

REVIEWS

Mark L. Jones, Paul A. Lewis, and Kelly E. Reffitt, eds. *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom, and Professional Formation*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013. Pp. xii + 291. ISBN 978-0-88146-436-8. \$30.00 pb.

As the editors of *Toward Human Flourishing* note in their “Introduction,” this book stems from two interdisciplinary projects and three sponsored symposia, the first two symposia on professional education and formation in terms of ethics, character, and an ethical sense of vocation, the last symposium on cultivating practical wisdom or *phronesis* in professional education and formation. Appropriately, the book’s division into three parts parallels the sequence of those three symposia. Over fifty pages of appendices follow the body of the work for those who might want to utilize various exercises and strategies for the university classroom or other professional educational contexts.

As in any edited anthology, variations in style and content occur, including with respect to the broadness or narrowness of relevancy; but I judge the overall quality of the contributions to be high. Two contributions are noteworthy for framing the overall discussion: Paul Lewis begins Part I with a survey of the history of character education in the twentieth century, noting the decline of integrated character education and the arising of four schools, movements, or programs that tried to fill the gap: cognitive developmentalism, values clarification, “revitalized character education” (19) promoted by former Secretary of Education William Bennett, and citizenship education. William Sullivan initiates Part II with a brief overview of the history of university education preparing persons to serve in the various professions, including teaching. He delineates “the three apprenticeships of professional education:” 1) the academic apprenticeship that focuses on cognitive skill or intellectual knowledge, 2) the practical apprenticeship that focuses on skill in professional practices, and 3) the socio-ethical apprenticeship that focuses on “identity and purpose” (108), which crucially for Sullivan involves a sense of obligation for public service.

Most of the remainder of my remarks will concern points in the book that especially grabbed my attention, points I mostly endorse but a few to which I take some exception. While I appreciate Darcia Narvaez’s rejection of biological determinism and her ideas for developing “mature moral functioning,” I believe she overstates the case in claiming that “the role of genetics [in character] is very small” (28). I think of research on psychopathic personalities, where their inability to empathize is genetically based. I also think of those on the autistic spectrum: while environment and phenotypical factors constitute a trigger, genes do determine who is a candidate for a condition with significant ramifications for moral character.

Having encountered and written about religious relativism in the classroom, I resonated with Thomas Lickona’s chapter on developing moral thinking and agency in students who tend towards moral relativism. Given the willingness of many students to cheat, I appreciated his highlighting of a classroom writing and small group discussion exercise by Hal Urban, which has proven effective in leading students to place a higher value on honesty, particularly because of how (dis)honesty affects one’s sense of self-respect (61-62).

William Sullivan’s chapter, already mentioned in regard to the three apprenticeships, develops the case for “civic professionalism” and describes how the professions developed and should exist for the sake of “public goods” (102-105). Analyzing the matter in terms of economics, he notes that the professions are granted social, political, and economic privileges in expectation that they in turn contribute to public welfare. In an age where economic self-interest and self-aggrandizement permeate our culture, including within the professions and professional education, this reminder of what should be obvious is most welcome.

Jack Sammons’ chapter is the only one to specifically reference the thought of Michael Polanyi. Unfortunately, I did not find Sammons’ critique of Sullivan’s notion of the three apprenticeships to be

particularly helpful. Sammons argues that the three apprenticeships should not be separated, in light of Polanyi's insistence that all knowledge derives from a process and practice of personal integrative effort rooted in the tacit dimension (153-155). His solution is that all three elements—the cognitive, practical, and moral—be fully integrated into the first apprenticeship (156). While I completely agree that cognitive apprenticeship needs to integrate the practical and the moral in every feasible way, I think that, practically speaking, the educational contexts of contemporary society dictate some relative separation. That is to say, some education needs to be in academic settings and some in field-work and internship type settings. Sullivan for his part clearly repudiates any notion of making the moral third apprenticeship a separate one chronologically or contextually. He refers to that option as the “additive strategy” and instead opts for an “integrative strategy” (110-112). So where do Sullivan and Sammons disagree on the third apprenticeship? I interpret part of Sammons' meaning to be that the ethical dimension needs to be a determinative pre-reflective or tacit component of all professional education. He also holds out little hope that Sullivan's strategy can succeed, given contemporary society's dominant sense of self as the self-serving, autonomous individual, rather than as part of a community of practice. This diagnosis of the rational, self-interested economic self parallels that of Sullivan and other contributors. My contention would be that, precisely because of the dominance of such individualistic, self-centered models of the self, the apprenticeships centered on the classroom and on practice need to explicitly raise and advocate professional ethics—as well as embrace the tacit and pre-reflective integration of moral values with the cognitive and practical dimensions of professional education.

