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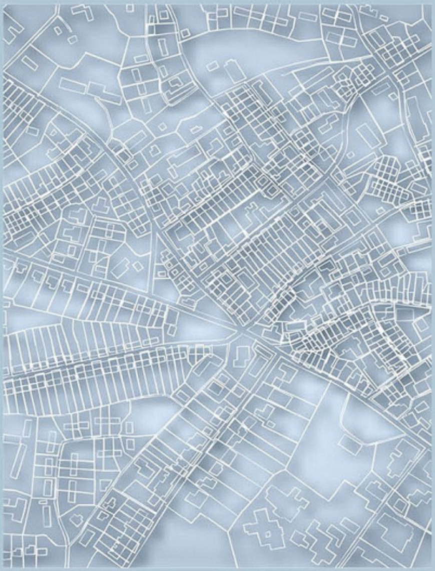

# Ryle on Mind and Language

Edited by
David Dolby

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# Ryle on Mind and Language

Edited by

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*In Memoriam*

*Bede Rundle*
*(1937–2011)*

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# Introduction

*David Dolby*

That Gilbert Ryle is a key figure in twentieth-century philosophy is widely accepted: he was a leading proponent of the school of ordinary language philosophy; the critique of Cartesian dualism set out in his 1949 book *The Concept of Mind* features in almost all introductions to the philosophy of mind; and many of his coinages and distinctions have entered the philosophical lexicon. Nevertheless, discussions engaging with Ryle's own writings are rare. This is a great pity, since his work is philosophically rich and the arguments and positions he develops are often subtler and more persuasive than those ascribed to him.

Thankfully, this situation is changing and we are seeing the beginnings of a resurgence of interest in Ryle's philosophy: his collected papers have recently been republished; his distinction between knowing how and knowing that is once again hotly debated; and there is a growing appreciation that his emphasis on the behavioural criteria for the ascription of mental attributes does not commit him to naïve reductionism about the mental.

One of Ryle's chief philosophical concerns was the nature of philosophy itself. Throughout his career he was clear that philosophy is not a theoretical discipline alongside physics and chemistry but with its own subject matter of non-mental, non-material objects: 'Philosophical problems are problems of a special sort; they are not problems of an ordinary sort about special entities' (1971, p. vii). His early account of the special nature of philosophical enquiry was set out in his 1932 paper 'Systematically Misleading Expressions'. Here he argues that the job of the philosopher is not to state philosophical facts but to give a systematic restatement of the facts of non-philosophical discourse in terms which do not mislead as to the form the facts (or alleged facts) recorded (1971[1932], p. 61).

The idea that philosophy is concerned with understanding the language of non-philosophical discourse is maintained in his mature account of philosophy as conceptual cartography. The linguistic understanding sought by a philosopher differs from the linguistic understanding of competent speakers in the way that a cartographer's knowledge of the topography of a village differs from that of the villager who can reliably find his way around. For just as the villager may be unable to draw a map of a familiar route accurately, so a speaker who can competently employ the words 'know', 'learn', and 'forget' might be stumped by the question: What is knowledge? Philosophical questions call for us to think about the familiar in an unfamiliar way, just as the villager asked to draw a map is required to re-think his topographical knowledge in cartographical terms (1971 [1962], p. 441). The question about the concept of knowledge is a question about what is said when it is said that someone knows, has learnt, or has forgotten something. In order to address such questions, the philosopher must chart the connections between concepts by reflecting systematically upon the use of the terms with which speakers competently operate.

Ryle claimed that philosophical error often results from a certain type of confusion about logical geography, namely mistakes about the logical category to which a concept belongs. Claims involving such category mistakes are syntactically correct and have the appearance of sense but they fall short of meaningful assertion.

The notion of a category mistake is the subject of the first two essays. Jonathan Dancy begins his contribution by setting out a number of difficulties with Ryle's treatment of categories, and in particular his two definitions of category mistakes. Dancy argues that the notion of absurdity to which the first definition appeals cannot be specified without circularity, while the second definition, in terms of logical implication, gives the wrong results.

Dancy argues that what Ryle needs to say is that category mistakes occur when the subject is the wrong sort of thing for the application of the predicate, or when a sentence would entail that something belongs to two incompatible categories. But such an account is not open to Ryle unless he can give an account of the categories to which the definition appeals and a way of identifying which pairs of categories are incompatible.

Dancy considers some general problems that beset the efforts of others to do better, before turning to Strawson's account. Strawson defines the notion of a 'categorial predicate' in terms of the a priori acceptability or rejectability of a predicate for individuals under adequately identifying descriptions. Dancy argues that the account of non-exclusive categories which Strawson develops has many virtues, but that it is ultimately unable to explain which trans-categorial predications are acceptable and which are not. We are left without a satisfactory definition of a category mistake and should, Dancy suggests, avoid the notion altogether.

Hans-Johann Glock begins his essay by tracing the history of the notion of a category from the ontological conception of Aristotle, through the transcendental notion of Kant, to the analytic conception of Wittgenstein against the backdrop of which Ryle developed his account. He defends Ryle's claim that category mistakes are not false but nonsense against objections from a number of quarters. He briefly examines Quine's arguments against the idea of truth and falsity in virtue of meaning and addresses his claim that category mistakes are mere obvious falsehoods.

A second line of criticism appeals to the compositionality of language: if category mistakes are syntactically correct combinations of meaningful words, then it seems they must themselves be meaningful. Glock discusses various principles of compositionality but argues that no plausible principle forces us to give up the idea of combinatorial nonsense.

In the final sections of the essay Glock criticises Ryle's criteria for identifying categories and category mistakes. He discusses a number of problems for Ryle's account and endorses Strawson's resolution of some of these. However, he argues that the resulting notion of a category is purpose relative and cannot serve to identify the peculiar subject matter of philosophy, as Ryle had once hoped. Nevertheless, Glock contends, the notion of a category mistake is clear and remains an invaluable tool of philosophical investigation.

Perhaps the most significant category mistakes, for Ryle, are those that underlie the Cartesian dogma of the ghost in the machine: for instance, the construal of some types of statement given in explanation of human action as referring to occult mental causes. Ryle argued that such statements are not to be understood as speculative categorical reports of unwittnessable phenomena. Rather, they are akin to statements subsuming an action under hypothetical or semi-hypothetical laws, licensing inferences about the actions, reactions, and states of the agent.

Ryle's account of hypotheticals emphasises this connection with inference. Someone who has learnt the truth of 'if p, then q' will be able, among other things, to infer 'q' from 'p'. Hypotheticals are inference precepts: a statement of the form 'If p, then q' licenses us, whenever it is the case that p, to infer that q. Thus, 'if p, then q' is to be understood in terms of the argument 'p, so q'. Ryle further argues that inferences licensed by a hypothetical do not require the hypothetical to appear as a premise in order to be valid: we *apply* the hypothetical 'if p, then q' when we argue from 'p' to 'q', much as we apply a rule of inference, such as *modus ponens*.

Roger Teichmann reconstructs Ryle's argument for this conclusion and identifies a key mistake: Ryle assumes that the premises of an argument express the beliefs from which persons who argue using the argument draw the conclusion. A person may rationally argue 'p, so q' without having an additional hypothetical belief from which to infer 'q', since we may say that a person who argues 'p, so q' is *ipso facto* a person who thinks that if p, then q. Ryle was nevertheless wrong to conclude that an argument of the form 'p, so q' may in general be valid without the addition of a hypothetical premise.

In his discussion of Ryle's account of hypotheticals, Teichmann argues that the analogy with inference precepts captures an aspect of the use of hypotheticals which is ignored by standard truth-conditional semantics and Ryle's emphasis on use neutralises the metaphysical urge to find a matter of fact which hypothetical statements report and which make them true.

