Action, Knowledge, and Will.
By JOHN HYMAN.
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John Hyman's new book is a masterful blend of the philosophy of action and epistemology. In it he seeks not only to realign the philosophy of action, but to turn epistemology—at least, that part of it concerned with the nature of knowledge—into a *part* of the philosophy of action. Chapters 1-5 are devoted to issues in the philosophy of action, while Chapters 7-8 are mostly concerned with epistemology. Chapter 6 forges the bridge between the two topics. In this review I outline Hyman's realignment of the philosophy of action, before turning to epistemological issues.

In Hyman's view, the philosophy of action has erred in systematically confusing four distinct dimensions of human action, the *physical*, *ethical*, *psychological* and *intellectual* (Ch. 1). While these dimensions are introduced in Chapter 1, they are explained in greater depth in Chapters 2-6, with (roughly) Chapters 2-3 covering the physical, Chapter 4 the ethical, Chapter 5 the psychological and Chapter 6 the intellectual.

To get a handle on the four dimensions, consider the key concepts of each dimension. The key concepts of the physical dimension are *activity* and *causation*. Activity contrasts with *passivity*. To be active is to cause a change, whereas to be passive is to undergo a change. When I kick a stationary ball with my foot, I am active whereas the ball is passive; when that ball hits my friend in the face, the ball is active whereas my friend is passive (pp. 32-9). In Hyman's view, acts are *causings* of changes. When I kick the ball, the act is my causing of the ball to move, not the event of the ball moving. So acts are not events, but the causings of events (pp. 60-6). Because acts are just causings of events, humans, animals, vegetables, minerals and balls all act. This raises the question of what distinguishes human agency from other forms of agency. Hyman's answer is (roughly) that it has to do with the way that human agency is *functionally integrated* (pp. 43-50).

The key concept of the ethical dimension is *voluntariness*. Roughly, an act is voluntary just in case it is not done out of (non-culpable) ignorance or compulsion (p. 77). So, for instance, if I am compelled to commit a crime (embezzle money, say) by threats to my life, my committing the crime isn't voluntary because I was compelled. Hyman spends some time discussing what it can mean to say that I am compelled to commit the crime, given that it was possible for me to have done otherwise (pp. 80-92). The care with which he deals with this issue is characteristic of this carefully argued book.

The key concepts of the psychological dimension are *intention* and *desire*. Roughly, an act is intentional if the agent does it because they want to, or values doing it, either for its own sake or because it is conducive to something else they want or value. Thus, all intentional action involves desire, in the broad sense of 'wanting' and 'valuing' (p. 107). For Hyman, desires are dispositions, which are manifested in behaviour that is directed towards goals, the attainment of which satisfies the desire. So, for instance, James's desire to please his mother might be manifested by his going to church. Putting this together, Hyman's view is that intentions are (the contents of) desires. When James manifests his desire to please his mother by going to church, he acts with the intention of pleasing his mother.

Hyman uses his account of intentions and desires to argue that explanations of intentional actions in terms of desires are causal explanations, although desires are not events (pp. 111-117). James's desire to please his mother, which is manifested in his going to church, is a causal factor in James's going to church. The standard problem with holding that explanations of intentional actions in terms of desires are causal is the possibility of deviant causal chains. My desire to annoy my boss by breaking a glass might cause me to break the glass, but not in the 'right way'; for instance, it might cause me to not pay attention when serving a customer and knock the glass off the table by accident. This action isn't intentional, but it is caused by my desire to break the glass. But, for Hyman, desires are dispositions, and the relationship between a disposition and its

manifestation is different to that between a cause and its effect. My desire to annoy my boss causes me to break the glass, but the breaking of the glass doesn't manifest this disposition (pp. 121-7).

The key concept of the intellectual dimension is *reason*. Hyman distinguishes between the *reason why* someone acted, the *reason for* (or ground on) *which* they acted and the intention they manifest in so acting (pp. 143-9). Say that James went to church because it would please his mother. The reason why James went to church is the fact that James's going to church would please his mother (Hyman convincingly argues that 'James went to church because it would please his mother' is true only if this is a fact). The reason for which he went to church—his ground for going—is the content of his belief that his going to church would please his mother. The intention he manifests in going to church is, again, the content of his desire to please his mother. So reasons why are facts, whereas reasons for and intentions are contents of mental states (beliefs and desires respectively).

