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Submissions: All manuscripts should be submitted as a Microsoft Word file attached to an email message. **Articles** should be no more than 6000 words in length (inclusive of keywords, abstract, notes, and references) and sent to Paul Lewis at lewis_pa@mercer.edu. All submissions will be sent out for blind peer review. **Book reviews** should be no more than 1000 words in length and sent to Andrew Grosso at atgrosso@icloud.com.

Spelling: We recognize that the journal serves English-speaking writers around the world and so do not require anyone's "standard" English spelling. We do, however, require all writers to be consistent in whatever convention they follow.

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- Our preference is for Chicago's parenthetical/reference style in which citations are given in the text as (last name of author year, page number), combined with full bibliographical information at the end of the article. One exception is that Polanyi's major works may be cited parenthetically using the following abbreviations (with abbreviations italicized):

<i>CF</i>	<i>Contempt of Freedom</i>
<i>KB</i>	<i>Knowing and Being</i>
<i>LL</i>	<i>Logic of Liberty</i>
<i>M</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
<i>PK</i>	<i>Personal Knowledge</i>
<i>SEP</i>	<i>Society, Economics, and Philosophy</i>
<i>SFS</i>	<i>Science, Faith, and Society</i>
<i>SM</i>	<i>Study of Man</i>
<i>STSR</i>	<i>Scientific Thought and Social Reality</i>
<i>TD</i>	<i>Tacit Dimension</i>

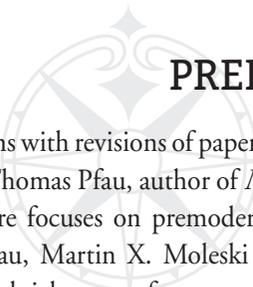
For example: Polanyi argues that (*TD*, 56). Full bibliographical information should still be supplied in the references section since many of us may work with different editions of his works.

- Endnotes should be used sparingly and be placed before the reference section.
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PREFACE

This issue opens with revisions of papers presented during the 2015 Polanyi Society Annual Meeting. Thomas Pfau, author of *Minding the Modern* (reviewed in *TAD* 42:1, October 2015) here focuses on premodern and modern notions of personhood. In his response to Pfau, Martin X. Moleski suggests some nuances to the issues Pfau addresses. Philip Rolnick presses for a recovery of a *telos* that is given to us and suggests that there is more to be said about the material factors that give rise to modernity.

In addition to these articles, Martin Turkis takes us into the work of Robert Scholes, a literary critic and semiotician who brings his theory to bear on his pedagogical practices. Turkis demonstrates that Scholes is a kindred spirit to and ally of Polanyi, despite there being no direct connection between the two. Finally, Andrew Grosso reviews Chris Abel's new book, *The Extended Self*.

Please note that some of the normal features of *TAD* are now missing in action—at least from the printed version of the journal. In order to make more room for articles in our limited space, we will be posting News and Notes, Society Resources, and E-reader instructions only on our website (www.polanyisociety.org). Keep up to date on those items and Society meetings by checking there.

Paul Lewis

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THE FAILURE OF CHARITY AND THE LOSS OF PERSONHOOD: BEYOND THE ENLIGHTENMENT IMPASSE



Thomas Pfau

Keywords: Modernity, hermeneutics, personhood, affection, volition, cognition, tacit knowing, Michael Polanyi, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Hans-Georg Gadamer

ABSTRACT

Pfau elaborates the arguments he develops in Minding the Modern, and devotes particular attention to the question of the incommensurability of premodern and modern accounts of personhood and agency. He highlights the distinct nature of humanistic forms of inquiry (including history and theology) and examines their hermeneutic character, noting the priority of meaning over method. He emphasizes the interdependence of affection, volition, and cognition, and also analyzes varying descriptions of relationality. The article closes with a meditation on a section of T.S. Eliot's Waste Land and the insights it provides to the themes mentioned in the essay.

I

Ever since the rise and prolonged dominance of historicism in the early nineteenth century—initially in higher biblical criticism, though quickly metastasizing into other fields (politics, law, and aesthetics)—historical inquiry has modeled the study of objects and phenomena on a quasi-scientific, Baconian conception of method. Under this new dispensation, the underlying aim of inquiry becomes one of “objectivity” rather than “truth,” as Stephen Gaukroger has remarked with reference to Bacon (Gaukroger 2006, 236). In due course, nineteenth-century historicism emulated the impersonal, detached, and critical methodology first pioneered by the empirical sciences. In so

doing, a historicist mode of inquiry has consistently foregrounded the need for maintaining distance from the phenomena and practices under investigation and, in so doing, achieve cognitive dominion over its objects. Analyzing this development in *Minding the Modern*, I remark how, “under conditions of modernity, all history is merely prehistory” (Pfau 2013, 36) and, as such, is both studied and put to rest by triumphalist and retrospective narratives constructed in the present.

That nineteenth-century humanistic and sociological inquiry (e.g., Comte, Feuerbach, Durkheim, et al.) had originated in seventeenth-century empirical and quantitative methodologies bears keeping in mind for several reasons, not least of which is the fact that the Baconian and Cartesian conceptions of method offer at best a decidedly incomplete account of human knowledge. For the migration of an (inherently problematic) conception of method from the empirical sciences into humanistic inquiry is an important feature of late-Enlightenment thought. Its pivot is found in Kant’s late-Enlightenment idea of “critique,” in particular Kant’s insistence of preserving human cognitive autonomy *vis-à-vis* forms of “experience” (*Erfahrung*) said to have originated in seemingly inchoate empirical data. Thus, in his 1784 “Ideas for a Universal History from a Cosmopolitan Point of View,” Kant sharply distinguishes between individual intentions, meanings, and practices (which he deems all but rationally unintelligible) and aggregate patterns of behavior that, unbeknownst to the historical individuals who display them, can be retrospectively invested with an actuarial logic of sorts. On this model, historical meaning is significant precisely to the extent that it is *not* available to the individuals or communities said to have inadvertently generated it.

Kant here anticipates Hegel’s essentially retrospective model of cognition, namely, as a belated, dialectical salvaging of meanings whose fullness necessarily eludes the individuals and communities that have produced them. Hans-Georg Gadamer characterizes this as the emergence of historicism, not as a reaction *against* a supposedly un-historical Enlightenment, but as the apotheosis of its critical and emancipatory idea of secular reason. In its dominant theological form—that of the so called Higher Criticism first shaped by Wolf, Eichhorn, Ernesti, and the Protestant Tübingen School and subsequently extended by Strauss, Feuerbach, Comte, Renan, and others—historicism secures theological meaning precisely at the expense of its relevance. For like another institutional creation of the Romantic era, the modern museum, historicism claims to “know” means precisely *not* to participate in meanings but, instead, to quarantine them within putatively separate past contexts. As Gadamer points out, historicism fundamentally reenacts the Enlightenment’s vaunted emancipation from history by arresting and inventorying the past, draining it of its relevance, and by “reconstruct[ing] the old because it is old” (Gadamer 2004, 275).

Nineteenth-century historicism marks the culmination of a process long in the making, involving “a kind of detachment of the ‘real’ historical world from its biblical description” wrought by the Enlightenment’s insistence on “a logical distinction and a

reflective distance between the stories and the ‘reality’ they depict.” Hans Frei offers a compelling account of this development, noting that “once literal and historical reading began to break apart, figural interpretation became discredited both as a literary device and as a historical argument” because it contravened “the elementary assumption that a propositional statement has only one meaning.” The resulting historicist protocol amounts to conceptual naturalism. That is, it confuses “history-likeness (literal meaning) and history (ostensive reference).” As Frei goes on to note, to so conflate the mimetic and referential functions of narrative “meant that one lacked the distinctive category and appropriate interpretive procedure for understanding what one had actually recognized” (Frei 1984, 3-5, 12).

The dilemma just sketched ultimately reduces to this question: does a modern conception of knowledge derived from the univocal, scientific methodologies first developed in the age of Descartes and Bacon have any place for hermeneutic practice, that is, for discerning the layered and interconnected nature of meanings as we encounter them in philosophical and theological traditions? If not, one would then have to ask whether meaningful hermeneutic activity is even possible in the absence of traditions and genealogies of inquiry. My argument, which I have developed in greater detail in *Minding the Modern*, is that both humanistic and theological inquiry cannot effectively proceed, and will likely erode their institutional relevance, unless we acknowledge and honor in our hermeneutic practice the indispensable role of tradition. Doing so requires first and foremost that we acknowledge the full extent to which a dynamic, evolving, and participatory model of tradition stands in direct conflict with the methodological prescriptions and epistemological assumptions of historicism. For in its methodical commitment to the attenuation of past meanings within a matrix of underlying material causes and background reference, historicism betrays its implicit discomfort with the possibility of meanings issuing from the past and having an enduring and potentially transformative hold on the present.

For a number of reasons, the development I have sketched thus far remains of particular relevance to theological inquiry, particularly as regards its exegetical and speculative manifestations. For it is here that achieving orientation in our own, inevitably damaged and disoriented present requires that we surrender the epistemological pride and *libido dominandi* enshrined in modern, science-derived epistemologies. Theological inquiry in particular requires our ongoing, reflective participation in the complex interplay of those voices that have preceded us. It is only in virtue of our “background awareness” (to borrow Polanyi’s term) of these voices that the hermeneutic quest for substantive, relevant meaning can possibly succeed. The key difference between hermeneutic and scientific inquiry has to do with how these two forms of knowing treat those background conditions. Echoing Gadamer’s *Truth and Method*, Michael Polanyi also notes how “scientific rationalism has been the chief guide towards

all the intellectual, moral, and social progress on which the nineteenth century prided itself.” Yet unlike Gadamer, Polanyi not only rejects the applicability of scientific methods to hermeneutic inquiry; he also insists that the idea of strictly value-neutral and context-independent, scientific methodology is a misguided fiction and, “strictly speaking nonsensical...Successful induction can be conducted only in the light of a genuine problem. An inductive problem is an intimation of coherence among hitherto uncomprehended particulars” (*KB*, 130-131).

Hence, if even within the empirical sciences inductive discovery entails “an oscillation between movements of analysis and integration in which, on balance, integration predominates,” the same is even more emphatically true of interpretive fields (*KB*, 130-131). For, as Polanyi insists, “no human mind can function without accepting authority, custom, and tradition; it must rely on them for the mere use of a language. Empirical induction, strictly applied, can yield no knowledge at all, and the mechanistic explanation of the universe is a meaningless ideal” (*KB*, 41). For scientific inquiry to generate not just formally correct information but the kind of knowledge that a community of learners would regard as positively meaningful, a vast and largely unarticulated body of background conditions must be presupposed. This “tacit dimension,” Polanyi notes, involves a “large area of hidden and yet accessible truths far exceeding the capacity of one man to fathom” (*KB*, 128). Indeed, in the course of investigating a particular, sharply demarcated problem, the scientist gradually achieves what notably was not being sought *per se*, namely, a fuller awareness of the antecedent coherence and inherent significance of these background conditions.

Of critical importance here is Polanyi’s insistence that “focal and subsidiary awareness are definitely *not two degrees* of attention but *two kinds* of attention given to the *same* particulars” (*KB*, 128). Background awareness attends to the ways in which some particular is embedded, how its texture is revealed and distinguished by its more or less conspicuous and functional relation to and interaction with other particulars. Here, then, the claim can be made that in interpretive fields, background awareness is precisely an awareness *of* tradition absent which our hermeneutic efforts of understanding a text or artifact could not even get underway. Polanyi thus stresses how, even under the strictest methodological protocols, the truly revelatory moments of scientific discovery happen to lie *beyond* what could be anticipated, predicted, or controlled. Both hermeneutic and scientific inquiry exhibit an aleatory or serendipitous quality, one in which focal awareness is found to have depended all along on tacit, background conditions: “Each scientist,” Polanyi notes, “starts...by sensing a point of deepening coherence. His questing imagination, guided by intuition, forges ahead...in one continued act of tacit integration—like making out an obscure sight, or being engaged in painting a picture, or in writing a poem” (*KB*, 82). That this should be so reflects Kant’s insight “that no system of rules can prescribe the procedure by which the rules themselves are

to be applied.” To the extent, then, that human cognition aims at the discovery of new meanings, rather than the confirmation of existing ones, it depends on the constant, if often tacit operation of “judgment”—that faculty (*prohairesis*) whose proper concern, according to Aristotle, lies with “what can be otherwise” (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a30).

Here it bears recalling how, at the beginning of Western thought, a nearly obverse understanding had prevailed, namely, of tradition as something received, not made, and of divine rather than anthropomorphic character. Thus Plato regards tradition as “a gift of gods to men ...tossed down from some divine source.” A bequest to human communities, rather than an anthropomorphism in its own right, tradition is said both to originate *in* and, in turn, point back *to* its transcendent source: “the ancients, who were better than we and lived nearer the gods, handed down the tradition that all the things which are ever said to exist are sprung from one and many and have inherent in them the finite and the infinite” (*Philebus*, 16c). What distinguishes the role of the ancients is not that they originated a tradition (they did not), but that they were closer in time to its source: “anyone who accepts and ‘believes’ that tradition is relying...not on the ‘ancients’, but on the gods themselves” (Pieper 2010, 28). J. H. Newman evidently concurs and remarks, “when nothing is revealed, nothing is known, and there is nothing to contemplate or marvel at; but when something is revealed and only something, for all cannot be, there are forthwith difficulties and perplexities.” What is most integral to Christianity turns out to be most vexing to modern historical method, namely, that “revelation consists of a number of detached and incomplete truths belonging to a vast system unrevealed, of doctrines and injunctions mysteriously connected together” (Newman 2013, 213). Lurking behind historicism’s apparent impatience with a continuously developing tradition, Newman sees the hubris of a modern secular epistemology viscerally uncomfortable with the possibility of a knowledge received on terms it does not control.

Yet to surrender the desire for dominion over what we are given is precisely what is required if traditions are to become intelligible at all. Inasmuch as it enjoins the recipient to cultivate humility and gratitude *vis-à-vis* what it offers, tradition fulfills what Paul Griffiths identifies as the twofold characteristic of the gift: a distinctive group of “things [that] can be given away without being thereby lost to the giver” and that, concurrently, “will be lost if they are not given away” (Griffiths 2009, 58). Indeed, inasmuch as historical inquiry proceeds on grounds other than purely quantitative and determinative ones, it remains necessarily entangled with the practice of hermeneutics and, ultimately, the teleologically ordered power of judgment. Meaningful and intellectually sound historical practice finds us involved in a complex and open-ended interpretive process that is dialectically structured and experientially realized as dialogue. The partners in that dialogue, I submit, are other interpretive voices that have preceded us, and that constitute a living and evolving tradition of inquiry. Historical

cognition, on this account, amounts less to a scientific method than an art (*techne*) on the order of Aristotelian *phronesis* in the course of which we come to understand our implication *in*, rather than separation *from*, the true aims of inquiry.

