Restoring Faith in Reason:
Thomas Pfau's Defense of Humanistic Inquiry

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Introduction

I am honored and delighted to have this opportunity to discuss Thomas Pfau's "study of two closely related concepts—'will' and 'person'--which have proven indispensable to Western humanistic inquiry and its ongoing, albeit enormously diverse, attempts to develop a satisfactory account of human agency."[1] I am in deep sympathy with his project to critically retrieve the meaning of these key concepts as they have developed in Western thought since the time of Plato and Aristotle (13), providing "a long historical perspective" (72) through a "forensic reading of representative arguments" (65). With Pfau, I affirm "the viability, indeed the necessity, of narrative continuities in the domain of intellectual history and philosophical theology" (163). "All understanding begins with a 'view,' a commitment to a hypothesis or idea whose hold on the intellect is as palpable as it is destined to undergo continual revaluation and revision" (66). The view that gives humanistic inquiry coherence is the product of many minds over many centuries, and it must be received and explored through "a sustained, comprehensive, and evolving critical engagement with the history of its key concepts of human agency (will, person, judgment, teleology)" (75) in order "not to expire in its struggle with competing notions or succumb to inner contradictions or corruptions" (63).

Although Pfau twice warns against indulging in what Freud calls the "narcissism of minor differences" (65, 380), the suggestions I make in this essay are only modest variations on the themes he explores. I am very sympathetic to Pfau's reading of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, John Henry Newman, and Michael Polanyi, and I was glad to see him in dialogue with W. Norris Clarke, SJ, (506, 524), my first metaphysics teacher, and Phil Rolnick (528,534-537), a fellow devotee of Clarke and Polanyi. I feel very much at home in Pfau's worldview and with the company that he keeps.

Illative Sense and Tacit Knowing

John Henry Newman is a major dialogue partner of Pfau's. From the epigraph for Part I ("The present is a text, and the past its interpretation," (7) to the last few pages of the book (615-616), Pfau repeatedly uses Newman's "quasi-phenomenological orientation" (fn, 47) in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (DCD)[2] and *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (GA)[3] to provide landmarks for his own observations. My doctoral dissertation was a study of the intersection between the epistemologies of Newman and Polanyi,[4] so it was a joy to see how highly they rank in Pfau's

estimation. I would like to explore just a few aspects of the material that Newman and Polanyi seem to have in common, both by way of making Newman more accessible to a Polanyian audience and to underscore some of the contributions Polanyi can make to Pfau's project.

The *Grammar of Assent* begins with a distinction that Pfau finds useful. Just as Coleridge talks about "the natural differences of *things* and *thoughts* (BL*,* 1:90)" (587), so Newman draws a distinction between notions and realities: "Sometimes [the terms of a proposition] stand for certain ideas existing in our own minds, and for nothing outside of them; sometimes for things simply external to us, brought home to us through the experiences and informations we have of them. All things in the exterior world are unit and individual, and are nothing else; but the mind not only contemplates those unit realities, as they exist, but has the gift, by an act of creation, of bringing before it abstractions and generalizations, which have no existence, no counterpart, out of it" (GA, 29). To grasp the meaning of an abstract proposition is "notional apprehension," while grasping the meaning of a proposition about a particular reality is "real apprehension."

Beyond the relatively passive act of apprehension, we are free to make up our minds about "things and thoughts." In an act of real assent, we make a decision about realities while in notional assent we pass judgment on ideas.

> An act of assent, it seems, is the most perfect and highest of its kind, when it is exercised on propositions, which are apprehended as experiences and images, that is, which stand for things; and, on the other hand, an act of inference is the most perfect and highest of its kind, when it is exercised on propositions which are apprehended as notions, that is, which are creations of the mind. An act of inference indeed may be made with either of these modes of apprehension; so may an act of assent; but when inferences are exercised on things, they tend to be conjectures or presentiments, without logical force; and when assents are exercised on notions, they tend to be mere assertions without any personal hold on them on the part of those who make them. If this be so, the paradox is true, that when Inference is clearest, Assent may be least forcible, and, when Assent is most intense, Inference may be least distinct. (GA, 52)

Pfau understands "real assent" as "an agent's assent (in itself inaccessible to rational discipline) to the reality and apparent significance of phenomena before they can be scrutinized by means of inferential and propositional reasoning" (404; we will return to this passage below when discussing Polanyi's insights into tacit knowing). Pfau continues: "As the radically contingent ground of reason itself, this uniquely human capacity for what Newman would call 'real assent' acts as a crucial constraint on the

utopoian aspirations of Enlightenment rationalism and liberalism." This is a recurring theme in the book as Pfau appeals to Newman's standpoint against thinkers who take a much narrower view of the knower and the known (46-7, 105, 179-180, 318, 405, 470, 566, 569-70, 616).

