

Announcement 2005

# Problems of Co-operation and Inquiry

*Conference to be held in Lincoln, United  
Kingdom, Monday March 28 to Friday  
April 1, 2005, inclusive*

Conference site – University of Lincoln,  
Brayford Pool

Supported by

University of Lincoln

and

Centre for Innovation and  
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## General

Co-operation has been studied for a sufficiently long period for conceptual paradoxes to surface and even to impede further inquiry.

One important paradox concerns the relation between co-operation and knowledge. If it is possible to acquire knowledge about co-operation, the results will allow for its enforcement. If one isn't interested in this kind of totalitarian capability, co-operation can be but a prerequisite to knowing—and hence will be limited to a condition for successful inquiry.

It is proposed to explore the last possibility, i.e. how co-operation may be used as a tool in acquiring knowledge, in particular in the social and socio-biological domains.

There is a clear need for such a tool. Many authors see the social sciences as having failed the yardstick of academic aspiration as developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century—evidenced by a multitude or even excess of methods and proposals on how to provide the resources that politicians and others need to achieve life's organisation to be just, equal and fair.

It hasn't proved possible yet to justify any of these methods and proposals as preferable above all others. This may be what has seduced many authors to claim that theirs are sufficiently justified already by their own point of view— or as some would say by their personal zone of comfort. One may ask, therefore, whether such zones or points do indeed help people to co-operate in a collective task of knowledge acquisition.

In other words, co-operation may support the process of knowledge acquisition—rather than constitute an independent domain of study. Knowledge of social phenomena may even be possible only if co-operation is initiated first.

## History

The conference continues an earlier series of 13 bi-annual conferences organised from 1979 onward in Amsterdam. Their aim was to explore, in a free and generous spirit, problems and solutions that appear fundamental to future research. The present topic takes a natural place in this effort. The series was organised around the following "Problems of ...":

*... Context (1979), ... Levels and Boundaries (1981), ... Actors and Actions (1983), ... (Dis)appearing Knowledge (1985), ... (Im)possible Worlds (1987), ... Mutual uses of Cybernetics and Science (1989), ... Support, Survival and Culture (1991), ... Values and (In)variant (1993), ... Excavating Cybernetics and Systems (1995), ... Action and Observation (1997), ... Participation and Connection (1999), ... Individual Emergence (2001).*

Copies of the proceedings of previous meetings may still be obtained from the Conference Co-ordinators – with some exceptions.

## Topic/Theme

Most studies of co-operation deal with its roles, processes of dominance, strengths and weaknesses—and with negative aspects like conflict and aggression. Co-operation here is what remains-in-focus and invariant, while properties such as management, forms of audit and learning refer to remaining variation.

Conversely, managers, teachers and other improvers are interested in what may vary, especially concerning properties they aim to increase or decrease. This means that they have to create or invent, rather than discover, what is to remain-in-focus and serve as an invariant.

An example is improving action. Without co-operation between actors (including the researcher) there is little that remains-in-focus – often not even what action is taking place, or when or who is using what resources. Only by initiating a stable form of co-operation – by way of organisations, including games – will it be possible to study action and increase aspects such as its effectiveness and efficiency.

This is well known in practice. Co-operation is what managers introduce to reduce the cost of unpredictability, it is what teachers use to increase individual understanding and it is what politicians use to improve the quality of life of their constituents. What all want to know are the results: how co-operation transfers to the future, e.g. by self-maintenance.

Self-maintenance implies communication. It suggests to actors what to expect to find and use as social experiences or resources, and it helps to experience the variation that actors need. Both types of

communication imply the possibility of checking for errors, for keeping-in-focus what is desirable and for creating order.

Communication thus proceeds on two levels. In the case of chess, players play by showing their moves, but also by indicating when rules are broken so there is no game anymore. Playing chess thus means using its *language* to create what remains-in-focus as well as to manage variation in strategies and hence in increased competence.

A large and quickly increasing number of such languages did develop in recent times—on a general level as in the case of critical conversation, of self-organisation, co-evolution and cybernetics, and on a domain level as in the case of information modelling and the development of accountancy. Results of the use of these languages indicate that people become competent to act, rather than experts in a field.

### Aim of the meeting

The meeting is convened to explore what knowledge is possible if co-operation is used as a tool in knowledge acquisition in the social domain.

### Suggestions

Contributors are expected to present research (empirical, theoretical and practical) in which the notion of co-operation as a tool in inquiry is explored. Contributions should emphasise general aspects, rather than particular and specific ones.

### Timing and structure

To facilitate productive interaction at all levels of the Conference, the organisers intend to provide—as at previous meetings—a special and appropriate milieu and ambience, organised around, and embodied in, four constituents:

- ways and means of discovering the pleasures and disappointments of scientific meetings.
- single stream sessions, led by a distinguished thinker and/or contributor.
- a social milieu—culminating in frequent social events (supported by free drinks).
- a cocktail party on Friday late afternoon.

### Participation

Abstracts of proposed contributions should be received by **January 31, 2005** and (draft) full papers, if possible, by **February 28, 2005**.

Acceptance is based on the quality of the abstracts. Draft full texts may be distributed during the conference. Final (revised) versions of papers need sending in only after the conference. They must be received by **May 31, 2005** to be selected for publication (style sheets will be issued at the conference).

Presentation in the conference should stimulate improvement of the papers and is part of the refereeing procedure! Final papers will be published in **Systemica**, a refereed journal. Negotiations with other journals are in process.

Participants who wish to contribute to the discussions without presenting a paper, are, of course, also very welcome.

### Further information

Please make arrangements for your stay well in advance: the Easter period is a busy time in Lincoln. Note that presentations start on **Tuesday morning** (arrival on Monday, or before).

Accommodation must be booked separately and is not included in the fee. The Conference Office at the University of Lincoln will provide help (check also [www.visitlincolnshire.com](http://www.visitlincolnshire.com)).

At 33 miles, Humberside is the airport nearest to Lincoln ([www.humberside-airport.co.uk](http://www.humberside-airport.co.uk)), with daily KLM connections to Amsterdam. Taxi services as well as car rentals are available. Other airports one may decide to use include Manchester, East Midlands and London. Ask your travel agent.

Lincoln is an attractive small city of 95,000 inhabitants. It boasts a relatively large number of interesting places and buildings, like the Roman Canal. The Cathedral contains a memorial window to George Boole, who was born in Lincoln. In the Castle one of the four surviving originals of the Magna Carta is kept.

The conference dinner will be held in the old Bishop's Palace, the Edward King House.

The University is located next to the Brayford Pool. Times change; the city now has more pubs than churches.

### Conference Website

[www.lincoln.ac.uk/conferences/index.htm](http://www.lincoln.ac.uk/conferences/index.htm)

### Correspondence

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+44 1522 886407 (or, in case of no response):  
+44 1522 886058 (Angie, PA to the Dean)  
+44 1522 886062 (Security Office)

### Costs

Conference Fee: £ 400, or Euro 570. Please send payments to the University of Lincoln (most methods are acceptable). Please contact the Conference Office ([conferences@lincoln.ac.uk](mailto:conferences@lincoln.ac.uk)), to receive further details.

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