Schwartz and Sharpe offer the most intriguing insight of Part III: that rules and incentives constitute a “war on [practical] wisdom,” the former by discouraging the development of skill in moral discernment as we face life's variegated situations, the latter by framing moral issues in terms of self-interest rather than of intrinsic rightness (177-183). Particularly striking was an example from an Israeli daycare center: in order to reduce the incidence of

parents picking up their children late, the director instituted fines. The result? Lateness increased and stayed higher for at least six months after the ineffective fines were eliminated! As the authors put it, parents interpreted the fine “as a *price*; . . . a price worth paying,” because lateness had literally been “*de-moralized*” (182; italics original). One reason this section especially resonated with me is that my campus has been passionately debating students' accessibility to faculty and campus citizenship more broadly in the wake of stronger rules on faculty office hours. The authors' insight is daunting as well as intriguing, for motivating people to do the right for the sake of intrinsic rightness is not an easy matter. But we can thank Schwartz and Sharpe for warning us about what can make matters worse.

As someone with no more than acquaintance with the pragmatic philosophy of John Dewey, I found David Ritchie's summary of Dewey's epistemology in terms of practical wisdom to be cogent and informed by diverse works of Dewey. Much of Dewey's epistemology seemed congruous with Polanyi's tacit dimension, including the crucial components of our drawing on past experience and our homing in on the “felt difficulty” of a problem (201-204). I noticed one element missing in Dewey's understanding of wisdom, at least as recapitulated by Ritchie, a lack which aligns with a potential downside of being “pragmatic” in the colloquial sense: ignoring the question of moral rightness. Dewey writes about what works, but does not here distinguish between working in terms of self-interest versus working in terms of wider concerns.

The editors' brief conclusion focuses on something central to the profession “professed” by myself and many readers of *TAD*: “the good of liberal education (whether for elementary students, undergraduates, or professionals)” (214). They attest that “(w)e need wisdom so as to know both how much of the good of liberal education can be sustained under present social circumstances and how to go about achieving it” (215). Fortunately their book furnishes some of that needed wisdom.

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Ritu Bhatt, ed. *Rethinking Aesthetics: The Role of Body in Design*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Pp. xv+239. ISBN 978-0-415-53474-1 (hb), 978-0-415-53475-8 (pb). \$180.00 & \$54.95.

The titles of some books seem to have little to do with their contents. Not so with *Rethinking Aesthetics*. Its essays deal in different ways with expanded notions of aesthetics. The traditional primacy of vision in theories of aesthetics is downgraded in most of the essays. Instead, as the book's subtitle suggests, tacit embodiment assumes a primary place in analyzing aesthetic design. Because the book is thematically centered in embodiment, not surprisingly it is architecture—the art form within which bodies dwell—that is the particular aspect of design upon which essays focus. Indeed, most of the authors are either practicing architects or professors of architecture. However, in many of the essays, the “aesthetic” is seen as a quality of all experience, perhaps coming to clearest focus in works of art, including architecture, but more broadly available for those attentive to how experience arises and is shaped.

The book is replete with examples of thinkers and schools of thought that aid persons in recognizing the ways our mind-body (a term used by several essayists) creates life-sustaining meaning. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Nelson Goodman are the philosophers who are most cited in the essays. Zen Buddhism is the tradition that is most frequently drawn upon as a resource for expanding traditional views of aesthetics.