Polanyi does not have a distinctive vocabulary for notional apprehension, notional assent, real apprehension, or real assent. He is more concerned with the fact that "we know more than we can tell."[5]

> The science of today serves as a heuristic guide for its own further development. It conveys a conception about the nature of things which suggests to the enquiring mind an inexhaustible range of surmises. The experience of Columbus, who so fatefully misjudged his own discovery, is inherent to some extent in all discovery. The implications of new knowledge can never be known at its birth. For it speaks of something real, and to attribute reality of something is to express the belief that is presence will yet show up in an indefinite number of unpredictable ways. (PK, 311)[6]

I find this an immensely rich insight. I associate it with the first line of the first poem of the *Tao Te Ching*: "The Tao that can be put into words is not the real Tao." Pfau is exploring great realities throughout *Minding the Modern*—self, other, will, intellect, love—none of which can be exhaustively defined and all of which are profoundly "enmeshed" with each other (29). The self that I can put into words is not the real self; even the thought that I can put into words is not the real thought. Our goal is "*to think the noumenon through the phenomenon*" (601).

We have to be careful not to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Precise observations, repeatable experiments, formal definitions, strict logic, and definite conclusions are remarkable accomplishments, and are not to be devalued. The error of the Enlightenment lies in over-valuing these great achievements and taking them as an exclusive model of how we know what we know. "Genuine humanistic inquiry must indeed commit to and embrace the idea of 'personal knowledge'—with 'personal' here speaking both to our responsibility for the knowledge in question *and* our recognition of its transformative impact on ourselves as ethical beings" (509). The philosophies of science inspired by the magnificent growth of science in the last three centuries tend to eliminate, in Newman's terms, "the personal action of our own minds" (Pfau, 615), as if there could be observations without observers, thoughts without thinkers, knowledge without knowers, judgments without judges, information without understanding—or science without scientists.

For Newman, Polanyi, and Pfau, knowing is a responsible personal action that falls, as all actions do, under the reignh of conscience, which is a major theme of Part IV, and especially of the final chapter

of *Minding the Modern*. The title of Newman's great work suggests the possibility that there may be a "grammar of assent" that would provide the paradigms and regulations for the formation and evaluation of assent, just as grammars provide the norms for correct speech and writing, but it turns out that the essay is actually opposed to the formalization or mechanization of our judgments. There is no set of rules and regulations that can take the place of personal judgment—there is no grammar of assent. "There is simply no alternative, Coleridge insists, but to acknowledge that 'the Man makes the *motive*, and not the motive the "man' (AR, 74), a point developed in John Henry Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, which repeatedly insists that the foundation for all cognition is to be found not in the 'paper logic' of some syllogistic template, but in the realm of personal judgment of "Illative Sense" roughly analogous to Aristotelian *phronēsis*: 'It is the mind that reasons and that controls its own reasonings, not any technical apparatus of words and propositions'" (432-433).

"Illative sense" is one of the most wretched expressions in Newman's writings. "Illative" is formed from the third principle part of the deponent verb, "infero," namely, "illatus." The phrase then means "the self-awareness by which we make inferences." This self-reflexive aspect of our minds acts as the conscience of our intellects, telling us when to grant or withhold assent to various propositions. As Pfau says so well, our grasp of the fundamental obligation to do good and avoid evil (*synderesis*) "is the condition of possibility for any moral (self-)awareness whatsoever, just as the law of contradiction is not a proposition among others within the domain of logic but the (ontologically given) premise for all reasoning in the first place" (289-290). The Illative Sense is not a formal component of any syllogism, but it is the ever-present subsidiary awareness that we are to seek truth, which is the good of the mind in all acts of knowing, and avoid every form of falsehood, whether from self-deception, credulity, enthusiasm, carelessness, or some other lapse of judgment. This is Newman's name for what Augustine described as "an inner sense [by which] I watched over the integrity of my senses" (112). "Simply put, all conscious states are subject to some form of appraisal, be it reflexive and explicit or more tentative and, perhaps, even subliminal. What the materialist and reductionist account fails to grasp is the categorical divide between the material 'event' of consciousness and its infinitely complex, layered, and richly evaluative internalization" (587).