Before moving on to show the ethical implications of our epistemological commitments, in particular as they impinge on our understanding of the human person, let me recapture the above in a series of thesis-type propositions:

- THESIS 1: *The choice of method must be secondary to an understanding of the aims pursued by interpretive inquiry.* Inasmuch as method furnishes the *structure* of inquiry, it must be preceded by an awareness of the ultimate *function* that it is meant to serve.
- THESIS 2: *The aim of interpretive knowledge is not information or “context” but significant meaning.* Here we may recall Husserl’s distinction between “correctness” and “disclosure” (see Husserl 1977, 120-127). Contrary to the “truth of correctness,” which others may confirm independently simply by adhering to the methodological template that had yielded it, the “truth of disclosure” is characterized by a distinctive (and not obviously reproducible) narrative quality. The latter can never be fully and conclusively assimilated to the former but, as something *lived* rather than *owned*, shows inquiry to have a fundamentally *hermeneutic* dimension.
- THESIS 3: *The objective of interpretive knowledge does not consist in accumulating contextual information.* By its very nature, a method is a form of iteration, an invariant template. It construes the facts, objects, and phenomena to which it is applied as essentially equivalent *types*. Hence its product, information, remains of necessity always something of an abstraction. Thus, method cannot produce meanings but, at most, can help establish the preconditions for the discovery of meaning.
- THESIS 4: *What sets theological, literary, or philosophical inquiry apart from other forms of historical study (e.g., social or economic history) is that its “object” of inquiry is itself of complex semantic nature, rather than being some value-neutral, material entity.* Indeed, our inevitably fluid, complex, and often bewildering socio-historical reality will disclose its distinctive features, tendencies, and significance only when filtered through various interpretive traditions and their underlying conceptual frameworks.
- THESIS 5: *A philosophical hermeneutic must reject what has long been a prevailing methodological axiom among intellectual historians, viz., that ideas themselves arise in, perhaps even in default of, their “historical context.”* In a recent essay, Peter Gordon (2013) argues that what truly defines meaning are not the material (a-semantic) causes and contexts said to have generated

it. Rather, the force and significance of meanings pivots on their adaptive potential, their enduring capacity to inspire reflective participation in them in times and settings far otherwise than those from which they issued. Meaning in history is inseparable from the study of its dynamic transmission, inflection, and re-articulation over time.

- THESIS 6: *Hermeneutic practice entails our essential involvement in the transmission of those meanings and traditions that are its object. Moreover, the fact that no method can (nor should) seek to immunize us against the semantic complexity and dynamism of our objects of (historical) understanding points to both an epistemological and a moral dimension to interpretation.* Sound practical reasoning (*phronesis*) involves acknowledging the complexity and enduring fecundity of historically constituted meanings. Inasmuch as inquiry unfolds as a process of hermeneutic participation *in* (and not methodical emancipation *from*) our object of inquiry, it enjoins a stance of humility.
- THESIS 7: *Conceptual frameworks are logically antecedent to the historical situation they help render intelligible. At the same time, their potential is only ever realized by historically situated humans engaged in a hermeneutic quest for self-awareness and self-legitimation.* Conceptual and narrative frameworks constitute a received and oblique “tradition” whose tacit efficacy has been variously characterized as “implicit reason” (Newman), “background awareness” (Polanyi), “pre-judgment” (Gadamer), or simply as a tangle of narratives absent which living and breathing human beings would remain bereft of all perspective on their existence. Hence, the ability of individuals and communities to achieve a reasonably articulate perspective on their very existence pivots on an active and sustained engagement of antecedent, narrative, and conceptual frameworks.
- THESIS 8: *The narrative pattern of any tradition in which historical inquiry remains essentially implicated will be dialectical in kind.* In dialectical inquiry, the yet unfathomable fullness of a conception that has sponsored a coherent and evolving hermeneutic tradition will itself acquire progressively greater clarity as that inquiry proceeds. Being integrative rather than disjunctive in its operation, a dialectical narrative implies an apophatic concept of its *telos* and, consequently, can advance knowledge only by way of retroactive clarification. Issuing from the awareness that first principles are precisely what is *not* known, the ethical stance underlying interpretive inquiry is one of reflective involvement rather than peremptory skepticism. To be a participant in the dialectical movement of a tradition involves recognizing oneself as both the agent and the witness of its continued unfolding. Whereas historicism’s

long-standing preoccupation with method aims at tabulating verifiable and putatively value-neutral *information*, inhabiting a tradition means acknowledging its proximity to, not distance from, us.

II

Michael Polanyi's 1961 essay "Knowing and Being" opens with an anecdote about a "distinguished psychiatrist" explaining to his students how to tell apart a genuine epileptic seizure from a "hystero-epileptic" episode. As he explains, merely directing focal awareness on apparent symptoms won't suffice; what is required is "extensive experience"—in particular a capacity, acquired over time, to learn to read and "relate to the delicately varied expressions of the human face which we can...identify without being able to tell quite how we recognize them" (*KB*, 123). It is no coincidence that Polanyi's observations concerning "a close analogy between the *elucidation of a comprehensive object* and the mastering of a skill" and a "structural kinship of the arts of knowing and doing" should happen to surface in the context of that most elemental of human activities: learning to read the face of another human being and thereby fathoming the incommunicable reality and presence of the other *as a person* (*KB*, 125ff).

For the past three centuries, the alleged universalism of modern epistemological method has also occluded the double distinction that Polanyi is trying to recover: first, between knowledge as the uniform (and ultimately illicit) application of an impersonal method to all phenomena and knowledge as practical art (*phronesis*) and, second, between the human individual alternatively determined as an objective *species* or acknowledged as an incommunicable *person*. In extension of more detailed arguments set forth elsewhere, I would likewise premise that a number of modern philosophical developments, each of them notably diffident or outright hostile to theological reflection, have dramatically impoverished our conception of the human person. In particular, I am thinking of the naturalism of Hobbes, the hedonism of Locke and Mandeville, and the skepticism of Hume's earlier efforts.

In their own ways, and other important differences notwithstanding, these approaches all tend to consider the human being as axiomatically self-contained—though less by choice than in virtue of the allegedly overriding, determinative role that these thinkers accord to embodied passions, sentiments, and desires. In the case of Hobbes and Mandeville, the implacable causality of the passions renders rational, interpersonal exchange an alternately adventitious or competitive occurrence and ends up reducing the human person to what, in an alarmed paraphrase, Edmund Burke was to call "our naked shivering nature" (Burke 1986, 171).

To be sure, in so sketching modern thought as a preponderantly naturalist and reductionist enterprise, I am admittedly asking you to grant me a very large premise indeed. Those disinclined to accept it may well point to more nuanced and

humanistic accounts of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, such as reflect widespread misgivings about the perceived inadequacy of their contemporaries' mechanist and reductionist arguments. How, you may ask, does the above hypothesis accommodate the Cambridge Platonists, Shaftesbury, or Joseph Butler in England? What about Rousseau's rapprochement with Stoicism or the partial revival of Plato in the work of Hemsterhuis, Herder, Goethe, Moritz, Hölderlin, Schlegel, and Schleiermacher, all of whom were undeniably anxious to overcome the perceived dead-end of Enlightenment hyper-rationalism, mechanism, and skepticism, respectively?

Now, it is certainly true the thinkers just mentioned are eager to shelter the human individual as a dynamic, self-aware, and responsible agent from a certain epistemological overreach felt to afflict the intellectual work of the preceding generations. Even so, to frame the later Enlightenment as vindicating the self's capacity for practical reason and unfettered moral deliberation risks conflating the species-concept of humankind with the idea of the human person and, thus, to beg the main question. Indeed, running together the idea of a self distinguished by its rational aptitudes with that of the human person is nothing less than a category mistake. For the former, species-based concept is taken to be instantiated by *all* individuals and, in so doing, treats them as *equivalent* and *convertible* bearers of specific capacities (biological, cognitive, linguistic). By contrast, the reality of the human person is not grounded in contingent acts of *definition* (including self-definition) but, instead, pivots on a specific mode of *recognition*. Person, Robert Spaemann reminds us, is not a "what" but a "who" (Spaemann 2006, 11). Its proper locus is not the discursive (and historically changing) domain of political, legal, or economic claims and aspirations but the Augustinian *ordo amoris*, the domain of virtue—and preeminently that of love (*caritas*). Fundamentally, the difference here is between a naturalist conception of existence as subjective self-enclosure (*homo incurvatus in se*) and a model of life wherein the spiritual and ethical place of the person pivots on its relational character within a community of persons. Antecedent to all legal, economic, or taxonomic wrangling, the *communio* of persons is not a choice or preference but rather our God-gifted, enduring responsibility.

These preliminary observations mainly serve to safeguard against attempts to assimilate personhood to a capacity- or rights-based notion of the modern autonomous subject. As I have argued elsewhere, with few notable exceptions—Hegel's account of "recognition" (*Anerkennung*) perhaps being one—most political and ethical thought since Hobbes does just that. In some cases (Hobbes, Mandeville, Hume, Schopenhauer), a radical naturalism leads philosophy to mount a critique of the individual as, in fact, holding very little by way of rational capacities. A naturalist epistemology that perceives "reason [to be] the slave of passion" (Hume) is bound to carry over into a pessimist, nihilist, or proto-existentialist ethic. It cannot surprise that where Enlightenment notions of rational self-governance have been thoroughly dismantled on the basis

of our supposedly animalistic and hedonist constitution, questions concerning the human person are unlikely to be granted relevance or philosophical standing to begin with. Yet that situation remains fundamentally unchanged even where Enlightenment thinkers respond critically to the extreme naturalism and skepticism of the writers just mentioned. What prompts these efforts is the question, already puzzling to Locke and his heirs (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, A. Smith, and Rousseau), of whether and how an ethical community might be built on so brittle a foundation as the modern individual. Can one plausibly identify as the Archimedean point for a just and ethical community a being defined above all by its claim to autonomy *from* all other such individuals and aspiring to live its life within a cocoon of economic, political, and personal rights and preferences? Where individual self-possession and subjective notions of fulfillment are taken to designate the very *being* of the individual, “person” only survives as synonymous with the political, economic, and legal fiction with which Roman culture had identified *persona* long ago.

For any formal criteria even to be recognized as rationally meaningful and ethically binding, some antecedent, teleologically ordered view of the human person has to be presupposed. For to introduce an ensemble of “rights” or a deontological “ought” as the sole criterion of human personhood only furnishes us with a definition but not, alas, with a warrant such as would compel us to honor that definition in thought and practice. Put differently, the very intelligibility and efficacy of sociological, political, or legal definitions of the individual as a self-possessed, rights-bearing, and happiness-seeking agent rests on an underlying normative view, an oblique consensus that this is indeed how personhood *ought* to be understood. And yet, Robert Spaemann notes, “with persons, *esse* is not the same as *percipi*,” and “the recognition that a person is ‘someone’ is not reached by analogy [with object perception].” For even “to acknowledge personal status is already to express respect” and, hence, to grasp in practice (rather than as a formal-logical syllogism) that “persons are beings that other persons *speak to*,” rather than “things merely *spoken of*” (Spaemann 2006, 180-183). For human individuals even to feel induced to overcome their ostensible isolation from one another and participate in a social, political, and economic community, some intuitive sense of *belonging together* and owing their very reality as persons to that relatedness must be presupposed. So as to arrive at a fuller grasp of that underlying reality we must begin by acknowledging that the convertibility of personhood and *communio* is something far more elemental than a transient agglomeration of individuals drawn out of some primordial isolation by evolutionary forces or by considerations of political or economic expediency.

Inasmuch as we can understand the human person only within a non-hierarchical and differentiated model of *communio*, the conceptual and methodological frameworks of contemporary sociology, political science, anthropology, or evolutionary biology are

bound to fail us in this quest. Concerned with objectivity rather than truth, these disciplines reject from the outset the possibility of any reality anterior and inaccessible to their positivistic conception of knowledge and it is this incommensurability of modern forms of inquiry with the reality of the human person which prompts me to draw instead on two alternative modes of human inquiry that, profound differences notwithstanding, do not presuppose from the outset all knowledge to be an exclusively verificationist and predictive undertaking: theology and literature.

III

Since the first council of Nicaea, the doctrine of the Trinity has served as the framework through which to approach the idea of person and its essentially *relational* (as opposed to contingently *social*) character. Augustine envisions the Trinity as the archetype of the ideal, organic community wherein the identity of the persons comprising that unity is inseparable from their relations, even as it is neither transferentially projected upon nor mimetically derived from the other persons in that community. While arguing that the Trinitarian framework reappears within the human person as the triad of memory, will, and understanding, Augustine takes care not to slip into a faculty psychology as we find it in Descartes or Kant. Instead, he insists on the mutually constitutive nature of all human capacities: “[W]hen I name my memory, understanding, and will, each name refers to a single thing, and yet each of these single names is the product of all three” (*De trinitate* IV:30). The underlying claim here is that the human person is the expression or manifestation of an all-encompassing order, rather than a subject capable of unilaterally fashioning an account of its inner constitution and its relatedness to other human beings. Hence, for Augustine, there is nothing elective or adventitious about human sociality, community, and relatedness, a point to be kept in mind lest we misread Augustine’s observation elsewhere that “*socialis quiddam est humana natura*” (*De bono conjugali* c. 1). Only then is it clear that person and self belong to different categories and that “the person can be neither a variety nor a promotion of the individual.” Echoing this observation by Gabriel Marcel, Henri de Lubac (1988, 33) notes, “a person is not an idealized individual nor a transcendent monad.”

Now, if modern accounts of the self unwittingly presuppose relational and communal characteristics long associated with personhood, they are also keen not to look too far into this crucial presupposition. Modern moral and political philosophy’s apparent preference for grounding its arguments in a concept of the *individual*, rather than confronting the reality of the human person—at once incontrovertible and unfathomable—can be seen as a *prima facie* instance of what Hegel calls “the cunning of reason” (Hegel 1970, 365). For in the case of the individual, or the “self,” no apparent normative dimension intrudes on the various rights claims and subjective preferences whose ideally unfettered pursuit modern political philosophy takes to be the very essence of

human flourishing. Once Locke had filed down the rougher edges of Hobbes' political theory, the utopian intimations of social contract theory and the Scottish political economists gradually furnish otherwise isolated and hermetic individuals with a strictly elective and opportunistic template of socialization. Where covenants between human beings only serve to uphold legal obligations and to reconcile competing economic interests, socialization will be understood as involving only contingent relations among essentially anonymous individuals. The I-Thou dynamic of personhood is supplanted by a species-concept of so many interchangeable individuals consumed with the pursuit of interests, the assertion of rights, and the barely restricted enactment of (ostensibly licit) desires. In the world shaped by Lockean contract theory, Scottish political economy, and Humean naturalism, the communion of human persons is de-potentiated into a society of individuals, with "society" denoting little more than a minimalist regulatory framework—an ephemeral association of the terminally dissociated. Inevitably, such an anthropocentric framework elides the reality of the human person qua *imago Dei*, that is, as the locus of supra-individual norms and transcendent ends. For if due consideration were given to this tacit dimension, human reason would confront unconditional limits on the scope and enactment of human desire, interest, cognition, and rights-claims. Conversely, once self and person are "desynonymized" (as Coleridge likes to call it), we find that setting limits to the scope of individual desire and interest, as any rational community must, presupposes a normative framework whose transcendent source modern thought cannot acknowledge without exposing the inherent contingency and limitations of procedural reason.

