REVIEWS

Hans Herbert Kögler and Karsten R. Stueber (eds), *Empathy and Agency. The Problem of Understanding in the Human Sciences.* Westview Press, Boulder/Colorado and Oxford, 2000. x + 287 + 30 pp. Price £18.99 (pb).

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This anthology is a contribution to the Explanation/Understanding debate in the philosophy of the human sciences. It attempts to assess the situation and update it, in particular, in view of recent developments in cognitive psychology and philosophy of mind. The book contains a long introductory chapter and eleven self-contained essays, including contributions by both editors. The philosophical style ranges from middle-of-the-road Analytic to middle-of-the-road Continental and Wittgensteinian. While not always inspiring, it appears solid all the way through.

In the Introduction, Kögler and Stueber frame the main question in terms of a contrast between 'Theory Theory' and 'Simulation Theory' of understanding (TT and ST, respectively). These terms are borrowed from the contemporary debate involving philosophers and child psychologists. However, both this chapter and many of the others in fact suggest that this is not a very happy way of presenting the alternatives. According to Theory Theory, our understanding of others is based on a largely tacit body of knowledge that is organized very much like a scientific theory. We use relevant information about the other person, in conjunction with our tacit theory of mind, in order to predict what he will do next (p. 8). According to Simulation Theory, we pretend to have the person's beliefs and desires and then assume an analogy with our own case (p. 9). TT and ST are competing ways of trying to explain the same phenomena – for instance, how young children learn to ascribe beliefs to others.

TT then holds that 'folk-psychological' understanding of others is a matter of predicting their behaviour on the basis of hypotheses. Here 'behaviour' is something like physical movements and sounds.

For instance, we believe that somebody will do x if he desires y and believes that x is a means to y. Hence

> If we know that someone wants a drink of cold beer and we know that he believes that he has to go to the kitchen in order to satisfy his desire, we will predict that he will go to the kitchen in light of the above tacit belief-desire principle (8).

But the Introduction does not address a potential objection. The authors imply that, 'He will go to the kitchen' is a *physical* description. But it clearly isn't. A physical description should just concern the movements of objects and omit the reference to 'the kitchen'. But, as most buildings do not have the same architecture, there is no general physical difference between the performances of going to a kitchen as opposed to a bedroom. Without the functional, intentionalistic distinction between the rooms, the unity of the behavioural pattern cannot be preserved. (In reality, no one has ever seriously tried to describe patterns of human, or even animal, behaviour just in terms of movements – if we discount early Behaviourist attempts in severely limited and artificial settings.)

But if descriptions of behaviour include intentionalistic components, then our 'folk-psychological generalizations' are, in an important way, different from assumptions of regularities in empirical natural science. They are, rather, aspects of the fact that we understand the internal relations between different intentionalistically defined concepts.

An analogous point may apply to ST. By 'simulation' it means an experimental technique by which I imaginatively reproduce the other's state of mind in my consciousness, then "*observing* how [I] would react in these circumstances" (9, emphasis added). But it seems to me that putting oneself in someone else's shoes is not experimental in this way. The point is not that I should wait for the one or the other reaction to appear in my mind; rather, my ability to simulate the other's state of mind is itself an expression of my *understanding* of her situation.

Thus, 'simulation' is neither a good description of most cases of interpersonal understanding, nor of the methodology identified as *Verstehen*. This is, perhaps, implicit in the Introduction but it is not stated clearly. In his individual contribution (194–221), Kögler argues explicitly that simulation is not adequate for grounding inter-subjective understanding. (Also see the chapters by Schatzki, 163–

180, and Makkreel, 181–193.) As also Dilthey has emphasised, in trying to understand the other we are not (primarily) aiming at his psychological states but at the meaning and validity of his actions in a commonly shared and understood historical world. Understanding as well as self-understanding depends on a public sphere of symbols, assumptions and practices.

