

## RETHINKING RYLE

### A Critical Discussion of *The Concept of Mind*

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#### I INTRODUCTION

Gilbert Ryle's *The Concept of Mind* was published in 1949 both to wide acclaim and to general bemusement. It was anticipated by its critics as a book that would, if not set the agenda for philosophy of mind, then at least preoccupy it for the then foreseeable future. Now, more than sixty years after its initial publication, we are in a better position to appreciate its legacy. Although Ryle published on a wide range of topics in philosophy (notably in the history of philosophy—especially Plato—and in philosophy of language), including a series of lectures centred on philosophical dilemmas, *The Concept of Mind* remains his best known and most important work. Through this work, Ryle is thought to have accomplished two major tasks. First, he was seen to have put the final nail in the coffin of Cartesian dualism. Second, as he himself anticipated, he is thought to have argued on behalf of, and suggested as dualism's replacement, the doctrine known as philosophical (and sometimes analytical) behaviourism. Sometimes known as an 'ordinary language', sometimes as an 'analytic', philosopher, Ryle—even when mentioned in the same breath as Wittgenstein and his followers—is considered to be on a different, somewhat idiosyncratic (and difficult to characterise), philosophical track.

To credit Ryle with demolishing substance dualism and paving the way for behaviourism is to underestimate his achievement. Hardly anyone

working in philosophy of mind today takes seriously the view Ryle describes in his book as ‘the official doctrine’—the view he ridicules as ‘the myth of the ghost in the machine’. It is widely agreed that the chaff of philosophical behaviourism has long been discarded while the wheat has been appropriated by the philosophical doctrine of functionalism. Functionalism in one of its many forms is widely accepted in the philosophy of mind today (and it gains its appeal by appearing as the best philosophical articulation of underlying assumptions in the cognitive sciences). It is a view that is thought to have saved the ‘reality’ of the mental from the ‘eliminativist’ or ‘fictionalist’ tendencies of behaviourism while acknowledging the insight (often attributed to Ryle) that the mental is importantly related to behavioural output or response (as well as to stimulus or input). According to a reasonably charitable assessment, the best of Ryle’s lessons has long been assimilated while the problematic has been discarded. If there are considerations still brewing from the 1930s and 1940s that would threaten the orthodoxy in contemporary philosophy of mind, these lie somewhere in the work of Wittgenstein and his followers—not in Ryle.

I shall argue that the view just outlined, although widespread, represents a fundamental misapprehension of Ryle’s work. First, the official doctrine is dead in only one of its ontological aspects: substance dualism may well have been repudiated but property dualism still claims a number of contemporary defenders. Indeed, both non-reductive and reductive physicalists are entangled in a metaphysical overgrowth whose roots are firmly established in the soil of the official doctrine. The problem of finding a place for the mental in the physical world, of accommodating the causal power of the mental, and of accounting for the phenomenal aspects of consciousness are all live problems in the philosophy of mind today because they share some combination of the doctrine’s ontological, epistemological, and semantic assumptions. So the time has come to pay new attention to Ryle’s little understood ‘dissolution’ of the mind–body problem.

Second, and importantly, Ryle is not a philosophical behaviourist—at least he does not subscribe to any of the main tenets associated with that doctrine as it is known today. One may be confused by this if one is also confused about Ryle’s conception of philosophy. If one identifies him as an ‘analytic philosopher’ and thinks that the only proper goal of philosophy (attainable if not in practice at least in ideals) is definitional analysis then the association with behaviourism (in at least one of its many

senses) will be hard to resist. But Ryle was not an analytical philosopher in this sense, and it is important to distance his perception of the correct method of philosophical inquiry from that of the early Moore and Russell, whose vision many of us working within the analytic tradition have inherited. That is the third point. For Ryle does not believe in meanings (concepts or propositions) as these have been traditionally construed: as stable objects or rules, the grasp of which is logically prior to, and thus may be used to explain, the use of expressions. Indeed, Ryle's conception of philosophy was not fundamentally different from that of Wittgenstein. Ryle set out in print as early as 1932 a philosophical agenda that prefigured the published work of the later Wittgenstein; the 'elasticity of significance' and 'inflections of meaning' Ryle finds in most expressions appear to be the family of structures, more or less related, noticed by Wittgenstein; and Ryle's attack on the 'intellectualist legend' shares Wittgenstein's concern to understand a proper—non-exalted—place for rules in an explanation of various philosophically interesting achievements and abilities. In spite of the fact that some of Wittgenstein's protégés were dismissive of Ryle's work, as, perhaps, was Wittgenstein himself<sup>1</sup>, the best way to understand Ryle is to see him, if not as following in Wittgenstein's footsteps, then as walking some stretches of philosophical terrain down a parallel path. Or so I shall argue.

*The Concept of Mind* was written in the late 1940s in order to demonstrate or put on show a programme in philosophy that Ryle had been defending (in the abstract) since the 1920s, and Ryle's writings on the mind continued into the early 1970s. What follows is best construed not as an exegesis of Ryle's work, but rather as my own critical interpretation of how Ryle's overall project is still relevant today and of how it may be defended.

## II THE OFFICIAL DOCTRINE AND ITS RELEVANCE TODAY

Ryle's explicit target in *The Concept of Mind* is what he calls the 'official doctrine', which results, he tells us, at least in part from Descartes'

<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, in his letters he seemed dismissive of Ryle's work (Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Cambridge Letters*, B. McGuinness and G.H. Von Wright, eds (Blackwell, Oxford, 1995), 284); on the other, he is quoted as having told Ryle's cousin that Ryle was one of only two philosophers who understood his work. Monk, R. *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius* (London, Vintage, 1991), 436.

appreciation that Galilean methods of scientific discovery were fit to provide mechanical explanations for every occupant of space, together with Descartes' conviction that the mental could not simply be a more complex variety of the mechanical. Whether or not every aspect of the resulting 'two-world' view is properly attributed to Descartes, it is, *grâce à* Ryle, a familiar view, which has widely become known as Cartesianism in Anglo-American philosophy. It has distinctive ontological, epistemological, and semantic commitments.

### The ontological commitment

The ontological strand of the view is that there are two different kinds of things, body and mind, that are somehow harnessed together. The one exists in space and is subject to mechanical or physical laws and the other one is not in space and is not subject to these laws. And yet the mind and body influence each other.

What the mind wills, the legs, arms and the tongue execute; what affects the ear and the eye has something to do with what the mind perceives; grimaces and smiles betray the mind's moods and bodily castigations lead, it is hoped, to moral improvement.<sup>2</sup>

The view that mind and body are somehow fundamentally different or distinct, but none the less interact, leads to the philosophical conundrum known as the *mind–body problem*.

For contemporary philosophers of mind, the *mind–body problem* no longer involves construing the mind as an independent substance. But working out the relation between mental and physical *properties* remains for certain philosophers an urgent project.

Through the 1970s and 1980s and down to this day, the *mind–body problem—our mind–body problem—*has been that of finding a place for the mind in a world that is fundamentally physical. The shared project of the majority of those who have worked on the *mind–body problem* over the past few decades has been to find a way of

<sup>2</sup> *The Concept of Mind* (subsequent pagination refers to this edition, unless otherwise stated), 2.

accommodating the mental within a principled physicalist scheme, while at the same time preserving it as something distinctive—that is, without losing what we value, or find special, in our nature as creatures with minds.<sup>3</sup>

Today the mind–body problem is often put in the form of an inconsistent triad. The mental and the physical are distinct; mental events or states are causally efficacious (they causally interact with physical and other mental events and states); and physics is a causally closed system (causal explanations of events are completely describable in the language of physics). The acceptance of any two of these statements seems to require the denial of the third. Yet, each statement on its own seems true. Various solutions to the mind–body problem have been offered; most of them attempt to reconstrue the first statement to allow a mental difference within a broadly monistic, physicalist ontology. Functionalism, coupled with a minimal commitment to physicalism, is the most widely held view today, but how it resolves the mind–body problem is still in need of clarification.<sup>4</sup>

One may wonder whether Ryle’s arguments against the official doctrine might also apply to those who have given up on full-blown substance dualism but who none the less remain mystified how to find a place for the mental in the physical world. After all, even within the terms of the official doctrine the differences between the physical and mental were not only represented as differences inside the common framework of the categories of *thing* and *stuff*, but also, Ryle says, of *attribute*, *state*, *process*, *change*, *cause*, and *effect*. Not only were minds thought to be things, but different sorts of things from bodies, so were mental processes thought to be causes and effects ‘but different sorts of causes and effects from bodily movements.’<sup>5</sup> Minds were represented as extra centres of causal processes, rather like machines but also considerably different from them. The official doctrine, says Ryle, involved a para-mechanical hypothesis. Today, mental processes are thought to be special orders of causal processes, perhaps like the symbol manipulations in computational devices but

<sup>3</sup> Jaegwon Kim, *Mind in a Physical World—An Essay on the Mind-Body Problem and Mental Causation* (A Bradford Book, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2000), 2.

<sup>4</sup> See Kim, *ibid.*, where he describes in clear terms what the problem is and defends a (functional-reductive) version of physicalism as a solution to the problem.

<sup>5</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 9.

perhaps also considerably different from them.<sup>6</sup> Mental properties, supposed to figure in causal relations, are thought to be in some way dependent on physical properties, but with enough difference to accord the mental a (causal) explanatory role of its own. Is this a modern version of a para-mechanical hypothesis?

That a para-mechanical assumption was at the heart of the official doctrine, Ryle says,

is shown by the fact that there was from the beginning felt to be a major theoretical difficulty in explaining how minds can influence and be influenced by bodies. How can a mental process, such as willing, cause spatial movements like the movements of the tongue? How can a physical change in the optic nerve have among its effects a mind's perception of a flash of light?<sup>7</sup>

With the acceptance of at least minimal requirements on a broadly physicalist scheme,<sup>8</sup> the particular problem of 'occult' causation seems no longer a threat: at least if 'occult' is thought to describe mysterious conscious acts that 'float free' from the physical world. But there is still felt to be a major theoretical difficulty in explaining how the mental can make a difference in a world whose causal explanations of events are supposed to be completely describable in the language of physics. The problem of mental causation may not be exactly the same as Descartes' problem, but it is none the less inherited by anyone who insists that mental properties must, on the one hand, make a causal difference and by those who, on the other, think that physics is a closed causal system. Just as mind-body interaction was a problem for substance dualism, so is mental causation still the problem facing the many varieties of (both reductive and non-reductive) physicalism.<sup>9</sup>

Thus two ontological aspects of the official doctrine—finding a place

<sup>6</sup> One important difference is that whereas computers are alleged to process symbols that have meaning assigned to them, mental symbols (or representations) are thought to have their meaning intrinsically.

<sup>7</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 9.

<sup>8</sup> A minimalist form of physicalism, Kim argues, would embrace some sort of dependence of mental properties upon physical ones.

<sup>9</sup> See Kim, *op. cit.*, 29, 30.

for the mental in the physical world and the problem of mental causation—still survive today.

### The epistemological and semantic commitments

If the ontological commitments of the official doctrine lead to the mind–body problem, its epistemological commitments lead to a different conundrum. According to the traditional view, bodily processes are external and can be witnessed by observers, but mental processes are private, ‘internal’ as the metaphor goes (since mental processes are not supposed to be locatable anywhere). Mental processes or events are supposed, on the official view, to be played out in a private theatre; such events are known directly by the person who has them either through the faculty of introspection or the ‘phosphorescence’ of consciousness. The subject is, on this view, incorrigible—her avowals of her own mental states cannot be corrected by others—and she is infallible—she cannot be wrong about which states she is in.<sup>10</sup> Others can know them only indirectly through ‘complex and frail inferences’ from what the body does.

