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Radical Axiology: A First Philosophy of Value

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be both original and educational. I would like it to be noted, however, that these choices reflect only the particular interests of a particular individual at a particular point in time. I am a logic instructor and, consequently, especially enjoyed Anne Waters' "That Alchemical Bering Strait Theory: America's Indigenous Nations and Informal Logic Courses." Examples are everything in logic courses and Waters has given me a whole new approach. I must confess, I have never even considered the possibility of integrating ethnic examples into my course, but Waters has convinced me that it is a viable and valuable option. I learned a tremendous amount from Maureen Smith's disturbing paper "Crippling the Spirit, Wounding the Soul: Native American Spiritual and Religious Suppression." Smith does an excellent job of detailing the suppression of American Indian spiritual practices and the efforts to secure freedom of religion for indigenous people. The volume is nicely rounded out with an essay on philosophical discourse. Thurman Lee Hester, Jr. is a citizen of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. Hester's thoughts on American Indian identity and the practice of academic philosophy set a tone for further study and dialogue. All in all, this collection sets a very high standard for others who may become interested in American Indian philosophy. I recommend it highly.

D.D. Hutchins

Radical Axiology: A First Philosophy of Value. By Hugh P. McDonald. New York: Rodopi, 2004. Pp. 388. \$

In this first installment of his ambitious and provocative two-volume project, Hugh McDonald seeks nothing more than to restore philosophy as the "queen of the sciences" by proposing a radical break with the 2400 years of philosophical tradition that has equated metaphysics with first philosophy. In its "fatal equation" of wisdom with knowledge this tradition has forced philosophy into a "handmaiden role, playing servant to the queen.... Philosophy in this mode is narrow, dependent, and even parasitical: it is not viewed as having its own problems, methods, and insights, as it did in its origin and much of its now considerable history" (xii). *Radical Axiology* represents a comprehensive and systematic alternative to this tradition, arguing that it is value, not being (early Greeks and medieval philosophy), the

subject (modern philosophy), or even language (some twentieth century philosophy), that is the root of philosophy. Before we can seek knowledge, we must first ask "What is the value of thinking, science, or reason?" As the love of wisdom, radical axiology is a "genuine philosophy" in that it focuses on questioning received and conventional values that judge that such projects and activities are of worth. Only such a dramatic "reevaluation," McDonald contends, will avoid the slow "death of philosophy" (xvi).

Perhaps this work's most valuable aspect is its vigorous assault on the "perverse notion" that any investigation can be value-free, "as if knowledge and truth are not themselves values in contradistinction to falsity, error, and lies" (xiii). Through meticulous value analyses, McDonald relentlessly unearths hidden evaluations and disguised value judgments that are covertly justified in superficially value-neutral propositions and scientific models. If nothing else, every investigation necessarily begins with the evaluation that a given project is worth undertaking. McDonald is particularly forceful regarding the supposedly value-free conclusions of science, arguing that to claim that science is value-free is to imply that lies are as good as the truth (187). In making explicit the hidden evaluations that lurk beneath every philosophical project, McDonald is hopeful that perhaps there is finally a way to move beyond philosophy's seemingly interminable debates between incommensurable paradigms. In this way, regardless of one's satisfaction with McDonald's ultimate solution, *Radical Axiology* is a must for anyone who is seriously concerned about the self-marginalization of philosophy.

McDonald's broad and varied expertise are put to great use in the final three chapters, which systematically critique the primary philosophical paradigms grounded respectively in being, the subject, and language. Given its dominance of contemporary Western philosophy, McDonald's penetrating and insightful critique of analytic philosophy is particularly noteworthy. "'Analytic' philosophy has not 'clarified conceptual confusions' any more than Cartesianism clarified ideas. It has only spawned new disputes. The original impulse to dissolve philosophical pseudo-problems and thus clear up philosophical issues has not been satisfied. The issues have not gone away, they have only been reworked into the linguistic paradigm. ... The value of this approach as originally conceived has proven

illusory. Worse, the approach has often made philosophy, the most interesting of fields, something dry, boring, and trivial" (312). McDonald's careful and systematic critiques of the major philosophical paradigms alone justify spending time with this challenging text.

Of course, given that McDonald rejects as mistaken every major philosophical paradigm, *Radical Axiology* is not likely to suffer from lack of critics. As McDonald himself notes, in a sense these criticisms are likely to verify his own claims regarding the incommensurability of paradigms and the priority of values in philosophy. Despite this risk, it is necessary to briefly examine the central concept of the project, value.

To a large extent, McDonald has persuasively demonstrated the methodological priority of values over that of being, subject, and language. However, his success in demonstrating value's existential priority is less secure. Throughout, McDonald contends that "A truly radical axiology would not involve ontology or a subject but would evaluate these free from a metaphysical perspective" (xviii). However, in claiming that value is independent of being, existence, and the subject, it would seem that McDonald is in danger of hypostasizing values. Although an act of evaluation would seem to precede any action as the author claims, it would nevertheless seem to be the case that one must always ask, "Value to whom"? As James correctly noted in "The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life," "Like the positive attributes good and bad, the comparative ones better and worse must be realized in order to be real. If one ideal judgment be objectively better than another, that betterness must be made flesh by being lodged concretely in someone's perception. It cannot float in the atmosphere, for it is not a sort of meteorological phenomenon, like the aurora borealis or the zodiacal light." To put this differently, in mistaking an abstraction for something that is concrete, McDonald is in danger of committing what Whitehead called the "Fallacy of Misplaced Concreteness."

Thus, in the end, McDonald would seem to be right in that to exist is to make and be the product of evaluations and judgments of value and in this sense actuality is value. Yet, to make this claim is to say something about reality: to be real is to make and be the product of evaluations. And in this sense we must retain the retain the priority of

metaphysics or perhaps to see axiology as coextensive with metaphysics. Thus, rather than proving that value is independent from the concrete fact of existence, McDonald seems instead to have shown the opposite: to exist is to make and to be the product of judgments of value.

Despite this potential shortcoming, Hugh McDonald has presented a compelling case for the importance of radical axiology by systematically defending the importance of practice over theory and the centrality of value to every activity, *Radical Axiology* is vital reading for anyone concerned with the state of contemporary philosophy and particularly for pragmatists who have remained wary of the "value" of first philosophy.

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Democracy and the Post-Totalitarian Experience, edited by Leszek Koczanowicz and Beth Singer for Volume 167 of the Value Inquiry Book Series, 2005. Pp. 224.
ISBN: 90-420-1635-3

This volume is a collection of seventeen essays from philosophers working in Poland and the United States, organized into eight parts. The authors met to read and discussed these issues at a conference held in Karpacz, Poland on 27-30 May 1998.

Part 1 Democracy and National Identity

Keszek Koczanowicz's aim is to understand political behavior in Poland in the post totalitarian era in light of complex strands of Polish national identity. In particular, he is interested in understanding how popular myths of the past legitimate present events and political goals. He discusses, for instance, the irony that workers joined together in solidarity to overthrow the communist state—but once achieved, voted the communist party into office again.

Shannon Kincaid argues that democracy needs nationalism of a specific sort and proceeds to define what democratic nationalism entails using both Polish and American philosophers to support the case.