

The Wisdom Page

About Cop Macdonald

Copthorne Macdonald is a writer, independent scholar, and former communication systems engineer. His interests include the nature of reality (including consciousness and mind), the development of wisdom, the global problematic, and the challenge of creating a sustainable future. He has written extensively in all of these areas, and his published writing to date includes 8 books and over 130 articles, reviews, and column installments. His most recent book, [*Matters of Consequence*](#), is a comprehensive map of the human situation that encompasses what is really important in life, addresses our search for meaning and significance, and deals with humanity's future in a positive solution-oriented way. (See his [complete publication list](#) and the more detailed discussion below.) He developed the slow-scan TV system used worldwide in amateur radio, founded New Directions Radio to foster socially-relevant communication, established a popular Internet-based compilation of wisdom-related resources called [The Wisdom Page](#), and has done extensive educational work in the field of energy alternatives and energy conservation. Copthorne was a columnist for two U.S. national magazines, Associate Editor of one of them, and was appointed to the Editorial Board of *Integralis: Journal of Integral Consciousness, Culture, and Science*. His engineering-related positions in the U.S. included Project Manager, Visual Communication and Display, at Westinghouse Electric Corp. in Pittsburgh; Manager of the Electronic Design Department at Ball Brothers Research Corporation in Boulder Colorado; and Director of Research at Vidcom Electronics in New York City. He immigrated to Canada in 1975, became a resident of Prince Edward Island that same year, and added Canadian citizenship to his U.S. citizenship in 1978. Engineering-related activities in P.E.I. include managing the EnerSave energy conservation program for four years, and writing *Bridging the Strait*, the definitive book about the design, construction, history, and financing of the Confederation Bridge.



Scholarship

Copthorne's advocacy of the integral approach to understanding, and his contributions to the literature concerning the nature of primal reality and the nature and development of wisdom led to his appointment to the Editorial Board of *Integralis: Journal of Integral Consciousness, Culture, and Science*. *Integralis* published three of his papers: "[Deep Understanding: Wisdom for an Integral Age](#)," a [review of Ken Wilber's book *A Theory of Everything*](#), and a [review of Michael Lerner's book *Spirit Matters*](#).

In 1994, the refereed journal *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science* published his paper "[An Energy/Awareness/Information Interpretation of Physical and Mental Reality](#)." That paper presented a science-based *carrier/information* way of looking at reality that is also compatible with the Eastern *perennial philosophy* view. In 2010 his paper, "[Implications of a Fundamental Consciousness](#)," which elaborates the perspective on mental reality first presented in the *Zygon* paper, was published in the refereed journal [ANS: The Journal for Neurocognitive Research](#). Part I of Copthorne's well-researched book *Matters of Consequence* presents this integrated mental/physical view of reality to a general audience. In late 2010 *ANS* published another of his papers: "[The Necessity for Developing Skill at](#)

[Mind-Process Observation, and a Suggested Methodology."](#)

In the Spring of 2006, Copthorne spent two weeks at Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida as a "T.P. Johnson Distinguished Visiting Scholar." The theme of his stay and the title of his main address was "Wisdom: The Highest Aim of Life and Higher Education." The talk (with slides) is available online in both [text](#) and [Flash video](#) formats.

His recent scholarly writing includes a chapter titled "[Nicholas Maxwell in Context: The Relationship of His Wisdom Theses to the Contemporary Global Interest in Wisdom](#)," in the 2009 book *Science and the Pursuit of Wisdom: Studies in the Thought of Nicholas Maxwell*.

There are articles about Copthorne in *Contemporary Authors*, volume 145 and *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series*, volumes 93 and 174.

Psychological/Spiritual Development and Wisdom

Copthorne's deep interest in personal spirituality grew out of the reading he did and the many Vipassana meditation retreats he attended during the 1970s and '80s. The insights which arose from these activities convinced him that what we as individuals were seeking, and what our culture desperately needed, was that mix of perspectives, attitudes, and deep understandings called *wisdom*. In the mid-1990s he wrote two books about wisdom for the general public. The first, [Toward Wisdom](#) (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1993), dealt with the big-picture, meaning-of-life, perennial philosophy aspect of the subject. The second, [Getting a Life](#) (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1995), dealt with the practical side of wisdom — what Coleridge referred to as "common sense in an uncommon degree." *Toward Wisdom* was favorably reviewed by *The Globe and Mail*, Canada's national newspaper, and the book led the national radio network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to do an hour-long documentary on Copthorne Macdonald's life and perspectives as part of its IDEAS series. (You can [listen to this documentary](#) in streaming audio.) *Getting a Life* has been used as the primary text in at least one university course. An essay of his, "[Playing the Wisdom Game: Some thoughts about the nature and development of wisdom](#)," appears in the 2006 book [Living a Life of Value](#). Another, "[Values, Wisdom, Action](#)," appears in the Fall/Winter 2007 issue of the journal *Kosmos: An Integral Approach to Global Awakening*. And yet another, "[The Centrality of Wisdom](#)," appears in the 2010 book [How to Achieve a Heaven on Earth](#).