In *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi describes the conscience of the intellect as "appraisal": "we should accredit in ourselves the capacity for appraising our own articulation" (PK, 91). We judge our own performance as knowers subliminally as we focus on that which we know and desire to communicate or that which we hope to discover.

> The assent which shapes knowledge is fully determined … by competent mental efforts overruling arbitrariness. The result may be erroneous, but it is the best that can be done in the circumstances. Since every factual assertion is conceivably mistaken, it is also conceivably corrigible, but a competent judgment cannot be improved by the person who is making it at the moment of making it, since he is already doing his best in making it. …
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> I shall go on, therefore, to repeat my fundamental belief that, in spite of the hazards involved, I am called upon to search for the truth and state my findings. To accept commitment as the framework within which we may believe something to be true, is to circumscribe the hazards of belief. It is to establish the conception of competence which authorizes a fiduciary choice made and timed, to the best of the acting person's ability, as a deliberate and yet necessary choice. (PK, 314, 315).

Polanyi spoke of "conscience" rather than "appraisal" in his 1946 work, *Science, Faith, and Society*. Just as Newman portrays the Illative Sense as sanctioning the act of assent, so Polanyi see conscience as the guardian of the commitments we make:

> The scientist's task is not to observe any allegedly correct procedure but to get the right results. He has to establish contact, by whatever means, with the hidden reality of which he is predicating. His conscience must therefore give its ultimate assent always from a sense of having established that contact. And he will accept therefore the duty of committing himself on the strength of evidence which can, admittedly, never be complete; and trust that such a gamble, when based on the dictates of his scientific conscience, is in fact his competent function and his proper chance of making his contribution to science.[7]

The title of the final chapter of *Minding the Modern* is taken from Coleridge: "Faith is fidelity … to the conscience" (591-618). Knowing is essentially an action that depends on using our personal judgment in good conscience—all certitude is essentially moral certitude.

In Pfau's reading, Aristotle sees "action as the consummation of practical reason" (3). To know is to act wisely with respect to the data and inferences available in any particular question. Therefore, theoretical reason—notional apprehension and assent for Newman, the realm of scientific theory for Polanyi—is the fruit of practical reason. What Newman calls "Illative Sense" is the voice of reason at work in all of our reasoning, a reflexive self-awareness that shows us how to reason rightly. This necessary self-appraisal of the operations of the mind is neither innate nor self-evident, but is learned in

childhood and appreciated by the kind of introspective phenomenology employed by Newman, Polanyi, and Pfau.

One of the great contributions to this conversation is Polanyi's assertion that "all knowledge is tacit or rooted in tacit knowing."[8] In his 1963 introduction to the second edition of *Science, Faith, and Society*, Polanyi indicated the central role that tacit knowing played in his philosophy of science:

> We meet here with a new definition of reality. Real is that which is expected to reveal itself indeterminately in the future. Hence an explicit statement can bear on reality only by virtue of the tacit coefficient associated with it. This conception of reality and of the tacit knowing of reality underlies all my writings.
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> If explicit rules can operate only by virtue of a tacit coefficient, the ideal of exactitude has to be abandoned. What power of knowing can take its place? The power which we exercise in the act of perception. The capacity of scientists to perceive the presence of lasting shapes as tokens of reality in nature differs from the capacity of our ordinary perception only by the fact that it can integrate shapes presented to it in terms which the perceptions of ordinary people cannot readily handle. *Scientific knowing consists in discerning Gestalten that are aspects of reality.* I have here called this 'intuition'; in later writings I have described it as the tacit coefficient of a scientific theory, by which it bears on experience, as a token of reality. Thus it foresees yet indeterminate manifestations of the experience on which it bears. (10)

Pfau does not use Polanyi's language of "tacit knowing" or "the tacit dimension," but he is very sensitive to the reality, as when he observed that "an agent's assent" is "in itself inaccessible to rational discipline" and pre-exists any kind of scrutiny "by means of inferential and propositional reasoning" (404). As with Descartes, the philosophies of the Enlightenment take mathematics, geometry, or pure logic as the norm for all knowing; there can be no knowledge unless there are clear and distinct ideas that possess their own self-evidence or that are rigidly linked to self-evident ideas by means of rigorous logical argument. The Enlightenment "grammar of assent" was characterized by "*not entertaining any proposition with greater assurance than the proofs it is built on will warrant*. Whoever goes beyond this measure of assent, it is plain, receives not truth in the love of it, loves not truth for truth-sake, but for some other by-end " (Locke, GA, 138). It is the rejection of the more primitive, but fundamental form of tacit knowing and "informal reasoning" (Newman) that leads to modernity's exaltation of "explicitness, transparency, certainty, verifiability" as the grounds of autonomous human knowledge (160). Pfau

affirms the reality and value of tacit knowing, without using that particular label for it, in all of his efforts at "rehabilitating reason as something more than mere calculation—indeed, as substantially *free*" (215).

