



**Review: [Untitled]**

Reviewed Work(s):

*The Nature of True Minds* by John Heil

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beings as they do—which, incidentally, need not mean that we are precluded from giving a more or less adequate account of how they do see human beings.

This, however, would hardly be enough to satisfy Bohman, since it is increasingly clear as his discussion proceeds that what he wants is an “evaluative” interpretation. He believes that Habermas provided for this possibility in an argument that rests a great deal of weight on there necessarily being “suppositions of commonality” between interpreter and interpretee. I suppose no one would want to deny that the scope of possible interpretive understanding is conditioned by how much the two parties have in common. But Habermas’s requirement is a strong one: the interpreter becomes qualified as a “virtual participant” along with the subjects of his interpretation, and “establishes a dialogue with them from ‘our’ point of view.” Now, I did myself argue in *The Idea of a Social Science* that there is a certain *analogy* between this sort of relationship and that between fellow participants in an activity or institution. But... “virtual participant” is decidedly strong and “from ‘our’ point of view” dangerously equivocal. Of course in a sense if I participate in a dialogue I necessarily do so from “my point of view”; but the same holds equally for my opposite number in the dialogue. The trouble with Habermas’s “virtual” dialogue is that my opposite number’s point of view is equally constructed by me: I see his or her position too from my point of view. In saying this I by no means want to support any general skepticism about the possibility of ever understanding the other’s point of view. I want only to insist that this is a very long way from genuine dialogue. We might do well to remember Socrates’s difficulties concerning the written word in cases where the author is not present to answer questions (and I hope I shall not be told that of course Socrates did not have the benefit of the discoveries of modern hermeneutics!). It seems to me that the difficulties over skepticism which exercise Bohman would have been much easier to deal with had he applied more consistently his admirable insistence elsewhere on the *multiplicity* of intellectual techniques and not referred so largely to the “modern world view.” This obscures the variegated concrete resources which our own culture makes available to us. Bohman’s very impatient treatment of mythological thinking is a good example of this intellectual tendency.

Very similar issues arise in the final chapter on “Criticism and Explanation.” I think Bohman is perfectly right to point out that explanations and descriptions of various sorts can be quite legitimately turned to critical purposes. But again, following Habermas, he clearly wants more than this. He writes of Max Weber’s “skepticism” about criticism; but what Weber was skeptical—indeed fiercely critical!—of was not criticism as such but the pretensions of social theorists to occupy a specially authoritative position in the context of critical issues. I think his misgivings would have been strengthened, not allayed, by the claims of writers like Bohman and Habermas.

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**The Nature of True Minds.** JOHN HEIL. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992. Pp. xi, 248.

*The Nature of True Minds* is an engaging exploration of implications of the doctrine of externalism in the philosophy of mind. Externalism is the view that the

contents of intentional attitudes are fixed in part by the subject's circumstances or environment. As Heil sees it, externalism "does indeed mandate a fundamental re-ordering of our conception of mind, its standing in the natural world, and its relation to behavior;" the question is "how much of our traditional conception of agency and intelligent action, how much of our science of psychology could survive such a reordering." (p. 25) While not offering direct arguments in support of externalism, Heil argues that externalism is compatible with sensible construals of mental causation, supervenience, and privileged access. His ultimate answer to the question is that externalism "poses no immediate threat to the standing of the intentional attitudes, nor, by extension, to our ordinary conception of agency." (p. 238)

By and large, Heil's arguments are judicious. Like most other philosophers of mind today, Heil embraces naturalism, as "the view that mental characteristics are determined by or supervene on features of agents comprehended by the natural sciences. Agents possess thoughts in virtue of their possession of particular sorts of physical characteristics." (pp. 4–5) Maintaining that supervenience or determination is a wholly ontological thesis, Heil takes no stand on whether or not intentional concepts are reducible to nonintentional concepts. Throughout *The Nature of True Minds*, Heil offers fresh insights into the views of many philosophers: for example, Putnam and Burge on externalism; Davidson, Hare and Kim on supervenience; Searle and Malcolm on mental causation. In addition, Heil develops his own account of privileged access (reminiscent of Burge's) and of the relation between thought and language.

*The Nature of True Minds* is packed with stimulating arguments. Considering the technical difficulty of the issues, Heil's style is admirably accessible. On the whole, Heil writes clearly and persuasively. However, his discussion falters a bit on three related points: in his discussions (1) of mental causation, (2) of supervenience, and (3) of physical realization. I shall comment on (1) and (2) briefly, and on (3) in greater detail.

(1) One of the most perplexing issues in the philosophy of mind is the problem of intentional mental causation, which Heil discusses at length. However, it is unclear (to me, at least) how Heil regards his own conclusions on this issue. On the one hand, he says, "If anything is to *count* as a thought, it must contribute—even if only potentially—to the operation of the system to which it belongs." (p. 222; emphasis his.) On the other hand, he also says that his discussion "falls somewhat short of a proof that...if the intentional attitudes exist, they do in fact influence behavior causally." Indeed, the matter of their influence on behavior is, he says, "in no small measure empirical." (p. 227) It is difficult to see how the causal relevance of the attitudes (assuming that there are any) is in any way an empirical matter if, as Heil also says, "thoughts, indeed intentional states generally, necessarily affect the operation of the system of which they are a part." (p. 222)

(2) Heil's main point about supervenience—that externalism is compatible with the supervenience hypothesis "provided we allow the supervenience 'base' of intentional characteristics to be 'broad'" (p. 14)—is well-taken; but *aficionados* of technical aspects of supervenience may take issue with Heil's discussion of "possible worlds" formulations vs. the "modal operator" formulations of theses of Strong and Weak Supervenience. For example, Heil assumes that existence of a disembodied spirit is allowed by the "possible worlds" formulations of both Strong and Weak Supervenience theses. But David Lewis's recombination princi-

ples for possible worlds, which Heil does not mention, render that assumption dubious.