So far, then, I have merely traced an argument that I have unfolded at greater length elsewhere (Pfau 2013): viz., that defining of the modern autonomous individual or "punctual self" (to borrow Charles Taylor's term of art) is a set of interconnected epistemological, cultural, and political assumptions incommensurable with the reality of the human person as it has been progressively reflected in Judeo-Christian thought for the past two millennia. Distinct yet intimately entwined, these theological traditions have continuously explored the enigmatic reality and presence of the human person and, in so doing, also alert us to the intrinsic limitations of modern discursive reasoning in this area. From Nicaea via Augustine, Boethius, Richard of St. Victor, and Aquinas onward—yet also in the writings of Martin Buber and Emanuel Levinas— theological reflection has been fascinated by the transcendent dimension thrown into relief by the mystery of human personhood—an unfathomable reality *in* which all human beings or individuals already find themselves, *from* which their discursive and social practices necessarily proceed and *to* which, ideally, their reasoning ought to return them. As Robert Spaemann and Robert Sokolowski have argued, the human person can never be captured in the modality of discrete propositions, even as legal definitions of personhood are required to protect persons from the myriad forms of abuse that the

hedonistic, violent, and self-interested propensities of human beings forever threaten to unleash on it.

This approach naturally inclines us to a consideration of love as the true human *Ur*-phenomenon. What modern epistemological, moral, and political accounts of the individual overlook—or reject for supposedly lacking a compelling warrant—is the fact that the recognition of the other *qua* person not only presupposes an underlying sense of relatedness, an antecedent community, but that such *communio* is phenomenalized in the human *Ur*-phenomenon of love (*caritas*). Strictly speaking, that is, recognition of other persons is not a choice, let alone a value-neutral one. Rather, it is a reality to which, rightly understood, we shall *assent* yet which pride and lust of dominion so often cause our understanding to disfigure or, indeed, disavow outright. Understood as a manifestation of trust and hope in the mutuality of our essential relatedness *qua* persons, love is ontologically distinct from desire. Indeed, few things testify as poignantly to the desiccated anthropomorphism of modern thought as its insistent effort to assimilate the supra-personal reality of love to the mechanistic, naturalist operations of desire manifested as in random *cupiditas* or as an implacable *libido dominandi*. In either permutation, desire inevitably severs the essential bond between love and recognition and, thus, ends up consigning the human person to the realm of the notional and the unreal. Dante tell us, “*Sanza speme vivemo in disio*” (“Without hope we live in desire,” *Inferno* IV:42). Later described by Hegel as the first stage of self-consciousness, desire reigns triumphant in a world from which grace, charity, and hope have seemingly been expunged. In its attempted reduction of the epiphanic to the anthropomorphic, human desire, like an old photograph, ends up exposing time and again the negative of “despair” (*acedia*) from which it falsely promises to extricate us. A quintessential misconstrual of love, desire recognizes the self in relation to others even as, *qua* desire, it hastens to repudiate community and relatedness as putative threats to the prideful dominion of the modern autonomous self.

I close by considering one literary instance of precisely this failure of charity and the loss of human personhood that it precipitates. Modeled on the Buddha’s sermon about worldly things destined to be consumed by fire, Part III of Eliot’s *The Waste Land* (Eliot 2015, 62-64) offers one of the more despondent moments of interpersonal failure and sin found in modern literature. The scene is the grimy metropolitan dystopia of London, the “Unreal City” filled “empty bottles, sandwich papers, / Silk handkerchiefs, cardboard boxes, cigarette ends”—a disenchanting place from which “the nymphs are departed...[and] have left no address.” “The Fire Sermon” features a speaker condemned, like his mythical forebear, Tiresias—and like Eliot’s poetic and intellectual *alter egos*, Dante and Pascal—to foresee and ponder the inevitable miscarriage and seemingly boundless depravity of humankind.

The particular scene in question involves the encounter between a humble typist and a nameless clerk whom she has invited for a dinner. Her confused expectations of

romantic love and unrequited desire arise from an all-encompassing sense of her banal, loveless, and insubstantial existence all but indistinguishable from the flat-line *durée* of modern, chronometric time. A female pendant to Prufrock (who has “measured out [his] life with coffee spoons”), the typist’s bewildered acquiescence into what can be described as a downward transposition of romantic love into impersonal desire recalls Prufrock’s dissociated experience of life as a solitary, inchoate, and meaningless sequence of prevarications: “[T]ime yet for a hundred indecisions.” Here, then, is the main passage:

At the violet hour, when the eyes and back
Turn upward from the desk, when the human engine waits
Like a taxi throbbing waiting,
I Tiresias, though blind, throbbing between two lives,
Old man with wrinkled female breasts, can see
At the violet hour, the evening hour that strives
Homeward, and brings the sailor home from sea,
The typist home at tea-time, clears her breakfast, lights
Her stove, and lays out food in tins.
Out of the window perilously spread
Her drying combinations touched by the sun’s last rays,
On the divan are piled (at night her bed)
Stockings, slippers, camisoles, and stays.
I Tiresias, old man with wrinkled dugs
Perceived the scene, and foretold the rest—
I too awaited the expected guest.
He, the young man carbuncular, arrives,
A small house-agent’s clerk, with one bold stare,
One of the low on whom assurance sits
As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.
The time is now propitious, as he guesses,
The meal is ended, she is bored and tired,
Endeavours to engage her in caresses
Which still are unreproved, if undesired.
Flushed and decided, he assaults at once;
Exploring hands encounter no defence;
His vanity requires no response,
And makes a welcome of indifference.
(And I Tiresias have foresuffered all
Enacted on this same divan or bed;
I who have sat by Thebes below the wall

And walked among the lowest of the dead.)
Bestows one final patronizing kiss,
And gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit . . .
She turns and looks a moment in the glass,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-formed thought to pass:
“Well now that’s done: and I’m glad it’s over.”
When lovely woman stoops to folly and
Paces about her room again, alone,
She smooths her hair with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

As they emerge from their fleeting and dispiriting encounter, Eliot’s nameless characters verge on allegories of spiritual destitution and an utter misapprehension of love. Adrift in dystopic metropolitan space, the clerk and the typist, solely defined by their humdrum occupations, barely register the profound harm wrought by their hapless and fleeting encounter. The clerk’s furtive departure (“[he] gropes his way, finding the stairs unlit”) faintly recalls the pagan naturalism of Protagoras and Democritus—resembling as it does the trajectory of an atom, unintelligible to the “human engine” of the clerk, though foreseen with harrowing accuracy by the latter-day Tiresias of Eliot’s speaker. The fact that the mythical seer, Tiresias, had “foretold” and “foresuffered” all, also means that *The Waste Land* is more than some garden-variety narrative of cultural decline. Rather, the endemic failure of love and recognition exposes the neo-pagan, naturalist assumptions that account for the dissociated hedonist psychology defining of life in a liberal-secular, urban world. In Eliot’s dystopic portrayal of the clerk’s “metrosexual” persona, Augustine’s *ordo amoris* has been supplanted by the idolatry of subjective preference, and limitless self-fulfillment has all but expunged *communio* and *caritas*. As it retraces the mythic cruelty long “foresuffered” by Tiresias, Eliot’s “Fire Sermon” unfolds with bland exemplarity the neo-pagan failure of love and recognition, and how a coherent model of human personhood is eclipsed by the dissociative and often predatory tendencies of modern, urban psychology.

And yet, simply to speak of “failure” is to obfuscate the main issue (Lubac 1988, 33). To see why this is so, we might recall Heraclitus’s remark that “although *logos* is common to all, most people live as if they had a wisdom of their own” (also found as an epigraph to Eliot’s *Four Quartets*). Heraclitus and, following his prompt, Eliot are not just identifying a failure but intimating a fault. Thus, to embrace the solitary and hermetic “self” as the only way of being in the world is still to *choose* and *cultivate* a stance (however intellectualized) for which we will henceforth be responsible. The palpably dehumanizing and ethically indefensible actions of the clerk cannot be construed as inevitable entailments of his seemingly natural, feral disposition. Rather,

the clerk bears as much responsibility for his hedonism *per se* as he does for violating the spirit of the meal (a failed Eucharist is ever there was one) at which he is “the expected guest.” His existentialist way of being cannot be explained as a necessary entailment of some inexorable force operating within him. For the human person is not simply some generic, “pure” nature (as the 16th c. theologian Baius had hypostatized) to which a first name then becomes somehow attached. In fact, a person’s nature is not something inexplicably received but, rather, a potentiality progressively realized and confirmed in the temporal order of acts and habits. As Coleridge was to put it, the nature or character of a person arises from “a mysterious diversity between the injunctions of the mind and the elections of the will” (Coleridge 1993, 349). Something of the sort probably led Abraham Lincoln to surmise that every man over forty is responsible for his face. The “nature” that precipitates the clerk’s predatory behavior with such seeming inevitability is, ultimately, something he himself has made and for which he bears responsibility.

Arguing that “where there is sin, there is multiplicity, yet where there is virtue, there is unity” (*ubi peccata ibi multitudo...ubi autem virtus, ibi unio*; quoted in Lubac 1988, 33), Origen (184-253 A.D.) had stressed long ago that where love is disfigured by desire, and where the fullness, presence, and mutual recognition of persons in communion is compromised, we are not confronted with some incidental “failure” but with a fault of deliberation, choice, and will. The so-called failure of personhood is not a failure at all but, rather, a case of *sin*. Eliot’s clerk sins against the *imago Dei* not only of the typist but, just as plainly, also against his own. Read against the backdrop of Eliot’s carefully embedded allusions to the rape of Philomela, the impersonal and dispiriting encounter here unfolded proves if anything more ghastly yet. For in modern urban, secular, and casually hedonistic culture, the violation of love and, thus, of the human person whose reality and flourishing essentially arise from it, has become the new normal. What makes the scene’s closing lines so acutely disturbing is the seismographic sensitivity with which Eliot’s writing registers the slightest tremors of spiritual anguish in the typist’s “half-formed thought” (“Well now that’s done”) and in the distracted and mechanical movements (“She smoothes her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone”) with which she fends off awareness of her own casual violation and self-abasement. At its strongest, this is what modern literature does: to capture the human person’s grounding in the dynamics of recognition and love, if only *ex negativo* by showing how the failure of achieving personhood is ultimately one of will, not nature. Needless to say, it is a proposition wholly at odds with modern liberalism’s essentially Pelagian understanding of self-legislating and self-contained human existence.

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RESTORING FAITH IN REASON: THOMAS PFAU'S DEFENSE OF HUMANISTIC INQUIRY



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Keywords: assent, illative sense, tacit knowing, conscience, objectivity, perspectivalism, Thomas Pfau, John Henry Newman, Michael Polanyi, Bernard Lonergan

ABSTRACT

*This article provides an appreciative but critical analysis of the account of humanistic inquiry Thomas Pfau develops in *Minding the Modern*. Moleski examines various complementary accounts of tacit knowing, and highlights the importance of assent, conscience, and tradition. He critiques Pfau's account of objectivity, and argues perspectivalism and pluralism are not barriers to reliable knowledge of reality. He concludes with a cursory comparison of the efforts of Pfau, Newman, Polanyi, and Lonergan.*

Introduction

I am honored and delighted to have this opportunity to discuss Thomas Pfau's study of the concepts of "person" and "will," both of which are central to "Western humanistic inquiry and its ongoing, albeit enormously diverse, attempts to develop a satisfactory account of human agency" (Pfau 2013, 9; unless otherwise noted, all parenthetical references are to this work).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). With Pfau, I affirm "the viability, indeed the necessity, of narrative continuities in the domain of intellectual history and philosophical theology" (163). The view that gives humanistic inquiry coherence is the

product of many minds over many centuries, one that must be received and explored through “a sustained, comprehensive, and evolving critical engagement...[in order] not to expire in its struggle with competing notions or succumb to inner contradictions or corruptions” (63).

I am very sympathetic to Pfau’s reading of Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, John Henry Newman, and Michael Polanyi, and I am also glad to see him in dialogue with my first metaphysics teacher, W. Norris Clarke, SJ (506, 524), as well as with 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. However (and mindful of Pfau’s repeated warning against indulging in what Freud calls the “narcissism of minor differences,” 65, 380), I would like to offer some modest variations to some of the themes he explores.

Illative Sense and Tacit Knowing

John Henry Newman is a major dialogue partner of Pfau’s. Throughout *Minding the Modern*, he repeatedly employs the “quasi-phenomenological orientation” (47, footnote 17) Newman described in both *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845) and *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870). My 1991 doctoral dissertation, “Illative Sense and Tacit Knowledge: a Comparison of the Theological Implications of the Epistemologies of John Henry Newman and Michael Polanyi” (subsequently published as Moleski 2000), was a study of the intersection between the epistemologies of Newman and Polanyi, so it is a joy to see how highly they rank in Pfau’s estimation.² I will herein explore some of the ground Newman and Polanyi have in common in the interests of making Newman more accessible to a Polyanian audience as well as highlighting some of the contributions Polanyi can make to Pfau’s project.

The *Grammar of Assent* begins with a distinction Pfau finds useful. Just as Coleridge talks about “the natural differences of *things* and *thoughts*” (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 [*sic*] we have of them” (Newman 1979, 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.”

Each form of apprehension is associated with a particular form of assent: acts of *real* assent involve decisions about real apprehension, whereas acts of *notional* assent involve judgment about notional apprehension. These can, however, be confused; we may attempt an act of real assent relative to a notional apprehension, or an act of notional assent relative to a real apprehension. Real assent to propositions about ideas

“tend to be mere assertions without any personal hold on them on the part of those who make them.” Similarly, notional assent to propositions that bear on reality “tend to be conjectures or presentiments, without any logical force.” In light of this, Newman suggests, it seems “that when Inference is clearest, Assent may be least forcible, and, when Assent is most intense, Inference may be least distinct” (Newman 1979, 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 suggests “this uniquely human capacity...acts as a crucial constraint on the utopian 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 (cf. 46-47, 105, 179-180, et al.).

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” (*TD*, 4). This is true with regard to both those aspects of reality with which we are already familiar and those aspects that intimate a new, and hitherto unrecognized, dimension or depth to reality. “The implications of new knowledge,” writes Polanyi, “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 its presence will yet show up in an indefinite number of unpredictable ways” (*PK*, 311).