Ryle's analysis of hypotheticals is of great relevance for his account of dispositions, ascriptions of which he regarded as inference precepts. Maria Alvarez expounds Ryle's conception of a disposition through an analysis of his account of motives. To explain an action by giving a motive is not, according to Ryle, to give a causal explanation. For motives are dispositions towards certain types of behaviour and dispositions are not the causes of their manifestations. One problem with this account is that it cannot accommodate cases in which an agent acts out of a motive, say cowardice, without having a disposition to act in a cowardly fashion: agents may sometimes act out of character in acting out of a particular motive.

Alvarez argues that Ryle conflates character traits, which are dispositions, with motives, which are not. She goes on to develop a proposal of Alan White's that motives be understood as kinds of explanation: motives are best thought of as explanatory patterns under which we can bring intentional behaviour, relating belief and desire in intelligible ways. Alvarez investigates Ryle's claim that actions are not caused by the behavioural dispositions of which they are manifestations. She argues that Ryle does not exclude the possibility of a causal explanation of action: when we cite a disposition in explanation of why something happened we do not give the cause-event, although we do imply that there was an event or sequence of events that caused the happening.

To account for the explanation of action by motives proper, Alvarez develops Ryle's idea that an episode may be made intelligible by re-describing it as an episode of another sort. When we give a motive for an action we re-describe it as falling under an intelligible pattern of belief, desire, and action. However, since the episode given in the e*xplanans* is the same as that in the *explanandum*, it cannot be its cause.

In the course of her discussion Alvarez draws out some of the respects in which the higher-grade behavioural dispositions of humans differ from simple dispositions of inanimate objects. For instance, she points out that whereas solubility is only manifest when a substance dissolves, human dispositions can be attributed not only to someone who actually acts a certain way, but also to someone who is inclined to act that way but prevented from doing so.

In his essay, Rowland Stout critically discusses Ryle's account of emotional agitations. He identifies two different conceptions of agitations which Ryle seems to work with simultaneously. The first is of agitations as a propensity to behave in an agitated way or to have agitated feelings. The second identifies agitations as conflicts of inclinations that result in agitated behaviour. Stout argues that both conceptions are problematic. The first conception faces the same difficulties as William James's theory of emotions in that it cannot account for intentionality. On the second conception the intentionality of agitations can be explained in terms of the intentionality of the conflicted inclinations, itself a matter of rationally structured expressive behaviour. The problem with this conception is that it treats emotionally expressive behaviour as aimless, a mere consequence of the agitation itself and not an aspect of agency.

Stout ends by explaining how we can account for the fact that emotionally expressive behaviour is sensitive to reason without necessarily being instrumentally rational. He argues that we have dispositions to behave in expressive ways that are sensitive to standards of appropriateness which may be a matter of naturalness or social identity. These dispositions themselves are the emotions and thus motivate the behaviour and do not merely trigger it.

Paul Snowdon discusses Ryle's attempt to give a philosophical account of silent thought. This topic raises difficulties for Ryle's philosophy of mind, which stresses the conceptual connections between thought and behaviour. Ryle argues that sequences of images and imagined words are neither necessary nor sufficient for thought, even silent thought, and suggests that instead of searching for some inner process we understand disengaged thought on the model of engaged thought. Descriptions of engaged thought, such as 'He thought about his tennis playing', can, Ryle claimed, be given an adverbial paraphrase, such as 'He played tennis carefully'. Thus, to think about what one is doing is merely to act in a thoughtful and careful manner. Snowdon challenges Ryle's claims about the superfluity of mental imagery for thought and he questions the significance of adverbial paraphrase. He argues, moreover, that thinking about what one is doing is distinct from acting with care and attention, since thinking is active.

Ryle extends his account of thinking to the disengaged case by distinguishing the different levels of description for action. Actions which fall under the same thin description (e.g., winking) may fall under different thick descriptions (e.g., catching someone's attention, practising winking). Under a thick description a silent thinker may be doing geometry or composing music, but under a thin description a disengaged thinker may be doing little more than sitting and muttering to himself. Snowdon counters that a silent thinker may not be making overt movements at all, and that, even when he is, these movements do not seem to be the thin components of thinking. He goes on to suggest that thought is, pace Ryle, just what it seems to be: a controlled sequence of images, of language, linked to cognitive structures in highly complex ways.

Julia Tanney also discusses Ryle's later writings on thought. She argues that Ryle's arguments provide a significant challenge not just for substance dualism, which was often the target of his arguments, but also for its property-dualist heirs. Like Ryle, she draws attention to the multifarious uses of the verb 'think' and argues that there need be no single occurrence or process that constitutes thinking.

Tanney endorses Ryle's claim that mental imagery is neither necessary nor sufficient for thought and argues that, even in cases where there is an overt performance, we need to look to the multiply embedded social activities in which the thinker takes part in order to determine what is done and what is thought. Her account stresses the fact that thinking is doing: there is a purposive and evaluative element to thought. The difference between working out a geometric proof and mimicking someone working out a proof lies, in part, in the different standards according to which the activities and performances are evaluated. Tanney's account draws on the fact that thought has a proleptic aspect: having a certain thought and thinking of something in a certain way involve being primed to think and do further things.

Tanney ends her essay by exploring the implications of Ryle's arguments for the supposed bifurcation between the inner and the outer. She argues that Ryle's reflections on thought, together with those of

Wittgenstein, undermine the idea that thought is logically prior to the social-linguistic activities in which our actions are embedded.

Christoph Pfisterer reconstructs and assesses Ryle's well-known argument against sense-data theories of perception. Ryle argues that the claim that perception of an object entails having sensations of that object and the claim that sensations are the proper objects of perception together lead to a vicious regress. It has been claimed that Ryle's argument is only successful against naïve versions of the sense-data theory and that more sophisticated theories can avoid the regress. Pfisterer considers and rejects some attempts to defend sense-data theory in this way before turning his attention to Ryle's positive contributions to the philosophy of perception.

According to Ryle, verbs such as 'look' and 'listen' signify processes or states, which are extended in time, while verbs such as 'see' and 'hear' signify achievements, which are without temporal duration. It follows that seeing and hearing are not processes awaiting scientific explanation, since they are not processes at all. Perceivings are successful achievements according to standards which require philosophical elucidation and not causal explanation. Pfisterer addresses several objections to Ryle's claims before voicing some reservations of his own.

A further element of Ryle's positive account of perception is his notion of 'perception recipes': rules about the typical looks, sounds, and smells of objects. To recognise a tune, he suggests, is to hear the notes according to the recipe of the tune. Pfisterer explores this suggestion and argues that it commits Ryle to conceptualism about perception, as has been claimed. He explains that to learn a perception recipe is to acquire certain expectation propensities: someone who can recognise a tune has learnt to listen in a way that is not open to those who don't know the tune. Pfisterer then relates the notion of a perception recipe to Ryle's claim that perception is an achievement with standards of success.

Bede Rundle's contribution focuses on Ryle's distinction between 'task' verbs and 'achievement' verbs. He explains how the distinction can be defended against a number of objections and suggests that the category of achievements be extended to accommodate episodes which begin enduring states as well as those which end them. He employs the amended notion of an achievement to sharpen Wittgenstein's account of understanding before showing how Ryle's analysis provides a corrective to current approaches in the philosophy of mind.

It is natural to think that our decisions may cause our actions. However, Rundle argues that a decision should be understood as the terminus of a period in which a person is unsure what to do and not as a mental act or episode. A decision marks the transition to a state in which one is ready to act. As such it does not cause the transition or the state that follows the transition any more than the onset of old age is the cause of old age. A decision is related to action by its being the onset of a behavioural disposition.

Rundle shows how the application of Ryle's distinction between tasks and achievements to the concepts of decision and understanding shifts philosophical attention to the extended states of mind whose onset the verbs signify in their achievement uses. And the elucidation of these states will appeal to behaviour in a way that is in keeping with Ryle's general programme.

