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**Thomas Pfau.** *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge.* University of Notre Dame Press, 2013. 688 pp. \$75.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780268038441).

In this big book, Literary Historian (Duke University) Thomas Pfau has produced a valuable scholarly resource with an urgent practical objective: to restore potency to human agency. Accessible and lively—if a bit Teutonic in sentence structure—his book reads as an engaging lecture course, in which Pfau explores the origins of a pervasive modernist fallacy that, he says, effectively excludes mind from a responsible role in practical and related reasoning.

Not until Hegel's generous tribute to Aristotle's concept of entelechy in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* do we have a genuine attempt to overcome the exclusionary logic of modernity's strictly propositional take on the world (35).

Pfau aims, he says:

...to retrieve...the unique nature of humanistic, interpretive concepts and frame-works enabling our quest for articulate and responsible knowledge in the realm of practical reason, and the distinctive dialectical process whereby such concepts (e.g., will, person, judgment, action, and the Platonic triad of the good, the true, and the beautiful) are received, rethought, and transmitted to future generations (4).

His 600 plus pages of text is divided into four parts. In the first, *Prolegomena*, Pfau sets out his project: to dispute prevailing nominalist assumptions about the normativity of language. For Pfau, human reason is not exhausted in the formation or acquisition or revision of concepts.

In the second part, *Rational Appetite: An Emergent Conceptual Tradition*, Pfau traces the tensions between this nominalist conceptual tradition and the presumed rationality of other, interpretation-based behaviours, including rhetorical 'arguments' that frame expression.

In the third Part, *Progressive Amnesia: Will and the Crisis of Reason*, he reviews the crisis these tensions have spawned, and which, he suggests, threatens to obliterate human consciousness in a fog of amnesia.

The final section, *Retrieving the Human: Coleridge on Will, Person, and Conscience*, offers a project of humanist resurrection. Here Pfau focuses on Samuel Taylor Coleridge as a prospective hero in the battle to retrieve meaning and justified human agency.

### ***Modernity's "exclusionary" propositional logic: Nominalism & Positivism***

In Pfau's view, nominalism, with its 'axiom of specialization' misleads modern thought by producing 'a type of knowledge whose legitimacy and significance are...sufficiently guaranteed by the methodological protocols governing the retrieval of the information in question' (425). Such a guarantee is fallacious and the type of knowledge it offers unsustainable, in his view. The particular versions of nominalism he targets are associated, not only with Ockham, but more particularly with Hobbes, Hume, Locke, and with C.19<sup>th</sup> liberalism. All are linked by their blinded and blinding reliance on the limited mechanics of propositional form and method.

Pfau traces this seductive propositional turn to Ockham's rejection of the necessity 'of narrative continuities in the domain of intellectual history and philosophical theology'. Ockham's reason, he says:

...is always bound up with a specific...thesis or...hypothesis on an equally particular problem...inquiry forever liable to revision and diametrical reversals, and hence incommensurable with other such cases...wherein agents, situations, and meanings are no longer connected to an underlying rational order or substantial form but, instead, prove inherently discontinuous... (163).

He laments that this nominalist romance with the particularised has never been recanted.

(I)mplicit in Descartes's insistence on the primacy of "method" is the assumption that what legitimates argument is solely the impersonal process by which it is generated; hence, the success of an argument should owe...everything to the methodology that secures the evidence on which modern scientific insight is said to rest. Implicitly, then, the...contingent force of rhetorical "argument" is steadily supplanted by the projection of an intersubjective consensus of expert knowledge... Modernity's gradual journey from Cartesian rationalism to Lockean empiricism to nineteenth-century positivism thus revives the nominalist creed...that reality consists only of individual things... (422).

But Pfau might have set out, a little more effectively and directly, how 'Aristotle's concept of entelechy', whose ongoing misconstrual he laments, might ever have properly been construed or how its proper understanding today might redress any continuing excesses of medieval meta-physical magic or of modern positivist myopia. The urgently needed recantation of the modernist fallacy remains too remote a possibility, perhaps, until this proper construction is available.

Pfau does not directly consider Aristotle's own logical and methodological intentions, so a summary glance is appropriate here, perhaps. Aristotle has been understood, from the Stoic times to today, as *inferential* in its focus. At its core, however, that logic is not so much inferential as it is implicational. The logical structures Aristotle designed, particularly in his *Prior and Posterior Analytics* and in the other works contained in his *Organon*, and applied in his scientific and philosophical research and teaching are not structured to produce coercive *inferences*, such as nominalist homunculi might whisper in our inner ears, or positivists might sell us. (Another important recent book, Terrence W. Deacon's *Incomplete Nature: How Mind Emerged from Matter* complements Pfau's concern with the contemporary dismissal of telos in humanist reflection.) Aristotle's logical structures are designed to 'demonstrate' *implications*. His logical theory and practice are, in essence, forensic. Aristotle's study of what sentences are is the *Categories*. Category is a word he stole from the law courts where it meant 'accusation'. To put a rational conclusion into words is to make an 'accusation on' or a 'charge' on which judgement must be formed. His syllogisms, particularly demonstrative syllogisms, produce carefully worded 'charges' that demand we recognise and conduct ourselves, ontologically, as *implicated* by what we say. For Aristotle, mind and its telic/recollective structures are phenomenal facts that oblige us to make judiciously measured responses to the 'charges' in and by which we are implicated. Aristotle was set on 'saving the phenomena', (Nussbaum, Martha "Saving Aristotle's Appearances" in *Language and Logos: Studies in Ancient Greek Philosophy presented to G.E.L. Owen* Malcolm Schofield & Martha Craven

Nussbaum, eds. Cambridge University Press 1982, 267-93), not on some medieval truth project, or on an optimistic frenzy of concept formation.

Back in the early 1950s, Jan Lukasiewicz (*Aristotle's Syllogistic from the Standpoint of Modern Formal Logic*. Clarendon Press 1951) briefly stated the key point that I think Pfau is seeking to make. Lukasiewicz pointed out that Aristotle's syllogistic is not presented as inferential but as implicational. That is, Aristotle's syllogisms run in the implicational form '*If all men are mortal, and if Socrates is a man, then he dies*' rather than in the inferential form, '*Since all men are mortal, and since Socrates is a man, therefore he must die*'. The difference is not stylistic. It changes the necessity. Traditional syllogisms are inferential. They are sophistically coercive and discount reasoned judgement. They structure statements of reasoning as assuming compliance rather than judiciously measured response. Implication, on the other hand, consults logical rules to prevent mistakes in sentence formation; but it consults recollection for accuracy of facts and perceptions. Implication invites the student/listener, the one who is charged with taking responsibility for making sense (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* IV, Chapter 4, 1006a25-26), to explore *if* the conditions are met, and *whether* they are appropriate (com-mensurately universal) to the conclusions (charges) stated. Implication is dialectical, and draws on the critically *recollective* judgement of those implicated as witnesses and learners.

Pfau's book is an important exploration of Plato's teaching about the fruitful *weakness* of words. We go wrong when we adopt creeds, like those of sophists, nominalists, or positivists, that trap us in webs of Hamlet's 'Words, Words, Words.'

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