I find this an immensely rich insight, one that reminds me of 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 explores 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 I can put into words is not the real self; even the thought I can put into words is not the real thought. In all cases, our goal is “to think the noumenon through the phenomenon” (601).

We have to be careful, however, not to throw out the baby 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. 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” (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 both Newman and Polanyi, knowing is a responsible personal action that falls, as all actions do, under the reign of conscience; this is also a recurring theme in *Minding*

the Modern. The title of Newman's great work suggests 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 Newman is actually opposed to the formalization or mechanization of our judgments. Newman argues there is no set of rules and regulations that can take the place of personal judgment—hence, his essay on assent concludes there is no grammar of assent. Pfau concurs, and highlights Newman's insistence "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*" (432-433).

"Illative sense" is arguably one of the least elegant expressions in Newman's writings. "Illative" is formed from *illatus*, the third principle part of the deponent verb, *infero*, which, of course, is the root of "inference." "Illative sense" thus signifies "the self-awareness by which we make inferences." This self-reflexive aspect of our minds acts as the conscience of the intellect, 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 "is the condition of possibility for any moral (self-)awareness whatsoever" (289-290). The illative sense is not a formal component of any syllogism, but it is the ever-present subsidiary imperative to seek truth and avoid every form of falsehood. "Illative sense" is Newman's name for what Augustine described as "an inner sense [by which] I watched over the integrity of my senses" (112).

In *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi describes the conscience of the intellect as "the capacity for appraising our own articulation" (*PK*, 91). We are, in every instance, called upon to "accept commitment as the framework within which we may believe something to be true." Such commitment establishes "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). Pfau also picks up on the language of appraisal: "Simply put, all conscious states are subject to some form of appraisal, be it reflexive and explicit or more tentative and, perhaps, even subliminal" (587). We judge our own performance as knowers subliminally, in the background, while we focus on that which we know and desire to communicate or on that which we hope to discover in the foreground.

Polanyi and Pfau also both employ the language of conscience when describing the act of knowing. In *Science, Faith and Society*, Polanyi suggested conscience is the guardian of the commitments we make: our conscience assents to those acts of knowing whereby we sense we have made contact with reality. Scientists commit themselves "on the strength of evidence which can, admittedly, never be complete." They do so trusting that such a "gamble," when consistent with the "dictates of...scientific conscience," is itself nothing other than their "competent function" as scientists, and is thus the only

way they can make any kind of contribution to science (*SFS*, 40). The title of the final chapter of *Minding the Modern* (591–618) is taken from Coleridge: “Faith is fidelity... to the conscience.” 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” (*M*, 61). In his 1963 introduction to the second edition of *Science, Faith and Society*, Polanyi describes the central role tacit knowing plays in his philosophy of science: “*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” (*SFS*, 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” (Pfau 2013, 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” (Newman 1979, 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).

What Polanyi describes as “tacit knowing” appears in Newman’s work as “implicit reason,” and Pfau picks up on the distinction Newman made in his *Oxford University*

Sermons between explicit (or conscious) and implicit (or unconscious) reason (301-302). 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 those engaged in reasoning: the hidden reality glimpsed by one generation is gradually revealed by those who come after, “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” (63).

By its very nature, then, 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” (*M*, 61; cf. *KB*, 195; *SFS*, 10). 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. All children have 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 children have 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 begins to use speech. 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 *praepjudicata 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...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 *Minding the Modern*) 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 advocate bad philosophies of science because the skills necessary for scientific investigation are different from the skills needed for philosophical reflection. 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 oneself seeing. Just as the eye is transparent to itself and functions in a subsidiary fashion to what the eye is focused on, so the mind operates in the background of consciousness as we focus on particular aspects of reality in the foreground.

In Pfau’s understanding of humanistic inquiry, our vision of reality affects every aspect of how we explore the realm of meaning. Drawing on Augustine, Newman, and Gadamer, he insists “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” (71). Rather, it lies in what Newman described as a “moment of certitude” that commits us to “view” the implications of which we then explore and gradually discover. When we “peremptorily exclude all questions of value, commitment, and final causes,” we are left with a perspective that is “by and large incapable of correlating thought and existence, life and action” (72).

Pfau often invokes Newman’s understanding 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 reevaluation 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 slight discrepancies between Pfau’s view of reason and my own.

It seems to me Pfau stops short of understanding the full implications of the view that he investigates and upholds. At one point, 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. Pfau, however, seems unwilling to embrace that implication of his own vision of reality. We may be committed to a particular view of things, but this involves neither “a nostalgic outlook on the past”

nor a “triumphalist view of intellectual history... *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).

I do not think it is triumphalistic to claim no other culture in history has elaborated the kind of principles that enable its adherents to strive for and achieve objectivity. Rather, 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 of two Canadian parents at the end of the baby boom in the United States. I am a bald, overweight, and irascible old man, but these aspects of the mystery that are part of 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; rather, I praise the tradition of the perennial philosophy developed by Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Bonaventure, and their heirs, when I claim this tradition provides what Polanyi called an “interpretative framework” (*PK*, 59) that allows us to act *as if* we possessed “an independent point of view from which to objectively judge” (69-70) competing intellectual traditions.

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,” he says, “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). However, 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 “there is no ‘view from nowhere,’” one must possess some kind of transcendent perspective to ground that judgment on all possible judgments. MacIntyre’s claim “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” (232) either is just a mystical edict asserted through his own gnostic illumination or a counter-example to the point that he is trying to make. 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, its chemical identity is H₂O.

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. The historical rootedness of presuppositions does not mean that we are in bondage to our idiosyncrasies. We cannot think without making assumptions; our assumptions are essentially prejudices that provide us with “antecedent probabilities” (Newman 1979, 328-329; cf. Pfau 2013, 27-28, 63-64, et al.). 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, such that “all knowledge begins in the senses” (Aristotle), to judge is to rely on pre-judgments. 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 in any place in the world.

Polanyi recognized this quandary, and saw that there was no way out except through accepting that all of our judgments are hazardous commitments. We are the ones who hold and accredit our intellectual passions and beliefs, but we hold them with universal intent. Even when we allow ourselves to be guided by the passions and heuristic instincts of others, we are the ones who allow ourselves to be so led, acknowledging even as we do so we 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” (*PK*, 195-202) of the frameworks in which we first find our intellectual bearings. Pfau highlights Coleridge’s rejection of 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). Every contingent act of knowing intuitively something of the necessary, and this intuition reassures us of the veracity of our intellectual efforts, however halting or groping they may be. In every judgment something

is finite, I implicitly rely on an awareness of the infinite; in every recognition something is time-bound, I manifest an awareness of a timeless viewpoint; whenever I see I am not God, I silently appeal to “the sense of his holy presence” (611).

In calling this vision of reality a “comprehensive account,” I am not suggesting it has been or 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 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 they operate on our minds in a tacit manner: “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).

Pfau argues it is not our ability to articulate our understanding of the good “in propositional form” that matters, but rather “the very effort to achieve moral articulacy” (253). Our tacit awareness of incommunicable transcendentals bears on every aspect of reality that we bring into focal awareness. Similarly, Polanyi argues our use of tools, signs, and symbols “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 such act involves an ineradicable personal commitment and is thus “a manner of disposing of ourselves” (*PK*, 61).

The aspect of the self 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 we call “will” is always oriented toward the good (*synderesis*, cf. 231, 273, 289-290, 320). The aspect of self some call the heart, as in Newman’s motto, “*cor ad cor loquitur*,” is drawn to beauty: “[I]t is not epistemology but ethics—for Shaftesbury intimately entwined with aesthetics—that should be the principal focus of philosophy” (239; cf. 242, 271, 283).³ 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, this 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* (1972). 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” (in Gallagher 2004, 735). 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 (Lonergan 1972, 565).

From Lonergan's standpoint, Pfau is operating from the universal viewpoint advocated by the *philosophia perennis*. Pfau prescind from his day, age, place, and time in order to enter into the worldview of the authors whom he reads. He considers their works in the light of invariant principles of reason and places authors in dialogue with each other and with the concerns of the present day by translating from one cultural context to another and by mapping their contributions on a grid oriented to the transcendental ideals of the true, the beautiful, and the good.

Lonergan goes beyond Polanyi in his assertion that there is an objective universal viewpoint that provides us, in principle, with a view of all possible views. As so many do, Polanyi took the history of scientific revisions as a model for all thinking about thinking, a paradigmatic example of a tradition intended to provide its followers with

progressive “intimations of hidden truths” that lead them to a greater understanding of and participation in reality. “Such are the metaphysical grounds of intellectual life in a free, dynamic society: the principles which safeguard intellectual life in such a society. I call this a society of explorers” (*TD*, 82-83).

Loneragan, by contrast, distinguished between the lower frameworks of scientific inquiry and the higher frameworks of humanistic inquiry:

Popular relativism is prone to argue that empirical science is the most reliable form of human knowledge; but empirical science is subject to indefinite revision; therefore, all human knowledge is equally subject to indefinite revision. Now such argument is necessarily fallacious. One must definitively know invariant features of human knowledge before one can assert that empirical science is subject to indefinite revision; and if one definitively knows invariant features of human knowledge, then one knows what is not subject to revision. Moreover, as is obvious, such knowledge surpasses empirical science at least in the respect that it is not subject to revision (Loneragan 1972, 336).

The presuppositions that make Pfau’s position tenable are the invariant principles of abstract reasoning: “Theories can be revised if there is a reviser. But to talk about revising the revisers is to enter a field of empty speculation in which the name ‘revision’ loses its determinate meaning” (Loneragan 1972, 304). Lonergan is diametrically opposed to Polanyi’s view that a correct account of the metaphysical foundation of human knowing must envision the possibility of being overturned by revolutionary discoveries:

Such a metaphysics, once it had surmounted its initial difficulties, would be stable. It would admit incidental modifications and improvements, but it could not undergo the revolutionary changes to which the empirical sciences are subject. For a science is open to revolutionary change inasmuch as it is possible to reach a higher viewpoint and consequently to alter the content of its primitive terms and relations. But it is possible to reach a higher viewpoint only within the framework of inquiring and critical intelligence; there is not, in human knowledge, any possible higher viewpoint that goes beyond that framework itself and replaces intelligent inquiry and critical reflection by some surrogate; and the viewpoint of metaphysics is constituted by nothing less than inquiring intelligence and critical reflection...Accordingly, since metaphysics is the integral heuristic structure of proportionate being, since it is a structure

that is coincident with inquiring intelligence and critical reflection, metaphysics is not open to revolutionary change (Lonergan 1972, 393-394).

Far-ranging statements about what humans can and cannot know all depend on an appraisal of our common human nature, which is a metaphysical question. Lonergan defends his view that we are capable of operating from a universal standpoint by noting the self-referential inconsistency of anyone who would challenge his basic account of knowing:

The only manner in which this basic theorem could be modified would be to modify its factual supposition that knowing consists in experiencing, understanding, and judging; and it has been argued that that fact is not open to revision in any concrete meaning of the term ‘revision.’ For any human reviser would appeal to experience, understanding, and judgment; and there is no use arguing that men might be other than they are, because it is equally true that the universe might be other than it is, and the issue lies, not in the possibility of a different metaphysics in a different universe, but in the possibility of a different metaphysics in this universe (Lonergan 1972, 735).

The reading, exposition, interpretation, and critique that Pfau has done seems to me to be consistent with Lonergan’s understanding of metaphysics, although Pfau’s appeal to the universal viewpoint of the western tradition is tacit rather than explicit. 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) and look forward to his next volume on the rehabilitation of the image in the nineteenth century. I am convinced that speculative thinking 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.

ENDNOTES

¹The phrase “humanistic inquiry” does not appear in the index of *Minding the Modern*, 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.

²Through my work with Bill Scott on *Michael Polanyi: Scientist and Philosopher* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), I discovered 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,” in *Tradition and Discovery* 41/2 (2014-2015), 45-55.

³In his next book, Pfau will almost certainly expand on the importance of aesthetics in human inquiry, and intimates as much in the last passage of *Minding the Modern*: “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).

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PERSON AND ITS CONSTELLATED COROLLARIES: CONVERSING WITH THOMAS PFAU



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Keywords: person, intellect, will, transcendence, the true, good, and beautiful, grace, teleology, Thomas Pfau, Boethius

ABSTRACT

*This essay explores the analysis of the concept of the person Thomas Pfau develops in *Minding the Modern*. Rolnick highlights the correspondence of the concepts of personhood and incommunicability, and also examines the relationship between personhood, intellect, and will. He further analyzes the correspondence between personhood, transcendence, and grace. He concludes with a question about Pfau's reading of the history of modernity and the difference between formal and informal historical influences.*

In *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge*, Thomas Pfau pits the wisdom of tradition—especially Aristotle, Plato, Augustine, and Aquinas—against the general trajectory of modernity. Declaring his main topic to be “the deteriorating conception of personhood in the modern era” (Pfau 2013, 384; unless otherwise noted, all parenthetical citations are to this source), Pfau links personhood to a correlative constellation of issues including the role of tradition, what a person actually is, the role of intellect and will, how person is distinct from nature, personal transcendence in relation to the true, good, and beautiful, teleology, and grace. Forming a virtuous circle, each issue is so deeply intertwined with the others that losing any one would vitiate the whole, a loss which unfortunately describes the condition of modernity.

Pfau ably narrates how, from Ockham to the present day, the concept of personhood has deteriorated because it has broken away from its constellated corollaries. From Ockham's overweighting of the will to Descartes' assertion of the *cogito* and beyond, the modern self has become an unprotected salient. Standing apart from a sense of transcendence and traditions oriented toward a given good, the concept of the modern self, variously described by Hobbes, Locke, Mandeville, Hume, and Adam Smith, has not fared well. From Nietzsche to Sartre to Jean-François Lyotard, a withering line of fire has left the modern self in a disoriented state, requiring an army of psychological therapists. At best, these hired servants of the modern self assuage its wounds, but never really heal them.

Carefully tracing the etiology of these problems, Pfau wants us to recognize their depth, but also to realize the solutions have never disappeared: for over two millennia, what Pfau calls the Platonic-Christian tradition has nurtured its adherents and oriented them toward a higher sense of purpose. Although modernity has been fraught with problems, it has not been without original minds who have helpfully applied the gifts of tradition to current problems.

Exordium

In a marvelous Exordium, Pfau artfully announces the themes that he will develop. Commenting on Lorenzo Lotto's "Portrait of a Gentleman in his Study" (c. 1524), he probes the subject's melancholy and observes, "[w]e cannot meet his eyes, and they will not meet ours" (1). The impossibility of eye contact suggests that face-to-face, personal relations have been encumbered, that something is not quite right. Seated on the threshold of modernity, the subject is uneasy. Pfau characterizes him as "irresolute," gazing away from the large book underneath his distracted fingers (4). The book, prominently featured but not read, is like the received traditions of moral inquiry, traditions that have lost the power to move the young man and have perhaps even become illegible to him. But this disconnectedness to the power of the past means that the modern self must first reconstruct its worldview and then reconstruct itself. In large part, Pfau's book narrates how the reconstructions are failures. The dismal picture is relieved by the successes of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Henry Newman, Charles Taylor, and a few notable others who offer creative retrievals of the Platonic-Christian tradition.

