

Julia Tanney, *Rules, Reasons, and Self-Knowledge*

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There was a period in modern philosophy when the analysis of language was seen as the cure for all philosophical problems. Philosophers such as Ryle, Wittgenstein and Austin, who focused on mapping out the variety of different roles that our words play, hoped that this activity would help us to see that the seeming puzzles in philosophy, especially those related to the relation between the mental and material phenomena, were due to us not noticing how language actually works. The decades after these authors have witnessed the resurrection of metaphysical approaches that strive to understand how the mental relates to the “furniture of the world”. Most of the analytic philosophers see it as a progress, so that philosophy is taken as again dealing with truly substantial questions, while the aforementioned authors belong only to a curious and confused phase in the history of thought, an unfortunate outgrowth of the linguistic turn.

Julia Tanney is one of the dissenting voices today who doesn't see these trends as an example of philosophical progress, and has been a persistent voice of opposition by arguing for the relevance of taking into account different linguistic functions of different vocabularies. When it comes to the mental concepts, the stress on those differences is meant to bring out how the application of the mental state terms doesn't function as picking out some inner causes of people's outer behavior, the nature of which waits for further empirical investigations, but as a component in the normative assessment of the complex descriptions of human actions. For Tanney, the first conception of mental discourse has resulted in the functionalist, representationalist, and computationalist accounts of the mind while the second approach exemplifies the work of Wittgenstein and Ryle, and so her defense of the latter, if successful, should give us a reason to think that the philosophy of mind has been on the wrong track for the last fifty years.

Considering the possible repercussions and importance of these is-

sues, it is good to see Tanney's work collected into a book. The collection has a quite focused outlook, despite the fact that the essays there have been written over fifteen years. The focus comes from the aforementioned purpose to shake the currently mainstream views in the philosophy of mind, and, due to that, there is also some repetition in the book. This is not necessarily a bad thing, though, because it helps to illuminate the issues from slightly different angles. In this review, I won't go through all the chapters but concentrate on the most salient issues.

The book is divided into four parts, each comprising of four essays. The first part concentrates on the normative aspect of mindful performances and how the norms of rationality are supposed to guide them. The bulk of the essays there addresses specific authors, Davidson in the first chapter, Papineau in the second, and Crispin Wright in the fourth. It is sometimes hard to follow what's the central thesis of the first part, but there are some threads that run through. For instance, Tanney argues against the view that the subjects need to represent the norms individually in order to follow them, in order to be assessed as rational or irrational. Her master argument against such individualism seems to be that any attempt to explain rational abilities by the individual representations of rules, which they should conform to, actually presupposes those rational abilities, and thus makes the explanation viciously circular (37, 75). She appeals to the regress of invoking higher-order rules that are supposed to specify how to apply the first-order rules (35), a problem that was already noted by Wittgenstein, and going even further back to Lewis Carroll. This regress indicates, or at least seems to indicate that the ability to follow rules is explanatorily prior to the representations of rules. The appeal to such regress appears also through the rest of the book.

In the second essay, Tanney turns to the claim that thought is essentially normative, and offers her own take on that issue. She rejects Papineau's view that the normativity of thought can be reduced to instrumental rationality, in which case it would be conditional on person's desires. This is connected with her analysis in the first essay because the reductionist program seems to presuppose the view that the norms of rationality are represented by subjects. Her own way of articulating thought's normativity is in terms of "internal errors", so that breaking the norm of thought wouldn't disqualify the subject of being a thinker (51). Such internal errors can't be accounted by theories that attempt to explain the normativity of thought causally, or so at least Tanney claims. I am not completely convinced because this idea may hang on a specific notion of causality which understands the latter in terms of laws. She seems to rely

on the conception of causal laws as being exceptionless since she dismisses the addition of *ceteris paribus* clauses for making the laws vacuous (123). But considering that there are many theories of causation on the market, it would have been nice to see some argument why the normativity of thought can't be explained on *any* understanding of causality.

The rule-following considerations pave way for the discussion about the distinction between reasons and causes in the second part of the book – if reason-explanations presuppose the rational/logical relation between reasons and actions, they seem to differ from causal explanations in which case the relation is discovered, not presupposed. Yet Davidson's arguments for the view that reason-explanations function as causal explanations has often be taken as a nail in the coffin of ordinary language philosophers who had insisted on the opposite. Since the reasons-as-causes thesis is prevalent, Tanney starts from the defensive position.

Probably the most important argument for the view that effective reasons have to be causes relied on the intuition that merely having a reason was not fully explanatory of a persons' action, unless the reason also played a causal role in generating the behaviour in question. Yet Tanney attempts to show that a sufficient explanation doesn't require conceiving of reason-explanations as causal. By rejecting the causal view of reason-explanations, Tanney is free to give up the view that by attributing mental states we are identifying certain causally efficacious inner states in the brain. She proposes that instead of postulating a causal connection in order to account why a person acted the way she did, one simply needs to engage in providing more complex descriptions of the action and its circumstances to make it understandable (109). Just putting the action in a sufficiently described context should be enough to make explicit the reasons for which the agent acted.