"Tacit knowing" appears in Newman's work as "implicit reason":

> The distinction here at issue would later be cannily reformulated as that between "implicit and explicit reason" in John Henry Newman's *Oxford University Sermons*. Arguing that "Reasoning, then, or the exercise of Reason, is a living spontaneous energy within us, not an art," Newman insists that "all men reason, for to reason is nothing more than to gain truth from former truth, without the intervention of sense; to which brutes are limited." At the same time, it is evident that "all men do not reflect on their own reasonings, much less reflect truly and accurately, so as to do justice to their own meaning; but only in proportion to their abilities and attainments." Yet unlike Hume, Newman does not view that state of affairs to license the sweeping conclusion that *whatever act of mind has not been analyzed and rendered explicit is therefore undeserving of the name reason.* Rather, a distinction is to be drawn between "the two exercises of mind as reasoning and arguing, or as *conscious and unconscious reasoning*, or as *Implicit Reason and Explicit Reason*." To so distinguish is to understand that "all men have a reason, but not all men can give a reason."
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> Yet precisely this very possibility that philosophy itself might rest on something *permanently given and implicit* is anathema to Hume's understanding of the trade. (301-302; emphasis added)

In his discussion of the development of ideas in a living, humanistic tradition, Pfau underscores the fact that relying on tacit, personal powers of reasoning demands an act of faith on the part of the person engaged in reasoning:

> Inasmuch as an idea "employs their minds as its instruments, and depends upon them, while it uses them" (DCD, 38), the implicit rationality of conceptions taken up "on faith" and worked through by successive generations will gradually divulge itself, provided the idea in question had sufficient weight and significance not to expire in its struggle with competing notions or succumb to inner contradictions or corruptions. As Newman puts it, "logic is brought in to arrange and inculcate what no science was employed in gaining ... [For] *intellectual processes are carried on silently and spontaneously in the mind of a party or school*, of necessity come to light at a later date and are recognized, and their issues are scientifically arranged" (DCD, 190). (63, emphasis added)

By its very nature, there can be no strict proof of the reality of tacit knowing. Those who have noticed this aspect of reasoning can only ask others to engage in the same kind of introspection so as to gain an intuitive appreciation of their intuitive powers of reasoning.

"All knowledge is tacit or rooted in tacit knowing." Children know no words at birth. Their awareness is fully tacit and inchoate. To learn how to speak, and therefore to gain what is necessary to be educated in how to think in a linear and coherent fashion, is to solve the puzzle of meaning wordlessly. Every child has their own "Helen Keller" moment when they pass from not understanding the words, gestures, facial expressions, and body language of their parents to "seeing what they mean." Only when the person has gained the fundamental skill of interpreting meanings can they then enter into the great domain of articulate knowledge discovered, preserved, and transmitted by a culture. The tacit powers of reasoning that enabled the child to begin to reason articulately do not disappear when the child enters the domain of language. Those spontaneous powers of the mind remain operative at all times: "Already in the tenth of his *Oxford University Sermons,* Newman had emphasized how all inquiry hangs on anticipations of meaning—Gadamer's "pre-understanding" (*Forverständnis*)—since in the absence of such *praejudicata opinioni* it would be logically impossible to correlate the evidence that is to either confirm or disprove them at all (65). Using a Polanyian observation about "unspecifiable knowledge," Pfau portrays knowing as an art : "'To the extent to which our intelligence falls short of the idea of precise formalization,' Polanyi remarks, 'we act and see by the light of unspecifiable knowledge and must acknowledge that we accept the verdict of our personal appraisal.' In other words, the authority of a specific method of knowing inevitably rests on, and is circumscribed by, the art of judgment" (29).