The thought of Michael Polanyi is explicitly mentioned in the book only in the article by Chris Abel, which will be discussed later in this review. However, ideas that resonate with Polanyian philosophy occur throughout. Thus, not only is there an ongoing critique of such dichotomies as body and mind or the artistic and the everyday, but also the importance of tacit processes is a recurring theme. Such Polanyian notions as levels, background beliefs, integration, and focal attention are scattered throughout the essays. More strikingly, editor Bhatt mentions what she calls the “post-critical turn” in her essay. This phrase refers not to Polanyi's concept, but to “a series of influential essays” written

in architectural and design journals, articles which have taken a non-skeptical “attitude toward ‘other’ traditional (often pre-modern) knowledge systems” (182). There is no indication of borrowing from Polanyi in this usage, but in both uses of the post-critical the role of the personal rather than some universal standard is evident.

Perhaps enough has been said about the book in general to indicate what a rich and provocative collection of essays it includes. Now a few words are in order about the most striking individual essays. Philosopher Mark Johnson is the writer who especially emphasizes that the aesthetic “is the very stuff of any meaningful experience” (49); this is the point of his essay, “Dewey's Big Idea for Aesthetics.” For Dewey, the integrative acts that produce unified experience are guided by aesthetic standards. His thick notion of aesthetically unified experience is seen to be what authentic thought is rooted in and to which genuine philosophy must refer (38).

Richard Schusterman offers a vision of the aesthetic that is only slightly less encompassing than Dewey's thought: Schusterman advocates living a life of awakened consciousness “in which ordinary or everyday things can be appreciated through aesthetic perception and thus transfigured into a special experience” (25). The thought of Emerson and Thoreau and the somatic practices of Zen are claimed to be particularly instructive for those eager to embrace philosophy as an enlightened style of living. Another essayist, Yuriko Saito, also is motivated by Zen to honor the innate properties of objects. In her “The Moral Dimension of Japanese Aesthetics,” she claims that an aesthetic attitude of honoring otherness, when transferred from objects to persons, constitutes the foundation of morality (165).

Architect Juhani Pallasmaa sees our aesthetic sensitivities as deeply embedded in the course of human bio-cultural evolution. “No doubt, our aesthetic preferences reflect our biological past and our aesthetically based choices have had evolutionary values” (226). Beginning with the tactile responsiveness of bacteria, embodied touch is seen by Pallasmaa to be the originating connection of living beings to the wider world. Touch is embedded within all forms of sensation. Touching is cognately related to

feeling and feeling suffused with aesthetic sensitivity underlies experience in general and perceiving in particular. “Touch is the unconsciousness of vision, and this hidden tactile experience determines the sensuous qualities of the perceived object.... It is exactly this unconscious dimension of touch in vision that is disastrously neglected in today’s retinal and hard-edged architecture” (220).

Remei Capdevila-Werning makes a claim about aesthetic experience that would likely be affirmed by the majority of the authors. She says that “aesthetic experience is a primarily cognitive endeavor and, for that reason, aesthetics is a branch of epistemology, which focuses on the broader field of understanding rather than on only propositional knowledge” (86). The connection with Dewey’s thought is evident in her claim. Works of architecture may themselves be regarded as symbols belonging to one or more symbol systems. Symbol and system are each subject to changing cultural emphases and thus open to multiple interpretations. Interpretations of a building’s meaning must be judged on how well they relate to its symbolized qualities and some interpretations have a better fit than others. How buildings are seen to operate symbolically is itself a matter of interpretation and Capdevila-Werner suggests six characteristics of proper symbolization (96).

The articles by Galen Cranz and Ritu Bhatt suggest how several schools of thought and practice that rely upon the intuitions of a body-mind can improve the quality of design. Cranz utilizes the Alexander Technique, of which she is a teacher, to reflect upon the proper design of chairs. “The built environment,” she writes, “especially the common chair, can interfere with the proper coordination of the head, neck, and back” (147). To properly accommodate the ideal needs of body-minds within the built environment, designers should “first understand the activities that take place within a space and the life of the inhabitants before starting the designing” (153). Bhatt describes the traditional Chinese organizing approach of feng shui as taking into account unconscious needs for security in architectural siting and design, unconscious needs typically ignored in contemporary architecture. Likewise, architect Christopher Alexander’s rather idiosyncratic pattern language is seen to rely upon “deeply-felt human

sensations and needs [that] should guide architectural design” (8).