Like Ryle, Rundle was convinced that philosophy is a grammatical investigation and not a theoretical science. In his contribution to this volume, as in all his writings, Rundle demonstrates how fruitful this approach to philosophy can be. It is to his memory that this volume is dedicated.

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# 1

# Ryle and Strawson on Category Mistakes

*Jonathan Dancy*

In the volume of essays on Gilbert Ryle published in 1970 by George Pitcher and Oscar Wood, there is a paper by Peter Strawson on categories. In my contribution to this new volume on Ryle, I go through some now well-recognised difficulties with Ryle's own treatment of categories, and in particular of category mistakes. I then consider some general problems that beset the efforts of others to do better, before turning to Strawson's suggestions, which as far as I can discover have never been discussed in print. These suggestions have obvious merits, but I end by arguing that they are less than fully successful.

## 1 Ryle

Though he was influential in the revival of interest in categories because of his appeals to category mistakes, Ryle says little in his published work to give us a clear notion of how the term 'category' is to be used. Clearly some of his ideas came from Russell, about whom I will have something to say later. For instance, in his article 'Categories', Ryle writes that 'There is not and cannot be any univocal title for all the significata of expressions, since if there was such a title all these significata would be of one and the same type' (1966, p. 77). This is very close to Russell, even to the extent of having to admit the systematic ambiguity of the term 'mean', or in Ryle's case of the term 'significatum', which he uses apparently unconsciously in just the role which he claims to be impossible. The same trait is to be seen in his graphic handling of category mistakes.

> A man would be thought to be making a poor joke who said that three things are now rising, namely the tide, hopes and the average age of death. It would be just as good or bad a joke to say that there exist

> prime numbers and Wednesdays and public opinions and navies; or that there exist both minds and bodies. (Ryle 2000 [1949], p. 24)

This is supposed by Ryle to show that there are two different senses of 'exist' – an unproblematic conclusion in itself, until we know what is meant by it. And I think that the two passages quoted above show that, like Russell, Ryle thought that if one was careful enough one should be able to carve language up into distinct sectors, one for each category, and explain away all terms that tended to bridge the gaps as 'systematically ambiguous'. No distinction is allowed between those terms that could meaningfully be applied to anything whatever, those that apply to things in more than one category, and those that are restricted to things in just one category. But these distinctions are, as we shall see, important.

Ryle offered two accounts of how to tell when two things (or 'proposition-factors', to use his technical term) are in different categories. The first is in 'Categories':

> Two proposition-factors are of different categories or types, if there are sentence-frames such that when the expressions for those factors are imported as alternative complements to the same gap-signs, the resultant sentences are significant in the one case and absurd in the other. (pp. 77–8)

This passes the explanatory buck to the concept of absurdity. The obvious question is what sort of absurdity is at issue, and we are left looking for a non-circular definition of the sort of absurdity that is category-absurdity. It is, after all, not clear that all category mistakes do result in one and the same sort of absurdity. Of course, the appeal to absurdity is perhaps more promising than the attempt to understand category mistakes as contradictions, or as mistakes that generate contradictions a priori; for there are plenty of contradictions that are not category mistakes. But then there are plenty of absurdities that are not category mistakes. 'Five is greater than six' generates contradictions a priori all right, and is no doubt absurd; but though it is a mistake, it is not a category mistake.

Ryle did offer a second method of discerning category mistakes. In terms that were not his, we might say that to discover type differences or similarities between two terms is essentially to discover differences between the sentences implied by uses of those terms; if we find differences down there, we have established a category difference between the terms. But this is no sooner said than rejected. 'Is red' implies 'is not green', and 'is green' implies 'is not red' but 'is green' does not imply 'is not green'. But this does nothing to establish that red and green (or 'is red' and 'is green') are in different categories.

What we all want to say, of course, is that category mistakes arise when a predication is false because the subject is the wrong sort of thing for the predicate properly to apply to it. Five is the right *sort of* thing to be greater than six, but a wrong one of that sort. So 'five is greater than six' is not a category mistake. These remarks make no appeal to any distinctive notion of absurdity. The difficulty is to provide an account of the sorts that we will be needing to appeal to in order to make the strategy work in general. After all, if my shirt is red it is the wrong sort of thing for the predicate 'blue' properly to apply to it, since red things are not properly called blue. So that is one sort of sort that is the wrong sort of sort.

How are we to focus on the right sort of sort? One simple answer is by giving a list. Ryle does indeed offer such a list, which includes 'quality, state, substance, number, logical construction, category'. (He categorically does not suppose that there might be some discoverable number of such terms.) And with such a list in hand it is easy to identify the category mistakes; a category mistake is any sentence that implies that some item is in a category that it is not in. But this would do nothing to distinguish category mistakes (and their supposedly characteristic absurdity) from other sorts of mistakes. Better perhaps would be to say that a category mistake is a sentence that implies that an item is in more than one category at once. But this introduces an enormous assumption: that the categories are mutually exclusive. (Ryle's second method did not need that assumption, nor did his first.) What is more, Ryle's list does not match that assumption; it is not absurd to suppose that numbers are logical constructions. But if we do not make that assumption, but allow that an item can be in more than one category, we lose one potent weapon for diagnosing category mistakes. For instead of saying that a category mistake is any sentence that entails that some item is in more than one category, we have to say '…is in two *incompatible* categories' – and now all the work goes into the distinction between compatible and incompatible categories.

Ryle's practice, especially in *The Concept of Mind*, is to imply that if you examine a list of the sort mentioned above you will somehow get the hang of things and be able to add to the list of your own accord. But the question would still remain what use the list is once one has got it; are the items on the list bound to be mutually exclusive? Ryle claimed both that the notion of a category mistake is an important technical tool and 'that there is only an inexact amateurish way of using it' (1954, p. 9), and this is an unstable combination. Intuition here is not reliable, and we can see this from Ryle's own examples. It is, I think, now generally agreed that the famous example of the foreigner who says that he has seen the colleges but has not seen the university, and asks where the university is, will not achieve what Ryle wanted it to achieve. (I cannot resist saying that this did in fact happen to me this very year, 2010, outside Balliol.) Ryle suggests that someone who says this has not understood how to wield the concept 'university'; the foreigner 'expected the University to be an extra edifice, rather like a college but also considerably different' (Ryle 2000 [1949], p. 21). But it is clear that someone can view the college buildings as the place which houses an organisation, realise that the University is an organisation as well and suppose that it too must be housed somewhere. Even if that is not true in Oxford, a supposition to the contrary is a simple mistake of fact, not a sign of incompetence with a concept. In fact, rather than making a logical mistake, the foreigner drew what one can only call the logical conclusion. The University is the wrong sort of thing to be a building, but not the wrong sort of thing to have a building. Ryle's intuitions led him astray here.

## 2 Russell

One lesson we learnt from the problems that Ryle gets into is that the notion of absurdity is probably not going to be the core of our account of a category mistake. Consider again the passage quoted above, which ends 'the resultant sentences are significant in the one case and absurd in the other'. A simpler and more promising contrast than that between the significant and the absurd is that between the significant and the non-significant. And this decants us into the idea that category mistakes are meaningless in a distinctive way. (Of course they are not syntactically ill-formed, and there is a sense in which one understands what is being said in a category mistake perfectly well.)

Russell's theory of types includes as one of its most important elements the stipulation that all false type-predications are meaningless; the only meaningful type-predications are the true ones. Of course he had his reasons, or at least his own motivations, for saying this, to do with paradoxes. But it leads to paradoxes of its own, which I will list fairly briefly.

First, what are we to say about the negations of type-predications, such as 'Saturday is not a physical object'? Are they meaningful when false, that is when the type-predications which they negate are meaningful (that is, true), or are they meaningful when true, that is when the type-predications which they negate are meaningless (that is, false)? One is initially tempted to say that since negations of type-predications are presumably type-predications in their own right, they must be governed by Russell's stipulation and so only be meaningful when true. But the idea that there is a sort of statement that is only meaningful when contradicting nonsense is hard to swallow, so long as we continue to think of these things as statements rather than as, say, articulations of rules. A more plausible account is that the negations of type-predications can only be meaningful when contradicting sense; which is to say that they can only be meaningful when false. But this seems even worse than the first alternative.