It is worth putting Ryle temporarily aside and pausing to consider just what is sensible and what is not about this aspect of the official doctrine. There are, to be sure, certain mental phenomena for which something like this picture is correct. Consider one’s report that one is silently humming a tune to oneself or one’s description of last night’s dreams. It would be difficult to deny that there are episodes (hummings in the head, dreams) that these are reports or descriptions about; so, too, would it be difficult to deny a kind of privacy which (in normal circumstances) makes the subject ‘authoritative’ and ‘incorrigible’ about whether or not such episodes occurred and about their character. Although Ryle does not deny—indeed he frequently peppers his discussions with—such episodes as hummings or dreaming, he seems to many (including his later self) to go too far in *The Concept of Mind* to minimize or downplay their existence. I shall argue later that such episodes can—indeed, must—be acknowledged within a reasonable view of the mind, but in order to understand Ryle’s attitude, it is important to note that the official doctrine does not

<sup>10</sup> The admission that there may be some mental states (as Freud has shown) that are not within the sight of our ‘mental eye’ as such is a mere variation, rather than a major deviation, Ryle points out, from the basic framework of the official doctrine.

merely acknowledge the existence of mental episodes of this kind; it takes them to be paradigmatic of all ‘mental states’ or ‘mental events’ (where these expressions have become accepted as the general placeholders for the supposed referents of all (or most) mental predicates). That is, the official doctrine assimilates all mental phenomena to these imaginative, or as some would say today, conscious (and occasionally unconscious) ‘experiences’. Not only is what you say about your imaginings and the subject of your dreams protected by correction from others and thus entitled to a special authority, so, too, is what you say about your sensations and emotions, and even what you say about your beliefs, desires, fears, hopes, wants, proclivities, and character-traits.<sup>11</sup>

But if all mental phenomena are to be assimilated to episodes like dreaming or the imagining of sounds and colours ‘in one’s head’, this raises a problem of how we tell that others have the right mental accompaniments to be credited with having minds. It would be possible, on this view, for others to act as if they are minded, but for them to have none of the right conscious ‘experiences’ accompanying their actions for them to thus qualify. Perhaps we are in much the same position as Descartes, who thought it made sense to wonder whether these creatures are automata instead. The epistemological commitments of the official doctrine lead to the philosophical conundrum known as *the problem of other minds*.

The problem of other minds is compounded by even more serious difficulties given certain assumptions about the way language works. Proponents of the official doctrine are committed to the view that mental discourse—and Ryle is primarily interested in what he calls ‘mental conduct verbs’—picks out or refers to items that carry the metaphysical and epistemological load of that doctrine.

The verbs, nouns and adjectives, with which in ordinary life we describe the wits, characters and higher-grade performances of the people with whom we have to do, are required to be construed as signifying special episodes in their secret histories, or else as signifying tendencies for such episodes to occur.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> I pass over here Ryle’s criticism that the official doctrine mistakenly construes our avowals or reports of such episodes as issuing from a special sort of observation or perception of shadowy existents.

<sup>12</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 5.



The underlying semantics of the official doctrine takes the meaning of mental expressions to be determined in part by what the words in such expressions name or designate in a similar way as the meaning of the sentence 'Jones bought the most expensive house in the village' is given in part by the individual named by 'Jones' and by the particular piece of real estate picked out by the definite description 'the most expensive house in the village'. Add to this the epistemological commitment that if mental words name anything at all they must name something about which only the subject herself could be in a position to make judgements. Just as the subject herself is the only one who can judge truly that she had a dream last night about Schipperkes and Egyptian Maus, so too, according to the official doctrine, is the subject the only one who can judge truly that she is seeing black, because the real act/object of the judgement is something that is in essence or as a matter of necessity only available to her. But now if this private act/object (seeing black) functions to give the expression 'sees black' its meaning, then what one person means by it and what another means by it may diverge. It may even diverge if there is no noticeable difference in the way the two people talk about seeing black things. And so what one person means by 'sees . . . black' may be very different from what another person means by it without anybody ever noticing.

If the semantic aspect of the official doctrine were restricted to, say, sensation vocabulary, then private word-meanings would be a problem for only a small class of mental concepts. But because the official doctrine assimilates all mental phenomena to conscious episodes that are essentially private, the problem of private word-meanings develops into an infection that is virulent enough to affect all mental discourse.<sup>13</sup> Thus the semantic accoutrements of the official doctrine—the view that mental terms function to name phenomena that the epistemological aspects of the doctrine assure us are hidden—lead directly to the philosophical conundrum known as the *threat of (necessarily) private languages* for mental phenomena. 'I am in pain', 'I have an itch', 'I see a black dog', 'I intend to go to the store', and 'I believe the cat is hungry', etc. mean something

<sup>13</sup> Note that if the objects of perception and judgement are construed on the analogy with mental imagery (as, say, Lockean ideas or representations) then the doctrine's underlying supposition about the function of language would lead not only to the essential privacy of mental language but to the necessary privacy of all language and eventually to idealism and solipsism.

(in part) only knowable by me. Such expressions made by you mean something (in part) only knowable by you. So now, not only do I not know if it is a person (as opposed to an automaton) with whom I attempt to communicate; I cannot be said to understand much of what my interlocutor is saying or perhaps even that it intends to communicate with me in the first place.

The problem of other minds was at centre stage of discussions in philosophy of mind in the 1950s before the mind–body problem attracted the wider audience. The problem of other minds is this: if certain aspects of the official doctrine are correct and minds consist of episodes that are only privately knowable, then we need to rethink our claim to know (with certainty) that other minds exist. The thought at the time was that this was an intolerable conclusion, so philosophers set about to show how the claim to have knowledge of other minds is none the less justified. But though no longer at the centre, the problem of other minds lurks in the background of recent discussions of ‘phenomenal consciousness’, which inherit the epistemological and semantical aspects of the official doctrine. Consider, for example, whether it is possible that a person may enjoy colour experiences within a spectrum of colours that is systematically inverted with respect to another’s and thus ‘really see red’ even though she (correctly) uses the word ‘green’ to identify green things. Or consider the possibility of ‘zombies’ who are our behavioural duplicates but who enjoy no conscious experiences, and thus are not really conscious, have no sensations, feelings, or other mental states. Both (alleged) possibilities are thought to present a problem for relational theories of mind such as behaviourism and functionalism which ignore the phenomenal aspects of conscious experience.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, the literature surrounding these particular discussions is not about the problem of other minds, or of how we would know that we were encountering a zombie or someone with colour spectrum inversion since it is conceded from the beginning that there would be no way of knowing. (Interestingly—and alarmingly—this is no longer thought to be intolerable.) But the semantic/epistemological aspects of the official doctrine survive in thought experiments that require the existence of mental episodes that are only privately knowable

<sup>14</sup> It has also been suggested as a problem for non-relational theories such as physicalism on the grounds that it is not clear how to view the relation between physical and phenomenal properties either. See Thomas Nagel’s ‘What’s It Like to be a Bat?’, *Philosophical Review*, vol. 83, 1974, 435–50.

and further construe these episodes as essential parts of the meanings of mental expressions.<sup>15</sup>

Ryle's criticism of the official doctrine begins by pointing out an absurdity in its semantic consequences. If mental conduct verbs pick out 'occult' causes then we would not be able to apply those verbs as we do, so something must be wrong with a theory of mental phenomena that renders so inadequate our everyday use of these verbs. For, according to the official doctrine

when someone is described as knowing, believing or guessing something, as hoping, dreading, intending or shirking something, as designing this or being amused at that, these verbs are supposed to denote the occurrence of specific modifications in his (to us) occult stream of consciousness.<sup>16</sup>

Ryle's criticism of the view is that if it were correct, only privileged access to this stream of consciousness could provide authentic testimony that these mental-conduct verbs were correctly or incorrectly applied. 'The onlooker, be he teacher, critic, biographer or friend, can never assure himself that his comments have any vestige of truth.' And yet,

it was just because we do in fact all know how to make such comments, make them with general correctness and correct them when they turn out to be confused or mistaken, that philosophers found it necessary to construct their theories of the nature and place of minds. Finding mental-conduct concepts being regularly and effectively used, they properly sought to fix their logical geography. But the logical geography officially recommended would entail that there could be no regular or effective use of these mental-conduct concepts in our descriptions of, and prescriptions for, other people's minds.<sup>17</sup>

Consider, for example, the widely-held supposition that a mental mechanism of some kind accounts for the difference between free,

<sup>15</sup> For further discussion, see my 'On the Conceptual, Psychological, and Moral Status of Zombies, Swamp-Beings, and Other "Behaviourally Indistinguishable" Creatures', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. LXIX, No. 1, July 2004, 173–86.

<sup>16</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

rational action and automatic bits of mere behaviour. This view presupposes

that one person could in principle never recognise the difference between the rational and the irrational utterances issuing from other human bodies, since he could never get access to the postulated immaterial causes of some of their utterances.<sup>18</sup>

Although mysterious processes like ‘willing’ and unreduced phenomenal or ‘experiential’ properties are easily seen to be within Ryle’s target here, because it is difficult to see how such phenomena can be accommodated within a physicalist scheme, it is perhaps less clear that any view appealing to hidden causes—whatever their nature—falls prey to his criticism as well. This is because the same criticism would apply if one could not, as a matter of fact, glean access to the causes that are supposed (at bottom) to be material or physical.

To elaborate this point, consider, for example, the metaphysical stance implied by a bare functionalism: the doctrine that mental properties are to be understood as second-order, functional properties with first-order, physical realizations. Mental properties are construed, on this view, as mediating between sensory inputs, behavioural outputs, and other internal states and are constitutively or definitionally tied to this second-order, functional or causal role: one which is realized or played by some (as yet unspecified) first-order base property.<sup>19</sup> According to functionalism, that something plays a causal role (and what kind of causal role it plays) is an alleged fact about the meaning of mental predicates, while the nature of what plays this causal role is for science to discover.<sup>20</sup> Although the postulated causes of behaviour are no longer thought to be

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>19</sup> Physicalist versions of functionalism specify that only physical properties are to be regarded as the potential occupants of this causal role (and whether or not some physical property is the realizer of some causal role depends essentially on its causal/nomological relations to other properties; widely thought to be the microphysical properties of the organism). See Kim, *op. cit.* p. 23.

<sup>20</sup> An analogy is often drawn with the concept of a gene. A gene is, by definition, something that plays a causal role in transmitting heritable traits from parent to child. The DNA molecule plays this causal role in biological organisms like us. So the concept of gene is by definition whatever plays a certain role; but that the DNA molecule plays this role is a contingent, empirical fact.

‘ghostly’ they are none the less on this contemporary view just as occult (to us) as streams of another’s consciousness are on the official view. As causal mediators between sensory input and behavioural output, the ‘truth-makers’ that this theory says lie behind our descriptions of others as in pain, or as wanting to watch the news, or as believing that it is time for the show to start, remain in practice hidden. Thus, at best, such descriptions can only be good guesses or hypotheses in a mental explanation in which the observable behaviour is a contingent effect. At worst, such descriptions merely gesture at the real, underlying (presumably physical) explanation. But to view all our ascriptions of mental predicates as good guesses or hypotheses, or as merely gesturing at a more satisfying underlying, physical explanation would be to undermine their explanatory role in the common, non-theoretical practices in which they are made.

The upshot of Ryle’s argument is that theories about the nature of the alleged referents of the mental concepts we employ in our ordinary everyday commonsense practices cannot make a mystery of this employment without threatening to rob the theories of their subject matter.