Standpoints, perspectives, frameworks: taking a view of views

Pfau's narrative of the conceptual history of "human agency, intellectual traditions, and responsible knowledge" (the sub-title of the book) might be summarized as a clash between two worldviews: "the Platonic-Christian-humanist model of will, person, action, judgment, and responsibility" (71) as opposed to the "naturalist … and reductionist outlook" of modernity (73). Scientists, mathematicians, or logicians do not need to grasp the nature of their own worldview in order to function competently. Their "vision of a reality" (PK, 86) operates tacitly in the background as they focus on the questions that concern them. They do not need an adequate account of their own human agency as they *use* their human powers skillfully to ask and answer questions appropriate to their field of inquiry. Good scientists may have bad philosophies of science. The skills necessary for scientific

investigation are different from the skills needed for philosophical endeavors. In a sense, the objects of the formal sciences are right before our eyes; the mind that perceives through the eyes and that reasons from what is seen is hidden from view. The one who sees something directly cannot directly see himself seeing. The eye is transparent to itself, and its functions operate in a subsidiary fashion to what the eye is focused on.

In Pfau's understanding of humanistic inquiry, our vision of reality affects every aspect of how we explore the realm of meaning:

> Like Augustine, or, much later, Newman and Gadamer, I do indeed believe that the proper point of departure for hermeneutic inquiry is not some instance of objective certainty or "first principle" to be syllogistically proven and conveyed in propositional form. The motional gesture of "understanding," as Gadamer frequently stresses, is not one of coercion but play, not an inexorable sequence of logical steps but a series of recognitions (or, as the case may be, misprisions) such as characterize all genuine "conversation" (Gespräch). *Humanistic inquiry thus begins with a moment of certitude, a "view" (Newman's term again) to the elucidation of which we take ourselves to be committed*, it being understood that the quest for clarifying that view is one of unceasing dialogue and learning and, as such, destined to transform and, hopefully, deepen the view that first prompted it. In the case of this study, its underlying "view" might bear reformulating thus: philosophies that peremptorily exclude all questions of value, commitment, and final causes--for example, modern science-derived epistemologies, reductionist accounts of mind, or the logical minimalism of much analytic philosophy--are by and large incapable of correlating thought and existence, life and action, for *they only attend to the propositional structure of our locutions* insofar as these seem to lead (with seemingly efficient and inexorable causality) to some kind of "outcome." And yet, from Plato to Augustine, Aquinas, Shaftesbury, Coleridge, and Newman, it is not the seamless conjunction of our locutions and actions but our *insight into their persistent asymmetry and frequent collision* that has yielded the most significant and capacious descriptions of human agency. (71-72; emphasis added)

Pfau often invokes Newman's view of views by placing the word in quotation marks as a reminder that the view in question is not an ordinary standpoint or perspective, but a deep and complex presentiment about what really matters: "Far from originating in some incidental and passive apprehension of brute facts, all understanding begins with a 'view,' a commitment to a hypothesis or idea whose hold on the

intellect is as palpable as it is destined to undergo continual revaluation and revision" (66). "All understanding begins with a view" is a fairly sweeping generalization—it is at least implicitly a view on all possible points of view—and one with which I think I concur, but it is here that I find some discrepancies between Pfau's view of reason and my own.

It seems to me that Pfau stops short of understanding the full implications of the view that he investigates and upholds. In the following passage, Pfau's recognition of "performative inconsistency" in Hume leads him to the brink of making the claim that the Western philosophical tradition, like the physical sciences that grew from "*philosophia naturalis*," has discovered truths unknown to any other philosophical tradition, truths that enable us to be critical of all cultures, including our own, but Pfau seems unwilling to embrace that implication of his own vision of reality:

> Like virtually every one of the writers engaged in this book (including those with whose premises and conclusions I find myself in sharp disagreement), I believe that reasoned inquiry not only does not preclude an inner commitment but, in fact, positively demands it. ... In the case of Hobbes, I not only take his account of human agency to be extremely restrictive and limiting ... but also as vitiated by an internal, performative contradiction and therefore *untrue*. Yet to be committed to a particular view of things as having far greater truth value (or "antecedent probability") is not *eo ipso* to indulge in a nostalgic outlook on the past any more than it betokens sheer subjective opinion or some milieu-specific prejudice. ... In embracing a particular intellectual tradition, ... we do not thereby adopt some triumphalist view of intellectual history. ...
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> The bigger point at issue is that (pace Hegel) not all dialectical tension will issue in a productive outcome. Not every narrative can be deemed inherently "progressive" merely on account of its underlying dialectical organization. Moreover, the (often hidden) costs and the presumptive yield implied in *Aufhebung* cannot be authoritatively balanced from a perspective that is itself generated and circumscribed by Hegel's dialectical narrative. *We simply do not have at our disposal an independent point of view from which objectively to judge whether the recurrent confrontation between naturalist and Platonic legacies has truly advanced our thinking or, perhaps, left it impoverished* … (69-70; emphasis added in the final sentence)