Second, how are we to decide whether a given type-predication is true when we don't yet know whether it has a meaning? It seems clear that one needs to know the meaning of a sentence in order to decide whether it is true or not. But Russell's stipulation reverses this order.

Third, what are we to say of the predicate 'is of the same type as'? Russell insists that when two individuals are of different types, no predicate whatever is univocally true (or false) of both of them. This insistence suffers from making no exceptions to the predicates for which it was designed to hold. For apart from being highly counter-intuitive (since it rules out univocal applications of predicates such as 'is interesting', 'is thought of' and also 'exists'), it is self-refuting in the case of 'is of a different type from'. This predicate can only be meaningful when false, no matter what it is applied to. So there are no counter-instances to the truth of 'is of the same type as', and this obliterates all type-distinctions immediately.

## 3 Two sorts of negation

We are pursuing the suggestion that there is a sort of meaninglessness in a category mistake. But we want to allow that if Socrates is not a number, he must be in some other category. An apparently promising way to run this is to allow that all type-predications are meaningful, but that other predications are only meaningful if they are type-correct, that is if the type-predication that they entail is true. This of course allows that some meaningless sentences can entail false sentences, since the category mistake 'Saturday is in bed' entails the false 'Saturday is a physical object'.

One way to make sense of this is to adopt Pap's notion of a predicate family (1960), thus: a predicate family is a set of predicates such that one and only one member of the set must be true of anything of which some member of the set is true or false. Colour predicates make up such a family, perhaps. And the type-predicates do too, since everything (as Pap supposed) must be of one type and nothing is of two types, so the other type-predicates are false of it, just as 'is blue' is false of the red things.

There is an ambiguity in Pap's account of a predicate family, which needs to be exposed. The cause is the phrase 'one and only one member of the set must be true … '. There is a strong sense of this phrase, in which there must be one and only one member of the family that is true and all the others must be false. On this reading, predicate families are exclusive, and the paradigm case of a predicate family is the family of type-predicates. But the phrase might also mean that there is one (but only one, and always the same one) that is to be true whenever any other member of the family is true or false. Call this 'the identity sense'. On this reading, predicate families are not exclusive, and the paradigm case for a predicate family is the family of colour predicates, for the predicate 'is coloured' must be true of any object of which any other member of the family is either true or false. The family of type-predicates is not, however, a family in this second sense. The third sense is what one might call the illegitimate numerical sense, that though one member of the family must be true (and not always the same one) others might be true as well, though they need not be. In this third sense, the family of type-predicates would again be a family, but no longer an exclusive one (if you see what I mean).

So the idea of a predicate family needs careful handling. But whichever way we take it, I think it cannot help us with our problems about category mistakes. If we take it in the strong sense, there will be very few predicate families, because there are very few exclusive families. For instance, something can be both red and coloured. Worse, if the class of type-predicates includes the negations of all type-predicates, we will find ourselves saying that all those negations are false, when the whole point was to say that all but one of them are true. This would resolve the strong sense into the illegitimate numerical sense. But the latter is no better, for it leads to the conclusion that all predicates whatever are of the, or a, same family, so that all predications are meaningful, none meaningless. For each family of predicates will include the relevant type-predicate, and each type-predicate is a member of the family of type-predicates, so that these families will amalgamate. The only way to stop this is to rule that one cannot lump together type-predicates and normal predicates; but this was just the sort of thing we were hoping to explain, and further, it prevents us from saying that all red things are coloured.

This leaves us with the identity sense. But this turns out to collapse into the strong sense. For whenever a type-predication is true, so will also be the negations of all other type-predications (always provided that the family of type-predicates is exclusive). So it is never the case that if something is, say, red, there is one and only one predicate (and always the same one) that must apply to it, for there will in fact be very many such predicates, except that most of them will be negative.

So again we need to look elsewhere, and what Pap suggests is that a suitable distinction between types of negative will enable us to say that all type-predications are meaningful (and either true or false) while other predications will be meaningless if they entail false type-predications. For whereas we should ordinarily agree to 'Socrates is not a number' on the ground that it is true – he isn't a number, he's a person – yet we would not ordinarily agree to 'Socrates is not the square root of nine because this implies that though he happens not to be this number, he is some other number. The point can be made in terms of predicate families (despite the difficulties we have already uncovered with that notion). To deny that a predicate is true of some object is to imply that some other predicate in the same family is true of it. So we get a distinction between two sorts of negation. That which implies that some other member of the same family is true is to be called 'limited negation'; that which contains no such implication is called 'unlimited negation'. Let us signify unlimited negation as –Fa and limited negation as Fa′. To assert –Fa is to assert that both Fa and Fa′ are false, while to assert Fa′ is to imply, if not to assert, that some other member of the F-family is true of a. We can then use the notion of significance in a traditional way:

> Fa is significant if and only if either Fa or Fa′ is true.
> Fa is not significant if and only if both Fa and Fa′ are false.

This seems to explain very nicely our intuitions about what is meaningful and what is not. 'Socrates is the square root of nine is meaningless, or non-significant, because it is false and its limited negation is false (implying as it does that Socrates is some other number). But its unlimited negation is true. In fact the unlimited negations of all category mistakes are true. However – and here is the clever bit – the distinction between limited and unlimited negation does not apply to type-predications, because all such negations are necessarily limited, and so all type-predications are shown to be significant. (Remember that category mistakes are not themselves type-predications.)

One's first thought, in criticism of this proposal, is that the notion of meaninglessness which it provides is fairly specious. A meaningless statement in this sense, that is one that is not significant, is just one that is false and whose limited negation is false. It is not that the statement is meaningless *because* it is false and its limited negation is false. These are just the same thing. So it is not clear that this Pap-based proposal really does give us what we want, because the sort of meaninglessness that it offers is too etiolated.

But even if we were unmoved by this criticism (a criticism which I think that Pap would admit), there is a further issue about how to put this notion of significance into practice. How are we supposed to tell whether a given remark is significant or not? Answer: to look to see whether its limited negation is true or false. But how do we establish that we are dealing with limited rather than with unlimited negation? There is a notational distinction, sure enough, between –Fa and Fa′. But is this a real distinction? The way to answer this question is to see how it is supposed to work in practice. In order to see whether 'Saturday is in bed' is meaningful, one has only to see whether the statement 'Saturday is not in bed' implies 'Saturday has already got up'. If it does, then 'Saturday is in bed' is meaningful; if not, not. But this procedure does nothing to tell us how we are to decide whether 'Saturday has already got up' is meaningless or not. It just assumes that we know the answer to this question already. The problem we faced with 'Saturday is in bed' is one that we face again with 'Saturday has just got up', and clearly when everything we are dealing with is of dubious significance or truth-value, none can be relied on to determine the significance or truth-value of the others. So the method will never lead to a conclusion.

## 4 Some general remarks

We have already uncovered certain assumptions that have tended to affect work on categories and the attempt to understand the peculiar nature of category mistakes. Here are some of them:

1. Everything is in some category or other, and nothing is in more than one category.
2. Category mistakes are lower-level predications which are more than just a priori falsehoods; they entail false categorial predications and have a peculiar logical status.
3. Some predicates apply to items in all categories; all others apply only to items in one category. A predicate that appears to apply to items in more than one category but not in all categories is a homonym.