This observation might also be called Wittgensteinian. However, a fine essay by Blackburn (270–288) highlights the close parallel between Wittgenstein's approach to meaning and understanding and Collingwood's. Both faced the problem of how we identify the content of thoughts and propositions, and both recognised that we need to look at the dynamic of the overall situation. Appeal to a shared language is clearly not enough. In relation to the past, "the policy of deeming someone who uses the same words to mean what we now mean by them is at best unwise and at worst downright silly" (279). Citing a *practice* does not necessarily fare any better, if by 'practice' we mean a technique. Techniques are understood in terms of goals and beliefs. Hence to say that someone has a certain thought and to say that he uses a certain technique are problematic for the same kinds of reason (281). Both Wittgenstein and Collingwood see this. However, Blackburn suggests that Collingwood's awareness of the historical embeddedness of practices gives him the edge.

The role of simulation is also called into question in another way, in both the Introduction and many subsequent chapters. This critique is described as the turn from empathy to dialogue (29) or from the first and third to the second person (see the contribution by Bohman, 222–242). When I understand the other I try to establish a mutual relation. As Gadamer insists, I assume that the other is presenting me with a meaningful and *potentially valid* view concerning some subject matter or purpose. In this 'fusion of horizons', our individual points of view merge into some new, meaningful insight. Kögler contrasts such *dialogue on an equal footing* with 'charity' as described by Davidson. That is the requirement that the interpreter 'optimise' agreement between herself and the other. Doesn't this boil down to saying that the charitable interpreter never has anything really *new* to learn from the other? (See 213–214.) – If the Gadamer view is more correct than Davidson's, then, for instance, our difficulties in understanding the Azande (if any) are not primarily a function of differences of cognitive makeup (cf. 20–22). Cognitive differences may be overcome, but various reasons – such as prejudices,

competing commitments, power inequalities, etc., – may prevent dialogue. This may also happen (and constantly does happen) between members of the same culture.

The individual chapters included in the volume cannot be adequately summed up here. The Introduction states correctly that the discussion has moved away from a simple conflict between a priori arguments for or against *Erklären* or *Verstehen* to a due appreciation of the variable and complex nature of interpretation in the human and social sciences (54). But perhaps the editors tend to downplay the differences still in existence. Also, the contribution of the ST/TT debate and of "recent evidence" (54) to the overall picture is not as obviously valuable as the editors think. On the whole, this volume is recommended as a presentation of the currently most influential paradigms in the philosophy of the human sciences.

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Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford University Press, 1999, 275, price £25.00 (hb).

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Contemporary Virtue Ethics has simply *come of age* with the publication of this work, the puff by Simon Blackburn on the back cover tells us. This seems a tremendously *strong* and, if true, beautifully *apposite* compliment. For one of the great virtues of Virtue Ethics is precisely its claim to be able to account for the moral and philosophical significance of humans starting as infants, and gradually becoming adults. Hursthouse again and again returns, like Aristotle and Wittgenstein both, to the figure of the child. She suggests that Deontology and Consequentialism both fail adequately to understand our *gradual* emergence, as our experience grows, as moral creatures, and the manner in which it is part of the *grammar* of moral concepts that they are not fully available – but (and this is equally important) are partly available – to quite young children.

Equally powerful plauditory puffs come from Roger Crisp ("the comprehensive statement modern virtue ethics has been awaiting for forty years") and Barbara Herman (who notes explicitly how "Hursthouse's uncommon insight into the texture of ethical life connects the claims of virtue theory with the ways most of us do think about morality and, especially, with the moral tale we tell our children.") How exactly does one judge if these commentators are right? Well, for example, by finding how *easy* it is for Hursthouse to make her case, to give a sweeping explication, and defence, in her quite charming prose, of Virtue Ethics. Actually, 'defence' has the wrong connotation: the point is precisely that Hursthouse does not feel the *need* to always be on the backfoot against Consequentialist and Deontological attacks. Virtue Ethics is no longer the poor relation, or the youngest child vieing for attention. It is now taking its place at the table – and eating (temperately, of course) – with the best of them.