(3) The key to Heil's treatment of the problem of mental causation is his contention that mental properties are physically realized in agents' brains. Heil goes some distance toward clearing up the confusion in the literature about exactly what kind of relation physical realization is—some distance, although in my opinion, not the whole way.

Heil aims to present a conception of the 'realizing relation' that is consistent with externalism. (p. 138) Unlike many other philosophers of mind, he is careful to distinguish between supervenience (a relation between properties as types), on the one hand, and realization and constitution (relations between particular exemplifications of properties), on the other. Liquidity *supervenes* on molecular structure; the liquidity of Clara's soup *is realized in* its molecular structure; the soup's being liquid *is constituted by* its molecular structure. Although realization is a relation between tokens, Heil says, "Realizing relations are constrained by supervenience relations. Whether there is a world in which *x*'s being B at *t* realizes *x*'s being A depends in part on whether As supervene on Bs." (p. 137)

There's the rub. If realizing relations are constrained by supervenience relations, then, given externalism, the relation between mental property exemplification and neurological property exemplification is *not* one of realization. For, as Heil would agree, if externalism is true, the property of thinking about Vienna does not supervene on neurological properties. If the property of thinking about Vienna supervenes on anything, it supervenes 'broadly' on the subject's relational properties—such as the property of being in a world with certain kinds of cities—as well as on her intrinsic properties. Therefore, in light of the supervenience constraint on realization, exemplification of a particular neurological property cannot realize an instance of thinking about Vienna. If the relation of realization is to be compatible with externalism, and if neurological property exemplifications are to realize mental property exemplifications, then it is *false* that the properties whose exemplifications *realize* instances of thinking of Vienna are the properties on which the property of thinking about Vienna *supervenes*.

So, far from being compatible with externalism, Heil's conception of the 'realizing relation' straightforwardly precludes externalism. For it follows from externalism that the property of thinking of Vienna does not supervene on any neurological properties; but it follows from Heil's conception of the realizing relation that the property of thinking of Vienna does supervene on a neurological property. To see that Heil's conception of the realizing relation really does have this untoward consequence, consider:

- (a) "x's being A at *t* is realized by x's being B, just in case x's being A is constituted, at *t*, by x's being B." (p. 137)

Heil says that "the exemplification, by Wayne, at *t*, of the mental characteristic thinking of Vienna is constituted by the exemplification by Wayne, at *t*, of a certain neurological characteristic, N." (p. 138) To paraphrase:

- (b) Wayne's thinking of Vienna at *t* is constituted by exemplification of a certain neurological property, N.

From (a) and (b),

- (c) Wayne's thinking of Vienna at *t* is realized by exemplification of a certain neurological property, *N*.

As we have seen: "Whether there is a world in which *x*'s being *B* at *t* realizes *x*'s being *A* depends in part on whether *As* supervene on *Bs*." (p. 137) To paraphrase:

- (d) *x*'s being *B* at *t* realizes *x*'s being *A* only if *As* supervene on *Bs*.

From (c) and (d),

- (e) The property of thinking about Vienna supervenes on the neurological property, *N*.

But (e) rules out externalism, as long as we understand neurological properties to be properties taxonomic in neurophysiology. For the properties on which thoughts about Vienna do supervene if externalism is true—such as the property of being in a world with certain kinds of cities—are not neurological properties. Indeed, such properties have nothing in particular to do with brains.

To turn the point around, suppose that externalism is correct. Heil says: "If thinking about Vienna is broadly supervenient [as externalism has it], then Wayne's thinking about Vienna is realized by *N*, only if *N* possesses the right sort of causal history. A molecular duplicate of *N* that lacked a causal history of this sort would not realize a thought about Vienna."<sup>1</sup> (p. 138) O.K., but then it follows that the property of thinking about Vienna does *not* supervene on *N*. For in cases in which a particular exemplification of *N* lacks the requisite causal history, *N* is exemplified without there being a thought about Vienna. Hence, if externalism is correct, realization relations between exemplifications of mental and neurological properties should not be constrained by supervenience relations between the respective mental and neurological properties. However, it would remain to be seen whether such a conception of realization, unconstrained by supervenience, would avoid the problem of mental causation.

In any case, *The Nature of True Minds* is well-written, up-to-date in its selection of topics, and fair-minded in its arguments. The book is rich and provocative and, in many places, original.

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**Responsibility Matters.** PETER A. FRENCH. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1992.

*Responsibility Matters* is vintage French. Everything that charms his admirers and annoys his critics will be found here: the obligatory references to Davidsonian agents, the clever titles as chapter headings (Time, Space and Shame, Hobbes

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<sup>1</sup> Note that 'N' here is being used as a name of a particular that exemplifies *N*, although it was introduced as a name of a neurological characteristic (property). (Also, in the locution I quoted from p. 137, 'A' and 'B' seem to be used both as predicates and as names of properties.) I suspect that this kind of slippage is a source of the problem with Heil's conception of physical realization.