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NORDENSTAM, TORE. Sudanese ethics. 239 pp.,
bibliogr. Uppsala: The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1968. Sw. Kr. 15.

This is a modest, but precisely handled, case-study in 'descriptive ethics' set in the context of a methodological discussion of what such a study may – or should – entail. Dr Nordenstam is a moral philosopher and his book, originally a Ph.D. thesis, derives from experience teaching in the University of Khartoum. Its substantive core is a reasoned account of a number of interrelated ideals or 'virtues' – courage, generosity-cum-hospitality, honour, self-respect – held by northern Sudanese and here analysed from a series of tape-recorded interviews with three main informants, all university students. The interviews themselves, or a large part of them, are reproduced verbatim in the latter half of the book. The first part develops in general terms the argument that what is required for intercultural research is a study of the 'ethics of virtue' which takes as its focus collective ideals but can examine them in their acceptance by and consequences for persons as agents.

Dr Nordenstam says much that, to an anthropologist, seems sensible. The book has a care and clarity which help to control its large objectives, approached as they are on a narrow front. The author is sympathetic to anthropological studies which have sallied into the same field, but he moves more cautiously and with greater methodological deliberation to what must concern both disciplines – the comparative and systematic examination of values within society, which by being 'moral' concern both the life of the society and the lives of its members. The book attempts much modestly: one hopes that a future book will attempt less more ambitiously.

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