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*Other Minds*

by Anita Avramides

Routledge, 2001. xv + 333 pp. £45.00 cloth, £15.99 paper

On Avramides' account, the problem of other minds arises as a consequence of the Cartesian epistemological project. In contrast to classical scepticism, the introduction of the 'demon' doubt allows for a form of scepticism that drives a wedge between appearance and reality. Given this, it can no longer be taken that experience presents one with awareness of anything external to oneself. All that one is immediately aware of are one's ideas—there is no necessary connection between the having of subjective experience and the existence of an objective reality. Once this model of experience is in place, the problem of other minds becomes an epistemological problem: how can one come to know whether another has a mind?

Avramides rejects the claim that the problem of other minds is fundamentally epistemological. Instead, it is at core a conceptual issue. Drawing support from Wittgenstein, Strawson, and Davidson, she argues that once we have given a satisfactory account of the mind, the epistemological issue becomes unproblematic. The existence of other minds is built into the concept of mind from the outset.

In keeping with the *Problems of Philosophy* series, the book has two main threads. Parts One and Two concern the historical development of the problem of other minds. In the first, the problem is attributed to the ideal theory, and the source of the standard reply, the argument from analogy, is traced. Rejecting the claim that this argument is advocated by Descartes and Locke, Avramides first finds evidence of it in the work of Arnauld. There is also a stimulating discussion of Malebranche's account of our knowledge of other minds, this filling a gap in the current literature.

Part Two continues the historical theme by focusing on those philosophers rejecting the ideal theory. Thomas Reid's commonsense alternative is discussed. Reid advocates a form of direct realism, leaving no room for scepticism about the external world to get hold. His account does, however, leave space for scepticism about other minds, and it is to Wittgenstein's work that Avramides looks for the first substantial attempt to undermine the sceptic.

The third part contains Avramides' positive account, and endeavours to defend it against criticism from the likes of Nagel and Stroud. The account builds on the Wittgensteinian insight, and attempts to marry the work of Strawson and Davidson. Avramides suggests that it is only by focusing on the issue of what allows us to possess a concept of mind that is general in its application—that can be applied to both oneself and others—that we can undermine scepticism. The "lived position" (p. 229)—the pre-philosophical view that the attribution of mental states to others is unproblematic—should be our starting point. What we have to do is ask what makes this stance possible. Interaction with others is the suggested answer. This approach, it is suggested, will undermine the sceptic's starting point, as once the Cartesian assumption that psychological terms get their meaning through introspective awareness is made, there is no way to make sense of the suggestion that others might also have mental states.

The book is a major contribution to the literature on other minds. The historical material is first rate, although it occasionally appears as if it is scepticism about the

external world that is the main subject (this, after all, is what Reid is taken to defeat), and there is remarkably little on Hume or Kant. The positive theory is interesting and appealing, if painted in rather broad strokes. It is not clear that Avramides' theory fully meets the sceptical challenge—it does, however, provide a stimulating starting point for further work.

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