Tradition and Person

Pfau's constructive argument requires "narrative continuities" (163). Against the discontinuities of modernity's anti-traditionalism, he cuttingly notes, "[u]nder conditions of modernity, all history is merely prehistory" (36). Relegating all that precedes

the present to prehistory means that what precedes does not quite count. This supercilious view of the past would “take tradition only as information” (402). Devaluing the past is the ahistorical worldview of the deracinated self of modernity, a self that fitfully indwells successions of the present moment.

By restricting what counts to cause-effect relations that yield their knowledge in an instant, a temporal point in time, Hume et al., effectively short-circuit inquiry (290). Eschewing tradition, 18th-century proposals lack temporal continuity; therefore, they cannot progress. “They simply flare up within a hapless, present-tense mind and, in so doing, effectively consume themselves” (321). Pfau humorously diagnoses such flare-ups as “a kind of *attention-deficit-disorder*” (297). Rejecting the demand for “instantaneous verifiability,” he counters that some things can only be achieved and deepened over time (297, *et passim*). Over the course of a life history, time is required to develop and deepen individual character; and for a community, time is even more essential, for only those communities that continue beyond a single individual’s lifespan become traditions—institutions of ongoing inquiry. The Polanyi Society’s journal is well named as *Tradition and Discovery*.

Lifting up the value of extended time, Pfau reclaims Aristotle’s focus on *habit* to foster “a narrative of human flourishing” (361). Excellent habits can only be developed over time and with a view of the good to be achieved. Pfau illustrates the power of habit with a Polanyian type of example. A violinist at first must attend to such things as movements of fingers and the bowing arm, but once these are mastered, can focus on higher-level concerns like dynamics, phrasing, and the sense of ensemble (362-63). Clearly having had some experience playing a stringed instrument, Pfau observes, “[r]epetition diminishes both the effort of consciousness and, thus, the consciousness of effort” (365). Habit can be transformative, but it requires a guiding purpose pursued over time.

Person: What it is and What it Includes

What Person Is: Incommunicabilis (Incommunicable)

Boethius’s definition of person as *naturae rationalis individua substantia* (individual substance of a rational nature) dominated the discourse during the centuries that followed (Boethius 1973, 84-85). But where Boethius’s famous definition led to insuperable problems, especially in terms of Trinitarian analogies, his lesser-known term *incommunicabilis* became the path forward for a robust development of personhood (see Rolnick 2007). Pfau demonstrates how this traditional understanding of personal identity was progressively developed up to Aquinas, severely diminished in Ockham, and (with some key exceptions) lost in modernity.

What Boethius (c. 480-524), Richard of St. Victor (d. 1173), and Aquinas (1225-1274) meant by *incommunicabilis* is that *person*, which always has a nature, must be distinguished from nature and is in some ways more valuable than nature. Nature is communicable; it can be shared, passed on genetically. Being communicable, nature is common to many; being incommunicable, *person* is unique to each one. Because nature is commonly possessed, it can be defined; because *person* is utterly unique, definition will remain elusive. To belong to a class that shares a nature is good, but to be a person is to inhabit a privileged realm of value.

One of the greatest contributions of Christian faith has been its celebration of personal incommunicability, a contribution modernity has largely forgotten. A person who grows in understanding and wisdom does not become another; he becomes more fully himself. By contrast, for Nietzsche and before him for Hume, personal identity over time is fiction, a made-up continuity artificially imposed on a stream of succession.

Person is a *sine qua non* for understanding Christian thought about human life and eternal destiny. However, because the term is inherently theological, modernity can only use it confusedly, demoting it to the neutral terminology of “self” or “subject,” and sometimes casting it off as fiction.

Having forgotten, ignored, or rejected the theological constellation which incommunicable persons can indwell, the modern self becomes vulnerable to various pathologies: on the one hand, to absorption into a totalitarian whole, be it the French Revolution, fascism, or communism; on the other, to depersonalizing subjection to method, measurement, and formal assessment. Pfau justifiably mocks the notion of “method as salvation” (459), for proceduralism has precipitated into absurd systems of bureaucracy, burdening persons with the drear dullness of impersonal, labyrinthine coercion. Bureaucracy is never a direct assault on personhood, only a smothering atmosphere. Quite different from the hard-edged immediacy of totalitarianism, the slow coercion of bureaucracy is mushy; it is very difficult blame its degradations on a particular villain. Modernity’s obsession with method and the resulting bureaucratic ugliness are merely symptoms. As Pfau perceives, the underlying problem is, “The incommunicable person of the Augustinian and Thomist tradition has morphed into a free-floating particular begging to be sublated into a philosophical, sociological, or statistical calculus” (376). But personal incommunicability cannot be sublated without being suppressed; it is “inaccessible to conceptual mastery” (526). Modernity’s quest for method and so-called assessment tools is not innocent; its tendency to reject as unreal anything over which it cannot achieve conceptual mastery is distantly alien from incommunicable personhood, and ultimately, dangerous.

Pfau senses epistemological humility is required to approach the subject of personhood. Great thinkers like Augustine, Boethius, and more recently, Emmanuel Levinas,

exhibit this humility, and they acknowledged “the limits of conceptual language and representation” (526). Often expressing their own inadequacy to the task, these visionary writers wanted discourse to become more than discourse, to escape the limitations of pages, concepts, and their own selves. But this kind of humility is unlikely to occur without faith in something or someone that transcends us.

What Person Includes: Intellect and Will

Much of Pfau’s account tracks the history of the will and, to a lesser extent, the intellect. These two, intellect (mind) and free will, are inextricably interactive. Intellect and will are the traditional components of the soul, but the soul is not the same as the incommunicable person, which is the unity of body and soul.

In Pfau’s account, the will, “enmeshed with self-awareness” (119) is the possibility of all moral reasoning, “a primal and ineffable force that creates a new reality rather than reacting instinctively or compulsively to the one given” (470, 491). The mind can act on itself; we can change our minds and changing our mind for the better is the stuff of human greatness. Being self-involved in the process of making ourselves (318), having the capacity to create new reality, human souls can become better or worse. Drawing upon the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth, Pfau notes that God cannot be indifferent to the possibility of human improvement (210). In relationship with an infinite God, our own finite nature implies a need for continuous growth toward God, thus creating the tension and plot of a spiritual narrative. But whether the soul is progressing or regressing, it is always the same, incommunicable, unchanging person who owns the historical narrative.

Once modernity had forgotten, ignored, or denied the relationship to God, deconstruction of the person and its will became almost inevitable. By contrast, the heart of Christian theology is thinking through the relationship with God, a relationship that depends on the mutual possession, *mutatis mutandis*, of incommunicable personhood.

Person and Its Corollaries: Transcendence, Telos, and Grace

The meaning and value of the concept of the person are inseparable from its relation to transcendence, teleology, and grace. Developing the concept of the person required the church, a tradition traversing generations of time; and the church could do so only because it recognized a given, transcendent purpose.

Person and transcendence are so interwoven that Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II) argued “transcendence...is to a certain extent another name for the person” (Wojtyła 1979, 282). Persons are inherently capable of participating in the transcendentals—the true, good, and beautiful. In Christian tradition these transcendentals have been understood as infinitely manifest in the character of God and ipso facto the attracting goal, the final cause, of the finite. Movement toward this goal is the given path of human character development. In order to pursue this goal, Jacques Maritain exhorted

us “to feed upon the transcendentals” (Maritain 1966, 64). To think of truth, goodness, and beauty as the food of personhood is to live within the tradition modernity has largely forgotten, and that Pfau would have us revive. But to defend this traditional vision against the desiccated, methodological obsession of modernity is to debate with people while they are speaking a different language. Suffering from what Pfau calls “epistemological superstition” (289), modernity can only put truth in scare quotes, as its cultural relativism produces an increasingly menacing population of Pontius Pilates.

Modernity and the Christian pursuit of the transcendentals are separated by a vast chasm. It is not really a contrast between the noble and the ignoble, but rather between the noble and the trivial. The pathology of (post)modernity is masked and ameliorated by a miniscule dose of the lingering Christian tradition. There is still a general sense that people should treat each other well; but if challenged, the deracinated self can rarely articulate any Christian or other warrants for this vague sentiment.

Much of the modern problematic arises from the belief that the self must construct its own meaning. In stark contrast, the Christian quest for truth, goodness, and beauty depends upon the belief that these transcendentals are *given* in creation and illuminated in Christ. They are ends that are consented to, not constructed (138). Of course David Hume tried to separate fact and value, because for him these are merely constructions. But if truth, goodness, and beauty are infinite in the eternal being of God and given as developmental possibilities in the time-space creation, then human endeavor begins in grace—in appreciation for the gift already given. In Hobbes and other stalwarts of modernity, it makes sense that the will would usurp the intellect (199). For in the absence of a given *telos*, intellect can be no more than the servant of the will, whether exercised as the totalitarian will to power or, having abandoned and condemned such grandiose efforts, exercised in the trivial pursuit of preference and pleasure.

Accepting the Christian vision of a purposeful universe, world, and society already orients individual persons, because purpose is an organizing, prioritizing, and unifying principle. If a transcendent purpose is recognized, the myriad decisions of a day, a month, and a lifetime are tilted toward progress in truth, goodness, and beauty. But without a goal toward which one can progress, the very idea of progress becomes incoherent—which is in fact the claim of postmodern writers from Lyotard to Derrida. The *telos* is either given or else it is ephemeral and ultimately meaningless, and when the greater context is believed to be meaningless, there is not much hope for the individuals who inhabit that conceptual wasteland.

By contrast, the Christian perspective is imbued with a sense of generosity—of *more than*. Thus seen, the universe is more than cause and effect; it is a creation, a gift of a universe home. We may also see each person as a gift, for none of us asked to be born; none of us earned our life. Others bring us into the world and then go to great lengths to nurture and instruct us. Having been given such gifts, we can rightly see ourselves

as subjects of grace. Communities of persons may also recognize that a final cause, a purpose, has been given. Such communities have hope—for this world and for what Aquinas called “the fellowship of eternal happiness” (*Summa Theologica* II.II.23.1).

In the divide between (post)modernity and the Platonic-Christian tradition, neither side suffers from a lack of sophistication. But the sophisticated arguments always begin in a kind of belief. On one side, the universe in which we find ourselves is believed to be its own reality. Uncreated and simply existing of its own right and power, this universe resembles the self-conception of modernity: it is asserted to be autonomous. On the other side, the universe and we who come to self-awareness within it, are believed to be recipients of goodness rooted in the ultimate goodness of an originating Person. The huge distance between these sides is already present in their initial presuppositions—in their different kinds of beliefs. Yet much is at stake. As the ancient Deuteronomist put it: “I have set before you life and death...Choose life so that you and your descendants may live” (Deut. 30:19).

Questions that Arise

Tradition is a kind of habit that has been vetted by predecessors. At its best, tradition is open to improvements, ready to be tweaked, with aspects being adjusted, dropped, or added to meet the changing demands of the time it traverses. But if gripped too tightly, tradition becomes arthritic, passé, and impotent to address new problems of new generations. Was the Christian tradition’s inelasticity at least partially responsible for engendering the pathologies of modernity? Pfau has provided an excellent genealogy of historical ideas, leading from Ockham to Hobbes, Hume, et al. But in addition to the history of ideas, and in interaction with those ideas, how did other historical developments, such as technology, lead to our current situation? For example, it is commonly and rightly noted the Protestant Reformation (1517) could not have arisen without Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press (1455). To have suggested this question, and to provoke this eventual line of research, may be among the more important accomplishments of Pfau’s work.

Thomas Pfau’s *Minding the Modern* is a treasure trove. Pfau manifests scholarly stamina in systematically linking the present to the past. His numerous insights have illuminated vast swathes of intellectual tradition, reminded us of intellectual and spiritual possibilities, and suggested new avenues of exploration. Michael Polanyi’s *Personal Knowledge* and Thomas Pfau’s “Responsible Knowledge” have much in common. They share a vision of personal meaning and value, and they both regret the unnecessary and damaging forgetfulness of a transcendent vision.

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ROBERT SCHOLES: A PHILOSOPHICALLY- GROUNDED APPROACH TO ENGLISH PEDAGOGY AS POPULAR, POST-CRITICAL EDUCATION



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[**Editor's Note:** Robert Scholes passed away on December 9, 2016.]

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ABSTRACT

Robert Scholes is a respected literary critic and semiotician who, motivated by dissatisfaction with the reigning epistemological assumptions in the field of literary theory, has advocated revamping the discipline of English in significant ways. Scholes's own epistemology and semiotic approach to pedagogy cohere quite well with Polanyi's epistemological work and are, in essence, post-critical. Given that far more students in the American educational system study English than philosophy, a wider embrace of Scholes's pedagogical approach could provide more opportunities than are currently available to give students access to a post-critical formation. Scholes's epistemology, semiotics, and pedagogy are discussed in some detail, and resonances with Polanyi's grand project are highlighted.

"We are condemned to inquiry by our status as humans" (*Structuralism in Literature* 169).

“What is inexplicit is not necessarily absent” (Protocols of Reading 78).

My epigraphs, which strike a distinctly Polanyian tone, are taken from the work of Robert Scholes, a literary theorist and semiotician who taught for many years as the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of Humanities at Brown University, and who served as president of both the Modern Language Association and the Semiotic Society of America.¹ Scholes, who began his career as a critic specializing in the work of James Joyce, went on to write a series of books that argue for a reworking of the subject matter of English in light of semiotic theory, advocating a move away from a nearly exclusive focus on imaginative literature and towards what he called, following Roland Barthes and others, textuality, envisioning the inclusion of a much broader range of textual types. Central to his program was his critique of the tendency for those working in the humanities to accept uncritically a consensus view of truth, leading to what he calls “hypocriticism.”

While Scholes is certainly not influenced directly by Polanyi (he has stated that, while he has not studied Polanyi’s epistemology, he “is dimly aware” of it), much of his critique harmonizes quite well with a Polanyian view, though the theory of personal knowledge is developed with more philosophical depth and rigor than Scholes’s “love of truth” (e-mail correspondence). I have found the two thinkers’ approaches dovetail extremely well, with Scholes’s pedagogical and theoretical contributions providing valuable resources for the development of a concrete classroom practice that coheres with Polanyi’s grand project of

a humanistic revisionism [that] can be secured only by revising the claims of science itself...The task is difficult, for it calls into question an ideal of impersonal objectivity on which alone we feel it safe to rely. Yet this absurd ideal must be discarded. And if once we succeed in this, we shall find that science no longer threatens man’s responsible existence and that we can restart the great work of the enlightenment without danger of the traps that have so disastrously ensnared its progress in the present century (*KB*, 46).

