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BOOK REVIEW

Francesco Farina, Frank Hahn, and Stefano Vanucci, eds., *Ethics, Rationality and Economic Behaviour*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 360 pp. ISBN 0-19-828981-2, US\$ 80.00 (Hb).

In this well-assembled collection of papers, the editors, who are also among the authors of individual articles, provide a good sense of the liveliness, complexity, and variety of topics in the three areas of inquiry listed in the title of the book. Three main themes run through most of the articles. The first is discussion of utilitarianism. A number of the contributors advance some strand of utilitarianism, including John Harsanyi, Peter Hammond, David Gauthier, and John Broome. In contrast, other authors including Amartya Sen, Bernard Williams, Steven Lukes, and Frank Hahn, explicitly reject the universal validity of a utilitarian strategy for dealing with general ethical problems and the more specific ethical problems that arise within economics.

The second theme concerns whether economic rationality, in a broad sense, provides basic instruments to understand and explain not only economic behavior, but human behavior more generally. The contributors are also divided on this point. While some of the contributors take economic rationality as a useful and comprehensive methodological tool for analyzing practical questions, others either explicitly deny that economic rationality constitutes the cornerstone on which all human behavior rests, or try to go beyond economic rationality in the belief that it alone is insufficient to give account of the full intricacy of human action. Harsanyi, Broome, Philippe van Paris, and John Roemer form the first group, while Hahn, Lukes, Sen, Williams, Gauthier, Robert Sugden, Pier Luigi Sacco, Stefano Zamagni, and Menahem Yaari form the second.

The final theme of the book concerns the technical approaches of the authors. Some of them rely on mathematics or on a highly technical vocabulary to deal with practical problems in a formal and precise way. They include the economists Hervé Moulin, Francesco Farina, Stefano Vanucci, Broome, and Hammond. Others examine the problems without resorting very much to mathematics. Most of them are either philosophers or economists with a philosophical bent. They include Sugden, Hahn, Lukes, Yaari, Sacco and Zamagni, Sen, Williams, Harsanyi, Roemer, van Paris and Gauthier. Anyone without a formal training in rational choice theory or other formal tools of economics may find it difficult to understand some of the contributions.

A better idea of the wealth of issues that are discussed can be gained from the extensive summary of the different articles in Francesco Farina's excellent introduction to the collection. Many of the reflections of the authors on the relations among ethics, rationality, and economic behavior have to do with utilitarianism. For many of the economists interested in questions of obligation, ethics appears to be reduced to utilitarianism. There are no in-depth discussions of major moral theories other than utilitarianism. At most, there are suggestions, primarily in the contributions of Sen and Hahn, that other moral traditions are better equipped to manage economic and non-economic practical questions, especially when we consider justice, moral education, or the spontaneous behavior of people. The reductionist approach that the authors take might be justified by the happy marriage that has existed between utilitarianism and economics during the present century. Utilitarianism has constituted the main path to welfare economics. However, the western tradition of moral thinking is much richer than a reading of these articles would suggest. It has dealt with economic matters and the rationality of economic and human behavior in diverse ways, some of which are incompatible with utilitarianism. Aristotelian, Christian, and phenomenological moral thinkers do not believe that utilitarianism provides the only approach to rational discussion of economic matters or human affairs.

For the most part, the authors are concerned with rationality understood as economic, instrumental, and self-interested. Although they are divided over whether this kind of rationality underlies economic and human behavior in all its rational facets, even the authors who argue that it does not, fail to present alternative models of human rationality that overcome the limitations of economic rationality. It is as if there were no other conceptions of rationality to engage thought about economic and human behavior. Throughout the book, economic rationality is treated as a prison which particular economic thinkers may escape, rather than being treated as a particular conception of rationality that can be viewed from outside.

Not all of the articles lack a conception of rationality other than economic rationality. The strategy of many contributors consists in highlighting certain rational processes and areas of what they take to be rational human behavior that do not fit the patterns of established instrumental rationality. Nevertheless, there is no explicit articulation of a non-economic rationality behind the criticisms of economic rationality. For example, Williams argues that rational dialogical processes that do not fit the algorithmic character of economic rationality are involved when we make many decisions. In a similar vein, Gauthier states that a full appreciation of the role that plans play in deliberation requires a re-examination of the orthodox view of economic rationality. Sugden maintains that coordination requires reasoning of a kind that is incompatible with the conception of rationality conventionally adopted in economics. Sacco and Zamagni assert that the standard approach to rational

choice cannot capture the element of rational behavior that is not self-interested.

Finally, while technical language has a place when writing for a very specialized readership, when the theoretical issues under discussion are of great practical consequence, the technicalities might at some point be translated into a more accessible vocabulary. This is essential if moral and political scientists wish to have an impact on people's minds, as they surely must, especially on the minds of those who have decision-making power in society. In most cases the argumentative refinement of the articles may intimidate anyone who is not a specialist in philosophical and economic theorizing on practical matters. In this respect, formal technicalities in ethical and political questions play the same role that technicalities play in many of our most sophisticated scientific and metaphysical theories: to blunt the critical faculties of the layperson. The temptation is better resisted if we want to make available important practical matters and solutions in the arena of political discussion.

In this collection, the several authors explore significant questions concerning ethics, rationality, and economic behavior. Philosophers and economists will enjoy mulling over the ideas and reasoning found in the book.

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