This is perhaps most strikingly apparent in Part I of the book, on the Virtue Ethics response to resolvable, irresolvable, and tragic dilemmas. Hursthouse finds it perhaps surprisingly easy to show how Virtue Ethics can be action-guiding in all these cases (and further can provide something which its rivals cannot – guidance *vis-à-vis* what we might call 'emotional action', guidance as to the appropriateness (and importance) of feelings of regret, or deep sorrow etc.; at what one did, *even* if one would not have done anything differently). Thus Hursthouse argues powerfully that the extent to which Virtue Ethics is 'agent-centred' as *opposed* to 'act-centred' has been exaggerated.

One of the interesting relatively novel themes of this book then is that in *some* key areas there may be a significant confluence underway between these three great traditions in ethics, and especially between Virtue Ethics and Deontology. Hursthouse argues that, on questions especially of the role of emotions in morality, and of what it is that a moral agent acts from (a settled state of character (virtue)?; a sense of duty?), Aristotelianism and Kantianism are coming to look more and more alike, the more they get worked out, (and) the more they come to understand each other.

But there remain differences in emphasis, that Hursthouse is keen also to emphasize. One concerns the nature of moral motivation, and the question, again used in the past to challenge Virtue Ethics, of what principled basis the virtuous can have (for moral action) which basis is not itself Consequentialist or Deontological. Part of Hursthouse's answer here is unexpected: she argues that acting

'because it was right', or 'on principle', etc., is not only not normally a necessary condition on moral action, it is not a sufficient one.

One way of understanding this is as a deep-set antipathy to intellectualism in ethics (and in philosophy generally). Hursthouse is suspicious of the mentalist fantasy that without certain quasi-philosophical occurent thoughts (e.g. "I'm doing the right thing"), one cannot be properly said to be acting from a moral motivation. And she thinks these thoughts are actually normally irrelevant to moral motivation: a very young child thinking this to themselves because they have been explicitly told it is not for that reason any the more moral (or virtuous); somewhat as (as on p. 133) someone usually rather disreputable acting in accordance with virtue on a quite temporary basis, out of character, would not be someone we would actually ascribe the virtues or a truly moral motivation to. Acting from virtue, as Hursthouse sets it out, is thus not intellectualistically definable, or theoreticistically codifiable. Acting from virtue happens (*if* and when it happens) over time, and is at least potentially accessible to artful deliberation and judgement, in the 'true meanings' of those words.

Can a role still be maintained for the idea that rules or principles are of some importance in and to the moral life? Well, of course; only, acting from rules cannot, as in most versions of Deontology (and some versions of Utilitarianism), be a matter of the rules determining 'in a queer way' what one does. When one acts from a rule, just as from virtue (see especially p. 123), one must eventually (and usually almost immediately) 'leave the rule behind'. One can't continually go back and check up on it (use it as a check on oneself), as it were. One must (judge, and) *act*.

Hursthouse writes: 'I am not necessarily an authority on whether I am acting "because I think this is right" or "on principle" or "from (a sense of) duty", any more than I am on whether I know or understand something.' (p. 160) Here there is virtually an explicit linkage to a central moral of Wittgenstein's 'rule-following considerations': that it is only a pattern of action (and appropriately interlinked intentionality, etc.) over time that can be criterial for mastery of a practice. A glad start, or a certain familiar feeling, can be of no great interest hereabouts. Hursthouse is right: only in the context of an ongoing series of actions etc. worthy of a virtuous person can someone be judged to be (e.g.) honest, or just, or courageous, *even by themselves*. Whether one's action is in accordance with a rule or a principle that one wishes to follow, or whether one's

act is virtuous, is not something that can be established in advance, or at an indexed instant, or in any mentalistic fashion.

