

study the essays in this section to clarify their conceptions and inform their arguments regarding values.

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Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge. By Thomas Pfau. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015. 688 pages. \$28.92.

Discontent with the modern disengaged, atomistic self and the trend toward moral subjectivism has spurred many different genealogical accounts of human moral agency by thinkers such as Gadamer, Charles Taylor, MacIntyre. These critiques have typically retraced the historical formation of modernity in order to retrieve the substantive understanding of the self and morality found in ancient and early medieval philosophy. Pfau's book can be considered a contribution to this genealogical project. In the book, Pfau attempts to retrieve the humanistic, interpretive frameworks for practical reason and the dialectical formation of concepts inherited from the classical philosophy (4). The book contains five parts. Part 1 discusses Pfau's methodology. Part 2–5 are Pfau's historical retrieval.

Part 1 is Pfau's historical argument for the recovery of a hermeneutical approach to humanistic inquiry. He traces the historical origin of the separation of practical and theoretical reason back to the rise of nominalism and argues that it led to two changes. The first is changing our picture of human agency to one in which will and intellect are no longer entwined, second, the dialectical interpretive approach of humanistic inquiry gave way to a naturalist and reductionist approach (20). With these two changes, concepts in humanistic inquiry no longer function as medium for articulating the structures of the *logos*. Instead, "concepts are now deployed, in contingent and occasional fashion, as mere *tools* for representing or 'depicting' . . . isolated and fleeting phenomena or substantially alien 'objects'" (25–6). Historicism perceives time as secular, as a linear progression, rather than perceiving "the past as having an enduring and indispensable 'presence' within our ongoing quest for rational orientation" (37).

In opposing the reductionist approach, Pfau argues for the hermeneutical approach which had been revived by John Henry Newman and the Cambridge Platonists. For Newman, humanistic inquiry should be "dialectical and agonistic in nature" (69). Ideas are not constructed in a hermeneutic vacuum. Rather, they are "engaged dialogically, interpersonally, and in ways bound to transform both the knower and the known." (59). Meaning can only be achieved "within the long *durée* of historical time, and that their value and

import” is secured by “our steadily deepening interpretive engagement with their historical transmission and development” (40).

In Part 2, Pfau retraces the development of ancient idea of human agency and how it has been marginalized by the nominalist view. According to Pfau, Aristotle’s notion of emotion is closely related to judgment. One’s desire involves consciousness of a good. While one’s desire or wish is voluntary, it cannot simply be defined in terms of will. His concept of *prohairesis* is defined as “one capable of deliberation and choice without being passively cued by contingent desire” (88). It implies that the agent is responsible for achieving rational articulacy about the human end in a dialectical process within the community and “strengthen[ing] the rational and normative framework of community itself” (91). It is different from Hobbes’s atomistic idea of decision, which lacks of rational deliberation (90). While Stoicism has retained features of Aristotle’s *prohairesis*, it has eliminated the emotive aspect of one’s epistemological and moral commitments in their idea of *apatheia*, which is criticized by Augustine. Unlike Stoicism, will, as the power of choice, for Augustine, is inseparable from desires which determine our actions. Augustine stresses that the human will is deeply enmeshed with self-awareness of an indelible inner conflicts, an awareness of its defective moral sense and thus of its “utter dependency on divine grace” (121).

By integrating Aristotle’s *prohairesis* and Augustine’s grace, Aquinas’s idea of will is also inseparable from intellect (148), but requires the help of God in deliberation about the good. For Aquinas, human beings are relational and participatory (135); thus, one has to deliberate about the human end within the community. According to Aquinas, “deliberation proper will ‘necessarily’ incline the will to act in pursuit of the good” (148). However, as human choices are usually inadequate, humans need grace in deliberation of good (140). As forms arises from God’s will and attesting to its perfection, it “also ‘bind’ their creator . . . it is not supposed that God could ever wish to remake creation” (149). Ockham’s nominalism, by contrast, shifted the understanding of divine power to one seen “as wholly self-certifying, rather than as committed to sustaining the forms it has created” (150).