This “ideal of impersonal objectivity” is, of course, the critical philosophical and cultural perspective that Polanyi wishes to replace with a post-critical theory of personal knowledge. The magnitude of this project is enormous, perhaps even Quixotic.

Scholes’s program, which aims to counteract hypocriticism within the discipline of English by making significant, strategic changes in both approach and subject matter, is, in my view, responding to those problems particular to the discipline of English that arose in response to the same modernist ideal that Polanyi targets. These problems, most notably hypocriticism, then develop further in response to the despair arising from the postmodern realization that such objectivity is unavailable to us. This leads

literary theorists explicitly to reject the belief in the enduring value of the texts they study, even as such a belief serves, tucked safely away from prying eyes, as the tacit impetus for the continuation of literary theorizing. Indeed, I believe that it will become clear that hypocriticism has a structure very similar to moral inversion, though its results are far less sinister than the totalitarianisms that Polanyi tracks and decries. The bohemians found in English department meetings are not—much to Bakunin’s dismay and Polanyi’s delight—armed.

Scholes’s program thus runs parallel to Polanyi’s, though it is much more modest. Calling it “modest” may, however, unfairly damn it with faint praise. As anyone who has attended an academic department meeting knows all too well, orchestrated shifts at the level of one school’s department, let alone an entire discipline, do not tend to find themselves without plenty of obstacles and detractors. Nonetheless, tackling an academic discipline is a far more proscribed task than attempting to influence the entirety of Western culture.

This brings those of us sympathetic to Polanyi’s epistemological aims round to a real conundrum: How to push forward his grand post-critical program?

Since the vast majority of people are not even aware that their worldview is influenced by the critical turn in Western thought, they must somehow become aware of the terminology that can help to express the outlook they currently hold unconsciously before they can be persuaded of its drawbacks and of the superiority of a post-critical perspective. This is a daunting task, indeed. A natural place to begin working on this is, of course, the classroom.

With some students, this process can unfold along the lines suggested by Dale Cannon, who gives us one possible approach to teaching introductory courses on philosophy in a post-critical mode (1999). Sadly, most students in the U.S. are unlikely to take an introductory class on philosophy. In contrast, nearly all American students take four years of English at the secondary level, and at least one or two courses at the university level. Given the post-critical resonances that I note throughout Scholes’s project, I believe that adopting his approach to English education would allow us to cast the net much wider and therefore haul in a more bountiful post-critical catch. Am I chasing a white whale here? Perhaps. Disciplines are slow to change, and cultures evolve even more slowly—yet I prefer to believe that Polanyi’s is a less tragic quest than Ahab’s. At the very least, I believe that bringing together Scholes’s and Polanyi’s contributions for use in as many English classrooms as possible would open up new opportunities for the creation of pockets of post-critical resistance; the more such pockets, the merrier.

In making this suggestion, I have no starry-eyed hopes of post-critical domination of English studies. My idea is much more circumspect: All of our students currently spend a fair amount of time studying English. Given that Scholes’s approach to teaching English is based on what is an essentially post-critical epistemology and creates

the opportunity to incorporate more self-consciously philosophical content (such as, perhaps, Polanyi's) into the English curriculum, its adoption and use—even by relatively small numbers of teachers and departments—would result in the exposure of a larger number of students than has heretofore been possible to a post-critical intellectual formation. This course of action is reminiscent of Polanyi's call for a “popular education in economics” that would “elaborate the new economic ideas and...simplify their outlines so as to make them comprehensible to the intelligent layman” in order to create the conditions for an “enlightened public [that] would have full power to direct its economic life” (2016, 19). The emphasis here, of course, would be on epistemology and language rather than political economy.

In light of this, and since, so far as I have been able to tell, no work on Scholes has previously appeared in these pages, my purpose will be to lay out a brief retrospective of those works of Scholes's that develop the post-critical stream in his thought in the hope that it might be of help to those who are interested both in Polanyi and in the humanities, but who may be unfamiliar with Scholes's contributions. In particular, I believe that those of us who teach the humanities can find in Scholes a sophisticated ally who holds a respected place within a critical milieu often hostile to any sort of epistemological or ontological realism, and whose work can provide a rich pedagogical resource for teaching in a post-critical mode. To that end, I shall begin with an exploration of Scholes's mature epistemological positions, as crystallized in *The Rise and Fall of English* before tracing the trajectory and evolution of these currents of thought as arising naturally from his earlier work in semiotics. Finally, I will sketch out the pedagogical approach advocated by Scholes for the discipline of English, explaining in a bit more detail the move away from imaginative literature and towards textuality. My method will be, so far as is possible, to allow Scholes to speak for himself. Throughout, I will attempt to explain as clearly as I may how Scholes's semiotic work and pedagogy can serve as concrete ways of moving forward the “humanistic revisionism” that Polanyi advocated.

Epistemology and the Humanities

Scholes lays out his most developed and in-depth critique of the state of the humanities in *The Rise and Fall of English* in which he discusses the problem of morale among teachers of English, invoking observations on the same topic made by Derrida in “Mochlos; or the Conflict of the Faculties”: “We feel bad about ourselves. Who would dare to say otherwise? And those who feel good about themselves are perhaps hiding something, from others or themselves” (quoted in *RFE*, 39).² Scholes believes this feeling of insecurity has arisen “because we have allowed ourselves to be persuaded that we cannot make truth claims [about our discipline] but must go on ‘professing’ just the same.” Putting it another way, he says he “believe[s] that if the humanities

cannot claim what [Nietzsche] called ‘the love of truth’ as a part of our enterprise, then that enterprise is in serious trouble” (*RFE*, 39).

In Scholes’s analysis, influential schools of thought—Yale deconstructionists like Paul De Man and J. Hillis Miller, as well as neopragmatists such as Richard Rorty and Stanley Fish, for example—“have taught us to be embarrassed by the word *truth*, and thus either to avoid it or condemn it” (*RFE*, 39). This in turn leads to the “skeptical gloom” noted by Nietzsche as arising in some followers of Kant who saw Kantianism as leading to the conclusion that we are cut off from truth by the mediated nature of perception (quoted in *RFE*, 42). Within the discipline of English, such gloom leads us to doubt, among other things, “the significance of the research that is required of us for the Ph.D. itself and for professional progress afterward” and to be “confused about what we should be teaching, and how, and why” (*RFE*, 44).

For Scholes, the questions of what to teach, and how, and why, are absolutely central, and in his mature work, he sees the answers to such questions as largely determined by the epistemology in which they are grounded. For teachers of English, the answer that he proposes is that ours is the task of helping students to become better readers and writers by focusing on a canon of methods rather than a canon of texts, a program he calls textuality (about which, more anon). In Scholes’s view, such a program is a way of pursuing the love of truth and fostering it in others insofar as in training ourselves in the most effective ways of approaching the production and consumption of texts, we are providing them with valuable tools for the pursuit of meaning, both as it applies to particular texts in question at any given moment and in the broader scope of life.

This is because, as Polanyi points out, “man’s intellectual superiority is almost entirely due to the use of language,” and “so far as we know, the tiny fragments of the universe embodied in man are the only centres of thought and responsibility in the visible world [... granted] a short-lived, limited, hazardous opportunity for making some progress of their own towards an unthinkable consummation” (*PK*, 70; 405). If Polanyi is correct here, then our tools for making this hazardous progress are, to a very great extent, linguistic, and therefore textual. This linguistic emphasis, along with the broad base of participation in English studies within our current educational arrangements, underscores the potential of the discipline to help create a current of thought and culture that counteracts the undermining of meaning endemic to modern critical thought, and moves towards the restoration of meaning by “stabiliz[ing] knowledge against skepticism, by including its hazardous character in the conditions of knowledge” (*PK*, 245).

Scholes’s resuscitation of the phrase “love of truth” is the flag under which he sails towards such a stabilization of knowledge. While it will not be likely to bother many Polyanian thinkers, it was and is a controversial formulation in the world of literary

theory, where most of Scholes's work has been done. Scholes, having read perhaps more widely and seriously across the philosophical spectrum than many literary critics, knows that discussions of realist/anti-realist or correspondence/consensus theories of truth and related debates are open questions in the world of philosophy, but notes with disappointment that "many literary critics seem to believe that [such debates] ha[ve] been settled" in favor of a strong anti-realist, consensus position (*RFE*, 51).

Thus while Scholes argues that the love of truth is a necessary part of the humanistic enterprise, he does not see that view as being the consensus among his colleagues. At the same time, however, he wishes to avoid falling back into "naive empiricisms of all sorts." A good summation of his position can be found in an earlier work, *Textual Power*, where he remonstrates with fellow humanists and semioticians thus:

Language is *not* transparent upon reality. Agreed. Perception is not unmediated, either. Agreed. But one cannot say even these things without claiming knowledge...Personally, I would insist that language consists of insensible structures that are inferred from the sensible phenomena of writing and speech...Texts are just as much a part of the world as kangaroos or atomic submarines. If we are totally cut off from things, language must be one of things from which we are cut off. If, on the other hand, we can think about texts with any degree of effectiveness, we can think about other things effectively, too. I am trying to undo, or at least cast doubt upon, the fundamental structuralist and post-structuralist view of language as a system of pure differences (104-105, italics in original).

Scholes argues that most of his colleagues "have largely given up on [literary] research as a progress toward truth" due to a range of structuralist, post-structuralist, and postmodern critiques (*RFE*, 47). This loss of faith is a momentous shift, given that imaginative literature achieved its imminence within the field of English largely due to the romantic philosophies of scholars like Matthew Arnold, who sought to elevate it to the status of a secular scripture. The professor of literature, therefore, plays the role of the priestly exegete who unpacks the hidden meaning of a literary text for her students—a true believer, as it were. In support of this view of professor-as-priest, Scholes traces in some detail the history of English as a discipline and finds that many early professors, such as William Lyon Phelps, who taught English at Yale from 1892 to 1933, were, in fact, active Christian ministers in addition to teachers of literature. The teaching and criticism produced by such professors/preachers was, to a great extent, of a piece with their work in the pulpit insofar as all of these modes were attempts to get at the truth in and about the texts and deliver that truth (and the methods necessary to get at it) to a wider public.

The criticism produced by most poststructuralist critics, however, calls into question the very bases of literature's elevation to the status of scripture, which leads Scholes to argue that

Hypocriticism is a word whose time has come. It acknowledges more fully than is usual the roots of *hypocrite* in the ancient Greek verb *hypokrino*, which had a set of meanings sliding from simple speech, to orating, to acting on stage, to feigning or speaking falsely. We are constantly in danger of following the same trajectory. I propose this word, then, to refer to a weak and deficient kind of criticism—and also, of course, as in the normal usage of the word *hypocrisy*, to refer to what *Webster's Collegiate* calls the “act or practice of feigning to be what one is not or to feel what one does not feel; esp. the false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion.” Hypocriticism is simply the critical practice of people who must go through motions developed by evangelical teachers like...Phelps without the faith that animated Phelps himself, who know less literature than Phelps did because they must know more critical theory and can't, after all, know everything, and who have lost faith in the possibility of either themselves or the books they “profess” telling the truth about anything important in the lives of those they are teaching. We hypocritics have lost faith in what we do, which means we must either recover that faith or change what we are doing...I believe that the only way to recover faith in ourselves and in our project is indeed to change what we are doing, for our present enterprise is a leaky vessel, and the vessel is adrift in a culture almost as indifferent to its fate as the ocean itself (*RFE*, 81; italics in original).

In Scholes's view, the effects of the loss of truth as the goal of literary studies extend beyond the professoriate. He claims that the authorities to whom professors report “seem either not to know or not to care just what we are doing” in our classrooms since they are not motivated by a love of truth either, but rather by “devotion to the morality of the marketplace and the aesthetics of fashion,” forces which also influence individuals within the discipline itself. If, then, humanists do not believe we are engaged in a search for truth, and we are primarily assessed on the basis of the quantity and attention-grabbing capability of our published material, then “we have... a conversation in which the rewards go to the best conversationalists” (*RFE*, 48).

Scholes admits that his defense of the concept of love of truth is “inadequate” (*RFE*, 39). His focus, however, is not on making a full-scale realist philosophical argument, but rather on examining the more constricted arena of the possibility of comparing

descriptions of texts with the texts themselves in order to ascertain the accuracy, fairness, and comprehensiveness – the truthfulness of such descriptions. This is, after all, his primary concern as a teacher of English and a literary critic. It is precisely here, however, where Polanyian epistemology can play an important role, providing a more rigorous foundation for Scholes's project. Indeed, Polanyi's description of the "typical device of modern intellectual prevarication" that his epistemological project attempts to counter sounds nearly identical to Scholes's descriptions of hypocriticism:

Knowledge that we hold to be true and also vital to us, is made light of, because we cannot account for its acceptance in terms of a critical philosophy. We then feel entitled to continue using that knowledge, even while flattering our sense of intellectual superiority by disparaging it. And we actually go on, firmly relying on this despised knowledge to guide and lend meaning to our more exact enquiries, while pretending that these alone come up to our standards of scientific stringency (*PK*, 354).

In order to attempt to overcome the tendency toward hypocriticism in English studies, Scholes advocates a move away from a focus on imaginative literature and towards the teaching of texts partly in order to desacralize the subject matter, and partly in order to make greater use of the resources of philosophy and semiotics. I will attempt to make clear what Scholes thinks such a move might entail in due course. First, however, we will explore the ways in which Scholes's epistemological concerns and his pedagogical methods arise from his involvement in semiotics. I have already quoted at some length from *Textual Power*, one of a number of texts in which Scholes applies a semiotic approach to teaching practice. In so doing, he works to incorporate the insights generated by structuralist and post-structuralist thought without succumbing to their excesses. The result is a valuable pedagogical resource based on a set of linguistic and philosophical positions which harmonize quite well with a post-critical perspective. I believe such a resource can be used to give a greater number of students access to the tools afforded by such an approach for the hazardous striving toward that which both Scholes and Polanyi advocate.

Semiotics

As a semiotician, Scholes aligns himself more closely with Peirce than with Saussure, seeing the latter's emphasis on arbitrary signification as leading ultimately to the excesses of deconstruction, which movement's privileging of Saussure and suppression of Peirce he critiques in *Textual Power*. He argues that "we may in fact 'know' more than we can systematize about human behavior, so that our intuitions may indeed be

superior to our more reasoned positions,” and he departs from French structuralist orthodoxy by “advocating...acceptance of the view that an act of communication may indeed point to the phenomenal world and even have the temerity to aim at what may lie behind the wall of phenomena—as Moby Dick seeks to tell us something about a real whaling industry and the behavior of real whales and whalers, while also probing deeper into the mysteries of the universe” (*SI*, 17; 24). A theme in much of his semiotic work is the necessity of “rescu[ing] the much-maligned referent” which is impossible to do while “remaining liberated from the empirical object” (*TP*, 85). This requires us “to rehabilitate reference itself...without falling back into naïve assumptions about the empirical object” (*TP*, 85).

