The project undertaken by Richardson is an enormous one, perhaps condemned in advance to eternal incompleteness, but not to just standing still or threading water. At its core is an invitation that we listen to and adapt a new way of "thinking about thinking," different from the one found in traditional Aristotelian logic. This way of thinking is one that is recessive/progressive; it is one that takes time, and that we must be enculturated into, by means of example. It is about making visible the invisible, through language, regarding the latter as a form of life—as part of what is being studied as well as the way of studying.

It takes the reader a little while to figure out what is going on—there are so many examples, so much repetition and yet not repetition. The text itself is indeed performative rather than descriptive in nature. Although the text is both rich and complex, it is nonetheless one that is well worth the read. The author has managed to do what she applauds her selected authors with doing—to make visible the invisible without destroying it or changing it back into the permanent of the certain. She invites us to "see," through her eyes, the texts of several thinkers in a comprehensive and, equally important, an emotionally exciting manner. If to think is to leap, or to try, so also to read this text is to take a chance. It is a chance well worth taking.

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Nicholas Rescher, Realism and Pragmatic Epistemology, Pittsburgh University Press, 2005

Nicholas Rescher has two goals in this book. One is to argue straightforwardly for realism. He claims there is an extra-mental world or "a way things are" independent of what any mind thinks about it, and that this is a necessary truth. His second goal is to support this metaphysical claim by a pragmatic consideration of inquiry and overcoming problems of epistemology. The implicit argument driving this book is that scientific reasoning, broadly construed, is a sufficient and responsible way of picturing the world and furthering inquiry. At times Rescher seems more focused on providing an apology for scientific inquiry than trying to sort out the problems of realism and knowledge. This orientation opens his argument to some significant criticism.

Rescher makes his argument for realism on the basis of operating inquiry. For example, he points out that there are always more facts than can ever be manifested in experience. He says there are "infinitistic aspects of things." (4) This unending possibility of experience means there is something beyond the investigating mind at work. Another line of this argument is that there are "mutually preemptive conditions of realization." For example, you can know a peach by incinerating it and measuring the caloric value, or by eating it and knowing it through the sensations of taste, smell and touch. But you cannot know the peach in both ways. This limitation indicates that there is an object, the peach, that stands beyond our mutually exclusive means of inquiry and binds them together. "Realism roots in ignorance," (5) Rescher says, and the cognitive
opacity of objects of inquiry indicates the independence of those objects from the inquiring mind.

A second major line of argument is that realism is retro-justified in experience. Realism provides the ground for an “optimal systematization” (9) of what we know. Realism is not a factual discovery, according to Rescher, but a “functionalistic postulate.” (33) He cites Peirce’s dictum “If this hypothesis (that there are reals) is the sole support of my method of inquiry, my method of inquiry must not be used to support my hypothesis,” but more or less bypasses the warning saying “this reality hypothesis is indeed not a product of inquiry but a presupposition for it, nevertheless, it is one whose justification ultimately stands or falls on the success of the inquiries it facilitates.” (34) The success of continuing inquiry and discovery of new facts provides the main justification for realism. Rescher summarizes “This cognitive opacity of real things means that we are not – and never will be – in a position to evade or abolish the contrast between ‘things as we think them to be’ and ‘things as they actually and truly are.” (42)

Given the platform of presumptive realism Rescher considers several problems of knowledge. These include the interplay between identification and indentifiability, the problem of appropriate specificity, cognitively evaluating very remote possibilities, and overcoming epistemic myopia. Rescher refers to William James when considering the question of identification and concludes that “the very idea of an individual thing – an individualized unit – is thus mind infected.” (50) In what seems a modified Kantian position he proposes “conceptual idealism” in which the mind is not the causal source of ideas but indispensably furnishes interpretative mechanisms. (51) Specificity prioritization is a thorny practical issue for epistemological schemes. The puzzle is whether to privilege incorporating schemes or the particulars of which those schemes are comprised. When there is a conflict between schematic integrity and recalcitrant facts, Rescher argues that the dissonance be removed in favor of the more particularly concrete. (71) A similarly difficult practical issue is evaluating extremely remote possibilities. For instance, the chance that an object will fall from the sky and crush me is very, very small, but still a possibility. It is not rational to discount these possibilities as meaningless, but to take cognizance of the plethora of remote possibilities would in essence gum up the work of inquiry. Rescher argues that we treat remote possibilities as effectively zero because there are too many to cope with in practical terms. To the problem of induction, Rescher applies the rubric of default reasoning based on the presumption of normality (99) Truth works best as estimates only and so vagueness is the practical limit of inquiry that moves along “warranted approximations.” (104)

The final topic Rescher handles is epistemic myopia. This condition means that we may miss the lawful order in a set of experiences (because we suppose then as random) or we may represent what is random to be the height of lawful connection. (111) He concludes that the key question of the world’s constitution in this regard is decisively undecidable. (113) but this does not end in skepticism or nihilism. Rather, access to reality is available only through a model that can serve as its “artificially thought-contrived surrogate.” (105) “Confusion can create disorder where there is order,
conflation can make order out of disorder. We have to face the prospect that, to a substantial extent, the world’s lawful order as best we can determine it may lie in the eyes of the beholder.” (113)

Given the limited scope of this volume, there are some questions that receive less attention than is warranted. One glaring absence is the justification of the economy of knowledge. Rescher presumes that inquiry is productive and continuous and does not consider the possibility of any serious limitations. But he offers no argument why such puzzles are not worth pursuing. In effect Rescher demotes self-reflexive understanding to the condition of an extremely remote possibility in order to focus on functionalistic principles applied to the process of knowing. To say this another way, there is not enough complexity represented in this model to provide an opening for the development of more thorough self-critical logic of inquiry. The problems of knowledge represented here are procedural rather than potential openings to a critical understanding of inquiry. This seems to me a different kind of myopia.

Overall, this volume is a useful exercise in responding to questions of the functionalistic character of epistemic realism. Perhaps an interesting addendum would trace disconfirming instances of realism or re-examine some Berkeley-like criticisms, or extend the description of realism toward the critical common-sensism of the later Peirce.

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C. S. Peirce’s System of Science: Life as a Laboratory. Frances Williams Scott, Elsah, IL: The Press of Arisbe Associates, 2006

The Press of Arisbe Associates is one of those small heroic presses that still take up works that academic publishers apparently no longer can afford to consider. Over the last decades it has published several good books, such as Donna Orange’s Peirce’s Conception of God, Richard Tursman’s Peirce’s Theory of Scientific Discovery, and Michael Raposa’s Peirce’s Philosophy of Religion. It also republished the Peirce-Welby correspondence after IU Press had let it go out of print. I think, though, that with Frances Scott’s book on Peirce’s system of science, the Press has made a mistake. Though not without merit, the book is outdated, uneven in quality, and lacks analytic rigor and direction.

C. S. Peirce’s System of Science is divided into three parts. Part One, which carries the same title as the book, consists of two chapters. The first opens with an extensive discussion of the scientific attitude and contains a good selection of quotations taken from the corpus of Peirce’s work. However, the author fails to draw those quotations together into a solid account of Peirce’s views on science. In fact, she stumbles rather clumsily through the fixation of belief—terrain that has been covered often enough before—concluding, erroneously, that the first three methods are all merely subjective. Chapter 2 discusses Peirce’s classification of the sciences. Here we see a similar pattern. Again we are given much information and again the author fails to draw it