I am very sympathetic towards Tanney's "descriptivist" account of reason-explanations. That Davidson supposedly established that reasons are causes is too often taken as a dogma. Yet I'm not sure if Tanney's opponent would be satisfied. There is the question whether it is possible to describe different contexts of action accurately enough, so that one can avoid taking some element in the description as the cause of the action. After all, actions can be described in innumerable ways and one might think that without identifying some element in some level of mental descriptions as the cause, indeterminacy results. In addition, there's the problem of cognitive intractability lurking in the corner, because it isn't clear how a finite human mind can handle the variety of contexts of action, without having some sort of mechanism for recognizing situations

where the attribution of attitudes is called for. Yet it seems that Tanney, by rejecting cognitivism, can't allow that. Instead, she talks about training in the discourse about reasons (142) but this remains quite vague and probably unsatisfactory for many. The third concern is that, again, she isn't really explicit about the notion of causality. As already mentioned, there are different conceptions and Tanney seems to limit herself to the deductive/nomological model. But what if we adopt a counterfactual or interventionist account of causation, instead? One can conclude, then, that there's still work to do in order to make Tanney's account of reason-explanations fully convincing.

While the second part of the book has a very unified outlook, concentrating on the issue of reason-explanations, the third part is a bit more disjointed. The first of the essays there reviews Tim Crane's book "The Mechanical Mind" and provides considerations why, *pace* Crane, the postulation of mental representations in order to understand mindful performances is not necessary. This allows her to strengthen the claim that the ascription of mental states need not involve postulating causally efficacious inner states to be legitimate. In arguing for her claim, she largely relies on the rule-following considerations she dealt with in the first part of the book. The point I find most interesting in that essay is that if mental representations are supposed to have meaning without being interpreted, one could also say that public representations are such, in which case mental representations lose their explanatory rationale (195). Although quite controversial, Tanney's arguments in that chapter might be of interest to those who are exploring the possibility of anti-representationalism in the philosophy of psychology.

The second essay of the third part of the book can be read quite separately. It addresses the zombie and Swampman thought-experiments in the philosophy of mind. She argues for the conceptual impossibility of zombies, which is a quite radical view because philosophers generally tend to endorse at least the conceivability of those scenarios. Only Dennett has been the opposing voice, and Tanney's argumentative strategy is a bit similar to his, although it doesn't repeat it by any means. The stress is on the equal applicability of mental concepts, and ordinary criteria that govern the application, to behaviourally indistinguishable individuals. In case of the Swampman thought experiment, Tanney also touches on the issue of the moral status of such creatures, arguing that behavioural indistinguishability grounds our proper moral reactions. Again, I am sympathetic to Tanney's views in that chapter but I doubt that the opponent would be convinced. Rather, a modal machinery

would be brought to bear on the issue and doubts would be raised about the relevance of ordinary criteria of applying mental concepts. Nevertheless, this essay serves as an original contribution to the otherwise a bit stagnant literature about philosophical zombies and Swampmen.

The next essay in the book is metaphilosophical, although still focused on philosophy of mind. Tanney argues against the method of conceptual analysis, thus sharing the view of naturalistically oriented philosophers such as Stich and Tye. She parts ways with them, though, when it comes to the question about the proper method. She expresses skepticism towards the possibility of investigating the putative tacit knowledge that is supposed to underlie the ability to ascribe mental states, as Stich has proposed. After all, such investigations would rest on the cognitivist assumptions that she has already rejected. In the essay that follows, Tanney continues with her critique of cognitive science's reliance on mental representations by articulating her take on the regress argument, first proposed by Ryle, and defends it against Fodor. Her interpretation of Ryle's argument seems to be very similar to the point she made in the first part of the book, namely, that explaining a rational ability by the ability to represent one's options and evaluating them already presupposes the rational ability in question (253).

The fourth part is somewhat different from the rest of the book because its topic is self-knowledge, although this issue pops out sporadically throughout the rest of the book, too. She opposes the view that the first-person authority towards one's own mental states is immediate and doesn't involve reflection and interpretation. Instead, she takes reliable self-understanding to be a matter of trained skill (296). She also defends the controversial view that self-interpretation at least partially constitutes the object of the interpretation, largely relying on literary examples. In doing that, she also addresses Richard Moran's and Dorit Bar-On's accounts of self-knowledge. My only quibble with the fourth part of the book is that Tanney doesn't distinguish between different kind of mental states and doesn't ask whether the subject's first-person authority towards them differs. It is plausible to think that the first-person access isn't uniform between different types of mental states.

Some worries aside, this is an impressive collection of essays and I recommend it to all who are interested in the somewhat forgotten strand in the history of 20th century philosophy. Perhaps the time is ripe for the resurgence of ordinary language philosophy. Tanney isn't the only author in that regard, also Avner Baz has done some valuable work, for instance. But only time can tell how far this resurgence can extend.