While Hyman talks of the four dimensions of human action, it is unclear what he means by this. The first (physical) dimension seems to concern action *as such*—what it is for something to be an action—whereas the other dimensions seem to concern central aspects of human agency. Indeed, Hyman's main critique of the major schools of thought in the philosophy of action from Descartes to Anscombe and Davidson is that they confuse *species* of action—whether intentional, voluntary or action done for a reason—with each other, and with action as such. Not all actions are voluntary (for instance, coerced actions), and voluntariness isn't the mark of action because one can choose to be passive (for instance, when I allow someone to carry me to bed). Not all actions are intentional (for instance, laughing spontaneously)), and an act can be intentional but not voluntary (for instance, if I act under duress I do what I intend, but I do not freely choose to do it). Some action is guided by the facts, but not all action is guided by the facts. This suggests that the physical dimension is primary, at least in the sense that it concerns action as such.

The central claim of Chapter 6 is that a fact cannot be the reason why someone did (or felt or believed) something unless it is a fact they know (p. 149). For example, the fact that his going to church would please his mother can only be the reason why James went if he knew that his going to church would please his mother. This central claim plays a key role in Chapter 7, where Hyman argues that knowledge is a kind of *ability*, and in Chapter 8, where he argues that knowledge is more valuable than (mere) true belief. The obvious question is: what is knowledge an ability to do? Hyman argues that knowledge is the ability to be guided by the facts (pp. 162-71). To know that *p* is just to have the ability to act, think and feel in light of the fact that *p*. (I return to these metaphors below).

While the connection between knowledge and action is much-discussed in contemporary epistemology, Hyman's proposal is distinct from the so-called knowledge norm of action. The knowledge norm of action says that, if (in some versions, if and only if) you know some proposition *p*, you are permitted to use *p* in your practical deliberations. Hyman's view is broader than the knowledge norm of action because he holds that knowledge is an ability to think and feel as well as to act; it is bolder because he holds that to know is to have the ability to act, and not just to have some property that grounds the permissibility of acting.

Hyman argues that reasons why are known facts by a process of elimination (pp. 149-58). First, he argues that reasons why can't be facts that one merely truly believes. Second, he argues that reasons why can't be facts that one truly believes on the basis of justification that falls short of knowledge. Third, he argues that being known is sufficient for a fact to be a reason why. I found the first and third arguments convincing, but she second merits some discussion.

Take Mary, who truly and justifiably believes that McEnroe won Wimbledon, but doesn't know because she is in a Gettier case. Suppose she infers that her brother, who had bet £100 on this outcome, has won £100. Hyman claims that it is clear that the reason why Mary believes that her brother has won £100 is the fact that she *believes* that McEnroe has won Wimbledon, not that McEnroe has won Wimbledon (p. 155). Or take George, who truly and justifiably believes that there is a barn in front of him, but doesn't know because he is in fake barn country. George likes

taking photographs of barns, and he sees what looks like a barn. He sits down, gets out his camera, and takes a photograph. Hyman also claims that it is clear that the reason why George took the photograph is that he *believed* that there is a barn, not that there is a barn.

There are two potential problems here. First, Hyman seems content to rest both claims on intuitions or 'what one would say'. Wouldn't some experimental epistemology be useful here?

Second, one might object that Hyman's view of reasons why makes them heterogeneous: when an agent knows, the reason why is the fact that they know, whereas when an agent merely believes, the reason why is the fact that they believe. Perhaps Hyman can make the same move in response to both problems. He holds that the function of explanations of action is to make it *intelligible* (p. 134). But what makes George's behaviour intelligible is that it is guided by the fact that he believes that there is a barn. *Something* has to make his behaviour intelligible. Because he doesn't know that there is a barn, the only candidate is his belief that there is a barn. This move might provide both a more principled argument and a reason for accepting heterogeneity.

I want to finish by addressing Hyman's use of metaphors. We are told that knowledge is the ability to be 'guided' by the facts, that to know that *p* is to have the ability to act, think and feel 'in light of' the fact that *p*, and that knowing involves a kind of 'awareness of' and 'responsiveness to' to reasons (p. 162, p. 169). At times I found these metaphors frustrating. They might be familiar to philosophers (and in everyday life), but one wonders what their cash value is. But perhaps this complaint is unfair. Hyman tells us that his aim is to radically reconfigure epistemology. Knowledge isn't an elite suburb of belief. It is something entirely different from belief (p. iv, p. 163, pp. 189-90). While those sympathetic to the knowledge first programme also claim to divorce knowledge and belief, they don't tend to go quite as far as Hyman. For Hyman, knowledge is an ability, whereas belief is a disposition. Hyman's account of knowledge as a type of ability may be, in places, incomplete. But the same goes for most other accounts of knowledge. (Knowledge might be a kind of belief, but if so, what kind? Knowledge might require reliability, but if so, how reliable is reliable enough?). Hyman's book is an invitation to a radical new research programme in epistemology. I hope that others join him in working it out.[1]

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