The question, ‘How do persons differ from machines?’ arose just because everyone already knew how to apply mental-conduct concepts before the new causal hypothesis was introduced. This causal hypothesis could not therefore be the source of the criteria used in those applications.<sup>21</sup>

Philosophers interested in providing theories about the nature of mental phenomena will balk at the idea that their ‘causal hypotheses’ are to be construed as the source of criteria used in the application of mental concepts. They would prefer to be seen as making claims—empirical claims—about the nature of these concepts’ referents. The difficulty with this rejoinder is that the scientific/metaphysical realism that underpins it—that ordinary mental concepts purport to refer to items or properties whose nature is open to empirical investigation—is precisely what Ryle is challenging. It should be clear at least that whatever the theories proposed, they must have some relation to these criteria, or else how could it be claimed they are theories about *seeing*, or *believing*, or any other of

<sup>21</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 11.

the ordinary phenomena that we express using mental concepts?<sup>22</sup> How ought we to view the relation between the everyday use of mental concepts with their many-layered criteria of application and the theoretical hypotheses about the alleged referents of such concepts—when the theories conflict with the criteria?<sup>23</sup>

There are some philosophers who have argued that empirical hypotheses in psychology or in the cognitive sciences should be allowed to appropriate commonsense mental concepts for their own scientific purposes even if the result conflicts with the ordinary use of these concepts.<sup>24</sup> There are also philosophers who have argued that work in the cognitive sciences will provide philosophers with the ‘constitutive’ story about the nature of the mind or of mental properties and some of these have argued that theories providing worthwhile reductions can conform to everyday thinking in most cases without conforming in all; they may in some cases rectify commonsense, naïve judgments.<sup>25</sup> The relation, then, between the ordinary uses of mental conduct terms and their uses under any proposed revision is still a live one. And Ryle’s reminders of how these concepts are used, what we normally appeal to when we wish to defend or explain this use, and of what we need them for, are therefore as important now as they were sixty years ago. This investigation of their use—a cartographic exploration of the logical geography of expressions in which these mental concepts figure—may, in the end, tell against a proposed theory about the nature of their putative referents.

### III BEHAVIOURISM

In the last section of *The Concept of Mind* Ryle concedes that the general trend of his book is bound—harmlessly—to be stigmatised as behaviourist;

<sup>22</sup> By ‘criteria’ I just mean the kinds of considerations or reasons we give (and these will be diverse and depend on the circumstances) to explain, correct, challenge, and defend a particular application of the relevant concept.

<sup>23</sup> The problem is considerably worse for philosophers whose theories put heavier constraints on what is required for mentality; e.g., type-type identities between mental and physical properties, or a special history or evolution required of the alleged representations.

<sup>24</sup> Analogy: the identification of water and H<sub>2</sub>O is for scientific purposes and need not constrain the way ordinary folk use the term ‘water’.

<sup>25</sup> David Papineau, for example, has made this suggestion in ‘Doubtful Intuitions’, *Mind and Language*, vol. 11, no. 1 (March 1996), 132.

although he hints that such a characterisation would not, strictly speaking, be true. Sixty years on, he is widely recognised as the father of philosophical (sometimes *analytical*) behaviourism, so if this epithet is inappropriate, it is important to see why and what motivates the persistent misinterpretation. A.J. Ayer notes in a critical essay on the book that many passages in *The Concept of Mind* conspire to make one think that defending a version of behaviourism is exactly what Ryle is doing:<sup>26</sup>

It is being maintained throughout this book that when we characterise people by mental predicates, we are not making untestable inferences to any ghostly processes occurring in streams of consciousness which we are debarred from visiting: we are describing the ways in which these people conduct parts of their predominantly public behaviour [. . .].<sup>27</sup>

The radical objection to the theory that minds must know what they are about, because mental happenings are by definition conscious, or metaphorically self-luminous, is that there are no such happenings; there are no occurrences taking place in a second-status world, since there is no such status and no such world and consequently no need for special modes of acquainting ourselves with the denizens of such a world [. . .].<sup>28</sup>

It has been argued from a number of directions that when we speak of a person's mind, we are not speaking of a second theatre of special-status incidents, but of certain ways in which some of the incidents of his one life are ordered. His life is not a double series of events taking place in different kinds of stuff: it is one concatenation of events, the differences between some and other classes of which largely consist in the application or inapplicability to them of logically different types of law-propositions and lawlike propositions . . . So questions about the relations between a person and his mind, like those about the relations between a person's body and his mind are improper questions. They are improper in much the same way as is the question 'What transactions go on between the House of Commons and the British Constitution?' [. . .].<sup>29</sup>

<sup>26</sup> 'An Honest Ghost?' in Ryle, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, Oscar P. Wood and George Pitcher, eds. (Garden City, New York, Doubleday), 1970 and (London, MacMillan), 1971.

<sup>27</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 50.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 160–1

The imputation of a motive for a particular action is not a causal inference to an unwitnessed event but the subsumption of an episode proposition under a law-like proposition [. . .]<sup>30</sup>

. . . consciousness and introspection cannot be what they are officially described as being since their supposed objects are myths [. . .]<sup>31</sup>

. . . the concept of picturing, visualising, or 'seeing' is a proper and useful concept . . . its use does not entail the existence which we contemplate or the existence of a gallery in which such pictures are ephemerally suspended [. . .]<sup>32</sup>

Ayer goes on to say that for a behaviourist programme to succeed, it has to be shown that mental talk can be reformulated in such a way as to eliminate any reference to an inner life. And yet *The Concept of Mind* abounds with such references. Ryle concedes the existence of an inner mental life, when he says, for example, that 'Much of our ordinary thinking is conducted in internal monologue or silent soliloquy, usually accompanied by an internal cinematograph-show of visual imagery'<sup>33</sup> or that exercises of knowing-how 'can be overt or covert, deeds performed or deeds imagined, words spoken aloud or words heard in one's head, pictures painted on canvas or pictures in the mind's eye.'<sup>34</sup> So just what is Ryle up to?

In order to answer this question, it may be worthwhile comparing Ryle's project of mapping mental discourse with the doctrine of *logical behaviourism* which held a (very brief) attraction for the positivists of the Vienna Circle. Philosophers such as Carnap, Neurath, and Hempel were interested in rejecting the prevailing view of the time that there is an 'impassable divide' in principle between natural sciences on the one hand, and those of the mind, society, or culture on the other.<sup>35</sup> The view of the time was that culture, society, and mind were subjects imbued with meaning, requiring 'empathic insight', 'introspection', and other devices for 'understanding the sense of meaningful structures', while the natural

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 87

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 149

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 234

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 28; although he later warns (in chapter 8) against a certain construal of this.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 46

<sup>35</sup> See Hempel's 'The Logical Analysis of Psychology', reprinted in Ned Block, *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology*, vol. 1 (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1980).



sciences were subjects that could be studied by a combined use of description and causal explanation. The positivists' aim was to defend the view that 'all of the branches of science are in principle of one and the same nature': namely, branches of physics, which was hailed as the 'unitary science'.<sup>36</sup> The difference between natural and social sciences, according to their view, is not a matter of one domain being essentially semantically-free and the other being semantically-laden, but is based on differences of methodology and interest. According to the positivists, psychology belongs with the science of sociology (the science of historical, cultural, and economic processes) which can be shown, insofar as its statements are meaningful, to be 'physicalist'. In the early days of logical behaviourism, this meant that the meaningful statements of the special science could be translated, without loss of meaning, into statements that do not contain psychological concepts, but only the concepts of physics.

According to the logical behaviourists, knowing how we would check whether a statement is true or false is to know what the statement means. Or: the meaning of a statement is its method of verification.<sup>37</sup> Just as the sentence 'This watch runs well' is shorthand for a host of statements having to do with the mechanism of the watch, and this mechanism's relation to the hands on the face of the watch, their relation to numbers, and their relation to the movement of the planets, psychological statements, like 'Paul has a toothache', are similarly abbreviations for sets of physicalist statements purged of psychological terms, which may be used to verify (or falsify) the sentence. Any psychological statement that is meaningful is an abbreviation of the physicalist statements that would verify or falsify it, and is thus translatable into (a set of) such statements. Mental constructs, in their legitimate use, appear only as abbreviations in physicalist statements.

Ryle's view is standardly characterised as a weaker or 'softer' version of this doctrine. According to this standard interpretation, Ryle's view is that statements containing mental terms can be translated, without loss of meaning, into subjunctive conditionals about what the individual will do in various circumstances. So Ryle (on this account) is to be thought of

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>37</sup> For Ryle's criticisms of verificationism see 'Unverifiability by Me' (first published 1936) and 'The Verification Principle' (first published 1951). Reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), 126–136 and 300–306.

offering a dispositional analysis of mental statements into behavioural ones. It is usually conceded that Ryle does not confine his descriptions of what the agent will do (under the circumstances) to purely physical behaviour—in terms, say, of skeletal or muscular descriptions—but is happy to speak of full-bodied actions like scoring a goal, or paying a debt.<sup>38</sup> But the ‘soft’ behaviourism attributed to Ryle still attempts an analysis (or translation) of mental statements into a series of dispositional statements which are themselves construed as subjunctive conditionals describing what the agent will do (albeit under the relevant action description) under various circumstances. Even this ‘soft’ behaviourism is bound to fail, however, since mentalistic vocabulary is not analysable or translatable into behavioural statements even if these are allowed to include descriptions of actions. For the list of conditions and possible behaviour will be infinite since any one proffered translation can be defeated by slight alteration of the circumstances; and the defeating conditions in any particular case may involve a reference to facts about the agent’s mind, thereby rendering the analysis circular. In sum, the standard interpretation of Ryle construes him as offering a somewhat weakened form of reductive behaviourism whose reductivist ambitions, however weakened, are none the less futile.<sup>39</sup>

But although it is true that Ryle was keen to point out the dispositional nature of many mental concepts, it would be wrong to construe him as offering a programme for strict analysis of mental predicates into a series of subjunctive conditionals.<sup>40</sup> The relationship between mental predicates and the ‘hypothetical’ and ‘semi-hypothetical’ sentences with which we can ‘unpack’ them is other than that required by strict analysis.

Some evidence that Ryle was not following this version of the behaviourist programme (for which he is often criticized) can be found in

<sup>38</sup> It is also usually conceded that the project of analysing actions in terms of muscular behaviour is doomed because there will be any number of different physical behaviours that could be involved, say, in an action (like paying a debt) and because identical physical behaviours admit of various action-descriptions.

<sup>39</sup> A fuller discussion would mention Ryle’s so-called ‘anti-realism’ about dispositions (his denial that certain mental predicates pick out underlying states), and his attendant objection that such states are to be construed as the mental causes of behaviour, as well as the (related) objection against Ryle’s alleged behaviourism that it renders mental predicates explanatorily vacuous.

<sup>40</sup> It would also be wrong to construe Ryle as offering a strict analysis of disposition statements in *general* into a series of subjunctive conditionals.

his discussion of dispositions in *The Concept of Mind*. In describing simple dispositions, Ryle says, such as the brittleness of glass or the smoking habit of a man, it is easy to unpack the hypothetical proposition implicitly conveyed in the ascription of the dispositional properties, since these are ‘single-track’ dispositions, ‘the actualisations of which are nearly uniform’.<sup>41</sup> But the practice of considering such simple models may lead, he says, to erroneous assumptions. Many disposition-concepts are not as easy to unpack since they are determinable concepts: their actualisations can take ‘a wide and perhaps unlimited variety of shapes’.

When an object is described as hard, we do not mean only that it would resist deformation; we mean also that it would, for example, give out a sharp sound if struck, that it would cause us pain if we came into sharp contact with it, that resilient objects would bounce off it, and so on indefinitely. If we wished to unpack all that is conveyed in describing an animal as gregarious, we should similarly have to produce an infinite series of different hypothetical propositions.<sup>42</sup>

Ryle goes on to say that the ‘higher-grade’ dispositions of people with which he is concerned are in general not single-track, but dispositions the exercise of which are indefinitely heterogeneous.

When Jane Austen wished to show the specific kind of pride which characterised the heroine of ‘*Pride and Prejudice*’, she had to represent her actions, words, thoughts and feelings in a thousand different situations. There is no standard type of action or reaction such that Jane Austen could say ‘My heroine’s kind of pride was just the tendency to do this, whenever a situation of that sort arose.’<sup>43</sup>

Ryle embraces, in the passages cited above, each of the points that would defeat soft behaviourism. He agrees that a description of what may be involved in unpacking a dispositional predicate may be infinitely long (because of its unlimited variety of shapes; but also, he need not deny, because an ascription of a mental concept to another will be defeasible in

<sup>41</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

an open-ended set of circumstances); and he argues that an elucidation of pride, for example, will include not only actions and words, but thoughts and feelings as well. This alone should dampen any inclination to interpret Ryle's discussion of 'multi-track' dispositions as committing him to a thesis about the translatability of mental statements or even to the weaker idea that there are logical entailments between statements containing mental predicates and those containing behavioural (including action) predicates.

