

Review of Matthew Ratcliffe, *Rethinking Commonsense Psychology: A Critique of Folk Psychology, Theory of Mind and Simulation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. 271 pages. \$35.00. ISBN: 978-0-230-00710-9.

Matthew Ratcliffe's *Rethinking Commonsense Psychology* is one recent attempt to bring phenomenology to cognitive science, this time with a focus on how we understand other minds. It contrasts 1) our experiential understanding of persons given in our interactivity and shared environment with them, and 2) the abstract understanding of others that folk psychology (FP) requires, whether it is understood in "theory theory" or "simulation theory." Though often viewed as two sides of a debate, both make similar assumptions about FP, that it is basically correct, that it is commonsensical, that the 'folk' actually use it, and that our understanding of other minds takes place from a third-person, observational perspective. In this book, Ratcliffe challenges these dogmas to recommend in the end that FP is not a useful tool for understanding how we understand other minds.

He begins with a nuanced overview of "theory theory" and "simulation theory." Rightfully, Ratcliffe observes, "the FP literature is surprisingly bereft of detailed descriptions of social experience, understanding and interaction" (p. 26). Phenomenology, on the other hand, provides "intricate descriptions" of these things and can be used to supplement existing science. So, we have in it a tradition within which we can reassess FP and develop a context to evaluate it. Reminiscent of Churchland, Ratcliffe asks whether commonsense psychology is really commonsensical or whether it may be merely an interpretive schema used by theoreticians to interpret empirical observations. Tracing the roots of "theory theory" to Sellars and later to functionalism, he wonders whether the untrained non-philosopher actually uses folk psychological explanation. Determining this is an empirical affair, though the FP literature seems often just to assume it. Although using a small empirical sample, Ratcliffe compellingly suggest that FP is not the unadulterated view of the person in the street, leading to a four-fold distinction between 1) "What people do"; 2) "What people think they do"; 3) "What philosophers and cognitive scientists think people do"; and 4) "What philosophers and cognitive scientists think that people think they do" (p. 55). The current understanding of FP, Ratcliffe argues, is a blend of 3 and 4 and has little to do with 1 and 2. If FP provides theoretical lenses through which experiments like the false be-

lief task are interpreted, rather than representing facts about what is the case, then room is left for other interpretations of the same empirical data.

Ratcliffe then introduces distinctions from Heidegger, Gurwitsch and Schutz. Heidegger distinguishes between the context of use in which we are practically engaged with things and the distilled, observer stance we take when theoretically contemplating objects. In an analogous way our real-life interactions with others are distinguished from theoretical contemplation. In practical activity, things are encountered as tools 'understood' in the context of other tools, projects and people. Likewise, our daily encounter with others is thus not the distilled, observer perspective that FP requires. Ratcliffe then focuses on the way social roles create a common world of interactivity. Though not quite tools, others are already encountered in shared situations before we contemplate them theoretically. Thus, our everyday understanding of others begins before the application of anything like FP. He then introduces Schutz's distinction between second and third persons. FP assumes a subject and a third-person other and is not rooted in an immediate context of encountering others as second-persons. If the ambitions and intentions of others are understood in a second-person context, then FP cannot be its (sole) source.

Ratcliffe then follows the lead of Clark, Chalmers, and others, by applying the notions of the "extended mind" and "scaffolding" to the interpretation of the intentions of others. Here, he argues that there is sufficient information in the shared situational context of interactivity with others to interpret their actions without recourse to their internal states. Particularly interesting is the way that Ratcliffe handles normativity. Norms are shared expectations of the way we will act, and insofar as social situations are role-oriented and laden with normativity, we can often predict the actions of others because we know what one does in that role on such and such an occasion. Because under ordinary circumstances people follow norms, we know what they are likely to do.

Yet, answering the question of *why* a behavior is performed, rather than merely predicting it, seems to require that we understand actions and not just mechanical motions. This would seem to require, in turn, understanding goals and, hence, internal mental states. But Ratcliffe argues that this is not necessarily so. "The agency of others is somehow experienced *in* their behavior rather than inferred from it" (p. 124). Both phenomenology (Husserl, Scheler and Merleau-Ponty, particularly) and neuroscience support this notion. Additionally, the emotions of others and their gestures provide outward manifestations of internal states perceivable even by children not old enough to have developed FP.

The book then returns to the theme of the second person to argue that patterns of dialogical interaction reflect others as persons. Following Stawarska, Ratcliffe points out that “I” and “you” are indexicals, shifting their meaning in face-to-face conversation, whereas third person pronouns require pre-established referents. Sartre’s notion that we feel the other’s presence in our own bodies is invoked, but stripped of Sartre’s tendency to focus on negative emotions. Sartrean and protoconversational interaction is visible in infants as early as six to eight weeks, which develops into full conversational skills in adulthood that can provide for understanding other minds without FP. Furthermore, if, indeed, we distinguish persons from things in second-person interaction then FP’s theoretical stance mistakenly treats persons as things.

Ratcliffe then tackles beliefs and desires head on, noting that both terms are ambiguous and that approaches to FP commonly conflate important differences in meaning. The term ‘belief’ can mean conviction, holding propositions to be true; ‘disbelief’ can signal “astonishment, disappointment or incredulity” (188). While everyday talk could perhaps be translated into what FP requires, “the differences ... do serve to show that the concept of belief that FP takes to be central to social life cannot simply be read off everyday discourse” (189). Similar observations are then made about ‘desire’, followed by an explanation of why conflating definitions, as FP seems to do, is problematic: it obscures the richness of our everyday talk and the way we understand other minds in situational context. The role of narrative in a context of shared norms and practices is then discussed, leading to a provocative analysis of how we understand reasons. “The norms of good reasoning are there for all to follow just like situational norms” (217); and so they, too, can be understood to set up expectations of how rational people will act. So, we need not have recourse to internal belief and desire states on these grounds either. Given that the folk do not seem to think that beliefs and desires, as understood by FP, are *in* the mind the way the liver is *in* the body, we have grounds for suspicion concerning their employment in everyday understanding.

The final chapter is more of an appendix than a conclusion. It raises the question of what is left for FP, given sufficient recourse to externally perceivable human behavior in a context of shared norms and practices. Not much, he suggests. There is a short section on how this view can be tied to evolutionary theory, a recapitulation of the notion that FP makes use of an impersonal stance, this time nuanced with a discussion about the ‘mechanistic naturalism’ advocated by Dennett in contrast to treating human beings as persons, and finally a closing comment on the relationship between phenomenology and scientific naturalism. The closing discussion is important

because it distinguishes Ratcliffe from several phenomenologists of late (Petitot, Varela, Pachoud and Roy) who recommend 'naturalizing phenomenology'. If there truly is a distinction between the modes of understanding embedded and situated persons and a "spectatorial" process of explanation and prediction" (242), naturalizing phenomenology is bound to cover over the very phenomena we are trying to disclose. The book closes with the notion that properly addressing the problem of other minds requires that we "start by acknowledging the personal. And ditching FP will be a significant move in the right direction" (244).

The book is a compelling, well-researched and well-argued piece of a newly emerging paradigm advocated in various forms by others like Hutto, Zahavi and Gallagher. If such accounts are correct, there is much at stake, not only concerning the reality of internal mental states, but, more practically, concerning how we understand cognitive deficits like those involved in the study of autism. This is important work, and Ratcliffe's book deserves the careful attention of researchers connected in any way with the study of other minds.

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