We can see Hursthouse here as walking a delicate and necessary path between on the one hand the fantasy of rules as absolute and determinative of decision-making (whether via a Utilitarian calculus or simply via Deontological rules) and on the other hand the fantasy of rules as completely open and requiring continual interpretation and reinterpretation (and here looms the spectre(s) of 'Post-Modernism', moral relativism and thoroughgoing moral scepticism). *All* these are intellectualist fantasies – and they are fantasies moreover with precise antecedents even in the literature on Wittgenstein's own remarks about rules, action, etc. For example: the 'absolutist' fantasy of rules can be associated not only with Platonism but also with the Baker and Hacker reading of Wittgenstein; the 'relativist' fantasy not only with Deconstruction and Scepticism but also with the influential Kripkean take on Wittgenstein. (An opportunity again to bring Kant closer to the Aristotle/Wittgenstein view of Hursthouse et al presents itself here: for it is surely a misreading of Kant ever to have thought that a truly *Kant*-ian deontology would be 'absolutist' in the sense just mentioned. Rather, Kant on judgement is strongly anticipative of Wittgenstein on rules and 'private language' – it is an incoherent fantasy to suppose that the rules can do the work for themselves, apply themselves, decide matters. *We* must do that – though in action, *not* normally in contemplative interpretation. For again, 'Interpretivism', the notion that rules must generally be interpreted before being applied, is just a flip-side of the same unsound coin that Wittgenstein invites us to throw away.)

A quite fundamental sense in which Hursthouse's work is not only Aristotelian in the best sense but also thoroughly Wittgensteinian, then, is in its deep distrust of intellectualism, theory and abstraction in moral philosophy. This distrust is *exemplified* in her stress on an exemplified and *realistic* rendition of what it is that is involved in moral motivation, deliberation and virtuous (or otherwise) action. But some might yet wonder whether Hursthouse is not yet resolutely non-theoretical enough. For example, might metaphysics be being smuggled into the very notion of a 'virtue' or a 'character trait' itself?

Part of Hursthouse's implicit rebuttal is, I take it, that 'virtue' and 'character trait' are, from a theoreticist point of view, 'messy'

concepts. They implicitly *resist* theorisation, much like Wittgenstein's term "language-game", for example. Our virtue concepts simply are, we might say, somewhat messy and vague, (and moreover are not 'absolutely the correct concepts', to paraphrase page 230 of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) – and they are all the better for it. I have no doubt that 'character trait' is ordinarily a perfectly workaday notion, containing no theoretical commitments whatso-ever. *If* 'character trait' in someone's account *were* reified or theorized (as an uncharitable reader of Hursthouse might surmise on p. 135, p. 73 and p. 11 of her book) – if Hursthouse were for instance postulating a mentalistic 'charity box', and 'courage box', etc. – then Virtue Ethics would have no sounder relation to a Wittgensteinian philosophy of psychology than (say) most known forms of Utilitarianism.

My own view is that a thoroughgoingly Wittgensteinian Virtue Ethics can afford if anything to be still slightly more courageous than it has been to date in giving up some of the ambitions that 'Kantian' and Utilitarian ethical theories have had. 'Virtue Theory' should aim precisely to be a non-theory, to be simply a way of returning us to our actual moral practices, practices (especially our child-rearing practices; see e.g. p. 176) which Hursthouse believes *manifest* our belief in the central importance of the virtues, no matter what we say in the heat of the debating chamber or in the cold of the study.

"Back to the practices in themselves" might be one slogan for it. 'Virtue Ethics' at its best provides *reminders* of what our practices are, of the immensely rich resources immanent in humans, in their (our) cultures, practices, hopes, etc. These resources include, of course, extensive resources for moral criticism (there need be no danger of a truly post-Theoretical Virtue Ethics being inherently conservative), and even for criticism of sets of concepts-in-use as seemingly incoherent. In contrast to the 'reminders' of our practices presented by the Virtue Ethics I am envisaging, one I think implicit in Hursthouse's own text, its non-Wittgensteinian and non-Aristotelian 'predecessors' in moral philosophy provide in effect replacements for those practices (*if* they have the courage and honesty to do so; too often, they back away – in an *ad hoc* fashion – from their own theoretical implications, just as soon as those implications threaten the status quo or one's 'intuitions').

A deeper engagement with Wittgensteinian thought even than Hursthouse has here provided us with might, therefore, have been welcome:

It would be extremely valuable to learn how if at all Hursthouse would square the Virtue approach with Paul Johnston's thought-provocative work on Wittgenstein's "Lecture on Ethics" and on fact and value.

Those sociologists influenced by Wittgenstein (e.g. the Ethnomethodologists) go unmentioned – but they are the best-placed of all to tell us about the actual resources people have with which to run and order their lives morally, prior to and apart from philosophical fantasies of how that is or should be done. Indeed, they (Garfinkel, Sacks, Jayussi, Sharrock, Francis etc.) have been doing just this for forty years or so, now.