Ryle insists in *The Concept of Mind* that there is a kind of logical mistake involved in conjoining or disjoining 'the mind exists' and 'the body exists' in the same sentence, for the expressions use different senses of 'exist'. The thought that the mind must simply be the body; that mental processes simply are physical processes; that mental properties just are patterns of behaviour; and that mental talk just is abbreviated physical talk are guilty of making this mistake.

. . . the 'reduction' of mental states and processes to physical states and processes presuppose the legitimacy of the disjunction 'Either there exist minds or there exist bodies (but not both)'. It would be like saying, 'Either she bought a left-hand glove and right-hand glove or a pair of gloves (but not both)'.<sup>44</sup>

Nor, as Ayer correctly points out, is there any sign that Ryle wants to deny the 'reality' of mental processes, or that he holds a fictionalist or instrumentalist view about them as has often been alleged of various forms of behaviourism. On the contrary, early in the first chapter of the book Ryle warns the reader against interpreting him in this way: doing long division and making a joke are both examples, he says, of mental processes. Further, calling Ryle a behaviourist also fails to do justice, not only to his rejection of 'isms' in philosophy<sup>45</sup> but also to his conception of philosophy as the dissolution of dilemmas.<sup>46</sup>

So what are we to make of Ryle's discussion of dispositions, if not as setting the stage for a softened version of logical behaviourism? Ayer suggests an answer in his essay:

<sup>44</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 12.

<sup>45</sup> 'Taking Sides in Philosophy' (first published 1937); reprinted in his *Collected Papers Volume 2*, *op. cit.*, 160–177.

<sup>46</sup> *Dilemmas*, The Turner Lectures (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1954).

In a great many instances in which a person is said to satisfy a 'mental' predicate, what is being said of him is not only, and perhaps not at all, that he is undergoing some inner process, but rather that he is exhibiting or disposed to exhibit a certain pattern of behaviour. This can apply to the ascription of intelligence, of motives and purposes, of voluntary actions, of emotions and moods, and of thoughts when they are overtly expressed.

This thesis is weaker than the other [that our talk about the mind is translatable into talk about behaviour], in that it does not do away with inner processes altogether. What it does is to minimize their role. When someone acts intelligently, his movements may be preceded or accompanied by some inner planning, but they need not be; the silent thought is not necessary for the performance to be intelligent. Similarly, when I utter a meaningful sentence, it is possible, but not necessary, that I have already run through the sentence 'in my head'; even if no such inner process has taken place, the utterance will still be the expression of my thought. In the case of the will, Ryle takes the stronger line of denying that there are any inner acts to which 'willing' could be taken to refer; but his main point, here again, is that even if such acts of volition were to occur, their occurrence could not be necessary to make an action voluntary; for one thing, the assumption that they were necessary would lead to an infinite regress, since it would make sense to ask whether these acts were voluntary themselves.<sup>47</sup>

Following up this suggestion, we should, in my view, construe Ryle as arguing against the official doctrine (with its attendant ontological, epistemological, and semantic commitments) by reminding us how we settle disputes, for example, about someone's character or intellect. In a large number of cases when we apply mental conduct verbs we have a way of settling disputes about such applications. If you dispute my characterisation of someone as believing or wanting something, I will point to what he says and does in defending my particular attribution (as well as to features of the circumstances). But our practice of giving reasons of this kind to defend or to challenge ascriptions of mental predicates would be put under substantial pressure if the official doctrine were correct.

For Ryle to remind us that we do, as a matter of fact, have a way of

<sup>47</sup> *Op. cit.*, 67, 68.

settling disputes about whether someone is vain or whether she is in pain is much weaker than saying that a concept is meaningless unless it is verifiable; or even that the application of mental predicates requires that we have a way of settling disputes in all cases. Showing that a concept is one for which, in a large number of cases, we have agreement-reaching procedures (even if these do not always guarantee success) captures an important point, however: it counts against any theory, say, of vanity or pain that would render it unknowable in principle or in practice whether or not the concept is correctly applied in every case. And this was precisely the problem with the official doctrine and is still a problem, as I suggested in the last section, with some of its contemporary progeny.

In his later essays on the concept of thinking, Ryle's particular interest is in the form of dilemma that pits the reductionist against the duplicationist.<sup>48</sup> This is the contrast between those whose battle cry is 'Nothing but . . .' and those who insist on 'Something else as Well . . .'. The way out, for Ryle (as for Wittgenstein) is to solve the dilemma by rejecting the two horns; not by taking sides with either one, though part of what the dissolution requires in this case, as in others, is a description of how both sides are to be commended for seeing what the other side does not, and criticised for failing to see what the other side does.

The attraction of behaviourism is simply that it does not insist that occult happenings are the referents, and thus account for the meaningfulness, of mental expressions and points to the perfectly observable criteria that are by and large employed when we are called upon to defend or correct our employment of these mental terms. The problem with behaviourism is that it has a too-narrow view both of what counts as behaviour and of what counts as observable. The attraction of Cartesianism is that it recognizes in a way the behaviourist does not that there may be crucial differences between creatures who—on a certain restrictive notion of behaviour—do indeed behave identically. The problem with

<sup>48</sup> Or, as he also puts it, the Occamist against the Platonist or Cartesian, or the deflators against the inflators. Ryle himself thought that in *The Concept of Mind* he left unexplored the notion of thinking as exemplified by Rodin's *Le Penseur* and in his later work he undertook to illuminate what *Le Penseur* might be doing without, as he says, committing 'the Category-howler of Behaviourism' or 'the Category-howler of Cartesianism'. See 'Adverbial Verbs and Verbs of Thinking' in Ryle's *On Thinking* edited by K. Kolenda (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1979), 17–32.

Cartesianism is that it attempts to account for these differences by hypothesizing the existence of occult or hidden causes.

Ryle refined his views over time, but it is misleading to construe him as starting, like the reductionist does, from a physicalist world view in which mentalistic or semantic notions are to be purged. Rather his important achievement in *The Concept of Mind* is to take the sting out of—or demystify—the Cartesian (inflationist or duplicationist) view by showing how the application of a wide range of mental predicates answers to the sorts of situations or circumstances that we have no trouble in ordinary life seeing. But unlike the reductionist, Ryle does not, in his turn, deflate what counts as seeing. The referee, for example, sees that the player has scored a goal in a perfectly good sense of ‘see’; but someone with sharper eyesight who does not understand the rules of the game will see no such thing. If one insists that ‘seeing’ can only apply to what both these individuals have in common, or that the referee cannot literally be allowed to see what the sharper-eyed man cannot, then one deflates ‘seeing’ in such a way that Cartesianism will reclaim its grip.

Our reductionist had begun by assailing Cartesian and Platonic extravagances on the basis of what can be, in an ordinary way, observed. But now he reduces, in its turn, observation itself to Nothing But some oddly stingy minimum. He deflates his own deflator . . . However, this stinginess of the empiricist must not soften us towards the lavishness of the transcendentalist. For though he properly acknowledges the difference between kicking and scoring, or between just presenting arms and obeying the order to present arms, yet he goes on to make these differences occult ones. For since they are not to be the earthly or muscular differences demanded in vain by the empiricist, they will have instead to be unearthly, nonmuscular differences that transcend the referee’s and the sergeant’s powers of perception.<sup>49</sup>

In an attempt to defeat the Cartesian or Platonist and remind us that mental predicates have perfectly ordinary standards of application, Ryle focuses on what is observable. It is part of his war against what is not only occult (and observable only through introspection) but also against what is hidden from the viewpoint of a third-party observer. But, in focussing

<sup>49</sup> ‘Thinking and Saying’, in *On Thinking*, *op. cit.*, 84.

on what is observable, he is not committed to reducing what is observable to sequences of 'muscular behaviour'. Those who attribute to Ryle a 'soft' behaviourism are at least correct that the reminders he issues to ward us against the Cartesian include frank appeal to what he later will describe as actions much higher up on the 'sophistication ladder' like paying a bill, or scoring a goal, as well as to what he will later call 'concrete' or 'per se' doings like scribbling numbers on a cheque book or kicking a ball between two posts.

Surely, as his earlier critics pointed out (and as those who see him as a behaviourist ignore) some of the phenomena he allows will reintroduce a realm of private occurrences (dreams and imaginings will be the paradigm case). But as Ayer suspects, this sort of 'ghost' is an honest ghost. Not simply (as Ayer suggests) because the phenomena do not command the stage of a private theatre: in the sense that no one else can tell us about them they are in that respect private.<sup>50</sup> For as Ryle himself says:

The technical trick of conducting our thinking in auditory word-images, instead of in spoken words, does indeed secure secrecy for our thinking, since the auditory imaginings of one person are not seen or heard by another (or . . . by their owner either).<sup>51</sup>

It is an 'honest ghost', I would suggest, since privacy for certain episodes will not lead to privacy for them all; and thus the epistemological concomitants of the official doctrine that would lead to the problem of other minds are not a threat. Nor does this sort of privacy usher in the semantic consequences of the official doctrine. The privacy attending our dreams and imaginings does not impugn our right to draw on observable (in the robust sense of the term) phenomena to defend our right to employ mental predicates for a large number of cases:

. . . this secrecy is not the secrecy ascribed to the postulated episodes of the ghostly shadow-world. It is merely the convenient privacy which

<sup>50</sup> Although Ryle does want to deny that in having dreams or in imagining tunes there is something shadowy that we see or hear (any more than, when a mock-murder is staged, is there something shadowy that is really murdered.)

<sup>51</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 23.



characterizes the tunes that run in my head and the things that I see in my mind's eye.<sup>52</sup>

There will indeed be cases in which only the agent can say whether she is pondering, imagining, dreaming, letting her mind wander, calculating, solving, planning, or rehearsing. But the sort of privacy in which only she can say whether she was doing any of these or other particular things is not the sort of privacy that gives rise to philosophical conundrums like the problem of other minds and the problem of necessarily private languages. On the contrary, the ability to describe one's private dreams, as well as one's sensations presupposes a language whose terms have established and public criteria for their correct use.

#### IV CATEGORY MISTAKES, RULES, AND MEANING

##### Category mistakes

Early in his career, Ryle set out in print an agenda that, with various revisions, was to occupy him for the rest of his philosophical career. (It was one that also occupied Wittgenstein.)<sup>53</sup> Certain sentences, which look on their face to be grammatically similar to other sentences, have a tendency to mislead. They are not, he insisted, likely to mislead the ordinary man who uses them with perfect propriety and without any danger of being deceived. They are rather potentially harmful to one who, in a philosophical spirit, starts to abstract and generalize about the logical form of sentences of that type.

Toying with some of the theoretical apparatus of the *Tractatus*, Ryle puts this point early on by speaking of sentences couched in grammatical or syntactical forms which are improper to the states of affairs that they profess to record.<sup>54</sup> In later work the idea of a grammatically proper record

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> 'Systematically Misleading Expressions' (reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, 41–65) was originally published in 1932. J.O. Urmson (1967) notes in his *Routledge Encyclopaedia* entry for Ryle that this early article is important as being 'easily the first, although incompletely worked out, version of a view of philosophy closely akin to that which Wittgenstein was then beginning to work out independently, and which is often spoken of as having been first suggested by Wittgenstein.' 'Ryle, Gilbert' in *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Paul Edwards, ed., 1967.