Basically, the will and the intellect were understood as entwined from Aristotle to Aquinas. With the rise of nominalism, the will is, for the first time, “conceptualized in a way that hints at a possible antagonism, perhaps even incommensurability between it and the intellect” (150). With Bishop Tempier’s condemnation of 1277, the influence of nominalism was consolidated. This changed the understanding of concepts as contingent predicates of, rather than as ontological frameworks underlying the reality of all things (165). The understanding of *telos* inherent in things also disappeared. This prepared the way for the advent of the “modern notion of agency as constructing orders, rather than conforming to those already in ‘nature’” (175).

It has also injected “an element of radical inarticulacy into conceptions of the divine will” as well as morality (179).

Part 3 traces the influence of nominalism in modern philosophy. With the loss of substantive form, Hobbes’s notion of nature is “conceived as an aggregate of inherently value-neutral forces” in which the nature law is constructed, ascribed and imposed rather than discovered (187). It is derived from the theoretical reflections on the preservation of creatures rather than from inner tendency of practical reason towards the *telos* (198). Hobbes perceives human agency strictly in terms of desire and volition, devoid of meaning and historical coherence. He provided a reductionist account of selfhood as mechanical, embodied desire under “the coefficient of legal constraints and inward compulsions, of outward force and inward motive” which is the lack of a transcendent dimension within a human being (203).

Locke took over Hobbes’s mechanistic view of mind as “inherently *re-active* and incapable of *inner* causation” (223). For Locke, will is determined by an uneasiness which is identified as desire. While Hobbes has prepared the way for the shift to a strictly empirical model of human agency, Locke completed “this downward transposition of the will from an active and dynamic metaphysical source to the epistemological zero-degree of literally mindless passions and, in so doing, prepares the ground for Mandeville’s scandalous portrait of hedonistic human agents consumed by the eternal present of desire” (219–20).

While Locke appeals to desire as a moral source, Shaftesbury shifted to feelings, the natural moral sense, as the sources of morality (228–9). Later Shaftesbury, following Aquinas, conceives of the moral sense as a natural habit “in need of constant cultivation” by means of aesthetic education (230). While the approach of moral epistemology found in Locke and Shaftesbury are different, both of them abandoned the Aristotelian-Thomist dialectic that assumes the intertwined relationship between will and intellectual, and marginalized questions concerning about ends. This cleared a path for noncognitivism.

In defending Shaftesbury’s theory against the criticism from Mandeville, Hutcheson rejects cognition as the source of willing, and argues for the moral sense of benevolence. However, both Shaftesbury and Hutcheson left unexplained the apperception between the “countless instances of affection” and “a reasoned and continuous sense of moral agency” (283). This further influenced both the moral theories by Hume and Adam Smith.

Hume offered a reductionist version of passion/will relation, based on nominalist premise, “defining the will as a strictly contingent, momentary spike” (284). Hume entirely rejects the mentalistic concept of consciousness “on account of its alleged indemonstrability in terms of the modern scientific method” (287). With the influence of Locke’s separation of politics from epistemology, religious and metaphysical speculation, epistemology and

moral philosophy are divided; the dichotomy of fact and value emerged in the eighteenth century (308–10).

While Smith rejects Hume's "atomistic view of the passion and disjunction of fact and value," he regards "emotion as an inter-subjective phenomenon" (334). Sentiment is no longer perceived as an inner sense operating independently of situational awareness, rather it is a kind of virtual action "displayed so as to maximize prospects of 'approval' by others" (334). Action is no longer understood as the "teleological fulfillment of rational personhood," but rather it is guided by the "sentiment of approbation" (343). For Pfau, Smith's "proto-behaviorist account of moral sentiments" had indeed "further eroded the meaning and significance of basic humanistic conceptions such as action, person, deliberation, judgment, responsibility, and self-awareness" (395).

All these changes led to the shift toward radical individualism with the affirmation of an isolated, autonomous self which manifests itself in the modern understanding of rights and freedom (375). For instance, a right is understood as "the exercise of power, unconstrained in the way it is discharged and without any obligation to give a reasoned account of why it is being exercised" (388). Human rights "have contracted to the unlimited acquisition and possession of commodities" without "any corresponding notion of the good or telos" as their metaphysical foundations (389). Freedom is understood reductively as subjective preference. For Pfau, modern liberalism has systematically atrophied the conception of human agency by way of "autonomizing and habitualizing entire clusters of motives and complex practices" (402). Individuals are no longer capable of articulating dialectically the moral reasons underlying human rights and actions.