On several occasions Hursthouse broaches topics (e.g. that of rules, already mentioned; that of "two virtuous agents . . . faced with the same moral choice" nevertheless choosing differently (on p. 68); and that of the requirement, for philosophical understanding of some area of social life, of comprehending the concepts actually immanent in that social life (on p. 130)) which have been explored in fascinating detail by Peter Winch, after Wittgenstein – but Winch's discussions unfortunately get no look-in either.

John McDowell gets by and large a justly serious and sympathetic treatment – but not his implicit and explicit criticisms of Philippa Foot. Hursthouse leans heavily on Foot – but one wants to know (especially around pp. 95–9) whether 'Humean residues' present in Foot's thought (at least until recently) *vis-à-vis* questions of desire and motivation can be rendered compatible with McDowell's thoroughgoingly Wittgensteinian and Aristotelian approach.

And, above all, one would love to know how Diamond and Conant's writings on ethics in Wittgenstein's early work, and also Cavell's 'perfectionism' etc., can (*if* they can) be integrated with Virtue Ethics. Diamond and Conant hold that Wittgenstein's intention in his philosophising is, throughout his life, non-theoretical and *therapeutic*. Is Virtue Ethics a way of returning us to the ever-present ethical dimension of our lives? Or does it still want to be a Theory, with a subject-matter, and Truths to tell? Hursthouse just touches on these matters (e.g. p. 151, p. 52, p. 56, p. 241), but there is surely much more to be said about them. (Perhaps Hursthouse will choose some of that 'more' in response to Diamond's student Duncan Richter, who has recently published some impressive explicit criticism of Hursthouse's work.)

These last questions are also directly linked to Hursthouse's engagement with McDowell. She is a 'naturalist' in a sense I think

compatible with McDowell & co. – namely, a 'normative naturalist', or a 'human naturalist', or an 'anti-super-naturalist' (see p. 224). Hursthouse rightly conducts most of her book from 'within' the ethical outlook on life, refusing to attempt to justify Virtue Ethics from 'an external point of view'. But is this because taking up 'an external point of view' would not do the trick and is in any case not required (Hursthouse's view – see pp. 165–190), or because the very idea of a genuinely external point of view upon ethics which would remain a view *of ethics* is, we can be brought to see, an illusion, a phantasm of our language (McDowell's point of view (as I understand it), along with Cavell, recent Putnam, and Diamond)? When Hursthouse explicitly denies 'that morality is a form of "enlightened self-interest" specified *from the neutral point of view*' (p. 190, my italics), McDowell & co. would ask, *what 'point of view' is that?* – and suggest instead that it is only the illusion of a point of view. (Or, at best, that 'the neutral point of view' – the supposed basic or privileged perspective of 'enlightened self-interest', or of 'science' – is a peculiar abstraction out of morality, rather than *vice versa*.) It is unclear to me whether Hursthouse has seen the depth of this Wittgensteinian point.

Some of these Wittgensteinian philosophers not encountered in Hursthouse's book (Conant, Johnston; also Crary, Pleasants) have recently argued that Wittgenstein's philosophy need not, *contra* a near-commonplace, be associated with either quasi-neutral 'coolness' or with outright conservatism or apoliticism. But more work remains to be done in that regard. A similar ongoing weakness (that Hursthouse herself recognises) in Virtue Ethics is its comparative paucity of offerings that explicitly address political questions. I say this, in part because of lingering worries concerning for example the elitism of Aristotle, the Catholic moralism of Anscombe and Geach, the 'pull your socks up' spirit at times of Foot on virtue and character, the theocratic nostalgia of MacIntyre, the lack of serious attention in the great majority of the Virtue Ethics literature (including arguably in some of Hursthouse's own previous work) to questions of (say) feminism, and even of justice itself – these kinds of associations have tended in the eyes of some to tarnish Virtue Ethics, to leave it appearing socially and politically *conservative*, in the worst sense of that word. But again, Hursthouse's new hook is refreshingly different and promising in this regard: again and again, she makes clear that she sees no necessary connection between Virtue and conservatism, elitism, etc. – quite to the

