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*Espionage, Statecraft and the Theory of Reporting: A
Philosophical Theory on Intelligence Management* by Nicholas
Rescher (review)

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could be for one's own children—as the Gospel almost says, “no dad's wisdom is appreciated by his own child until someone else says the same”—but also discover new things, chief among them for me, Andre Dubus, an author surely worth putting on one's “must read this month” list, even if it is only in 38th place because one hasn't yet read such works beloved for their wisdom as *Don Quixote*, *Magic Mountain*, and *The Search for Lost Time*.

Plato's Bedroom belongs to a new genre, the course-book. Books are “the precious life-blood of master spirits,” and yet courses, conversations with great teachers, the greatest being Socrates and Jesus, are more. An academic reflection of that priority would make the record of such a course, such a “course-book,” a proper substitute for a scholarly “contribution to knowledge,” release young scholars from the obligation to decide some important question prematurely, and later give us all a book worth reading, savoring, even rereading. The recognition of this genre, the course-book, would go some way to restoring the nobility of teaching, by setting aside the anonymous evaluations of the learned by the unlearned, and compelling administrators to visit courses, or if unwilling, restore the rule of academe to those who do enjoy being in a classroom, teaching and learning.

American academe used to have fine professors who never published a book, for example Richard Kennington at Catholic, and might again if such a course-book as O'Connor has published were given greater recognition. One of the best of us in Yale grad school just could not write, and Swarthmore did not have the wisdom, though recognizing how good his classes were, to declare him the exception to the rule, publish or perish. What a waste! Of him of course, and of the loving attention students would have enjoyed, and then the wisdom they might have gained for themselves and given to others the rest of their lives.—Michael Platt, *Friends of the Republic*

RESCHER, Nicholas. *Espionage, Statecraft and the Theory of Reporting: A Philosophical Theory on Intelligence Management*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018. vii + 179 pp. Paper, \$24.95—Given the bias and irresponsibility of major print, audio, and visual media, this is a timely treatise on standards with respect to reporting, especially on matters of state. Nicholas Rescher modestly calls it “a general introduction to the theory of reporting.” His focus is primarily on reports relevant to matters of state, that is, those involving diplomacy and warfare.

Rescher comes to his topic with ample personal experience and academic credentials. A former Marine assigned to an intelligence unit, and a longtime professor of the philosophy of science at the University of Pittsburgh, with dozens of books to his credit, he remains cochair of the

Center for Philosophy of Science. A logician by early training, he became an authority in medieval Arabic logic and a career-long student of G. W. Leibniz. As a student of Leibniz, he has been instrumental in the reconstruction of the German mathematician and philosopher's cipher *machina deciphtratoria*, ancestor to the famous Enigma cipher machine utilized in the 1920s and in World War II. Rescher is also known as the coauthor of the so-called delphic method of forecasting.

This book is difficult to categorize. G. K. Chesterton could write an essay on a bedpost or on some other trivial household or garden object. The medieval historian and philosopher Etienne Gilson had a penchant for research and published on topics only tangentially related to his professorial occupation. Thus we have two delightful books, among others, from Gilson's pen, *Heloise and Abelard* and *Choir of Muses*. Rescher's 179-page treatise falls into the Chesterton genre. One may say it is informative, eye-opening, and not without entertainment value.

Rescher acknowledges that the term "report" is an equivocal one, one that can be applied from the most trivial to the most momentous of accounts. He provides many examples and discusses criteria appropriate to each. There is obviously a big difference between the report of three-year-old Karen who tells a visitor, "The kitty lives in the blue house," and the loudspeaker that blares, "Air-raid: this is not a drill." As an ex-Marine, Rescher knows what it means "to report," or to be put "on report." Whistle-blowing he takes to be a dramatic mode of reporting. Predictions and forecasts, he thinks, too, are a kind of reporting. Hearsay reporting he dismisses because it compromises authenticity.

As Rescher is a professor specializing in the philosophy of science with dozens of books to his credit that span the range of philosophy, one should not be surprised to find references to David Hume, Pierre Laplace, and John Stuart Mill cropping up in this treatise.

In support of his contention that the prime function of useful reportage is to yield information for effective guidance of action, Rescher uses an episode in the career of John Stuart Mill, who in 1858 filed a report on the East India Company's stewardship of the subcontinent. It was judged by Lord Grey, then British Colonial Secretary, to have been the best written report he had ever read. Mill was rewarded with the then astonishing sum of 5,000 pounds.

A report does nothing for the recipient who is not equipped to understand it. This puts an obligation on the reporter to keep in mind the recipient's level of comprehension. Garbling is another pitfall. Winston Churchill, in the interest of clarity, had little confidence in what was conveyed only orally, and demanded confirmation of such reports in writing.

When speaking of state and military intelligence, Rescher makes a vital distinction between information for its own sake and information for guidance. "Intelligence," he advises, "must always be relevant to real political and military purposes and must be accurate, precise and verifiable." Of spies and counterspies, history reveals that "[i]t is far from

easy to spot a wolf in sheep's clothing." Rescher cites as examples the cases involving Alger Hiss, Claus Fuchs, and Anthony Blunt.

Rescher concludes with the acknowledgment that evaluating reports prepared for state purposes is a complex business. There is an inevitable gap between the supporting evidence provided and the objective factual claims often based upon it. The information actually at our disposal in many matters confirms our claims but does not always demonstrate them. One is reminded of Plato's discussion in the *Meno* where, in introducing the notion of "true opinion," Plato has Socrates speak of the value of such knowledge. True opinion, although supported by fact, falls short of demonstrative knowledge but is nevertheless required by those who would govern. "Men," says Socrates, "become good and useful to states not only because they have knowledge, but because they have right opinion."

Given the practical wisdom offered in this volume, it could well be required reading for any high school or college journalism class, and promoted for principled guidance to others, especially those who report on matters of state.—Jude P. Dougherty, *The Catholic University of America*

RESCHER, Nicholas. *Metaphysical Perspectives*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017. x + 255 pp. Cloth, \$45.00—*Metaphysical Perspectives* includes nineteen self-contained chapters, but there is a structural development among them that contributes to Rescher's main project.

In the introduction, Rescher notes that philosophy, especially metaphysics, is a complex affair the chief aim of which is to grapple with life's big questions.

Chapter 1 begins the big-questions journey. According to Rescher, while "Why is there something rather than nothing?" is an important question, the crucial one is "Why is there something *contingent*, for example, why does the universe exist *as it is*?" What we need is a collective explanation—one explaining why the whole collection of existents exists. We also seek an axiological, teleology-of-value explanation, not a factual one. Thus, we must focus on possibility and value. Reality is optimific, so we must eliminate all suboptimal possibilities. The best world is actualized, one that maximizes the conditions for rational agents to exist.

This is the book's key chapter because it clarifies Rescher's goal. And I think teleology must be involved if the crucial question is the one Rescher identifies. But he dismisses too quickly "Why is there something rather than nothing?" and the importance of causal explanations. I think Rescher's approach may be useful in identifying the most axiologically satisfying possible world among alternatives, but it will not explain why