<sup>54</sup> 'Systematically Misleading Expressions', *op. cit.*, 43–44.

of a fact drops out of the picture and we are left with the more digestible idea that certain statements which share a superficial grammatical similarity with others are apt to mislead if one assimilates the logical form of the first expression to the logical form of the second. This is because, although the ‘grammatical *prima facies*’ may be the same, upon examination a very different reading of the logical form of the expressions is required.<sup>55</sup>

Propositions are related to one another in various discoverable logical relationships, and although a person may know ‘by wont’ a proposition’s logical course down a limited set of familiar tracks it is also true that he or she may be taken by surprise by some of its more distant logical connections. People in general never achieve a complete appreciation of all the logical powers of the propositions that they use.<sup>56</sup>

Several different propositions may have some (non-propositional) constituent in common. It is convenient, Ryle tells us, though hazardous, to abstract this common feature and call it a ‘concept’ or an ‘idea’. It is hazardous, as we shall see in more detail later, because concepts or ideas may be construed, as they were in the early days of logical speculation, as proper parts or substantial bits, the assemblage of at least two of which (it was supposed) constitutes a proposition. And this construal in turn misled people into thinking that the rules of logic govern the relations between propositions but have little or no bearing on their constituent concepts. For Ryle, this is a mistake. Concepts are abstractions from the families of propositions of which they are common factors, and when we talk of concepts or ideas we are talking in a summary fashion of the family of propositions that resemble each other in respect of this common factor: ‘Statements about ideas are general statements about families of

<sup>55</sup> In ‘Philosophical Arguments’ (Ryle’s Inaugural Lecture as Waynflete Professor of Metaphysical Philosophy, Oxford, 1945 and reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, 203–221) Ryle spells out the idea of logical form as follows:

Every proposition has what will here be called certain ‘logical powers’; that is to say, it is related to other propositions in various discoverable logical relationships. It follows from some as a consequence and it implies others. It is evidence strengthening or weakening the probability of ulterior hypotheses. Further, for any logical powers possessed by a given proposition it is always possible to find or invent an indefinite range of other propositions which can be classed with it as having analogous logical powers or, as it is commonly put, as being of the same logical form (207).

<sup>56</sup> ‘Philosophical Arguments’, *op. cit.*, 208.

propositions'.<sup>57</sup> And just as our understanding of the propositions we use capably down a limited set of familiar tracks is none the less only a partial or imperfect understanding (because we will never be able to grasp all the logical powers of the propositions), so too is our grasp of ideas or concepts: 'The risk always exists that confusion or paradox will arise in the course of any hitherto untried operations with those ideas.'<sup>58</sup>

Since concepts and propositions do not wear their logical form on their grammatical sleeves, the possibility exists that the philosopher, in attempting to abstract and generalize about the logical form of sentences of a certain type, will be misled by the surface grammar. It is the job of the philosopher of Ryle's ilk to show this to the philosopher making the mistake by generating implausibilities, contradictions and regresses from the misleading expression, construed as being of one logical type instead of another, and thus showing it—as so construed—to be absurd or nonsensical.

What are some examples? Impressed by the fact that 'Unpunctuality is reprehensible' looks grammatically like 'Jones merits reproof', a philosopher might mistakenly believe that, because the second sentence has in its subject-place a (proper) name of an individual or object, the first has in its subject-place the name of a different kind of object. An abstract noun such as 'unpunctuality' might then be mistakenly construed as referring to an abstract object. But Unpunctuality, considered as a universal, is not blameworthy nor is the universal Virtue commendable, since universals are not the sorts of things that can be commended or blamed. The expression 'Unpunctuality is reprehensible' generalises and abstracts over expressions such as 'Jones is unpunctual', 'Smith is unpunctual', 'the meeting was unpunctual', etc., and expressions such as 'Insofar as they are unpunctual, Jones and Smith, and whoever was responsible for the meeting are blameworthy.' It is not literally true that a universal (any more than a meeting) can be blamed for anything.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> 'Philosophical Arguments', *op cit.*, 209.

<sup>58</sup> 'Philosophical Arguments', *op cit.*, 210.

<sup>59</sup> Who would make such a mistake? Plato's young Socrates made it, Ryle tells us, when he propounded the early (Substantial) theory of Forms. Writing about 'Parmenides' in 1939, Ryle argues that the later Plato should be credited with discovering (at the very least) that the Forms (formal concepts) were of a different logical type from particulars (proper concepts). Thus, Plato's arguments in 'Parmenides'

Similar mistakes are made, Ryle tells us, by a philosopher who takes the quasi-descriptive phrase ‘the thought of going to hospital’ in a sentence like ‘Jones hates the thought of going to hospital’ to suggest that there is one object in the world which is what is referred to by the phrase ‘the thought of going to hospital.’<sup>60</sup> Making this mistake, philosophers come to accept ‘Lockean demonology’ with its construal of ‘ideas’, ‘conceptions’, ‘thoughts’ and ‘judgements’ as readily (and for the same reasons) as their predecessors believed in substantial forms or as children believe in the North Pole.<sup>61</sup> In the last section, we shall see that similar mistakes are made, according to Ryle, by nominalisations of the verb ‘to mean’ which have tended to mislead not only philosophers of language, but other philosophers as well as to the proper construal of the task and the methods of philosophy.

Ryle’s writings on the question of what constitutes a philosophical problem, and of the way to solve it, occupied him in the 1920s and 1930s. *The Concept of Mind* was written after this ‘long spell of methodological talk’: what was needed was ‘an example of the method really working’.<sup>62</sup> Although entitled *The Concept of Mind*, the book, Ryle tells us in a later essay, is

an examination of multifarious specific mental concepts, such as those of *knowing, learning, discovering, imagining, pretending, hoping, wanting,*

should be classified by us as belonging to the same sphere to which belong, for example, Aristotle’s theory of Categories, Kant’s separation of formal from non-formal concepts, Russell’s theory of types, and Wittgenstein’s and Carnap’s theories of logical syntax. (‘Plato’s “Parmenides”’, 36, reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume I* (Routledge, Abingdon, 2009), 1–46.)

<sup>60</sup> ‘Systemically Misleading Expressions’, *op. cit.*, 58.

<sup>61</sup> Or, consider the statements

‘Numbers are eternal’ and ‘Time began a million years ago’. Both are linguistically regular statements but the latter expresses no proposition. The former is nonsensical if construed [in one way but not if construed in another way]. If it is construed as a terse way of saying that numbers are not temporal things or events or, better, that numerical expressions cannot enter into significant expressions as subjects to verbs with tenses, then what it says is true and important. But if it is construed as saying . . . that numbers, like tortoises, live a very long time—and in fact, however old they get, they cannot die—then it could be shown to be absurd. ‘Philosophical Arguments’, *op. cit.*, 213.

<sup>62</sup> ‘Autobiographical’, in Ryle, *A Collection of Critical Essays*, Oscar P. Wood and George Pitcher, eds, *op. cit.*, 12.

*feeling depressed, feeling a pain, resolving, doing voluntarily, doing deliberately, perceiving, remembering and so on.*<sup>63</sup>

The book focuses on the ‘type-errors’ or ‘category-mistakes’ which philosophers of mind are prone to make when they consider the logical form of ‘mental conduct verbs’ especially if they use as their starting-point the ‘Janus-faced account of human life’ suggested by the official doctrine. In the book, Ryle investigates the workings not just of one concept by itself, but ‘of all the threads of a spider’s web of inter-working concepts.’<sup>64</sup>

In *The Concept of Mind* Ryle focuses on a particular mistake which is typically made by philosophers of mind or epistemologists wishing to distinguish certain moves or performances that deserve credit (i.e., achievements) from others that are perceptually similar (in one sense of ‘perceptual’) that do not. The mistake involves appending on to the achievement or credit-deserving performance some extra, non-perceptual feature.<sup>65</sup> Later, we shall look at the official doctrine’s version of this mistake, which takes the additional feature to be a special mental accompaniment and to involve theoretical operations upon it. But consider first my own elaboration of the general mistake—in a context in which the mistake is obvious.

Consider a ball kicked into a net. The trajectory of the ball, the style of the kick, the angle it makes may be the same on any two occasions when the ball is kicked, but the causal effects of the two occasions may be completely different. On one occasion, nothing remarkable happens; on another, there are various consequences: approximately half the people in the stadium scream, clap, and jump to their feet; . . . there is a big parade in a city and a number of smaller celebrations in various towns; . . . wealth is redistributed in a very complex way (but the person who kicked the ball is richer than he was before), and so on.

<sup>63</sup> ‘Phenomenology versus “The Concept of Mind”’, 188 (first published 1962 and reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 1, op. cit.*, 186–204).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>65</sup> This mistake presumably arises from assimilating expressions which employ a mental concept as an active verb like ‘to think’, ‘to reason’, or ‘to deliberate’ (which verbs, in certain contexts, seem to signify an occurrence) with expressions that use the adjectival or adverbial forms to qualify actions (‘thoughtful’, ‘deliberate’, ‘reasonable’). In the latter case, where there is no outright, recognisable occurrence for them to signify, it is mistakenly supposed that they signify a hidden one.

Now suppose there to be an ‘anthropologist from Mars’ who wants to study the differences in the causal effects of the two occasions. He asks himself, ‘What is it about the kick, the ball, or the net that is responsible for these variable causal effects?’ Nothing, apparently, that can be seen with the naked eye. So the Martian confiscates the ball, the net, and even the kicker to take them back to his laboratory in order to examine them more closely.

Everyone would agree that no matter how sophisticated his equipment back on Mars, the Martian will not find a solution to his problem by examining these items in his laboratory. Nor would he be correct in inferring—when he cannot find any relevant functional or physical properties—that the difference was a matter of a mysterious, ghostly, non-physical property that accompanied the kick, the ball, or the net on the one occasion but not on the other.

The Martian is making a mistake: he is looking in the wrong place for what made the difference. There was, indeed, a difference in the ball’s going into the net on the two occasions and this difference accounts for the different effects. The difference was that in the one case a goal was scored (and the game won) and in the other case, there was no goal. And whether a goal is scored, and whether any particular goal-scoring is also a winning of the game is not (in the normal case) decided by looking more closely at the ball, the net, or the kicker. But just because the difference does not turn on either the functional or the microphysical properties of the ball etc., this does not mean that the difference is a mysterious or ghostly fact, or even a ‘bare’ one that cannot be further explained. What it is to score the winning goal in football is taught by initiating someone into the practice of competitive sports in general, and of football, in particular.

So far, everyone should agree: our imaginary Martian is making an obvious mistake, looking in the wrong place for an explanation of the difference between the ball’s going into the net on the two occasions. But according to Ryle, philosophers are making a similar sort of mistake (although rather less obviously so) when they look into what they take to be *cognitive mechanisms* in order to account for agency, intelligence, rationality, understanding, seeing, believing, and so on. Consider: if you were to look to a coin’s physical properties in order fully to account for its purchasing power you would be making a mistake similar to the one the Martian made with the football. A credit card is a more interesting object for its magnetic strip and chip encode information that plays an even more complex role in the sort of economic transactions in which it trades. Make

the credit card as complex as you like but you still will not find an answer to how it gets its purchasing power without adverting to the banking institutions and economic environment in which it plays its role. The human brain is, by all accounts, the most complex and wonderful object in the world. But like the alien anthropologist, the cognitive psychologist who imagines that an explanation of agents' rational and cognitive powers supervenes on first-order properties inside the agents' skulls is also looking in the wrong place—no matter how exponentially vast the complexity of the human brains.<sup>66</sup>

The 'natural' phenomena that philosophers are interested in studying are, according to Ryle, better construed as many-layered, complex practices in which the concepts of agency, rationality, understanding, meaning, and the like are wielded.<sup>67</sup> A striking feature of the normative practices that interest philosophers is that the 'game-pieces' or 'counters' in such language-games are—in the usual case—self-reflecting agents. In much the same way as the game of chess could become significantly more complex by converting the chess pieces into agents who are responsible for their own moves, so, too, are the practices in which the concepts of understanding, meaning, and the like are invoked, made more complex, by the fact that the 'game-pieces' or 'counters' that we, as onlookers, are theorizing about are also required at times to be theorists themselves.<sup>68</sup>

Although Ryle does not put it in this way, it seems that we are partly led to make the logical or category mistake of construing mental conduct concepts as signifying occurrences of hidden processes because (very roughly) we conflate how we (as theorists) explain an individual's successful moves with what we require of the individual in making those moves. What I mean by this will become clearer in what follows.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Dennett disagrees and suggests (wrongly I think) that the complexity of the human brain just *does* make a difference and that Ryle's silence on the question how brains make it possible for people to do what they do leaves important philosophical problems unaddressed. See his Preface to the Penguin Classics edition of Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Penguin, 2000), *op. cit.*, xiii.

<sup>67</sup> These practices are as natural as the game of football, as long as the domain of the natural is allowed, while excluding the ghostly, to include the conventional. Scoring a goal in football (unlike in the Quidditch matches imagined by J.K. Rowling) does not violate the laws of physics, broadly construed. But it would be a mistake to require of a reasonable naturalism that the laws of physics (broadly construed) have any more to say about the scoring of a goal than they have to say about the ball's going into a net.