Fred Sommers builds a whole system of categories on this last assumption (see Sommers 1960; 1963; 1965). But it is not clear what motivates it. One possible motivation is that without it we will find it much harder to characterise category mistakes. Instead of saying that category mistakes occur when the predicate we use to describe an object in one category applies properly to objects in some other category, we will have to say that they occur when we use a predicate that is not appropriate for objects in the relevant category. And this deprives us of a sort of triangulation argument. Such an argument would take us from the premise that 'is hard' is a predicate that applies properly to physical objects to the conclusion that when we speak of hard problems, or hard people, or hard luck, 'is hard' is in these other instances a homonym.

Remember Ryle's remark that 'a man would be thought to be making a poor joke who said that three things are now rising, namely the tide, hopes and the average age of death' (2000 [1949], p. 24). Presumably the idea here is that 'is rising' is a homonym. What it is for the tide to rise is not what it is for hopes to rise, and this again is different from what it is for the average age of death to rise. These three things are in different categories, and so 'is rising', though predicable of items in all three categories, is not synonymous throughout.

But why not? Why should it not be the case that though some terms are restricted in their application, being applicable to items in only one category, others are applicable to items in all categories, and yet further ones are applicable to items in more than one category, though not to items in all categories? Isn't the denial of this possibility completely unmotivated?

Actually it might not be *completely* unmotivated. There is the theorist's motivation, which is that a theory of category mistakes will be much easier to produce if we can say in general that a predicate that is applicable to one category but not all is thereby shown to be inapplicable to all the rest. For if we cannot say this, we will have to examine the categorial behaviour of each predicate in turn in order to determine its potentially unique categorial spread before we can say quite which of its applications involve category mistakes and which do not. We will have to show of the individual predicate we are dealing with that it does not apply synonymously both to some other category (where perhaps it is more obviously at home) and to the one concerned here. And this would be hard work, which theorists might prefer to avoid. What a shame, then, that there appears to be no justification for doing so.

Take a term like 'hard'. We have hard chairs, hard decisions, hard problems, hard luck and hard times. Is the predicate 'hard' synonymous throughout? How are we to address this question? We could hardly argue baldly that since (let us suppose) there are no hard numbers, 'is hard' cannot apply synonymously to chairs, people, decisions, problems and times? If not, what other resources do we have? Suppose we try to say that the hardness of a chair is just a different property from the hardness of a problem. But if it is, this will not be simply because chairs and problems are different sorts of thing. And even if they are in different categories, we might think that just as a hard chair is contrasted with an easy chair, so a hard problem is contrasted with an easy problem, hard decisions are contrasted with easy decisions, hard people are contrasted with easy people, and hard times are contrasted with easy times. Is this enough to show that the contrast between hard and easy is the same contrast case by case, despite the different categories that may be involved? It is hard to be sure that the answer to this question is no. Further: Can one compare chairs and problems in degrees of hardness? I don't see why not.

Similar points could be made about rising. What persuades us that 'is rising' does not apply synonymously to tides, hopes and the average age of death? It cannot be just that these are very different sorts of things. Suppose we point out that synonyms for 'is rising' such as 'is going up' or 'is higher' apply with equal ease to all these three things. Are we going to be told that this is because 'up' is not synonymous throughout, or that 'is going' is not? Is it perhaps that tides move in a way that hopes do not? Well, it is true that when hopes rise, there may be no physical movement going on, though there may of course now be hope where there was no hope before and so more hope overall (and yes, of course this does not mean that hope fills up more or different territory). But what is not clear is that such differences are enough to establish homonymity.

## 5 Strawson

Strawson is well aware both of the inadequacies of Ryle's account and of the dangers that arise for those who base their account of categories on a distinction between different sorts of negative (1970). In what follows, however, I will argue that though in certain respects his account is as near perfect as makes no matter, what he devised cannot properly speaking be called an account of categories.

The main distinction in Strawson's account is not that between the significant and the absurd, nor that between the significant and the non-significant, but that between what is a priori acceptable and what is a priori rejectable, the latter comprising both necessary falsehoods and nonsense. He first gives a definition of a 'categorial predicate':

> ... a categorial predicate is
>
> 1. a priori acceptable for at least some individuals under all adequately identifying designations of those individuals
> 2. either a priori acceptable or a priori rejectable for any individual whatever under all adequately identifying designations of that individual. (p. 203)

And from this definition there follows immediately the definition of a category mistake:

> A predicate is category-mismatched to an individual if and only if it implies a categorial predicate which is a priori rejectable for all adequately identifying designations of that individual. (p. 203)

It will be seen that Strawson interests himself initially not in the relation between the subject term and the predicate term in a sentence, but in the relation between a predicate and an individual, in some way such as to reveal the categorial (which is not the same as the essential: see below) nature of the individual. Of course individuals do not occur in sentences in their own right; if they occur in sentences at all, it is by proxy, and it is subject expressions that stand proxy for them. So Strawson's interest passes to a certain class of subject expressions, which he calls the class of adequately identifying designations (AIDs). We are to discover the categorial nature of any individual by considering the implications of these adequately identifying designations of that individual. The system is quite demanding in this respect. For there is really no guarantee in advance that there will be any predicate at all that is a priori acceptable for a given individual under *all* AIDs of that individual. If it turns out that the class of AIDs has been set too wide, there will be some designations in that class that don't imply any potential categorial predicate, then the individual concerned will turn out to be in no category at all. To take an example, the predicate 'is currently being discussed by me' is one that has no categorial implications at all. So it had better not be an AID of anything. Conversely, any AID must have some categorical implications.

What is more, it is obviously important that AIDs should be specifiable in some other way than as those predications that reveal something of the categorial nature of any individual of which they are true. For otherwise we run the familiar danger of circularity – the sort of danger that unsettles so many other accounts of the categories. So we need to look carefully at Strawson's specification of the class of AIDs. He says it is the logical sum of:

1. Completely specifying designations (CSDs): these only apply to individuals whose identity is completely determined by their essential properties. All the essential properties are a priori determinable from the meaning of the CSD. The examples given are 'the proposition that snow is white', 'justice', 'the number 5' and 'the colour blue'.
2. Clearly individuating terms (CITs): these are general descriptions under which both particulars and non-particulars fall, and which embody in their meanings principles for distinguishing or counting or re-identifying individuals. The examples given are, for particulars, 'animal', 'person', 'island', 'river', 'day'; and for non-particulars, 'sentence', 'sonata', 'flag', 'disease', 'word'.
3. Variably individuating terms (VITs): these, though they do not embody in their meaning principles for distinguishing, counting or re-identifying particulars, at least restrict the class of what could count as such a principle. Examples given are 'colour', 'noise', 'sound', 'extent of ground'.

This scheme, as Strawson presents it, has several advantages which ought to be stressed before I pass on to say what I have to say by way of criticism. The first and main advantage is that it has considerable explanatory advantages; it does explain the sort of mistake that a category mistake is, it treats category mistakes as a special brand of mistake and it does not confuse them with other mistakes. In short, it explains them in the sort of way that we want them to be explained. The theory also explains the characteristic feature of absurdity that attaches itself to a category mistake at a sub-categorial level, by means of a distinction between explicit and implicit mistakes; the more one builds on what was an explicit mismatch, that is the more one descends into sub-categorial levels, the greater the impression of absurdity becomes. And, finally, the theory explains the supposed meaninglessness of the absurd sentences in the normal way by relating them to a contradiction at the categorial level. Nor should we forget that for once we have come across a system that is not based on circularity.

So there is a lot to be said for this system. But I suggest that the problems are not all yet solved, for a few additions seem to be needed before what is on offer here can properly be called a theory of categories, and it is not clear how they can be achieved.

The main problem that I will raise concerns the question of exclusiveness. It is worth quoting here the characterisation of categories in Stephan Körner's *Categorial Frameworks* (chapter 1, p. 9), which I take to be pretty representative.