Finally, let me say something about the one article that explicitly makes use of Polanyi’s thought. “The Extended Self: Tacit Knowing and Place Identity” by Chris Abel is the longest essay in the book, and befitting its length, Abel attends to such diverse topics as place identity, the neurosciences, embodiment, the development of the self, and what implications all these factors have on the way the built environment is shaped. In discussing the home as the core of place identity, Abel suggests that there is a tension between those who affirm the functional, comfortable design of typical suburban houses and critics of the tastes and values embraced by suburbanites and manifest in their architecture. One set of critics, exemplified by Martin Heidegger and architect Christian Norberg-Schulz, laud enclosure and density as essential to existentially positive place making and dwelling. Abel argues that such a construal of ideal dwelling ignores the diversity observable in various cultures about how best to dwell. He notes that Australian aborigines identify their home with the land on which they dwell; their temporary shelters are of little importance. He might have pointed out that in the western United States the ideal of many is to eschew density in favor of a ranch or at least a ranchette.

Not only the nature of the ideal home, but also the nature of the ideal city elicits aesthetic debate. Kevin Lynch’s *The Image of the City* praises the image elements of the typical European city and disparages American urban design, which prioritizes car traffic rather than pedestrian friendly streets. However, again there seems to be no universal aesthetic at work in people’s notion of ideal place identity. “However, one inescapable factor that every human being shares with every other human being on the planet in his or her own day to day experience of the world—regardless of background or culture—but which is generally taken for granted, is the human body” (110). Embodied persons not only want to feel their homes are meaningfully related to their environments, they want to experience intimate places within their homes where they feel centered and whole.

Does body identity play a role in suggesting what constitutes the best suburban and urban design? Abel turns first to Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi and then to neuroscientists—especially Sandra and Matthew Blakeslee in their *The Body Has a Mind of Its Own*—to explore the ways bodies relate to their environments. Merleau-Ponty insists that our bodies are not best seen as existing in abstract space. Rather they inhabit space in a world-creating way comparable to that employed by other persons and which therefore allows us as bodies to identify with others (114-116). Abel artfully describes Polanyi's notion of indwelling, emphasizing how those components that function as subsidiaries are enveloped by our body so that our being is not limited to the extent of our skin. Polanyi thus offers an explanation “not only for how people identify with others, but also for how they identify with the homes, cities and other places they inhabit, and which help shape their lives” (120-21). Consequently Abel suggests that place-identity is an aspect of tacit knowing involving a metaphoric extension of a person's body.

Polanyi's insights are seen by Abel to be confirmed by the work of the Blakeslees and other neuroscientists. They describe several types of internal body maps that represent an elaboration of Polanyi's notion of latent learning. The way bodies become oriented and purposefully act in a flexible space domain is described by the term “peripersonal space.” Self-centered body maps are augmented by geocentric place cells and grid cells, all of which as embodied phenomena move beyond the purely mental images of Lynch in his justification of European urban design.

Abel makes use of Polanyi's thought in one direct and one indirect way. Polanyi appreciates how beginning architectural students come to their study with a tacit understanding of buildings and environment that would best be nourished by apprenticeship and learning by example, rather than through overly intellectual indoctrination. Polanyi and others show that place making is a dynamic and flexible process, but it is a process that tends to settle into a preference for that which is familiar, that which establishes a core place identity. It is this inflexibility that worries Abel in the last section of his essay. More important than what one prefers in

the design of places is the threat of unsustainable urban and suburban design dependent on cars. Thus concentrated living as advocated by Norberg-Schulz, Lynch and others trumps merely aesthetic reasons for design. Abel does not mention some of the key works of the so-called New Urbanism (works like *Suburban Nation: the Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream*), but clearly his article as a whole is sympathetic to this movement.

Diverse and stimulating, *Rethinking Aesthetics* is a book that lives up to its name.

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