<sup>68</sup> A fuller treatment of Ryle's work would address his discussions of self-knowledge.

## Rules

We saw earlier that Ryle is often given credit for having shown some of the many difficulties in substance or Cartesian dualism. He is widely recognized, that is, for exorcising the ghost in the machine. But, I argued, the arguments in *The Concept of Mind* suggest difficulties for any account that takes all (or most) mental predicates to signify inner processes: whether the properties involved are occult, second-order functional, or first-order physical ones. Ryle's target was not merely the mysteriousness or ghostliness of the mental processes hypothesized by the Cartesian; it was their essential hidden-ness. Our practice of employing mental concepts would be a complete mystery on a view that takes the 'truth-makers' of our mental statements to be not only items within an occult (to us) stream of consciousness, but also on a view that takes them to be items within an occult (to us) series of computations or neurological events. But this is only part of Ryle's destructive strategy. The other part is to show how logical absurdities arise with one particular offshoot of the official doctrine: one he dubs 'the intellectualist legend'. This involves the type-error illustrated above of supposing that what distinguishes certain performances from others that are perceptually similar (in one sense of 'perceptual') is the addition of some non-perceptual feature. The official doctrine construes this feature as a special mental accompaniment.<sup>69</sup> The intellectualist legend, accepting this construal of the official doctrine, says that intelligent or rational behaviour can be accommodated or explained by some sort of theoretical operations involving these hidden accompaniments. And if this is a mistake, it is a big one; for it is made not only throughout various sub-branches of philosophy but also in collaborating disciplines.<sup>70</sup>

<sup>69</sup> In contemporary versions, this feature becomes a special mental property which is none the less tied (identical to or realized by) physical properties (which are, in turn, widely supposed to depend upon the microphysical properties of the individuals). See Kim, *op. cit.*

<sup>70</sup> As Fodor says about the tendency to attempt to explain behaviour by reference to underlying psychological mechanisms:

If this *is* a mistake, I'm in trouble. For it will be the pervasive assumption of my discussion that such explanations, however often they may prove to be empirically unsound are, in principle, methodologically impeccable. *The Language of Thought* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1975), 5.

For a defense of Ryle against Fodor's criticism, see my 'Ryle's Regress and the Philosophy of Cognitive Science', forthcoming in *La Philosophie d'Oxford au 20ème Siècle : Approches du Sens Commun*, edited by B. Ambroise & S. Laugier (Hildesheim : Olms).



Consider: what distinguishes one bodily movement from another imperceptibly different movement (in one sense of ‘imperceptible’) is the fact that one is intentional and the other not; one the result of agency, the other not; or one the result of reasons, the other not. On the intellectualist construal, this difference amounts to the occurrence of a non-perceptual, mental feature (an ‘intention’, ‘volition’, or ‘reason’) that plays a causal role issuing in behaviour. Similarly, what distinguishes the meaningfulness of a person’s utterance from a phonetically similar sound made by a parrot is the addition, in the first case, of a mental act of ‘meaning’. What distinguishes acts of hearing from acts of listening is the mental accompaniment of ‘understanding’. What distinguishes an inference from a mere string of statements is that the first was, but the second was not, made ‘under the influence’ of the rules of logic. What distinguishes a witty or tactful performance from one that was clumsy or gauche is some mental act which renders it witty, tactful, or the lack of such, which renders it clumsy or gauche. And so on.

This construal of what is required for intelligence, rationality, agency, meaning, or understanding, and the like, is partly funded, Ryle tells us, by the idea that mathematics and natural science set the standard as human accomplishments. Impressed by the analogy, one might suppose that it is the capacity for theorizing that constitutes the intellectual excellence of man, together with

the idea that the capacity to attain knowledge of truths was the defining property of a mind. Other human powers could be classed as mental only if they could be shown to be somehow piloted by the intellectual grasp of true propositions. To be rational was to be able to recognize truths and the connexions between them. To act rationally was, therefore, to have one’s non-theoretical propensities controlled by one’s apprehension of truths about the conduct of life.<sup>71</sup>

Ryle’s argument-strategy against the supposition that (broadly rational) abilities can be explained in terms of prior theoretical operations (involving the apprehension of the relevant truths) is to exhibit how the supposition leads to a logically vicious regress. Intelligent behaviours cannot be explained, in general, by assuming that theoretical operations

<sup>71</sup> *The Concept of Mind* 15.

have gone on behind the scene, since those operations themselves can be intelligent or non-intelligent. The supposition that intelligent behaviour always requires prior theoretical operations launches a vicious regress of theoretical operations. Thus, it must be allowed that some intelligent behaviour is not the outcome of prior theoretical operations.

But how, then, are we to distinguish successful from non-successful performances if not by saying that in the first case, the relevant moves were influenced by apprehension or ‘cognitive awareness’ of a rule whereas in the latter case they were not? As Ryle asks:

What is involved in our descriptions of people as knowing how to make and appreciate jokes, to talk grammatically, to play chess, to fish, or to argue? Part of what is meant is that, when they perform these operations, they tend to perform them well, i.e., correctly or efficiently or successfully. Their performances come up to certain standards, or satisfy certain criteria. But this is not enough. The well-regulated clock keeps good time and the well-drilled circus seal performs its tricks flawlessly, yet we do not call them ‘intelligent’. We reserve this title for the persons responsible for their performances. To be intelligent is not merely to satisfy criteria, but to apply them; to regulate one’s actions and not merely to be well-regulated. A person’s performance is described as careful or skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon successes, to profit from the examples of others and so forth. He applies criteria in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right.<sup>72</sup>

Colloquially, the point is put by saying that an action is intelligent because the agent is thinking about what she is doing. But the intellectualist interprets this ‘because’ to mean that whenever the agent acts intelligently a mental process of the relevant kind generates her action. Today, the intellectualist still flourishes: though conceding that there may be no overt act of deliberation or theorizing, she is none the less tempted to suppose that a corresponding (presumably, at bottom, physical) process occurs covertly or tacitly.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>72</sup> *The Concept of Mind*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Compare: an agent acts for, or because of, certain reasons rather than others when those reasons *cause* her action, where reasons are now construed as mental states and

Consider, for example, how such a temptation presents itself to those wishing to give an account of the ability to understand and to speak a language. Let it be conceded that language use itself is unreflective and that the competence involved in speaking a language is a practical skill that does not require of speakers or understanders that they work out explicitly in advance how to say or interpret what is said. None the less, as one philosopher of language explains it,

there is a recurrent temptation to think of there being *something* about my inner, mental life, some further, non-behavioural component of my understanding, which explains these successful performances . . . The meaning of an expression, we want to say, is what grounds a competent speaker's understanding . . . [and] one, intuitively persuasive, remarkably persistent, and highly abstract thought about the notion of meaning is [that] the meaning of an expression is given by a *rule* which determines that expression's correct usage. . . . A sufficient condition of understanding an expression is explicit propositional knowledge of that rule. . . . [F]or any meaningful expression there is a rule governing its usage knowledge of which would suffice for understanding, for mastery, of that expression.<sup>74</sup>

Because it will help reveal how Ryle construes the notion of meaning (concepts and propositions) and because this will in turn help us to understand how Ryle conceives his task as a philosopher, it may be worth looking in some more detail at the case of understanding and speaking a language to see why one might be tempted toward the view that there are two achievements: one that is logically independent of, and explanatorily prior to, the other.

Here is one line of reasoning. When someone fails to use or react to an expression properly we will agree that this may be because she does not understand its meaning. It seems a mere platitude to say, then, that when she does use an expression properly it is because she understands its

triggering events thought to be (or to be realized or instantiated in, or dependent upon) some physical (presumably neurophysiological) states or other. See Donald Davidson's 'Actions, Reasons, and Causes', reprinted in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980), 3–19.

<sup>74</sup> Mark de Bretton Platts, *Ways of Meaning- An Introduction to Philosophy of Language*, second edition (A Bradford Book, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA and London), 217, 218.

meaning. Indeed, sometimes even if a person deploys an expression or reacts to it in a way that shows understanding, we might be tempted to demand further proof. Asking the speaker what she means by her deployment of the expression might be one way of demanding such proof. The fact that we are sometimes satisfied by her answer might tempt us to think that the ability to answer in one or more of these ways lies behind, or accounts for, the ability to use the expression correctly.<sup>75</sup> After all, it does not seem enough to say that to know the meaning of an expression just is to have the ability to use it properly, since someone might use, or react to the expression appropriately by coincidence or by accident and in such cases we would not wish to credit her with understanding it. So it seems that understanding of the meaning of the expression is one thing, and the ability to use it correctly something else. If so, then understanding the meaning of an expression may be part of a robust explanation of the ability to use the expression correctly. To understand or to know the meaning of an expression would then be an achievement of its own—one which is causally (and perhaps only contingently) connected to any subsequent deployment of the expression.

This picture of how rational abilities in general are to be explained, including the ability to speak a language, was called into question by Ryle in a number of early papers<sup>76</sup> and by Wittgenstein in his discussion of rules.<sup>77</sup>

Close attention to the cases in which we credit someone for her performance shows that it is often enough for her (merely) to have

<sup>75</sup> As suggested by the quotation from Platts, above, in recent discussions that are arguably mere variations of the intellectualist legend, it is acknowledged that the speaker may not have the ability to answer the question but that a theorist can, so a theoretical construction of what would explain meanings is attributed to the speaker as tacit (inaccessible to her) knowledge which would suffice to explain her understandings. For a further discussion and references, see my ‘Playing the Rule-Following Game’, *Philosophy*, vol. 75, no 292 (2000), 203–224, especially note 14.

<sup>76</sup> Especially in ‘Knowing How and Knowing That’ (first published in 1946; reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, *op. cit.*, 222–235; and ostensibly reworked as the second chapter of *The Concept of Mind*); ‘Why Are the Calculuses of Logic and Arithmetic Applicable to Reality?’ (first published in 1946; reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, 244–260); and ‘“If”, “So”, and “Because”’ (first published in 1950; reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, 435–445).

<sup>77</sup> *Philosophical Investigations*, translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (Blackwell, Oxford, 1953), especially §§143–155 and 179–202. For a discussion see my ‘Real Rules’, *Synthese* (Special edition dedicated to the work of Crispin Wright, ed. by D. Pritchard and J. Kallestrup) forthcoming.

satisfied certain criteria.<sup>78</sup> Close attention to the cases in which we require not only that she satisfy certain criteria but also that she is guided by criteria or rules shows that the latter is in fact a separate skill, which we only sometimes (but importantly not always) demand of the one we wish to credit for her performance. To require that one advert to criteria in order to ensure that one's performance is successful is like requiring that one show a ticket in order to prove one's right to travel by rail.<sup>79</sup> Although this is sometimes required, it would be a category-mistake to imagine that the ticket itself plays a role in the explanation of the train journey on the same level as the pistons, levers, and tracks do. So, too, would it be a category mistake to imagine that reasons, for example, play a role in the explanation of action on (almost) the same level as the internal processes that have a role to play in the explanation of the body's motions; or that meanings or understandings play a role in the explanation of language use on (almost) the same level as the internal processes that play a role in the explanations of vocalisations. But just this type of category-error seems to be made by those who construe mental phenomena, including understanding, as inner causal events.<sup>80</sup>

As a way of seeing how we might resist this temptation, it will be again useful to consider a less controversial case, in which such a picture is rather less compelling. Ryle used a number of analogies in order to break its attraction, but I shall again attempt to tell the story in my own way (adapting an example from Ryle and taking some hints from the later Wittgenstein.)<sup>81</sup>

Consider the following confession of the (then) recently married, celebrity chef, Jamie Oliver:<sup>82</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Indeed, this was the point of 'unpacking' certain intelligence-ascribing sentences in use into various hypothetical and semi-hypothetical sentences about what the agent would do in various circumstances: namely, to show that, in these uses, the relevant criteria are satisfied by what she says and how she acts (in the circumstances) and that no implicit appeal to covert processes is necessary.