> A categorisation in this sense consists of the following phases, each of which represents an acknowledged or rejected natural partition, i.e. the division of all objects or of all objects of a natural class into two or more non-empty, jointly exhaustive, and (apart from possible borderline cases) mutually exclusive natural classes. (Körner 1970, p. 9)

I think it is clear (and Strawson, when I discussed this matter with him in 1971, did not dispute the fact) that Strawson's categories are not exclusive. That is to say, it does not respect a 'one thing, one category' requirement. Each thing will, or at least can, turn out to be in several categories, since it is possible for more than one categorial predication to be a priori acceptable for any individual that satisfies a certain set of AIDs, and a priori rejectable under all others. The only example of a categorial predicate that Strawson offers is 'has some spatial location'. Of this predicate, indeed, let us allow that it is either a priori acceptable or a priori rejectable for all AIDs of any individual. But if it is predicates of this sort that are to be categorial, how are we to exclude such similar predicates as 'has weight', has 'extension' and 'is solid' – to say nothing of 'is a substance' and 'exists'? It seems that many categorial predicates are to be true of each individual of which one is true, and if so, Strawson is presenting a style of category that is completely different from that presupposed by earlier theorists, especially Russell (though perhaps not Ryle). And what is more, these Strawsonian categories also differ from what we ordinarily take ourselves to be talking about when we ask what category something is in.

A way of pointing up this worry is to think about the predicate 'has spatial location'. Suppose that we think that every physical thing has spatial location, but also that every event has spatial location as well. (Everything that happens happens somewhere or other.) So now we know that the predicate 'has spatial location' is a priori acceptable for all AIDs of physical things, and for all AIDs of events, and let us also allow that it is a priori rejectable for many other individuals under all AIDs of those individuals (e.g. the colour blue, Marxism, friendship and more dubiously Manchester United Football Club). So let us allow that it is either a priori acceptable or a priori rejectable for all individuals under all AIDs of those individuals. Does this show that events and physical objects are in the same category? Does it show that they are in a same category? Does it show that they share some categorial predicates but not all? The last of these seems the right way to go – but then there seems to be a sense in which what we are getting is not so much a system of categories as a list of categorial predicates which do not cluster in the sort of way that we were originally expecting.

Now of course this might not matter very much, if Strawsonian categories did exactly the same job as that done by more 'normal' categories. And I have already admitted that they do explain the sorts of things that we want explained, and that they do it in the right sort of way. As an illustration of this, consider how Strawson's system would explain the category mismatch involved in 'the chair was postponed'. Despite the fact that there is one categorial predicate that is a priori acceptable of both physical objects and events, the important point is that there are others that are a priori acceptable of events but not of chairs, for example. 'occupy time'. (I take it that though chairs persist in time they do not take time.) So the system will classify this predication correctly as a category mismatch.

But still there are aspects of the scheme as it stands which are themselves in need of explanation. For, to take an example, the CIT 'chair' implies numerous categorial predicates and the negations of all the rest. But the family unity, as it were, of this group of predicates needs to be given some explanation, and it is not difficult to see the lines on which such an explanation has to run. The fact about chairs which guarantees this unity of the family of categorial predicates applicable to chairs is that a chair is a physical object. The relation between the predicate 'is a physical object' and the various categorial predicates whose family unity it underpins is no doubt difficult to elucidate. Possibly the other members of the family constitute a set of singly necessary and jointly sufficient conditions for being a physical object. But whether this be the answer or not, surely it is clear that the predicate 'is a physical object' holds some special position in the category family of which it is a member. And its importance cannot, in Strawson's system, be explained. Somehow we need to build into his system a role for these special categorial predicates, and the obvious role is a strictly categorial one; these special predicates serve to mark the lines that separate the various distinct families of Strawsonian categorial predicates.

A more local difficulty emerges when we pursue the idea that both events and physical objects occupy space (though physical objects do, and events do not, occupy space to the exclusion of other such). Now it seems clear (if only because of the vagueness of the characterisation of VITs) that all categorial predicates will themselves count at least as VITs, even if they are not CSTs. And if so, by the second part of Strawson's definition of a categorial predicate, it is immediately seen that the liaisons between categorial predicates must all be determined a priori. And we have already seen that this is false, because the term 'has spatial location' does not entail 'is a physical object'; some things that have spatial location are events, not physical objects. Just in virtue of knowing that something has spatial location I do not know a priori whether it has weight or not. First, it might be an event, and events have no weight. Second, it seems that there might be a tense atmosphere in the room without that atmosphere being the sort of atmosphere that has weight.

Further problems arise, as for most categorial systems, with such terms as 'detail', 'obstacle' and 'device'. It seems clear that nothing of a categorial nature can be deduced from the fact that what we are dealing with is a detail, simply because there can be philosophical, mathematical, musical, historical and architectural details. On the other hand, there seems to be no way of preventing 'is a detail' from counting as a VIT, especially in view of what Strawson says of one of his examples of a VIT, 'extent of ground': he writes that 'This leaves open to us any way we please of tracing out the boundaries of such extents, and thereby determining particular individuals which fall under the term; but it also *requires* that we adopt some boundary-indication procedure if we are to specify *any* individual under the term' (1970, p. 198). Something very close to this could be said of 'is a detail'; but 'is a detail' implies neither 'has spatial location' nor its contradictory. One thing, of course, that we cannot say is that 'is a detail' is not a VIT because it carries no categorial implications. This would bring in circularity, vicious this time. We are supposed to be able to tell what is a VIT and what is not *before* we build up an account of categorical relations, not afterwards; so this move would put the cart before the horse.

My main criticism of Strawson is thus very close to something that I said about Ryle. For though Strawson claims to do away with the traditional style of categories by introducing a new style that does just the same job as the old without falling foul of the difficulties that scuppered the latter, it appears that the new style needs as a backbone the very sort of compartmentalisation that theories of the old style wanted to find. The problems we have seen have really all derived from the fact that some trans-categorial predications are acceptable and others are not. We need some method of explaining the ones that are and distinguishing them from the ones that are not, and it is in virtue of this requirement that a theory on traditional lines is still called for.

## 6 Conclusion

Until such a theory has been produced, it seems to me that we would do better to avoid the notion of a category mistake altogether. As things stand, it is a technical term of which no adequate sense has yet been made. The most we can do with the notion of a category mistake is to say, of some mistakes, that they involve illegitimate cross-categorial predication. But this is not very informative once we admit that some cross-categorial predications are perfectly legitimate. Every mistake involves thinking that things of one sort belong to some other sort instead. Can we say more than this about category mistakes? Not yet.

If we want to move forward, perhaps the right way would be to look for a level of predication, just below the most basic distinction of all, that between particular and universal, and try to construct (I do not say find) a set of mutually exclusive and exhaustive predicates which seem to be of the right kind. And it is not as if we have no understanding at all of what we are looking for. We know already that one of these predicates will probably be 'is a physical object'; our aim will be to start from there and build as far as we can. Assuming that we have some success in that project, we can then turn to the relations between those 'categorial' terms and the other, lower-level ones. This is where we approach the issue of how to characterise a category mistake. We have to allow that some sub-categorial terms are not restricted in their application to items in only one category. But this should not disconcert us. We have a good initial understanding of which those terms are: examples that immediately occur to us include 'is a detail', 'is interesting', 'is a possible object of thought'. Leaving them aside, we construct a sort of map which places in their categories all predicates that can be mapped onto just one of our categorial terms. And with all this in place, we can announce that a predication is category-mistaken if none of the categories allowed by the subject term is also allowed by the predicate term. At this point, something of substance might have been achieved. And we would not yet have even addressed the question whether category-mistaken statements are to be thought of as necessarily false, as meaningless or as absurd. That issue seems to me to be, at this stage, comparatively incidental.

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# 2

# Nothing Categorical on Categories

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## Introduction

The notion of a category appears to have suffered a tragic decline. It started life as a basic concept of the grand metaphysical tradition of philosophy. By the heyday of linguistic philosophy it had been reduced to a tool of a purely negative project, namely the critique of certain philosophical doctrines or questions as based on linguistic mistakes. Later even its negative potential was questioned and it became common opinion that no coherent doctrine of categories can be devised. Later still, even these failures and disappointments were almost forgotten and the notion of categories seemed relevant merely to scholars of Aristotle and Kant.