I do not think it is triumphalistic to claim that no other culture in history has elaborated the kind of principles that enable its adherents to strive for and achieve objectivity. To me, that is simply a description of what sets Aristotelian realism apart from all other kinds of philosophy. While I have come

to this view via a very peculiar and idiosyncratic path, the whole point of cultivating the skill of abstract thinking is to set aside my roots as a Polish-Irish-English mixed breed born at the end of the baby boom in the United States of two Canadian parents. I am a bald, overweight, and irascible old man, but these aspects of the mystery that is me are negligible when I am defending the Western view of right reason. My foibles certainly can and do pose difficulties in my family and my friendships, but I am not exalting myself, but rather the tradition of the perennial philosophy developed by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and their heirs, when I claim that this tradition does provide an "interpretative framework" (Polanyi, PK, 59) that allows us to act *as if* we possessed "an independent point of view from which to objectively judge whether the recurrent confrontation between naturalist and Platonic legacies has truly advanced our thinking" (MtM, as above).

In some passages, Pfau portrays the effort to achieve objectivity as part of the essential flaw in modernity instead of part of its genius: "Ancient philosophy has no concept equivalent to the modern idea of 'information' as neutral and instrumental knowledge; in fact, the proposition that there might be a type of knowledge that can be agonistically or indifferently appraised by means of some 'view from nowhere' would have struck thinkers of that era as bizarre" (91; see also 608).

> How can a modern critique justify its selective questioning of the premises and principles of all other theoretical and moral systems, unless it is also prepared to advance *an equally comprehensive, alternative account of human flourishing*? Finally, can there even be such a thing as a wholly neutral intellectual stance--a view from nowhere uninformed by some distinct *tradition* of rational inquiry? ... Echoing Hans-Georg Gadamer, Alasdair MacIntyre insists that there can be no such thing as a critical and rational argument unfolding independent of a specific intellectual tradition: "it is indeed only relative to some competing theory or set of competing theories that any particular theory can be held to be justified or unjustified. There is no such thing as justification as such, just as there is no such thing as justification independent of the context of any tradition." Moreover, MacIntyre notes, "the first principles of such a theory are not justified or unjustified independently of the theory as a whole." (232; emphasis added)

I think that to assert that the ideal of objectivity requires "some 'view from nowhere'" is to create a straw man. All of our judgments require a view, and all of our views have a developmental history, but it does not follow that our power to think abstractly is defeated by these necessary conditions of human inquiry. It is not just Hume who must offer "an equally comprehensive, alternative account," but Pfau,

Gadamer, and MacIntyre. To declare apodictically that "there is no 'view from nowhere,'" one must possess some kind of transcendent perspective to ground that judgment on all possible judgments. MacIntyre's claims that "there is no such thing as justification as such," "no such thing as justification independent of the context of any tradition," and no independent justification of "first principles" apart from "the theory as a whole" either is just a mystical edict asserted through his own gnostic illumination or is a counter-example to the point that he is trying to make. The historical rootedness of presuppositions does not mean that we are in bondage to our idiosyncracies. If no one can take a standpoint outside of the culture that educated them, then MacIntyre, unless he happens to be God or an angel masquerading as a human being, cannot make universal negative claims about the limits of reason. "There are no timeless truths" is either a timeless truth of the very sort that it negates or else it is a truism of virtually no import about the chronology of the development of ideas. Once upon a time, we did not know that water molecules are composed of one oxygen and two hydrogen atoms; some chemist discovered this truth at some particular time in history, and now we know something about the whole history of the cosmos that was not known beforehand, namely that wherever and whenever there is water, it is H_2O.

It may well be that there are no presuppositionless standpoints. If so, the declaration that "there are no presuppositionless standpoints" is based on presuppositions. If the declaration is true, then it follows that relying on presuppositions does not necessarily keep us from knowing truth—that there are no presuppositionless standpoints is irrelevant to the question of finding out what presuppositions are involved in the questions that interest us. We cannot think without making assumptions; our assumptions are essentially prejudices that provide us with "antecedent probabilities" (GA, 328-329; see Pfau, 27-28, 31, 61, 63-64, 66, 71). From the fact that we need prejudices in order to reason rightly it does not follow that all of our judgments are necessarily biased. If that were the case, then we could never know that all reasoning depends on presumptions and that therefore "there are no presuppositionless standpoints" in any culture at any time anywhere in the world. For God and the angels, perhaps, there may be direct knowledge without the need to draw inferences, but for all rational agents in this cosmos who have an embodied intellect like ours, to judge is to rely on pre-judgments.

