

PAUL LORENZEN, *Constructive Philosophy*, tr. Karl Richard Pavlovic, Amherst, The University of Massachusetts Press, 1987, x + 291 pp.

Though he is at the centre of the influential Erlangen school of contemporary German philosophy, and some of his writings have been available in English for over a decade, Paul Lorenzen is relatively unknown to English speaking philosophers. The essays collected here, the earliest of which date from the mid-sixties, the latest from 1981, provide a detailed, comprehensive introduction to his thought.

Lorenzen's constructive philosophy is a form of Kantian theory of knowledge. Lorenzen asks Kant's question—how are they possible?—of knowledge claims made in various fields of inquiry. Like Kant, he finds both empiricist and rationalist accounts of knowledge and justification wanting; throughout these essays there are echoes of Kant's criticism of empiricism, that intuitions without concepts are blind, and of rationalism, that concepts without intuitions are empty. Lorenzen, however, is for the most part suspicious of the Kantian doctrine that the objects we can know are constructed by our minds or language, and so he does not accept Kant's answer, that knowledge is possible because knowers supply the objects they can know with their form. He favours the pragmatist thesis that it is methods of inquiry and theories of the world that we construct, and not the world (not all aspects of it, at least) into which we inquire.

How, then, does Lorenzen understand the possibility of knowledge? A principle tenet of his constructivism is the claim that by reflecting on our practical endeavours—our interests and most mundane accomplishments—we can find and elucidate pre-linguistic, pre-theoretic bases of inquiry and warranted belief. We can, that is, become explicitly cognizant of a "prior understanding of man and world . . . [which] does not formulate itself in propositions that could be part of a science" (161). The task of constructive philosophy, then, is to show how the knowledge claims that underlie positive inquiries—claims the sciences assume to be true and from which they derive their authority—can be built on top of this prior understanding through small, methodical steps. In other words, the constructive philosopher is to demonstrate how the conceptual and normative frameworks of even sophisticated and powerful theoretical inquiries like physics and political science are grounded in a pre-reflective awareness of the immediately at hand. Because it is crucial to this project that the method of construction itself be rationally acceptable, the nature and warrant of intuitionist logic is a topic Lorenzen turns to often in this book.

This is not to say that Lorenzen's enterprise is a wholly descriptive one. Indeed, if some purported inquiry, or a conception of the objects of some inquiry, cannot be generated by constructivist methods (as cannot, for instance, according to Lorenzen, the concept in mathematics of an actual infinity (195-202)), then that inquiry or conception is, in the strictest sense, misguided or unintelligible. This is a very strong claim. Should it be true, constructive philosophy would be a first philosophy of the kind philosophers as dissimilar as Quine and Gadamer have urged is impossible.

It is because of its commitment to the thesis that a principled distinction can be drawn between our pre-reflective, wholly practical understanding of the world, and those reflective, theoretical beliefs we acquire by exploring the world scientifically and in other methodical ways, that constructivism can come forth as a first philosophy. Unfortunately, it is on the question of the intelligibility of this variation on Kant's intuitions/concepts distinction that *Constructive Philosophy* is weakest. Lorenzen occasionally cites such thorough anti-Kantians as Kuhn, Gadamer and the later Wittgenstein when considering strains of epistemology he himself rejects, but he does not address in any depth their arguments that intuition/concept distinctions are bogus, and thus that criticism cannot but be a matter of comparing and contrasting competing practices and their associated systems of thought.

The most extended discussion in this book of current critiques of base-superstructure models of criticism and justification takes the form of a reflection on Neurath's metaphor in which the scientist is presented as a mariner who must fix his boat while at sea (5-6). Lorenzen wishes to suggest against both Gadamerian hermeneutics and Quinean holism that though one cannot inspect knowledge claims by reconstructing them beginning from a place outside of them, criticism need not thereby

be without foundations and thus inevitably circular. Neurath is right that there is no getting beyond life, but, Lorenzen maintains, that does not mean that there is no firm starting point within life. There had to have been a time when there was no boat; therefore, Lorenzen concludes, our ancestors must have built it while swimming in the water. First they fashioned a crude raft, "out of, say, driftwood," and now we inhabit a ship so comfortable that we can hardly imagine what swimming is like. Constructive philosophy, then, attempts to replay (though as a synchronic idealization) the activity of building while swimming. But in truth neither we as children nor our ancestors carpentered a first belief-system out of individual beliefs, or acquired an initial belief by putting together free-floating concepts. Certainly there was once no boat—but as Sellars and Davidson insist, one cannot have a belief, concept or word unless one has a lot more of them besides; and so, just when there was no longer no boat, we found ourselves on a sea-worthy ship.

Perhaps there is a more forceful response to this sort of objection in some other of Lorenzen's works. Despite this lacuna, *Constructive Philosophy* is a volume of often stimulating papers.

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