My essay challenges this dismissive attitude and claims that important methodological lessons can be learned from the notion of a category. Following the lead of Gilbert Ryle, I shall argue that although its value is basically a critical one, and a limited one at that, investigating the possibility of a doctrine of categories affords valuable insights into the nature of philosophical problems, statements, and arguments. In order to show that the notion is not just of historical interest, I shall first take a brief and selective look at its history, focusing on the ontological conception of Aristotle and the transcendental conception of Kant. In the second section I shall turn to the roots of Ryle's theory of categories and category mistakes in early analytic philosophy, especially the *Tractatus*. Building on Wittgenstein, Ryle explicitly linked the idea of categories to the contrast between sense and nonsense and thus between mere falsehood and nonsense (Section 3). That contrast played a pivotal role in the rise of analytic philosophy. It has been unduly neglected since the 1970s, but has recently been revived. The sources of this renewed interest are twofold. The topic of nonsense occupies centre stage in current debates sparked by the self-styled 'New Wittgensteinians'. More importantly, mainstream analytic philosophy has come to appreciate the importance of the metaphilosophical issues that were such a striking feature of its early career. These issues include the question of whether one central task of philosophy is the diagnosis and avoidance of certain forms of nonsense, and in particular of nonsense that falls under Ryle's heading of 'category mistake'.

A negative answer to that question was given by Quine, who rejected the distinction between nonsense and mere falsehood. Section 4 addresses this fundamental critique of the idea of category mistakes, as well as Quine's more specific objections to Ryle. Sections 5 and 6 confront a slightly less radical line of criticism. Unlike Quine's, it does not rest on animadversions to the very contrast between sense and nonsense and hence to the idea of meaning. Instead, it denies *combinatorial nonsense*, the claim that perfectly meaningful sentence components can be combined in a way that may be grammatical, yet without resulting in a sentence that is itself 'meaningful', that is endowed with linguistic sense. Having allayed these fundamental worries, I turn in Section 7 to the two ways in which categories and their violations were identified by Ryle. Both are beset by problems. Some of these have been tackled by Strawson. I shall argue, however, that his proposal leads to a proliferation of categories and makes them relative to specific purposes. On this basis, the final section casts doubt on the idea that one can identify those concepts that constitute the subject-matter of philosophy through the idea of categories. Nevertheless, categories can be characterised in a clear and useful way, once we abandon the idea that they are either absolute or hard and fast. And drawing category distinctions and diagnosing category mistakes remains an important tool of philosophical critique.

## 1 Traditional accounts of categories: Aristotle and Kant

Aristotle was the first to use the notion of categories in a philosophical context.[1] In his early work *Categories* he presents a list of ten categories which seems to be derived from the different kinds of questions which can be asked about a person, or, more generally, an object: 'Who is he?', 'What kind of thing is he?', 'How big is he?', 'What is he doing?', and so on. This procedure for identifying categories seems to be based on a logical or even linguistic conception of what categories are.[2] What are classified are *things one can say* about something, in particular types of predicates which can be used to answer certain questions.

However, in Aristotle this linguistic conception is linked to certain metaphysical doctrines. First, he often seems to regard predicates themselves *not* as linguistic expressions, but as fundamental properties or features of the world. Second, some questions that can be asked about a person, for example 'Who is he?' or 'Who has certain properties?', point not towards ranges of *predicates* but towards ranges of *subjects*. This gives rise to the special category of 'first substance', which includes particulars like Socrates. Finally, there is a close connection between ranges of predicates and *types* of things, the kinds to which they belong. The type or form (eidos) of a thing constitutes another special category ('secondary substance'). It is determined by the kind of predicates it accepts. The view that emerges regards categories as the ultimate or fundamental kinds into which things in general can be divided. The furniture of the universe consists of substances, qualities, and so on, and anything we may encounter can be subsumed under one of these genera (although Aristotle occasionally allows for a single item to appear in more than one category).

This metaphysical conception of categories comes to fruition in Aristotle's later work. In *Metaphysics* he conceives of philosophy as ontology, the science of 'being qua being'. This obscure dictum can be understood as the idea that philosophy, qua ontology, investigates not specific features of particular objects, but the most fundamental and general features of reality as a whole. And these ultimate features include first and foremost the highest genera that Aristotle had earlier treated as categories.

In Kant the notion of categories is transformed in two ways. At the level of philosophical logic, Kant went beyond Aristotle by suggesting a new way of identifying categories, one which he thought could be proven to be both correct and exhaustive. Categorial distinctions are based not on differences in the type of *terms* which occur in a judgement, but on the way they are *combined* to form a judgement. The categories are derived from a table which classifies judgements according to their *logical form* (Kant 1998 [1787], B95–116).[3] That table is in turn determined by logical form words like 'all', 'the', 'if', and so on. The idea is that to each form of judgement there corresponds a different categorial concept which renders possible the combination of subject and predicate in empirical judgements of that form.

Alas, Kant not only fails to clarify the notion of logical form. His view is marred by a fundamental tension. On the one hand, he distinguishes judgments of *different forms*. In particular, through the third heading of his table of judgement he commits himself to the view that all judgments display one of three patterns of 'relation', namely 'S is P', 'if p then q', 'p or q'. On the other hand, his definition of a judgement, as well as his classification of judgements into analytic and synthetic, retains the view that *all* judgements are of subject/predicate form, that is of the first type distinguished under the heading of relation, and that they differ merely in the way subject and predicate are combined. One might remedy this failure by confining the definitions of judgement and of the analytic/synthetic distinction to elementary judgements. But this would be a departure from Kant's claim that all judgements can be classified by assigning them to one of the three groups in each of his four parameters. It would also mean that both the logical form 'S is P' and the category of a substance derived from it occupy a distinct and more fundamental role than the two other forms of judgement and the categories derived from them.

These shortcomings notwithstanding, Ryle rightly commended Kant: through his stress on logical form he restored logical form words from 'the limbo of logic to its workshop' (Ryle 1971, p. 177), where they have remained ever since. More important still was the fundamental reorientation he brought about on the grand methodological level. According to Kant's 'Copernican Revolution' philosophy should be 'occupied not so much with objects as with the mode of our knowledge *of objects*' (Kant 1998 [1787], B25). This means that philosophy differs from common sense and science not in degree, by being concerned with more abstract features of reality, but fundamentally. While science and common sense talk about reality and its objects, philosophy is not directly concerned with objects of any kind, not even the most general features of reality or the abstract entities postulated by Platonism. Instead it reflects on our way of knowing or understanding the objects of the material world. Kant's 'reflective turn' (Glock 1997) transforms philosophy into a second-order investigation of the ways in which objects are given to us in experience. For example, we experience objects as located in space and time, and as centres of qualitative changes which are subject to causal laws. According to Kant these are necessary features of experience. They cannot be derived from experience, since they define what it is to be an object of experience. According to his transcendental idealism they are ultimately structures which the mind imposes on experience in order to make sense of it.

This idea was developed by the phenomenological tradition within the framework of reflecting on different ways of being conscious of objects. Husserl went beyond Kant in reflecting on what it is to be an object in general – not just an object of (sensory) *experience* – and distinguishes different domains of objects (physical, mental, abstract) according to what he calls their 'modes of givenness'. Heidegger went beyond the consciousness of *objects* – and perhaps the limits of intelligibility – by speaking of 'disclosedness of world', an awareness of all non-object-like features which are relevant to a person's self-understanding.