contrary. Thus for instance Hursthouse nicely points up – in the course of discussing oppression, justice and virtue – the necessary involvement of the emotions in anti-racism (pp. 113–8). And she plausibly writes (p. 97) that a poor person returning a purse to its rightful owner is showing great virtue, whereas a rich person doing so may well not be. Presumably Hursthouse would likewise think that a monetarily tiny act of charity by a poor person is far clearer an indication of a virtuous character than a gigantic act of benevolence by a rich person, especially given the almost inevitable complications in the latter case due to the visibility of the act, etc. Margaret Thatcher, by contrast, would presumably say that the rich person was morally admirable just by virtue of having played her part in the national economy – i.e. by virtue of becoming rich, and employing others, etc. ... Any further charity on that rich person's behalf would be super-ordinately generous, gravy. Hursthouse has no truck with such corrupt 'Victorian virtues' thinking; while yet, more generally, leaving one perhaps surprisingly comfortable with the use of a full-blown and unapologetically 'old-fashioned'-sounding vocabulary of 'vice', 'virtue', 'chastity', 'temperance', etc.

We await, then, a full treatment of virtue politics to 'accompany' Hursthouse's own book on virtue ethics. There seems to me no reason why a virtue politics should not be genuinely politically radical, encompassing for example a deep respect for oppressed minorities and majorities, and for non-human animals (see for example pp. 224–8 on temperance, vegetarianism, and so on), suggesting and eliciting a horror at what we do *to ourselves* when we exploit animals (human and otherwise), and stressing that there are both ordinary and more 'elevated' senses in which the working for an possession and exercise of virtue can be said to benefit the *possessor* in almost all such cases.

For me, the most refreshing aspect of the book remains its sense of the virtues as something(s) one gradually comes to learn, explore, and indeed – one hopes – develop further (This is one of many reasons why I think the book would indeed be suitable, as it hopes to be (p. 17), for use as a textbook with students). Intimately connected with this, and with the central figure of the learning child interlinked with and counterposed to that of the socially-embedded and conscientious adult, is Hursthouse's strong sense of the necessary temporality of ethical decision-making and action. Just as Consequentialism and Deontology have almost always taken it as some kind of unfortunate accident that

we are not born as adults, so they have thought that it is an unfortunate accident that we never have endless time in which to reflect and decide what to do. Hursthouse again and again gets us to see how the real texture of (e.g.) acting 'instinctively', thinking quickly, thinking slowly and 'through' one's feelings, asking people (e.g. those who we recognize already as virtuous) for judicious advice, regretting things before and after doing them (even if we do not think we made a mistake in taking the course of action we did), feeling pain and sympathy for those who are hurt by our acts or omissions . . . all these are *part and parcel* of the moral life, not mere addenda resulting from our 'failure' to be timeless gods who could calculate the absolutely correct decision (whether by utilitarian or 'Kantian' procedures). Here again, Virtue Ethics looks healthily non-theoretical. These features of the moral life, one's moral growth in continuous and irregular encounters with them and development through them, explain why (roughly) ethics cannot be taught – cannot, that is, be acquired by rapid deliberate explicit pedagogy.

In stressing the absolute saturation of human life by temporality, Hursthouse brings Virtue Ethics close not only to Wittgenstein, but also to the best of Heidegger and his tradition(s). Perhaps that is one place where Virtue Ethics is now headed (perhaps not surprisingly, given the absolute importance of Aristotle to Heidegger and Gadamer). In the wake of 'On Virtue Ethics', perhaps we will soon have from O.U.P. not only 'On Virtue Politics' (see pp. 6–7), but also (say) 'Virtue and Time'?

Whether or not it is yet quite time for that, the gradual process of Virtue Ethic's coming of age has for sure reached a healthy point, a perhaps-unexpected maturity. With Hursthouse's book, we can at least say that Virtue Ethics is no longer in tutelage to Consequentialism and Deontology, and that it should now be assessed, as much as any of us ever can be, as a competent (would-be) if still-ever-maturing moral agent . . .

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