Polanyi recognized this quandary, and saw that there was no way out except through accepting that all of our judgments are hazardous commitments:

> So we see that both Kepler and Einstein approached nature with intellectual passions and with beliefs inherent in these passions, which led them to their triumphs and misguided them to their errors. These passions and beliefs were theirs, personally, even

> though they held them in the conviction that they were valid, universally. I believe that they were competent to follow these impulses, even though they risked being misled by them. And again, what I accept of their work as true today, I accept personally, guided by passions and beliefs similar to theirs, holding in my turn that my impulses are valid, universally, even though I must admit the possibility that they may be mistaken. (PK, 145)

To advance the Western tradition, we must act in faith that our reasoning either is reliable or that it is corrigible. We do not have the freedom to change our nature into that of God or the angels. We must work with what nature has given us.

Pfau's exposition of Coleridge points toward a relatively satisfying "comprehensive account" of our power to "break out"[9] of the frameworks in which we first find our intellectual bearings: "Coleridge … touches on the relation of reason to truth, and he specifically rejects the modern perspectivalist and pluralist argument that rationality is itself contingent on, and determined by, inherently non-rational (material) factors such as race, gender, ethnicity, material circumstances, and so forth" (558). "There is something in the human mind which makes it know (as soon as it is sufficiently awakened to reflect on its own thoughts and notices), that in all finite Quantity there is an Infinite, in all measures of Time an Eternal; that the latter are the basis, the substance, the true and abiding *reality* of the former; and that as we truly *are*, only as far as God is with us, so neither can we truly *possess* (i.e., enjoy) our Being or any other real Good, but by living in the sense of his holy presence (AR, 92)" (611). In every judgment that something is finite, I implicitly rely on an awareness of the infinite; in every recognition that something is time-bound, I manifest an awareness of a timeless viewpoint; whenever I see that I am not God, I silently appeal to "the sense of his holy presence."

In calling this vision of reality a "comprehensive account," I am not suggesting that it has been or that it can be spelled out with mathematical or logical precision. The transcendental realities of truth, beauty, and goodness in the classical Platonic triad, or "the good, the beautiful, the just, reason" in Pfau's exposition of Strauss (51), are not clear and distinct ideas that can be expressed in notional propositions fit for notional apprehension and notional assent. "The Tao that I can bring into focus is not the real Tao." The transcendental realities that can be designated by notional propositions are not the real transcendentals. Polanyi holds that they operate on our minds in the tacit dimension:

> I suggest now that the supposed pre-suppositions of science are so futile because the actual foundations of our scientific beliefs cannot be asserted at all. When we accept a certain set of pre-suppositions and use them as our interpretative framework, we may

> be said to dwell in them as we do in our own body. Their uncritical acceptance for the time being consists in a process of assimilation by which we identify ourselves with them. They are not asserted and cannot be asserted, for assertion can be made only within a framework with which we have identified ourselves for the time being; as they are themselves our ultimate framework, they are essentially inarticulable. (PK, 60)

"That the good seems to defeat each and every attempt to seize it in propositional form proves nothing, for what matters is the very effort to achieve moral articulacy" (Pfau, 253). Our tacit awareness of incommunicable transcendentals bears on every aspect of reality that we bring into focal awareness: "Like the tool, the sign or symbol can be conceived as such only in the eyes of a person who relies on them to achieve or to signify something. *This reliance is a personal commitment which is involved in all acts of intelligence by which we integrate some things subsidiarily to the center of our focal attention.* Every act of personal assimilation by which we make a thing form an extension of ourselves through our subsidiary awareness of it, is a commitment of ourselves; a manner of disposing of ourselves" (PK, 61).

The aspect of the self that we call "intellect" is always oriented toward the truth—the hermeneutic model "conceives of ideas and concepts as continuously evolving realizations of a *truth* … Concepts are grasped as conduits for the successive distillation of a truth" (41). The aspect of the self that we call "will" is always oriented toward the good ("*synderesis*," 231, 273, 289-290, 320). The aspect of self that some call the heart, as in Newman's motto, "cor ad cor loquitur," is drawn to beauty: "it is not epistemology but ethics—for Shaftesbury intimately entwined with aesthetics—that should be the principal focus of philosophy" (239; see also 242, 271, 283).[10] The self is not a prison for itself. We can, paradoxically, adopt a viewpoint above ourselves and call our own commitments into question: "For to engage life and human consciousness *as a philosophical problem* is to stand necessarily at some remove from it and to have achieved a certain measure of transcendence" (474). In such an act, the self goes beyond the self. To a machine intelligence, this is a contradiction in terms; to a phenomenologist, it is an observation.