<sup>79</sup> "If", "So", and "Because", *op. cit.*, 251–253.

<sup>80</sup> The qualifier 'almost' is needed in order to accommodate the idea that the inner processes are supposed to be content-bearing. Indeed, the category-error reaches its apex with the idea that mental predicates pick out inner, casually-efficacious (probably at bottom) physical events with semantic or representational content.

<sup>81</sup> See 'Knowing How and Knowing That', "If", "So, and "Because", *op. cit.* and *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in the *Independent* (16 October 2004).

My wife used to cook things and there'd be blatant things wrong. So I told her and she'd get right upset. So I've developed this new technique; it's called lying. Have you ever tried it?

We can understand how Ryle (and Wittgenstein) would like us to understand the role of rules by imagining—as part of a philosophical thought-experiment—how we might meddle in the Olivers' marriage. Jamie is a gifted chef, inventor and adaptor of many interesting and delicious dishes. He acquired this ability in part by training in his father's pub, and then by apprenticeships in some of the better restaurants in London. Suppose, contrary to fact, that Jamie himself is not very good at articulating what constitutes a successful dish or how to go about making one, thus is not a good teacher.

Now suppose, for the sake of the thought-experiment, that Mrs Oliver—Jules—wants very much to cook dishes like her husband's. But she has not received the appropriate training, nor does she have his natural gift. One way of helping her would be to convert what Jamie does well into a procedure that can easily be followed by someone who lacks his flair for cooking. This is the point of *cookbooks* which give recipes to follow such that, if any good and if followed correctly, they should facilitate the production of the dish. Since we are supposing that Jamie is not very articulate about what he does well and perhaps also not the best person to take a synoptic view of it—retaining the good moves and dispensing with the bad—let us introduce a *theorist* or, in this case, a *recipe-writer* into the picture who can convert what Jamie does well into recipes for other people to follow.

In real life, Jamie Oliver is able to play the role that I have given to the *recipe-writer* but I have described the story in this way to underline that this role is different from the role he plays as creator or adaptor of tasty dishes. This latter role is one he has acquired by practice and drill and by instruction from his teachers. True, he might have learned by following others' recipes, but it should be clear that he *need not* have learned this way. In fact Jamie might have been unable to read or write or, indeed, unable to understand spoken language yet none the less acquire his skill by imitating his teachers, then going beyond imitation to devise dishes of his own. Jamie does well what Jules wants to do well, and, according to this counter-factual thought experiment we are to imagine that for the purpose of teaching Jules somebody else comes along—a *recipe-writer*—and

converts Jamie's successful 'moves' into recipes for Jules (and others) to follow.

The first point to notice is that what Jules will do in learning to cook is very different from what Jamie does in cooking and from what he did in learning to cook, for she has the additional task of following a recipe. This will require the mastery of various skills not required of her husband. She must be able to read, for example, either the words or the diagrams in which the recipes are written. She must be able to apply the recipe to the situation at hand. She will probably also have to master additional techniques, for example, the technique of measuring, even if her husband never measures ingredients since he can 'just tell' how much of a certain ingredient he needs. When the recipe says to add the salt after adding the yeast but before adding any liquid ingredients, Jules will have to convert this direction into an action sequence.

The second point is that recipes are general: they are meant to be read by an indefinite number of people. They also must presuppose certain abilities. As we have seen, they presuppose the ability to read; to see that the situation at hand is one to which the recipe applies, and that the general advice will be followed by acting in such and such way at the appropriate moment. But so, too, will recipes normally presuppose other abilities specifically related to cooking. Some will presuppose knowledge how to whip eggs into soft or hard peaks; some will presuppose mastery of auxiliary ingredients which are themselves the result of a procedure which might have been followed from a recipe (like those recipes that without further explanation require you to add mayonnaise or *sauce hollandaise* which you are not expected to produce from a jar). Still others will presuppose abilities the acquisition of which does not normally depend on following rules. It is unlikely to be specified, for example, how long a recipe-follower must wait before adding the liquid ingredients (or if only an instant will do); nor where she is to find a certain casserole dish in her kitchen; nor, whether a cast-iron dish is more appropriate than one made of clay.

Whether or not Jules succeeds in creating dishes as delicious as her husband's will in part depend on whether she has the abilities that are required for following the recipes in the first place. Some of these will be abilities that are not required of her husband; some of these will also be abilities that are required of her husband but (because of their generality and their particular audience) would not be useful to him.

It should be clear by now that what Jamie does in concocting dishes by *wont* or by *know how* (to use two of Ryle's expressions) is very different from what Jules is expected to do in creating dishes by *following rules*, or by *knowing that* (according to the recipe) she is to do such and such. Although they are related in Jules's case—following the recipe is supposed to enable her to cook a successful meal—her following a recipe does not guarantee that she will succeed, for reasons we have seen. Rules cannot tell you how to follow them (for this you would need other rules); but these second-order rules do not guarantee their own mastery either (for this there would have to be third-order rules); and so on. If Jules were to follow the recipes incorrectly then she presumably would have less chance of creating a successful dish; however, she may follow them incorrectly but nevertheless create successful dishes anyway (and this demolishes the idea that she must have followed rules in order to be given credit for her performance or for it to have counted as an achievement). Even on the supposition that Jules were able to cook dishes as well as her husband, and that this success may be partly explained by her having followed the recipes, this would not be sufficient to explain her success. For, as we have seen, there are many skills that are involved in following recipes which are not themselves governed by those recipes.

All of this is clear enough in the case of cooking and following recipes. But when the topic switches to logic, language, meaning, or action, philosophers have the tendency to forget or ignore the fact that the ability to follow rules—in the cases in which this notion has clear application—involves various skills of its own with their own (separate) criteria for success. Ignoring this, philosophers argue that the skills that may be acquired by training and drill (knowledge by *wont* or *know-how*) are reducible to knowledge of recipes or rules and that knowledge of the recipes or rules will figure in a cognitive explanation of the ability. And here, what the theorist says in explaining why the move was successful (because it accorded with a rule) is mistakenly construed as a procedure followed or as a process undergone by the agent who makes the move (grasp or apprehend, and then follow the rule). Failing to recognize the possibility of different (equally legitimate and non-competing) explanations, the intellectualist converts a normative 'because' into a causal 'because'. Two different kinds of explanation are being conflated. The first, an explanation by appeal to standards or norms that are codified in the performance-rules that govern some activity or practice; the



second, an explanation by appeal to causal relations or to the laws of nature which are supposed to subsume them.<sup>83</sup>

It is true that we sometimes require of self-reflecting agents that they stand back from their performances and speak the language of the ‘theorist’. We sometimes require of chefs that they be able to explain what they do by reference to recipes; of speakers that they tell us what they mean; and of rational agents that they tell us reasons for which they acted. We do not always require this, nor do we always accept the account that we are given. But the intellectualist mistake is to suppose that even in the cases where this is not required, covert processes involving meanings, or reasons lie behind, and causally explain, the successful dishes, the meaningful utterances, and the reasonable actions.<sup>84</sup>

That this is a mistake can be seen by focusing on how the notion of following a rule (or a recipe) has been imported from one context in which it has a clear purchase to another in which those features that made it a clear case of rule-following completely disappear. For consider a suggestion that Jamie, himself, is tacitly following rules when he creates his dishes (on the assumption that such would be required of a cognitive explanation of his ability to cook). It is clear that Jamie (in the thought-experiment) does not follow recipes explicitly or consciously in the way that Jules does. But, so the argument goes, he may have tacit knowledge of the recipes, and follow them automatically without being aware of doing so.

One rejoinder to this is that this supposition is not necessary; indeed the story was told in such a way as to make it clear that what Jamie does comes about through drill and training.

A second rejoinder to the supposition that Jamie, himself, follows recipes when creating his dishes (that the theorist then writes down when she watches what he does) is that it leaves us unable to give an account of where the recipes come from in the first place; at least as long as we are willing to reject as unhelpful the idea that Jamie unconsciously intuits or apprehends the recipe for *Farfalle with Savoy Cabbage, Pancetta, Thyme, and*

<sup>83</sup> For more discussion, see my ‘Ryle’s Regress and the Philosophy of Cognitive Science’, *op. cit.*

<sup>84</sup> Even in the cases in which it is required, a cognitive-mechanical account taking us from grasp of first-order rule to action will not explain the separate ability that involves appeal to (first-order) rules, the exercise of which is sometimes required of self-reflecting agents. For, as we have seen, this is a separate ability with (second-order) standards of its own.

*Mozzarella* or that he was born with knowledge of it as part of his innate inheritance. According to the thought-experiment, there is such an account: what Jamie does in concocting the dish comes first; the recipe comes second. The recipes are, after all, abstractions from what Jamie does—the various steps he takes—but steps that will, it is hoped, enable another to produce the dish. Other ‘moves’ Jamie makes have been discarded by the recipe-writer when she produces the recipe. The point of a recipe is not to record everything that Jamie does in the construction of a dish: the point is to whittle it down to the most direct and practicably general procedure so that others can have the basis for producing the desired result.

But the most important difficulty with the suggestion that Jamie’s tacit following of the recipes explains his ability to cook is that the second-order practice that Jules had to master (involving competences which must be presupposed or learned; mistakes which must be avoided) has ceased to exist. There are no corresponding competences to master or pitfalls to avoid for Jamie on the hypothesis that he follows the rules tacitly. Jules may misread the recipe, read it correctly but implement it wrongly, read it and implement it correctly but fail because other abilities (knowing which pan to use or how long to preheat an oven) were wanting. Jules may also follow the recipe correctly but fail because the recipe was bad (due to mistakes the recipe-writer made in abstracting the necessary moves, or because she expresses these moves in a misleading way, and so forth.) The introduction of invisible or tacit rule-following obliterates the possibility of these errors. But if these errors, which were possible for Jules, are not possible for Jamie, then the analogy that they both follow rules (one explicitly, one tacitly) breaks down. Where there is a case to be made that someone understands what the rules require, there must be the possibility of misunderstanding those rules; and where there is a case to be made that someone follows the rules correctly, there must be the possibility of following them incorrectly.

Following a recipe or a rule involves standards of its own. Ryle’s regresses turn on the fact that standards of reasonableness, intelligence, or rationality are in play as much for the higher-order activities of deliberation or theorizing as for the lower-order activities upon which these are alleged to operate. Those who construe these activities as automatic processes—those who mechanize them, if you will—forget that the possibility of these second-order mistakes and competences (diagnosable

by still higher-order rules) is an essential part of the logic of rule-following as it figures—when it figures—in our first-order normative practices.

## Meaning

According to Ryle's account of the history of logic and philosophy, Husserl, Meinong, Frege, Bradley, Peirce, Moore, and Russell were all alike in revolting against the associationist and internal idea-psychology of Hume and Mill and in demanding the emancipation of logic from psychology. The notion of meaning, he says, was their escape-route from subjectivist theories of thinking. And nearly all of them had a Platonist construal of meanings as concepts and propositions; they 'talked as if these conceptual enquiries of philosophy terminated in some super-inspections of some super-objects, as if conceptual enquiries were, after all, super-observational enquiries.'<sup>85</sup>

Moore's regular practice and Russell's frequent practice seemed to exemplify beautifully what, for example, Husserl and Meinong had declared in general terms to be the peculiar business of philosophy and logic, namely to explore the third realm of Meanings. Thus philosophy had acquired a right to live its own life, neither as a discredited pretender to the status of the science of mind, nor yet as a superannuated hand-maiden of *démodé* theology. It was responsible for a special field of facts, facts of impressively Platonized kinds.<sup>86</sup>

Just as Ryle thought that there was a danger in expressions such as 'Jones hated the idea of going to the hospital' because it might lead to a mistaken view about ideas, so, too, did he think that there is a danger in talking about meanings. Although philosophers may describe what they study as concepts (word-meanings) and propositions (sentence-meanings) it is important not to be misled by this description. The meaning of expression is not an entity denoted by it and not the nominee of anything; and it is a related mistake to suppose that a particular concept is precisely indicated

<sup>85</sup> Phenomenology and 'The Concept of Mind', *op. cit.*, 187.

