Nahser applies the principles of pragmatic inquiry, established in his groundbreaking *Corporantes PathFinder Lab Journal* to discover pragmatic marketing strategies and learn more meaningful branding methodologies. Starting with a challenge, opportunity, or problem, then using simple questions and steps, Nahser shows how specific lines of inquiry into the real core values of a given business creates both a sustainable business model and gives rise to on-going pragmatic leadership. Provost Emeritus of Presidio School of Management, San Francisco, featured in *Newsweek* (April 14, 2008), and now Senior Wicklander

Fellow at the Institute for Business and Professional Ethics, DePaul University, Chicago, Dr. Nahser offers pragmatic pointers on how today's business schools can teach and develop the good character young women and men need to provide pragmatic leadership in sustainable business.

## Reviews

No successful businessman of whom I am aware has thought as deeply and rigorously about philosophical matters and their application as has Ron Nahser. To their great benefit, readers of his *Journeys to Oxford* will find great insight into the practical matters of living well and of leading virtuous organizations. What is most marvelous and unusual is that Nahser not only practiced what he professes in his own business life, he has, as provost, led a business school for tomorrow where others can learn the art of values-based leadership in sustainable organizations.

James O Toole D.Phil. (Oxon.)

Daniels Distinguished Professor of Business Ethics, Daniels College of Business, The University of Denver.

For Nahser, we are not so much what we do, but what we are called to do. This delightful series of essays engages the reader in a process of discovering what he or she needs to do in order to be. His *PathFinder* method is really a *SelfFinder* approach. Corporations would do well to hire those who feel driven to find their calling. This book can help practitioners find their calling and help managers recognize and support such people.

Daryl Koehn, PhD (MA, Oxon.)

Executive Director, Center for Business Ethics, University of St. Thomas, Houston, TX

Ron Nahser's *Journeys to Oxford* has given an interesting and valuable twist to a very old story. That story, exemplified in Oxford over the last two centuries, concerns the struggle for the soul of education, particularly higher education. It might be depicted as a contest between a liberal understanding of education and a much more utilitarian one.

By showing the development and concluding with an outline of a plan for business learning is what has made these talks such a valuable contribution to the Oxford University Centre's focus on values in education and business over the past 15 years. And now combined in *Journeys to Oxford*, I trust they will now prove useful to a broader audience interested and engaged in this vital topic of learning and values in education and business. (From the Prologue)

Richard Pring  
Director (ret.)

Oxford University Department of Educational Studies  
Emeritus Fellow, Green College

In summary, this book provides a roadmap, which teaches the tasks and responsibilities that make life worth living, (the finding of one's calling ) especially in business and industry. In the final analysis, the purpose of the development of the method of Pragmatic Inquiry is to help us reflect on our experiences to gain insights and wisdom to make the best business decisions, philosophically supported, for the good of all to foster a just and sustainable world. (From the Preface)

Samuel M. Natale, D. Phil. (Oxon.)

Director of Research and Funding, Centre for Social Values in Education and Business  
Oxford University Department of Educational Studies --Cover Blurb of the Book

The debate over the purpose of business has been irregular, noisy but persistent ever since the industrial and commercial world became dominant. Is it about doing good or making more money?

Right through the 20th century up to now the debate storms on.

Ron Nahser's contribution to this subject is thoughtful, timely, unusual and very worthwhile. His appraisal of

the situation is personal, accessible and balanced; and helps show a way for each of us to answer a very good question: 'What is it all for?'

Wally Olins CBE MA (Oxon.)  
Former Visiting Fellow  
Oxford University, Said Business School

Journeys to Oxford is a practical guide for companies to become consciously aligned with a purpose beyond their products. In this masterful series of lectures, Dr. Ron Nahser shows that successful businesses of the future will be those that make social responsibility a major part of the reason they are in business. The Pragmatic Inquiry™ process provides a much needed roadmap for companies to integrate the social, economic and environmental agenda into their business mission. The ability of leaders to do this will determine which companies succeed and which will fail in the 21st century.

Brian Bacon  
President and Founder  
Oxford Leadership Academy

It is clear from the nine chapters in *Journeys to Oxford* in this volume that Dr. Nahser has thought not only deeply but greatly of the function of business in society.

It can even be said he has engaged, both personally and professionally, in the search for a religious grounding for business, a search to which these lectures make a valuable contribution.

In their scope and breadth, the nine lectures herein offer a tantalizing introduction to the method of Pragmatic Inquiry™ pioneered by Ron in his *PathFinder Lab Journal* designed to illuminate the values and vision that drive personal and organizational performance.

I commend Ron's invitation to you, the reader, to pursue the truth in your own community of inquirers so that, together, you may come to read the signs, which give meaning, purpose and lead to what you do in the world.

Richard M. Gray, Ph.D.  
Greenbrae, California  
Founder, Presidio World College --Cover Blurb of the Book

This book is the first in the International Journal of Decision Ethics Series on Studies in Decision Science of Management and Economics.

This book tells the story of the development of principles and methods of American pragmatism and their application to management science. The work is especially welcome since economics in theoretical and applied forms, such as management practices and business education, is vital to solving the challenges in this era of globalization and sustainability.

We can no longer rely on the traditional models construed initially by Adam Smith's *laissez faire* capitalism that mimicked the rigid Newtonian interpretation of science, as well as by nineteenth-century Marxian economics that presupposed the ontology of reductive materialism. In a similar manner, the 20th Century logical positivists models presupposed the unity of science, leading to a fact-value dualism. In this light, they applied mathematical reasoning and language to all disciplines---the syntactical axiomatic method---without differentiating between physical and societal domains.

In Europe, Pragmatic methodology was finally adopted as a procedure by later logical positivists, for instance in the notion of tolerance for a choice of meta-languages in explaining reality. Expanding on this tradition, Nahser is the first social scientist who, by combining his unique business strategy and moral philosophy background, presents a comprehensive reformulation of a foundation for management science based on a pragmatist model showing the central importance of values-driven narratives to guide decisions and actions.

Not only does his work incorporate Dewey's empirical method of the continuum of end-means valuation, but also concludes by reminding us of our place in nature and the need for sustainable management.

In sum, this work introduces the best of contemporary ideas and methods of the unique American intellectual and democratic tradition to scholars, students and practitioners from Oxford to Beijing, and all points in-between. It provides methods and language necessary as we construct new economic models and management practices by helping each of us in our organizations and cultures create new narratives to meet the challenges we all face in our globalization and sustainability era.

Parviz Morewedge  
Director of Global Scholarly Publications  
Senior Research Scholar at SUNY Old Westbury, NY --Cover Blurb of the Book

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