Copthorne's third wisdom book, [Matters of Consequence](#) (2004), focuses on a third variety of wisdom: activist wisdom — the kind of wisdom needed to change the world for the better. Wise values, wise perspectives, and personally relevant intellectual knowledge provide the foundation that supports all varieties of personal wisdom. Activist wisdom adds to that foundation an intellectual and experiential understanding of the world situation. Together, these four elements bring wisdom to activism, and provide change agents with the kind of holistic understanding they need for maximal effectiveness. Acrobat eBook editions of all three of these wisdom book titles are available for [free download](#). A [German-language translation](#) of this book was published by Verlag Via Nova in 2010.

Copthorne has taught meditation, conducted personal growth workshops, and maintains both this www.copmacdonald.com web site and [The Wisdom Page](#), that compilation of wisdom-related resources mentioned above..

Societal Transformation

During a 13-month trip around the world in the early 1970s, Copthorne became concerned about "the world problematique." Upon his return to the U.S., he founded New Directions Radio — an international network of radio amateurs concerned with using ham radio and slow-scan TV "to help create a more

aware, more caring, and more responsible human society.” Associated with this, he became a columnist for *CQ*, *The Radio Amateurs Journal*, and from July, 1972 to March, 1975 wrote 32 article-length columns concerning slow-scan television and New Directions Radio activities. In 1973 he became a columnist for, and Associate Editor of, *The Mother Earth News*, and over the next ten years wrote 62 article-length “New Directions Radio” columns. During this period, an essay of his on alternative uses of ham radio and TV was included in the book *Radical Technology* (New York: Random House, 1976).

As Associate Editor of *The Mother Earth News* he attended the 1979 *UN Conference on Science and Technology for Development* in Vienna, and wrote several articles on technology-and-development issues. In the 1980s he became involved with energy conservation and energy alternatives. For four years he ran a Canadian government energy conservation program, and between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s wrote a high school textbook and workbook on energy conservation and alternatives, several energy conservation booklets, energy-related software manuals, and dozens of newsletter, newspaper, and magazine articles on these subjects. In 1998 he wrote a paper for the government of Prince Edward Island Canada on preparing for the employment opportunities and challenges of the 21st century. (Check out the [complete list of his publications](#).)

Societal transformation is also an important part of his 2004 book, [Matters of Consequence](#). The book leads us to envision, as a realistic possibility, a year-2050 world characterized by physical sustainability, economic equity, vibrant local cultures, an electronically facilitated world culture, and sufficient time in people’s lives to pursue a rich, full, life. It then examines strategies and techniques for getting us from here to there.

Science, Engineering, and Art

Copthorne Macdonald’s first career was electronic engineering and R&D management. As a university student he developed a slow-scan TV system that enables radio amateurs to send pictures around the world using their short-wave voice radio equipment. [The paper he wrote](#) describing the system won the 1958 National Student Paper competition of the American Institute of Electrical Engineers. In recognition of this accomplishment Cop was, in 2007, inducted into *CQ* magazine’s Ham Radio Hall of Fame and in 2009 was honored with the Hamvention’s award for Technical Excellence. (Here, some recollections about the early days of [amateur radio SSTV](#).)

At Westinghouse, he designed a system that transmitted weather radar images over phone lines and another that put voice and sequenced still pictures on ordinary 33 rpm phonograph records. In 1965 he became Manager of the Electronic Design Department at Ball Brothers Research Corporation in Boulder, Colorado, and in 1968, Director of Research at Vidcom Electronics in New York City. He holds three [US patents](#).

In 1967-68 he collaborated with artist Roberta Phillips to create a work of electronic art that appeared in the 1968 “Experiments in Art and Technology” show at the Brooklyn Museum. The *New York Times* featured the work in its article about the show, and there is an 11-minute [video documentary](#) about the project.

His engineering-related publications include numerous articles on slow-scan TV, a contribution to *Specialized Communication Techniques* (Newington, CT: American Radio Relay League, 1975), and a 1997 book entitled *Bridging the Strait: The Story of the Confederation Bridge* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1997).

Personal

Copthorne was born Chicago, USA in 1936. He immigrated to Canada in 1975, and is a citizen of both the US and Canada. He is a member of the Tau Beta Pi and Eta Kappa Nu engineering honor societies, is an Associate Member of Engineers Without Borders, a member of the Assembly for Expanded Perspectives on Learning, and a Founding Member of the World Wisdom Alliance. As mentioned above, for developing amateur radio's first slow-scan TV system, Cop was inducted into *CQ* magazine's Ham Radio Hall of Fame and was honored with the Hamvention's award for Technical Excellence. From The Association of Professional Engineers of Prince Edward Island, Canada he received the Honorary Life Membership award for "outstanding service to the engineering profession."

If any dictum has been central to Cop's life, it has been Goethe's advice to "go and dare before you die."

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