Conclusion

When I was studying philosophy at Fordham University as a young Jesuit, I fell under the spell of Bernard Lonergan's *Insight.*[11] I do not know how many times I have read it since 1975—probably six or eight, at least. Lonergan had a similar fascination with Newman during his early studies: "My fundamental mentor and guide has been John Henry Newman's *Grammar of Assent*. […] I] found Newman's presentation to be something that fitted in with the way I knew things. It was from that

kernel that I went on to different authors."[12] In the section on "The Notion of a Universal Viewpoint," Lonergan anticipates precisely the kind of work Pfau has done in *Minding the Modern*:

> The universal viewpoint is concerned with the interpreter's capacity to grasp meanings; it would open his mind to ideas that do not lie on the surface and to views that diverge enormously from his own; it would enable him to find clues where otherwise he might look but would fail to see; it would equip him with a capacity to transport his thinking to the level and texture of another culture in another epoch. There are the external sources of historical interpretation and, in the main, they consist in spatially ordered marks on paper or parchment, papyrus or stone. But there are also sources of interpretation immanent in the historiographer himself, in his ability to distinguish and recombine elements in his own experience, in his ability to work backwards from contemporary to earlier accomplishments of insights in human development, in his ability to envisage the protean possibilities of the notion of being, the core of all meaning, which varies in content with the experience, the insights, the judgments, and the habitual orientation of each individual. (565)

I have seen more than I can say and learned more than I can tell from Pfau's breathtaking exploration of the "abiding framework" of the Western intellectual tradition (162). I look forward to his next volume on the "nineteenth-century rehabilitation" of the image (index, "image," 660). I am convinced that speculative theology is not a luxury but a necessity. We must see what we believe, not by sight but by insight, and I am sure that Pfau's work on aesthetics will be eye-opening.

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[1] *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2013), 9. The phrase "humanistic inquiry" does not appear in the index of the book, but it is a favorite expression of Pfau's (e.g., 40, 46-47, 52, 53, 71-73, 75, 509). I take it as a convenient name for the tradition with which Pfau identifies and which he wishes to renew, defend, and refresh in this work.

[2] First published in 1845. Sixth edition, 1878, with foreword by Ian Ker (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1989).

[3] With an introduction by Nicholas Lash (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979).

[4] "Illative Sense and Tacit Knowledge: A Comparison of the Theological Implications of the Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi" (The Catholic University of America, 1991) was revised and published as *Personal Catholicism: An Analysis of the Theological Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000). Through my work with Bill Scott on *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), I discovered that Polanyi had read the *Grammar of Assent* twice; after mulling this over for a decade or so, I finally came to grips with that fact in "Polanyi and Newman: A Reconsideration" (*Tradition and Discovery* 41:2 (2014-2015) 45-55.

[5] *The Tacit Dimension* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1966) , 4.

[6] *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962 [1958]).

[7] From the penultimate paragraph of "Science and Reality," the first chapter of *Science, Faith, and Society*, with a new introduction by the author (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963 [1946]) , 40.

[8] *Meaning*, with Harry Prosch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 61.
[9] Polanyians will recognize "dwelling in" and "breaking out" as an important them in PK, 195-202. We must first inhabit a framework and learn to operate within it before we can radically revise it.
[10] In his next book, Pfau will almost certainly expand on the importance of aesthetics in human inquiry. "The strong emphasis on the visual and the image that characterizes Ruskin's aesthetics and that is also observable in its most profound extension, Gerard Manley Hopkins's poetics, reflects attempts to develop a phenomenology of the human person by other means. It will be the matter of another book to show how … [Coleridge's] heirs proceeded to rethink the human in emphatically objective terms, viz., by embarking on a rehabilitation of the image" (617-618—the last words of the book).
[11] *Insight: A Study of Human Understanding*. New York: Harper and Row, 1972 [1957, 1958]).
[12] Michael Paul Gallagher, "Lonergan's Newman: Appropriated Affinities" (*Gregorianum* 85 (2004) 735.