Review

Reviewed Work(s): The Nature of Mental Things by Arthur Collins

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provide anything resembling an analysis of a nontemporal act, or even questioning whether Kant is really committed to such a notion, the author does little to remedy the situation. Here, as elsewhere, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the methodological constraint which the author imposes on himself lessens significantly the value of the book.

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THE NATURE OF MENTAL THINGS. By ARTHUR COLLINS. Notre Dame, Ind., University of Notre Dame Press, 1987. Pp. xviii, 180.

Descartes believed not only that thought could genuinely be about a world that is what it is by and large independently of what is thought about it, but also that thought could be and be known to be just what it is quite independently of the features or even the existence of the world that is thought about. This penetrating and original work forcefully argues that liberation from the tensions and entanglements of the second Cartesian commitment requires acknowledging that ". . . beliefs are not inner states of agents at all, or inner realities of any kind that might cause anything whatever" (p. 165). "There is no room for an inner state of the subject, mediating between the subject and the subject matter of the belief" (p. 167). Why not? In brief, because "There is no state of belief that the subject might report without asserting that p" (p. 167). The conceptual reconstruction and argumentation developed to explain and justify the connection between these two claims is rich and intricate. No more can be presented here than a sketch of one central and characteristic train of thought.

A theory of belief ought to explain these facts: first, belief-talk involves both first-person *expressions* of belief, such as "I believe that p," and third- (or second-) person *ascriptions* of belief, such as "Joe believes that p." Second, uttering "I believe that p," is one way of asserting that p, committing oneself to it, taking a stand on its truth. Third, ascriptions of the belief that p are not assertions of p, since one need not endorse a belief in order to attribute it to someone else. Fourth, in spite of this difference between expressions and ascriptions, there must be some univocal sense of "belief that p" in play in both sorts of belief statement, because of such facts as that "the quantified assertion 'Someone believes that p' follows equally from 'Joe believes that p' and 'I believe that p' . . ." (p. 29). Fifth,

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though expressions of the belief that p have the significance of assertions of p, they nonetheless, like ascriptions, exhibit a different pattern of truth values across possible situations. That is why we must each admit, in the manner of the paradox of the preface, that not-p and "I believe that p" might both be true, as well as that not-p and "Joe believes that p" might.

If one focuses on this last feature of belief statements as most revelatory of the nature of belief, one will be inclined to contrast "S believes that p" with "S knows that p," understanding the former as involving only a narrow state of the believer, and not, as the latter does, also how the world the beliefs are about is. This, Collins argues, is a mistake. For if ascription of belief were ascription of a state that is internal in this sense, a state that could be just what it is regardless of whether the state of affairs it represents obtains, then just as one can ascribe a belief state to another without taking a stand on its truth, so one would be able to ascribe the belief state to oneself without taking a stand on its truth, merely describing oneself as being in a certain state, which by the hypothesis that it is an inner state does not entail that the outside world is one way rather than another. "Belief that p cannot be an inner state because such an account would engender incoherent first-person belief statements that fail to express any stand on the belief itself" (p. 169). Expression is not explicable as self-ascription. Since it involves asserting what is believed, and not just that it is believed, "an expression of belief is not a report in which the speaker tells others about himself" (p. 28).

What alternative is there? Collins wants us instead to treat as central the role of belief expressions as assertions. He is then obliged to understand the divergence of truth values for both expressions and ascriptions on that basis. For asserting that p, like ascribing knowledge that p, does involve taking a stand on how the world is. The positive theory developed here understands "I believe that p" as an essentially *disjunctive* state, analyzable as "p, or I am much mistaken." This explains why "I believe that p" seems to acknowledge the possibility of a mistake, in a way that the simple assertion of p does not. It explains why expressions of beliefs commit the believer to a stand on the truth of a claim. It explains further how the truth values of p and "I believe that p" can diverge. Finally, it offers a "uniform disjunctive formulation for both ascriptions and expressions of belief:

> S has (I have) the true belief that p, or
> S has (I have) the false belief that p," (p. 167)

(where "belief" in the definiens is to be given an independent reading involving "commitment," or "undertaking") which does not in the third person case assert that p. Like factives, such as "know," neither disjunct can hold in virtue of an inner (p-independent) state of S, so the disjunction does not pick out an internal state.

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Radical though its ideas are, this provocative book is clearly and carefully written. One source of difficulty in assessing its central argument, though, is that the notion of asserting, of making a commitment or taking a stand that may turn out to be correct or mistaken, is treated as an unexplained explainer. In the absence of an account of this primitive, we are bereft of a vocabulary for discussing precisely the difference between expressing a belief (undertaking a commitment) and ascribing one to oneself on which the argument turns. For instance, it is possible to say *of oneself* under some description that one believes something, without thereby undertaking a commitment to it, if one does not and is not obliged to recognize oneself as satisfying the description. *De facto* first-person ascriptions of belief need not be assertions. What of *de jure* first-person ascriptions (or expressions, using "I") of what are in fact belief states, but are not recognizable as such under the specifications (causal, functional, neurophysiological, normative . . .) they are presented by? The argument requires distinguishing this case from the former, and that depends on how asserting is understood. What speech act is performed by a state-ascription, specifically, whether it counts as undertaking an assertional commitment with a particular content, would seem to depend on how the state ascribed is specified, as well as how the subject of the state is specified. Another complaint is that the notion of "inner state," which defines the enemy to be refuted, is not set out as clearly as one would like. These last remarks are simply requests for more, addressed to what is clearly an important book.

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MINIMAL RATIONALITY. By CHRISTOPHER CHERNIAK. Cambridge, Mass., The MIT Press, 1986. Pp. x, 161. $19.95.

Starting in the early 80s, Christopher Cherniak published a series of important articles asking what consequences we should draw from the fact that there are "truths, and inferential tasks, too 'large' . . . for human beings—or any feasible creature—to manage" (p. ix). This book collects and develops this material, adding interesting new arguments and refining old ones; developing the consequences for our views of rationality of the finitude of our memories and our computational capacities. Cherniak begins with the now-familiar thought that conformity to certain rationality conditions is constitutive of agency, of the possession of psycho-

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