Part 4 can be conceived as Pfau's philosophical exposition of Coleridge's retrieval of practical reason and relational theory of person, which have also been echoed in contemporary writings by Gadamer, Anscombe, MacIntyre, Taylor, and Milbank (617). In Coleridge writings, we can find for the first time in Romanticism an extensive criticism of historicism and modern reason as parochial and hermetic. In Historicism, knowledge has become a specialized commodity, as the aggregation of infinite number of distinct facts or event, displacing "classical, eudaimonistic understanding of theoria" (425). Coleridge criticizes the modern ideological framework for abandoning practical reason to an unconstrained scientific and economic consideration which has led to a kind of "economic theodicy" (461). Coleridge rejects the modern notion of the will as noncognitive and a quasi-somatic energy. Rather, he considers the will as free choice by which human beings develop self-awareness as a unique and instinctive personality (483). It is the potential of sin undertaken by a "responsible Will" which is inseparable to God's "fullness" confirmed by conscience that confirms the ontology of God. And it

is through our self-originating act of the will that “consciousness grasps its precarious spiritual constitution” (493).

Pfau shows how Augustine’s idea of person of Trinity inspired Coleridge’s notion of human agency as distinctive and relational (528–31). Boethius’s distinction between person and nature in Christology also anticipated Coleridge’s primacy of self-consciousness which stipulates human agency as unique and incommunicable (537–8, 614). Richard St. Victor’s study of personality and charity further contributed Coleridge’s phenomenology of inner, spiritual life as involving alterity, reciprocity, equality, and community (549). Similar to contemporary phenomenologists and McDowell, Coleridge perceives the human-world relation as dynamic, integrative, relational and participatory (571). Following St. Victor and Cambridge Platonists, Coleridge’s theory of human agency indeed aims to “arrive at a definition of person that is equally applicable to God and to human beings” (561). The underlying assumption of this objective is that “the phenomenology of human psychological experience is intrinsically related, indeed metaphysically indexed to the divine realm of the Trinity” (561). Similar to Emmanuel Levinas, Coleridge stresses the primacy of ethics in which persons are perceived as relational and reciprocal embeddedness in a community (593, 602); and it is our conscience that “reveals to us the implicit presence and categorical anteriority of a ‘Thou’ within the ‘I’” (602). With this relatedness to the reality of the others, Coleridge links “the Trinitarian idea of person to the realm of finite, human experience” (602). While our experience of other impulses may obscure this ontological relatedness, our faith, which is our fidelity to the conscience, can preserve our loyalty to our true human nature (603).

Pfau’s book is very rich and ambitious. He advances his argument by drawing on discussions of many different theologians, philosophers and poets, ancient as well as modern. He has persuasively shown how nominalism has adversely influenced the modern understanding of human agency which led to an inarticulacy of modern ethics. He has also shown how Cambridge Platonists, and their successors, have responded to the atomistic, mechanistic view of mind and retrieved the substantive understanding of human agency. However, Pfau’s genealogy seems to be portrayed as the dialectical development between only two schools of thoughts—nominalists and Cambridge Platonists. Pfau’s categorization of all those thinkers reduces their thought into two rival camps; the differences between them have been diminished in his portrayal.

Pfau’s criticisms of nominalism and the modern mechanistic view of human agency are persuasive, but questions remain. Why did nominalism successfully attract and influence so many thinkers and dominate the modern intellectual development to a certain extent? I think this is a crucial question Pfau has to answer in his retrieval in order to make his argument more

compelling. Furthermore, Pfau's book may be "overly rich." His discussion in each chapter is abundant; it contains debates of different issues and ideas from many scholars. While this shows Pfau's encyclopedic knowledge of the subject, it also obscures the focus of each chapter. It would be helpful if an outline of each chapter were provided. Sometimes, Pfau's sentences are very long and complicated—there are instances where a sentence takes up to seven lines. Occasionally, I feel like I'm reading an English translation of a huge German philosophical work. The writing involves lots of technical terms. It seems that the book is written for specialists in the area of history of subjectivity and ethics, rather than for philosophers in general.

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