There are obvious echoes here of the tacit dimension of knowledge as well as of certain affinities between the thought of Polanyi and Peirce in semiotic and epistemological contexts brought to our attention by Mullins, Colapietro, Agler, and Innis. This connection to Peirce’s work for both Polanyi and Scholes is important, because both are concerned about preserving the possibility of meaning over and against the corrosive nature of the critical turn in Western thought. Perhaps the critical turn made the later linguistic turn inevitable, and if our vocabulary for pursuing meaning-creation after this linguistic turn is deeply shaped by Saussure’s dyadic conception of a sign, then meaning is likely to be doomed for any hardy soul who, like Derrida, follows it through to its logical conclusion that language is itself primordial and autonomous, but also a completely arbitrary system of pure differences, hanging in metaphysical thin air. As John K. Sheriff points out:

The nemesis of human understanding...based on the Saussurean sign...is the gap between the signifier and the signified, the word and what it represents, the statement and its meaning. If one has nothing but systems of dyadic signs whose parts have no logical, natural, or motivated relation, one is left with mystification and blindness when one tries to define the meaning of a sign. The definition or meaning of the signified is not determined by its signifier but by something else. Structuralists call this “something else” differences with other signs in the system. None of the signs *have* meaning in themselves; rather, the differences between (and within) signs *allow* meaning. Consequently, as Derrida has shown so thoroughly, all meaning is supplementarity, an ideality exterior to the process of language (Sheriff 1989, 53).

This theory of the sign is a prime example of the intellectual prevarication that both Scholes and Polanyi wish to overcome. It effectively undercuts the possibility of meaning even as it depends upon this “despised knowledge” to make its dialectical

attack (*PK*, 354). As we have already seen, widespread acceptance of this view leads to hypocriticism in the humanities. Both Scholes and Polanyi would agree with Sheriff that “we need a theory of signs that can relate phenomenology and ontology, modes of consciousness and modes of being” (Sheriff 1989, 54).

In contrast to the corrosive nature of the dyadic approach, which essentially leaves the person grasping the meaning of a sign a helpless bystander who must take what she gets, Peirce’s triadic notion of the sign, which posits, in addition to the object (i.e. the *signified* in Saussure’s terms) and the sign (or, the signifier), the *interpretant*. Peirce sums up the components of a sign thus:

A sign or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object (2.228).

This third category provides a place for the personal agency required for the fiduciary nature of linguistically-codified knowledge. We might put this another way by saying that it provides a conception of language that allows for “human value” to be “the source of all valuation” (Blond).

I have been attempting to make clear some of the ways in which Scholes’s semiotic position is inextricably tangled up with those issues of epistemology and ontology of interest to Polanyi *vis a vis* a brief exploration of the theoretical affinities both Scholes and Polanyi have with Peircean semiotics. My own view, again, is that Scholes, like Peirce, has important contributions to make to a pedagogically-based, post-critical movement in the humanities that seeks to move more thinkers from “a profession of nihilism” (or, for Scholes, hypocriticism) towards the ability “to profess now knowingly and openly those beliefs which could be tacitly taken for granted in the days before modern philosophic criticism reached its present inciseness” (*PK*, 268).

While there is much more that could be said about Peirce’s under-utilized theory, we must continue to move towards the ways in which Scholes’s semiotic and philosophical views inform his pedagogy. Along the way we will see that much of what he sees as important in the humanities is the development of students’ awareness of themselves as textual beings, that is, as beings who are distinctive primarily due to their use of language. This concern, as it is dealt with in the classroom by Scholes, might be rendered in Polanyian terms as helping students to better understand their calling and its location within the various orders of reality—cultural, linguistic, physical, etc. The emphases, of course, in textual studies will be on cultural and linguistic phenomena.

Thus Scholes notes that “when we become aware of ourselves, we are already thoroughly developed as textual creatures” (*PR*, 27). The role of a teacher, then, is to help

“to bring the assumptions that are in place out in the open for scrutiny” in order to give students access to a “usable cultural past” (*TP*, x; *RFE*, 126). The “humble subject ‘English’ is so important [because...] texts are places where power and weakness become visible and discussable, where learning and ignorance manifest themselves, where the structures that enable and constrain our thoughts and actions become palpable” (*TP*, xi). For Scholes, a focus on these traits, rather than on literariness *per se*, provides a foundation for a study of texts that is less susceptible to hypocritism than the mainstream of current practice, since its aims are not so heavily laden with what amounts to theological content that is not accepted by the rank and file of practicing teachers, but which still functions (out of sight, like the Turk in Walter Benjamin’s description of the role of theology in Marxism) as the rationale for the teaching in the first place. The call is for teachers of English to stop “teaching literature” and to start “studying texts” (*TP*, 16). The subject matter is thus broadened (to include texts which are not imaginative literature nor literary criticism) as the discipline refocuses upon a “love of truth...existing at a lower order of abstraction[, in] words like *fair*, *accurate*, and *comprehensive*,” even as it maintains its right to point to “what may lie behind the wall of phenomena” (*RFE*, 57; *SI*, 24).

In so doing, the disciplinary apparatus also reserves its right to make ethical claims, implicit in terms like “power and weakness...learning and ignorance...enable and constrain,” (*TP*, xi). Scholes sees the teaching of textuality as an act with a significant ethical component, and these ethics, inextricably bound up in the creation and decoding of texts, make claims on us that go beyond the linguistic realm since, as he puts it, “the world is a text, but it is not only a text” (*PR*, 91). Hence also his agreement with Hilary Putnam, who argues that “we don’t have an Archimedean point; we always speak the language of a time and place; but the rightness and wrongness of what we say is not just for a time and place” (*RFE*, 57; quoted in *PR*, 86, italics original). Here Scholes shares the Polanyian concern for universal epistemic and ethical intent in knowledge which is indwelled within the finite constraints of a particular knower’s calling, and which is in turn partly determined by the constraints of the technical vocabulary of a particular discipline.

The particulars of Scholes’s more practical pedagogical suggestions arise from this view, constituting for him “an act of faith: faith that teaching can be improved or adjusted to new circumstances, that critical dialogue can refine thought, and, more specifically, that literary theory and classroom practice really do have something to say to one another” (*TP*, x-xi). Again, this position is very close to the post-critical view of the fiduciary nature of personal knowledge held within the constraints of one’s calling in which, because of the admixture of tacit and explicit dimensions, the epistemological content both is and is not available for critique and scrutiny.

The contrast between Saussurean and Peircean semiotics serves here as a case-in-point. Within the realm of literary theory, Saussure's dyadic approach has, to a very large degree, dictated the terms of the discussion regarding meaning in literary texts for about a half century. A young scholar entering the discipline, then, will have her calling shaped and molded by the disciplinary constraints dictated by this dominant view. This may happen explicitly, if she focuses on semiotics in her work, or tacitly, if her interests lie elsewhere, as the post-structuralist assumptions about meaning will be in the air, so to speak. Either way, these constraints will have ramifications—some of which will be ethical—both within the discipline in question and outside it.

One such ramification is that, for one with this formation, there can be no explicitly-acknowledged, seaworthy connection between semiotics, phenomenology, and ontology. This young literary scholar will continue to behave as if texts have meanings (even Derrida himself, as many have pointed out, cannot avoid doing so), but any talk of meaning will be officially thought to be so much embarrassingly naïve folk psychology. Such engagement with meaning will be therefore be driven out of sight.

Scholes is post-critical in that he openly proclaims our ability as linguistic creatures to penetrate the wall of phenomena with our signs, sometimes reaching the ontological on the far side (if indeed it be on the far side). This approach, if followed with rigor, allows the moral and ethical dimensions of our enterprises to remain out in the open, rather than being stashed out of sight below decks due to embarrassment over the impossibility of impersonal, objectivistic moral and ethical justification. For, as Polanyi reminds us, "modern man's immorality is unstable. Presently his moral passions reassert themselves in objectivist disguise and the scientific Minotaur [i.e. moral inversion] is born" (*PK*, 268). Hence the importance and usefulness of challenging those destructive elements of the modern critical project within our disciplinary apparatus and replacing them with something better, to be handed on to our students so that, perhaps, their callings will include the resources necessary to avoid the pitfalls leading to hypocrisy and, ultimately for Polanyi, moral inversion.

Pedagogy

In the following section I shall sketch out Scholes's suggestions for the wholesale restructuring of English as a discipline (those interested in several concrete examples of how Scholes's and Polanyi's work might be combined in the classroom, along with further examples of the sorts of critical and pedagogical resources found in many of Scholes's works are advised to consult the endnotes).³ My purpose here is to attempt to smooth the path toward a more wide-spread use of Scholes's post-critical pedagogy in the teaching of the humanities in general and of English in particular by tracing those trajectories in Scholes's work that are concerned with establishing fundamental, lasting change at the disciplinary level.

Scholes's treatment of these themes is primarily concerned with what goes on in departments of English, yet I think it fair to say resonances will be felt, to varying degrees, across the humanities. This trend toward a significant reimagining of English begins to take shape in *Textual Power*, in which Scholes deconstructs certain aspects of the English apparatus, outlining the division between the consumption and production of texts. Under the heading of consumption, he contrasts classes based on the interpretation of imaginative literature with remedial courses on "reading," which attempt to improve the students' skills at reading "non-literature," a textual type which presumably needs no interpretation. On the production side of the discipline he includes classes on creative writing, which produce what he calls "pseudo-literature," and those on composition, which produce "pseudo-non-literature" (*TP*, 7). He points out that consumption is valued over production, with the interpretation of literature at the top of the heap (such courses, of course, being given to the more prestigious staff) and composition at the bottom (often given to younger faculty and graduate students). He further notes that work done in composition is considered remedial, while that done in creative writing is thought to be a joke—the proof of this, he notes, lies in the fact that classes on reading and interpretation do not tend to take as their raw materials texts produced by the teachers or students of composition and creative writing classes.

In Scholes's view, this disciplinary separation is artificial, and so his call to move away from the teaching of literature and towards teaching textuality aims to reunite the production and consumption of texts and to stop giving short shrift, as we have seen, to genres other than imaginative literature. In other words, he seeks to make relevant the connection between seeing and doing that was, for a while, achieved in the classes of rhetoric and oratory in days of yore. Scholes develops this line of thought in great detail in *The Rise and Fall of English*, in which he makes what perhaps amounts to his most audacious claim: the discipline of English ought to be restructured wholesale along the lines of the medieval trivium.

In turning for inspiration to the *trivium*, which consisted of logic, grammar, and rhetoric, Scholes does not advocate a simple transplantation of the ancient method into our educational context, but rather finds a spirit and a system for approaching learning that can be modified to suit our current purposes. One thinks here of Polanyi's call to renew the enterprise of the Scholastics:

Such is, in bold outline, my program for reconsidering the conception of knowledge and restoring thereby the harmony between faith and reason. Few of the clues which are guiding me today were available to the Scholastics. The modes of reasoning which they relied on were inadequate; their knowledge of nature was tenuous and often spurious. Moreover, the faith they wanted to prove rational was cast

into excessively rigid and detailed formulas, presenting intractable and sometimes even absurd problems to the reasoning mind.

Even so, though their enterprise collapsed, it left great monuments behind it, and I believe that we are today in an infinitely better position to renew their basic endeavor. The present need for it could not be more pressing (Polanyi 1961, 247).

Scholes, like Polanyi, “acknowledg[es] the cultural past of our institutions,” even as he refashions them into a coherent approach to training students in semiotically-grounded approaches to textuality in light (and in spite) of post-structuralist theory (*RFE*, 126).

In the area of grammar, he is interested in focusing on themes of subjectivity and objectivity in language, leading students in the study of “the way that their mother tongue presents human beings with a set of words and grammatical rules in which they attain subjectivity at the cost of being subjected” as well as “how...‘objective’ discourses...work and what their strengths, costs, and limitations may be” (*RFE*, 120-121). In courses on logic (or system-and-dialectic), he would strive “to make available to students the tradition of clear and systematic thinking [in philosophy]...so that students may learn to employ the resources of logic and dialectic in their own thinking and writing” (*RFE*, 122). His revamped take on rhetoric would include the rhetorical traditions going back to Aristotle and beyond, but would also extend to new forms of media, “especially those that mix verbal and visual textuality to generate effects of unprecedented power” (*RFE*, 125).

In the modern trivium, as in the ancient, the organizing principle would be “a canon of concepts, precepts, and practices rather than a canon of texts,” whose aim would be to “put students in touch with a usable cultural past [...in order to] help [them] attain an active relationship with their cultural present” (*RFE* 120, 126). Scholes is in no way dogmatic with regard to the trivium as an organizational structure for English. The point, rather, is to refocus the discipline onto a canon of methods that will foster in students the love of truth, while helping them to better understand and navigate their own cultural situation by means of a sharpened knowledge of its historical development and the use of language itself. It is important to note that, as Scholes frequently points out, this shift would not mean that the literary canon present in English departments at the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty first centuries would be summarily thrown out the window. Those texts would, by and large, remain in the classroom, studied (along with others that have often been traditionally associated with philosophy, linguistics, sociology, economics, etc.) in the ways enumerated above. They would no longer serve, however, as ends in themselves, but would rather function as some (though not all) of the raw materials for the consumption side of textuality. Ultimately, Scholes’s trivial proposal is aimed at finding a concrete, feasible way out of

the epistemologically rooted hypocriticism he sees as endemic to English in its current practice.

A Scholesian approach to teaching English is, at its very roots, a philosophical project, and its adoption would result in a discipline that is pedagogically more rigorously philosophical than it has been, at least as practiced by most critics and teachers working within its disciplinary bounds (there are important exceptions, of course). To reiterate a point made much earlier in this paper, I think it clear that if Scholes's call for an emphasis on the traditions of clear and systematic thinking (including the limitations and excesses of these traditions) were widely incorporated into English instruction, it would be an important step toward a growing awareness among a larger subset of intelligent laypersons of the often corrosive influence of the ideal of impersonal objectivity at the levels of worldview and culture. This would open a new space—small, but a new space nonetheless—in which explicitly post-critical approaches could be explored and applied pedagogically, a curricular environment in which Scholes's and Polanyi's insights would support and accentuate one another quite well.

