

courses should also consider this book for their students, as it allows for an integration of theory and practice, and gives readers ideas about creating their own career development path and formulating an integrated approach to career counselling.

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Varela, Francisco J. (1999). *Ethical Know-How: Action, Wisdom, and Cognition*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

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It's not often that one encounters a book on ethics that blends cognitive science, philosophy, psychoanalysis, and Buddhism all in the span of eighty-five pages. After all, Aristotle's lectures on the subject of the ends to which human conduct should be directed required eight books. Nevertheless, Francisco Varela's latest book should not be dismissed out of hand for its brevity, nor should it be imagined that it weighs in with the same comprehensive rigour as the ancient Greek's tome. But it is a refreshing take on ethics by an unapologetic non-specialist, and for a reader tiring of the cookbook approach to ethics so favoured by professional gate keepers and research ethics boards, these three lectures, given at the University of Bologna, connect deeply with human experience.

Varela and Humberto Maturana first presented their views on epistemology and ontology in their 1980 book *Autopoiesis and Cognition*, and furthered their radical position with *The Tree of Knowledge* (1987). In a previous book, *The Embodied Mind*, Varela and colleagues made explicit enactivist claims that he now applies to ethics in this little book.

Enactivism is a view of cognition as embodied, intimately bound up with actions in an environment and inseparable from all other bodily actions involving the brain and central nervous system. The aphorism "All knowing is doing, and all doing is knowing," coined by Maturana and Varela in their first book, sums up the enactivist position on cognition, and highlights both the "know-how" and "action" in the title of Varela's latest contribution on the interface between cognitive science and the humanities.

A central argument for Varela is that in making ethical decisions, we draw on our long term, accumulated experiential knowledge, our "know-how," rather than rationally evaluating situations based on an abstract set of principles. Ethics, Varela suggests, that is presented as a purely rational processes, that poses ethical solutions based on abstract principles, is hardly an ethics at all, but rather a convenient shorthand derived from social convention. This view is noticeably absent in much of the ethical literature in psychology, and casts doubt on the utility of our principle-bound codes of ethics for counsellors.

Despite Varela's clear allegiance to cognitive science, postmodernists might be enamoured with Varela's admonitions to relinquish the essentialism he sees as getting in the way of ethical behaviour. For counsellors and counsellor educators, an

enactivist informed ethics fits well with counselling practices that are reflective, conjointly constructed, and relational. But like his precocious predecessor Aristotle, Varela does not manage to tidily solve the perplexing conundrums he raises. How, for instance, are we to make sense of ethical conduct that presupposes a "self" when embodied cognition casts doubts on the existence of such a self? And if our codes of ethics manifest a shallow view of ethical decision-making, with what are we to replace them? For now, Varela suggests that ethical behaviour should be characterised by a vigilant attempt to "transcend the limitations inherent in a repertoire of purely habitual responses." In other words, to be mindful of one's "self" and its well-trodden rationalisations and conduct in the face of value-laden decisions.