<sup>86</sup> 'The Theory of Meaning', 370 (first published 1957 and reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, 363–385).

by a particular expression: as if the idea of equality could be identified as that for which the word ‘equality’ stands.<sup>87</sup> For Ryle, ‘concepts are not things that are there crystallised in a splendid isolation’.<sup>88</sup>

We are not at all likely to be misled by expressions of the form ‘x means what y means.’ But when we use the expression quasi-descriptively, as in ‘The meaning of x is the same as the meaning of y’ or ‘The meaning of x is doubtful’ we are liable to be misled into thinking that we are referring to some queer new object. Ryle generalises the point to suggest that all the mistaken doctrines of concepts, ideas, terms, judgment, contents, and the like derive from the fallacy

that there must be *something* referred to by such expressions as ‘the meaning of the word (phrase or sentence) x’ [which is analogous to the policeman] who is really referred to by the descriptive phrase in ‘our village policeman is fond of football’.<sup>89</sup>

The idea that expressions have meaning insofar as they stand for things should be rejected. Indeed, some expressions denote (in one of a variety of ways) because they are significant. Learning the meaning of an expression is to learn to operate correctly with it; more like learning a piece of drill than like coming across a previously unencountered object.<sup>90</sup>

Considering the meaning of an expression is, for Ryle, considering what can be said, truly or falsely, with it, as well as what can be asked, commanded, advised, or any other sort of saying. In this—normal—sense of ‘meaning’:

the meaning of a sub-expression like a word or phrase, is a functional factor of a range of possible assertions, questions, commands and the rest. It is a tributary to sayings. It is a distinguishable common locus of a range of possible tellings, askings, advising, etc.<sup>91</sup>

<sup>87</sup> ‘Philosophical Arguments’, *op. cit.*, 215.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Phenomenology versus the “Concept of Mind”’, *op. cit.*, 192. Compare Wittgenstein: ‘The preconceived idea of crystalline purity (of logic) can only be removed by turning our whole examination round . . . The philosophy of logic speaks of sentences and words in exactly the sense in which we speak of them in ordinary life. . .’. *Philosophical Investigations*, *op. cit.*, §108.

<sup>89</sup> ‘Systematically Misleading Expressions’, *op. cit.*, 59.

<sup>90</sup> ‘Theory of Meaning’, *op. cit.*, 379.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

This way of looking at meanings inverts the natural assumption that the meaning of words and phrases can be understood (learned, classified, or discussed) before consideration begins of entire sayings.

Word-meanings do not stand to sentence-meanings as atoms to molecules or as letters of the alphabet to the spellings of words, but more nearly as the tennis-racket stands to the strokes which are or may be made with it.<sup>92</sup>

According to the intellectualist legend, various rational abilities can be explained by attributing to the speaker propositional knowledge of the rules that govern that ability, which knowledge is then applied to particular cases. The intellectualist account of what explains the ability to speak and understand a language is roughly that the speaker has a cognitive grasp of concepts or word-meanings which she then uses to form or to apply to particular expressions and sub-expressions. This rough idea of what is involved in language use gives the philosopher a particular problem she can call her own: the study of word-meanings or concepts considered as objects in their own right ‘crystallised in splendid isolation’ from the (normative) practices or language-games in which they are expressed.<sup>93</sup>

If the discussion of recipes above convinces us that there is something wrong with this rough picture and we decide to reject the idea that the ability to understand and speak a language depends, as Wittgenstein would say, on ‘operating a calculus according to fixed rules’, what is left of philosophers’ *concepts*? The apprehension of concepts, or word-meanings, was supposed to be part of a cognitive explanation of a person’s ability to understand expressions in which those concepts figure. Without that form of explanation we risk losing the proprietary subject of philosophy. Just what is an analytic philosopher supposed to be analysing if concepts do not (because they cannot) play the role originally ascribed to them?

Ryle credits Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* for inverting the two disastrous Millian assumptions that much of philosophy of language inherited (that

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> This conception survives in remarks (heard in philosophical discussions) such as: ‘I am not interested in anyone’s judgments about how such expressions [in which these concepts are a distinguishable factor] are correctly used; I am interested in the concepts, themselves.’

every word names something and that the meaning of the word is what it names). For Wittgenstein, the meaning of an expression is a style of operation performed with it: operating with a word in speaking a language is like operating with a knight in playing chess. But the introduction of rules is not enough to subvert the intellectualist, for as we have seen, she can finesse what it is to grasp a concept into having knowledge of a rule-book. She may be happy to agree that operating with a knight involves operating in accordance with the rules of chess (the scoring of a goal involves playing in accordance with the rules of football); so too would operating with words involve operating in accordance with grammatical and semantic rules. But just as the intellectualist might attempt to explain the chess player's abilities by supposing she consults her propositional knowledge of the rules of chess, so too, might the intellectualist suppose that language mastery can be explained (in contemporary versions) by supposing the speaker/understander to have knowledge of a theory of meaning (etc.) sufficient for understanding and use.<sup>94</sup>

Ryle, together with the later Wittgenstein, came completely to reject this way of conceiving of language (meanings) and thus also the corresponding way of conceiving the task of philosophy. Wittgenstein's discussion of family resemblances among concepts amounts to a renunciation of the idea that there is a compendium of rules, which, once understood or grasped, determines the use of the expression in all of the circumstances in which it is correct to use it.<sup>95</sup> There are no rules, set

<sup>94</sup> 'Theorists' can explain to others who share the vocabulary of the theory how her subject's actions have 'measured up' to the standards required in order to credit her with having the ability in question. But this is not an answer to a causal question. The intellectualist mistake (on my way of understanding it) involves supposing that the subject herself must somehow have used what is represented by this theory to measure her own results as she went along—if not explicitly, then implicitly (or tacitly). The mistake is made because we sometimes *do* require of a subject, say, that she be able to tell us what she means. Sometimes she can play the role of the 'theorist', herself, in helping to explain how what she has done measures up. But (again) in doing this she is involved in two (explicit) activities, each with their own standards.

<sup>95</sup> In other words, in suggesting that we use the same general term for many different objects because we notice a family resemblance in things which are known by that name, Wittgenstein rejects not only a theory of universals but the very idea that there is something which we grasp which enables us to use the expression properly. His notion of a family resemblance is not a new theory which is meant to justify our grouping many things under one expression (or else one might be led to ask: what is the family resemblance by which we call individual chairs 'chairs?'). It is rather the denial that such an answer can be given.

out in advance for the application of the general noun ‘game’, for example. We use the word to apply to various activities because we just do find certain things similar, in various salient ways, and group them together because we do. But there is no philosophical, underlying explanation or justification for this fact. Ryle emphasizes the ‘systematic ambiguity’, ‘elasticity of significance’ or ‘inflections of meaning’ that attend most of our expressions.<sup>96</sup> This does not make them ‘pun-words’ or ambiguous expressions like ‘report’, ‘still’, or ‘bank’. But it does mean that the logical behaviour of an expression used in one context cannot be taken for granted when the same expression is used in another.<sup>97</sup> ‘A given word, will, in different sorts of context, express ideas of an indefinite range of differing logical types and, therefore, with different logical powers.’<sup>98</sup>

The theorist I introduced earlier in the thought-experiment is interested in assembling recipes, or rules for cooking, which are abstractable features of various moves made in the creation of successful dishes: in constructing the theory (or recipe) she presupposes that one acquires the ingredients as listed and prepares them as required, and then she relays mixing and heating procedures of a particularly talented chef. Conceptual philosophers of Ryle’s ilk are primarily interested in word meanings construed as a functional factor (or a distinguishable common locus) of a range of possible assertions, questions, commands, and the rest: those features which are ‘tributaries to sayings’. Just as the recipe theorist must devise recipes by construing the role that ingredients, measuring, mixing and heating play within a range of possible (successful) dishes, the philosopher’s chart of the logical geography of concepts deals with the various ways in which these concepts figure in the sayings (not only the describings) of people competent in their use. Like the recipe-writer, the philosopher-cartographer will presuppose many abilities of the follower of his philosophical map.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, ‘Philosophical Arguments’, *op. cit.*, 214.

<sup>97</sup> And this, presumably, is why the formal logician must also engage in the philosophical enterprise that Ryle recommends:

The extraction of the logical skeletons of propositions does not reveal the logical powers of those propositions by some trick which absolves the logician from thinking them out. At best it is merely a summary formulation of what they have discovered. (‘Philosophical Arguments’, *op. cit.*, 208.)

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 215.

The local villager knows his way around *ambulando* but it puzzles him to describe the route in terms of compass bearings and distances measured in meters; for this a cartographer is needed. The chef in our thought-experiment knows how to produce delicious meals but is unable to abstract, generalise, and idealise what he does; for this, a recipe-writer is required. We may operate with expressions down a limited set of tracks but will never know all the ‘implication threads’ of the expressions we ordinarily and naively rely upon and operate with; for this a philosopher-cartographer is needed.

As people’s understanding of the propositions that they use is always imperfect, in the sense that they never have realized and never could realize all the logical powers of those propositions, so their grasp of ideas or concepts is necessarily incomplete. The risk always exists that confusion or paradox will arise in the course of any hitherto untried operations with those ideas.<sup>99</sup>

Insofar as she constructs her map of the logical geography in this way by using actual and possible sayings as her data, the conceptual philosopher of Ryle’s ilk is *distancing* herself from her Platonic cousins. Two sentences of different languages, idioms, authors or dates may say the same thing; when they do, what they say can be considered in abstraction from the several sayings of it. But this does not mean that what is said stands to the sayings of it as a town stands to the several signposts which point to it.<sup>100</sup> Concepts or ideas, according to the Rylean philosopher, are (double) abstractions from our sayings; they are not part of a cognitive (para-mechanical) explanation of those sayings, any more than recipes or maps figure in a cognitive (para-mechanical) explanation of Jamie’s ability to cook, or the local villager’s ability to find his way about.

Unlike the project suggested by ‘analysis’, the philosopher-as-cartographer is required to take a synoptic view of the logical geography of concepts; this will require the opposite of a piece-meal approach. The task is not to pinpoint the locus of this or that idea, ‘but to determine the

<sup>99</sup> ‘Philosophical Arguments’, *op. cit.*, 208.

<sup>100</sup> ‘Categories’, 182 (first published 1938 and reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, *op. cit.*, 178–193).



cross-bearings of all of a galaxy of ideas belonging to the same or contiguous fields.’<sup>101</sup>

What is to be done with a map of the logical geography of concepts that the philosopher-cartographer constructs? Just the kind of enterprise that Ryle illustrates in *The Concept of Mind*. The risk always exists that confusion or paradox will arise in the course of untried operations—perhaps not with concrete ideas but with those that are more abstract. Ryle, like Wittgenstein, attempts to show us how in our attempts to abstract and theorise about our expressions we must avoid being misled by ‘grammatical prima facies’, or avoid committing ‘type-trespasses’ when we operate with an idea as if it belongs to one category instead of another. The *reductio* arguments he uses figure as a kind of ‘philosophical destruction test’ of our initial attempts to abstract, generalise, and theorise about the ideas, or distinguishable factors, we identify in our expressions. It is also a destruction-test that is applied to philosophers’ theories—which deliberately recommend that we operate with an idea as if it belongs to a particular category. Ryle agrees with Wittgenstein that the philosopher, in her role as cartographer, does not discover, or look for, new matters of fact: the philosopher throws new light on the terrain, but does not give new information. ‘And the light he throws is resident in the rigour of his arguments.’<sup>102</sup> The diagnosis and cure of category-errors should not only enable us to understand the real (as opposed to naively anticipated) logical powers of ideas; they should eventually pave the way toward the dissolution of philosophical dilemmas. *The Concept of Mind* thus not only charts the logical geography of our mental concepts: in doing so, it also points the way toward the dissolution of the mind–body problem, the problem of other minds, and the problem of (necessarily) private languages.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> ‘Abstractions’, 444, (first published 1962 and reprinted in *Collected Papers Volume 2*, 435–445).

<sup>102</sup> ‘Taking Sides in Philosophy’, *op. cit.*, 173.

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