I hope to have shown that while Scholes cannot be properly characterized as a Polanyian thinker, his methods and aims are to a very great extent parallel to and in harmony with Polanyi's. In addition, the fact that Scholes's work is oriented towards more humble goals than Polanyi's grand program, tending towards engagement with semiotics and critical theory in order to apply the best of these movements to classroom practice leads me to see in his work a valuable repository of arguments and practices which can be used to effectively teach the humanities in a post-critical fashion. This pedagogical movement, rooted in epistemological and semiotic positions that are common to Scholes and Polanyi (as well as Peirce) would constitute a small, but significant step toward the humanistic revisionism advocated by Polanyi that would place our personal, fiduciary epistemic commitments at the center of a conception of knowing that would allow us to rigorously and realistically connect our use of signs to the phenomenological and ontological realms in which we dwell.

I have jokingly referred to these lofty disciplinary, philosophical, and cultural pretensions as a white whale. A more widely-employed post-critical English pedagogy, combining the insights of Scholes and Polanyi, might be as serviceable a harpoon as we are likely to get our hands on, given the fact that under our current educational regime nearly all students have some exposure to the study of English while far fewer take courses on philosophy or semiotics, thus leaving precious few initiates in the sciences aware of even the barest rudiments of proper philosophy of science.

ENDNOTES

¹All quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the works of Robert Scholes. Due to the retrospective nature of this article I have chosen to use the following abbreviations for the titles of Scholes's major works:

- CR *The Crafty Reader*
EAF *English After the Fall*
F *The Fabulators*
SI *Semiotics and Interpretation*
SL *Structuralism in Literature*
PR *Protocols of Reading*
RFE *The Rise and Fall of English*
TP *Textual Power*

²In 2011 Scholes published *English After the Fall*, in which he restates and further develops the case he made in the earlier *The Rise and Fall of English*. While this later volume is very valuable, I find the arguments put forth in the earlier work to be more robust and foundational, and more likely to be of interest to those interested in Polanyi's work. In *English After the Fall*, he notes that he does not know of any English departments that have "followed [his] advice for making the fall of English a fortunate one...no doubt...because [he] failed to make the case persuasively enough" (xiv). In this later work he reiterates, focuses on, and expands his arguments for the move to textuality, while eschewing recommendations for more specific curricular categories (i.e. the trivium) that might be used to carry out such a shift. With regard to his failure to make the case sufficiently enough, we may wish to pardon him—it might well be a tall task for any individual scholar to completely alter the approach to the entire discipline of English in one fell swoop. But again, I have focused on the earlier *The Rise and Fall of English*, which I see as a more comprehensive and uncompromising statement of his project.

³A fascinating example of the application of Scholesian semiotic method at the level of culture is found in *Protocols of Reading*, where he approaches the life stories of James Joyce, Benito Mussolini, and Georg Lukács as texts in order to gain insight into modernist ideology. This is a rich undertaking, which provides ample opportunity to study not only how the calling of talented individuals can influence culture and ideology on a grand scale, but also particular aspects of moral inversion manifested at the level of the individual (Scholes notes that as all three figures grasped the "difficulty—perhaps the impossibility—of achieving the socialist program...[they] shifted their goals in various directions, all of which were marked by certain authoritarian and totalizing proclivities;" (PR, 29)). Such an approach could most certainly serve as the basis for classes on historicized ideology and a host of other issues. These passages might also be usefully incorporated into a class which takes as its point of departure the concept of moral inversion.

While the foregoing example provides thematic material that can be readily applied by any able-bodied humanist to a range of post-critically useful classroom scenarios, many of Scholes's works contain a wealth of material that is more explicitly designed for immediate pedagogical deployment. *Textual Power*, for instance, contains a series of chapters entitled "The Text in the Class I, II, & III" where Scholes outlines a practical way for educators to help students improve their skills as readers by breaking the reading process into three subsidiary steps: submission to the text, interpretation of the text, and, finally, criticism of the text.

The first stage is that of the preliminary reading, which is dependent upon our submission to an “assume[d] authority and intentionality,” otherwise there will be “nothing sufficiently other for us to interpret...[and] criticize” (*TP*, 39). The next step is that of interpretation. The reader, “based on a feeling of incompleteness on [his or her] part,” here fills in the gaps left in the text and looks for “a concealed or non-obvious meaning” which may or may not turn up (*TP*, 22). Significantly, the interpretive stage “question[s] that very unity of subjectivity and intention that we have postulated in order to read” in the first place (*TP*, 40). The third stage involves criticism of “the themes developed in...[the] text...or of the codes themselves, out of which...[the] text has been constructed” (*TP*, 23). This is often more effectively carried out from a practical, collective position, rather than one that is purely personal and individual, so that part of the teacher’s role is to help students identify their own group or class interests – again, to help students to understand more fully their calling.

Scholes’s account of this stage of reading is reminiscent of Polanyi’s description of discovery as “a conscious and persistent striving for the solution of an articulate problem...” in “...an act in which satisfaction, submission, and universal legislation are indissolubly combined” (*PK*, 301). The implicitly post-critical nature of Scholes’s approach here might be made more explicit by accentuating the ways in which a rigorously defensible criticism must rest upon a foundation of submission and interpretation that are ultimately fiduciary and personal in nature, due to the fact that the reader must pour herself into these preliminary stages in ways that will never be completely available for introspective critique. Again, I provide these brief sketches in order to illustrate how a teacher of English (or of the humanities more generally) might concretely combine contributions from both Scholes and Polanyi in order to teach the process of reading in a post-critical mode.

Unsurprisingly, given his deep involvement in semiotics, Scholes’s approach to teaching texts is informed by a heightened awareness of genre: “Major literary works are all comments on their own form, on the generic tradition or traditions from which they take their being. The study of literature, then, must involve the study of communicative process in general—or semiotics—and in particular the codes that govern the production and interpretation of the major kinds of literature, and the subcodes that inform the various genres that have developed in the course of literary history” (*SI*, 34-35). Such a “semiotic approach...allows critic, teacher, student, and reader more scope for thought, more freedom and more responsibility, than a[n]...exegetical one” because texts are, in the final analysis, “communication[s] to be tested and weighed, not icon[s] to be worshiped” (*SI*, 126). The aim of such an approach is to “both socialize and desocialize...[since] students need to acquire the interpretive codes of their culture, but they also need see them as codes, so that they can appreciate those texts that reshape accepted ideas and at the same time defend themselves against the manipulative exploitation of received opinion” (*SI*, 14).

The Crafty Reader, published in 2001, is comprised of a series of studies offering concrete suggestions and examples for the teaching of a variety of text types through this lens of genre as informed by semiotic theory. A central concern in this book is to focus on whole genres as well as particular texts which aspire to the level of craft rather than art, or which, at any rate would not likely be considered high art by most canon-guardians. The topics covered thus range from poetry (with attention to poets and forms scorned by the New Critics), to the private-eye novel, to the science fantasy of J.K. Rowling. A particularly intriguing chapter, *Reading the World*, provides the contours of a course based on a reading of American culture informed by Baudrillard’s work on hyperreality *vis a vis* the paintings of Norman Rockwell. This section, which manages to remain tethered to Scholes’s realist ontology, also makes (in my own view, at least) a convincing argument that Rockwell is not a hack sentimentalist, but a skilled postmodern craftsman who is savvy to the complex, mediated nature of human existence. For those individuals new to the classroom and charged with teaching

literature, textuality, or semiotics, this book may prove a godsend, as almost every chapter can serve as the outline for a new course, perhaps easing a bit the curricular hand-to-mouth existence of green teachers.

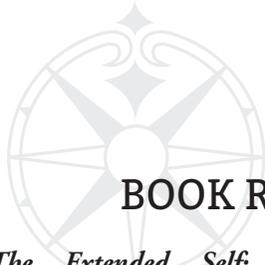
Finally, Scholes has produced much valuable literary criticism in addition to his philosophical pedagogy. In the works that I have been drawing on most prominently, examples of his approach to literary criticism can be found in the chapter on *Ulysses* in *Structuralism in Literature*, as well as in chapters on film, drama, and fiction, and close readings of short stories by Joyce and Hemingway in *Semiotics and Interpretation*. In 1963's *The Fabulators* (updated in 1979 to include J.L. Borges and some Latin American magical realism under the title *Fabulation and Metafiction*) he resurrects the term "fabulator" to describe what he sees as a new sub-genre of allegorical fiction by writers such as Kurt Vonnegut, Iris Murdoch, and John Barth. This genre "emphasizes art and joy" by "tend[ing] away from the representation of reality but return[ing] toward actual human life by way of ethically controlled fantasy," simultaneously exhibiting "an extraordinary delight in design...for its own sake," thus producing texts whose formal qualities "assert...the authority of the fabulator" (F, 10-11). All of the above passages might be usefully employed as accessible examples of semiotically informed critical approaches in courses which include the primary texts or genres addressed.

It is important to note that, in addition to the foregoing examples, Scholes has been involved in the creation of a number of textbooks. One such is *Text Book: Writing Through Literature*, originally published in 1988 and updated several times since.

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BOOK REVIEW

Chris Abel, *The Extended Self: Architecture, Memes, and Minds*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2015. Pp. 357 + xx. ISBN 978-0-7190-9612-9. £25.

This ambitious book explores a number of distinct but related dimensions of human experience, including the nature of the self, the evolutionary history of the species, the correspondence between embodiment, cognition and articulation, the role of technology and built environments in the development of identity, the unfolding global ecological crisis, and the interdependencies between these various fields. Abel's goal is to demonstrate the extent to which our understanding of these issues will mutually inform one another and to do so in a way that avoids both the "deterministic thinking" of modernism as well as the "nihilistic aspects of [some forms of] postmodernism" (xv; note that a concise overview of many of the arguments Abel develops in this book is available in "Technically Embodied Selves," an essay included in the recently released third edition of his *Architecture and Identity* [New York: Routledge, 2017]).

Drawing on the work of Eva Jablonka and Marion Lamb, Abel at one point in the *Extended Self* highlights the

"interaction" between four different forms or "levels" of human evolutionary history, including the "genetic," the "epigenetic," the "behavioral," and the "symbolic" (76). It is perhaps more than anything this interaction Abel emphasizes throughout the book, for it is this interaction he believes best accounts for the development of all forms or levels of emergence and development. This dynamism is articulated not only in terms of interaction but also in terms of "combinativity" and "process" (cf. 3, 120-122). Persons, language, meaning, artifacts, customs, and built environments "all emerge out of an indivisible reality" (38), and each in turn affect the nature and shape of that reality.

The organizing theme of the book is that of the "extended self," which Abel defines as a reality that "reaches outward to embrace a complex world of many different kinds of experiences involving both interpersonal and cultural transfusions" (3). The nature of the self and its existence is one of the recurring questions Abel explores. Echoing the proposals made by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch in their book *The Embodied Mind*, Abel suggests the self is a "fundamentally fragmented, divided and non-unified" reality (49), so much so that "there is no self beyond the aggregates

of experience” (50). Abel’s account of the extended self is one that not only allows for but insists on a “merging of personal and group identities” along with a merging of human and non-human fields or entities (7).

Close to the heart of Abel’s account of the self lies his exposition of embodiment. The body is the “nucleus or fulcrum of human experience” (26), what Husserl described as the “persisting point” of all human experience (31). Abel sees the body itself as a dynamic field that can be said to include our interaction with the artifacts, technologies, and artificial environments (including cybernetic ones; see 236-258) we encounter in the world... or, perhaps better, *as* the world (32). Abel draws on both Merleau-Ponty and Polanyi, and appreciates that the latter more so than the former recognized the continuity between formal and informal experiences (36).

Artifacts, tools, and built environments are thus all essential aspects of Abel’s analysis of the extended self. Taking his cue from Bernard Stiegler’s reading of Heidegger, Abel suggests this dimension of human experience should not be understood in exclusively instrumental terms but should be recognized as “*a way of revealing*” (62), one that clarifies the essence of human nature. The technical is thus a mediating field between the organic and the inorganic, one populated by “organized beings” with an evolutionary history governed by “both material and non-material dynamics” (64). The development of the human mind and that

of human technology are so intertwined that their interaction “properly constitutes” time (65).

Not surprisingly, evolutionary models are an important part of Abel’s project. He appreciates Darwin’s genius, but also recognizes the inability of natural selection to account for all the varieties of evolution Abel considers (75-86). He looks instead to the descriptions of autopoietic systems provided by Polanyi, Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana, and John Minger (86-92). It is within the context of his analysis of autopoiesis that he naturally takes up a consideration of memetics (93-112), and indicates his efforts are aimed in part at helping provide the “more rigorous foundation” memetics “badly needs” (109).

Throughout the book, Abel refers to architectural examples of the ideas he presents (see, e.g., 26-30, 124-142, 149-154, 174-187, etc.). These examples, however, are not mere illustrations or analogies but rather serve as specific instances wherein the interaction and interdependence of the self, mind, embodiment, and the environment are manifest. One of the most intriguing architectural concepts he uses is that of Mitsuo Inoue’s description of the differences between (on the one hand) Western and Chinese architecture and (on the other) Japanese architecture: whereas the former tend towards “geometrical” forms of order, the latter are “movement-oriented” and reveal their order only as one passes through them (239-245). This notion of “movement-oriented” order is

very much of a piece with Abel's larger project.

One of the less pronounced but nonetheless pervasive themes of the book has to do with current environmental and ecological concerns. Abel argues late modern Western lifestyles are unsustainable (225-227) and offers a few suggestions for overcoming our "addiction" to automobiles (231-233) and restructuring urban environments (233-235). His proposals are more programmatic than practical, but he acknowledges as much: his concern is to provide an alternative account of the self that will help us apprehend the nature of real freedom and thereby give us a better "understanding of our place in the world, and of the more complex realities that go with it" (224-225). Ultimately, though, he seems rather pessimistic about our chances: we are, he suggests, likely "not up to the task" of making significant changes in our lifestyle, there is a "well organized and funded campaign" dedicated to minimizing our awareness of the problem, and history is replete with examples of failed or collapsed civilizations that failed to "properly manage their environmental resources" (227-228).

Throughout *Extended Self*, Abel does a masterful job coordinating a considerable range of concepts and resources in an organized and compelling manner. It does seem, however, there are two questions to which he might have devoted more attention, especially given the importance both questions have for his project. The first question has to do with the distinction

between the *reality* of the self and the *apprehension* of the self, or what we might call (on the one hand) the *objective* or *ontological* mode of the self and (on the other) its *subjective* or *phenomenological* mode. At times it seems Abel recognizes a distinction between them, but at other times it seems he risks conflating them in confusing or problematic ways.

The second question has to do with the reality of the self: it is not at all clear the account Abel provides of the emergence and development of the self (or its embedded or "extended" nature) requires one to conclude "*there is no self beyond the aggregates of experience*" (50). One could, it seems, draw the opposite conclusion just as readily from the argument Abel provides. A more systematic analysis of the nature of emergence and the relationship between lower-level and higher-level entities within complex, dynamic ecologies is needed; Polanyi's account of dual control would be helpful here. Hopefully Abel will have an opportunity to address these questions in his forthcoming *The Self-Field: Mind, Body, and Environment*.

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