In spite of these differences there is a common element to the conceptions of categories initiated, respectively, by Aristotle and Kant. Whether located in reality or imposed by the mind, whether features of experience or of human existence, categories are the fundamental structures which constitute the proper topic of metaphysical theories. Theories of categories seek to describe these fundamental structures in a systematic way; in Kant they have the additional task of defending their objectivity against sceptical doubts.

## 2 Categories in early analytic philosophy: the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*

By comparison, the role of categories in the analytical tradition of the twentieth century may appear modest. It derived from two interrelated lines of thought. These do not employ the term 'category' and its cognates, yet nonetheless deal with the phenomenon from a novel perspective.

In order to avoid the logical paradoxes, Russell developed a theory of types which divides things into (a hierarchy of) different kinds which cannot be put together in a single class. Individuals make up the lowest type, classes of individuals the next, classes of such classes the third, and so on. Sentences which affirm membership of a class (e.g. '$A \in B$') are meaningful only if A belongs to a lower type than B.[4]

The second source, on which I shall concentrate, evolves from the critical or negative aims that the linguistic turn assigned to philosophy. The idea is common to Wittgenstein, logical positivism, and so-called Ordinary Language Philosophy. Some or even all philosophical statements and theories are not false, but flawed in a more fundamental way, namely by being nonsensical, unintelligible, or absurd.

Both lines of thought converge in the early Wittgenstein. The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*TLP*) denies that there is a need for Russell's theory of types. But it takes over the idea that certain combinations of signs are excluded as nonsensical (see Glock 1996, pp. 201–2, 333–4). What prevents such combinations are not artificial 'ideal' languages à la Russell that introduce type-distinctions ab novo; rather, they are already excluded by 'logical syntax' – logico-syntactic rules which determine the combinatorial possibilities of signs and lay hidden below the surface of natural languages all along.

Just like Kant before and Ryle after him, the early Wittgenstein extracts categorial concepts from forms of judgements. The latter he calls 'variables', and they correspond to Russell's 'propositional functions'. Just like Kant's types of judgement, variables characterise propositions of a particular kind. If we replace one of the 'constituents' of

(1) a is red

by a placeholder we get a propositional variable or propositional function

(1′) x is red

The variable is given by the determination of its values, that is by stipulating what sort of propositions can be constructed through filling the argument place (Wittgenstein 1961 [1922], 3.31ff.). The value of (1′) are all those propositions we get by substituting a name for x, the variable 'collects' all the propositions of the form – 'a is red', 'b is red', etc.

The analogues of Kant's categories are 'formal concepts', like number, colour, and so on. A material concept such as 'red' is the name of a property – and thus of what the *TLP* treats as one kind of 'object' – and it can occur in a genuine proposition like (1). By contrast, a formal concept like 'visible object' does not stand for anything, and it cannot itself be meaningfully employed. Instead, a formal concept is given by a variable. 'Visible object', for instance, is the constant form of all expressions which can be meaningfully substituted in (1′). The form or category of an object can neither be named – it is not itself an object – nor stated through a formal concept like 'colour'. Rather, it is *shown* by the fact that its name is a legitimate substitution instance of a given propositional variable (Wittgenstein 1961 [1922], 4.1272). That 'a' is the name of a visible object whereas 'b' is the name of a tone is shown by the fact that 'a' but not 'b' can meaningfully be substituted in (1′). In an ideal notation there would be a distinct variable and a distinct style of name for each logical category. Such a notation would reflect the rules of logical syntax, and devising it is crucial to philosophy, since philosophical problems and theories are based on violating or misunderstanding these rules.

The category distinctions of the *TLP* are of a metaphysical kind, in spite of the fact that the saying/showing distinction portrays metaphysical statements as ineffable. The rules that determine the combinatorial possibilities of a name – what other names it can meaningfully be combined with – are ultimately determined by the nature of the object it names (see Glock 2006). However, the *TLP* takes several steps in the direction of Ryle's anti-metaphysical and linguistic account of categories. First, categories are *abstractions* from the *role of signs within propositions*, just as for Kant they were abstractions from the role of concepts within judgements. Second, categories are connected to the *linguistic difference between sense and nonsense*, what it makes sense to say, and what is unintelligible; and third, that difference is *central to the task of philosophy*. As Ryle put it: 'The philosopher's proprietary question is not "What does this or that expression mean?", but "Why does this or that expression make nonsense? and what sort of nonsense does it make?"' (1970, pp. 6–7).

## 3 Categories and nonsense: Ryle

Following Wittgenstein, Ryle links categories to this difference between sense and nonsense and thereby to a contrast between mere falsehood and nonsense. Some grammatically well-formed sentences in the indicative and/or their use in assertoric speech-acts are neither true nor false nor unjustified or unwarranted. Instead, they apparently suffer from a more basic defect, a defect of a semantic kind. They are neither true, nor even false, but fail to be truth-apt. *Mutatis mutandis* for questions. At least some traditional philosophical questions do not call for an answer, but need in turn to be questioned, since they make no sense (see Moore 1903, p. vi).

Failure of truth-aptness is clearly distinct from falsehood. But at least two distinct failures have been identified. For one thing, there are the truth-value gaps famously detected by Frege and Strawson. According to them, some meaningful assertoric sentences are neither true nor false. More accurately, by using them on a particular occasion, a speaker does not express a truth-apt proposition or statement. The rationale is that at least one of their singular terms lacks a determinate reference, since there is no unique referent for its use on this occasion. Either there is no referent at all, or there is more than one. The most famous example of the former case is, of course, 'The present king of France is bald', uttered after 1848.

The second type of failure of truth-aptness is lack of sense. It featured in Frege and Russell, yet it really came into its own through Wittgenstein, Carnap, and Ryle. Some sentences that appear to be grammatically well-formed cannot be used to make a truth-apt assertion for purely linguistic reasons, independently of the contingent satisfaction of existence and uniqueness conditions pertaining to their constituent singular terms. These sentences are meaningless, senseless, or nonsensical.

At this juncture it is imperative to note that in ordinary parlance no less than in linguistics and philosophy, these terms and their cognates can mean at least three different things. In one sense, they apply to statements or beliefs and mean something like *patently false* or *unreasonable* (we tend to label such cases 'nonsensical' more often than 'senseless'). In this capacity, the term was widely used in the enlightenment, to brand superstition and religious dogma. At present, it is popular among politicians, especially when it comes to disparaging uncomfortable allegations as 'absolute and utter nonsense'. I shall refer to this as *absurdity*.

In a second sense, the term applies to actions of all sorts, including linguistic utterances, and means something like *obviously pointless* or *futile*. I shall refer to this as *futility* (here we prefer to speak of 'senseless' rather than 'nonsense'). Both usages retain a connection to the original meaning of the German *Unsinn*, in that a nonsensical statement or action betokens lack of sense or even sanity. In a third and historically most recent sense, our terms apply to linguistic expressions or utterances and mean something like *bereft of linguistic meaning*. By the same token, such expressions or utterances defy linguistic understanding, that is are *unintelligible* to competent speakers, by contrast to the aforementioned truth-value gaps. I shall refer to such cases as *linguistic nonsense* or simply as nonsense.

Now consider various candidates for linguistic nonsense:

(2) Ab sur ah
(3) The was it blues no
(4) Socrates is identical
(5) Julius Caesar is a prime number
(6) Colourless green ideas sleep furiously
(7) Moscow lies north-east of the South Pole
(8) $\sqrt{2} \in Z$
(9) White is darker than black
(10) You can't step into the same river twice

One can distinguish these cases by reference to different types or degrees of understanding and correlated failures of understanding (see Glock 2014). As regards (2), we are at a loss to identify a language to which it belongs; in fact (2) does not belong to any extant language. (3), by contrast, is a garbled string of familiar English expressions. In ordinary parlance, we would tend to disparage all of (2)–(6) as nonsense. By contrast, we might not classify (7)–(10) as nonsense immediately, but instead treat them as absurd. They are necessary falsehoods that contradict necessary truths of certain conceptual schemes, for instance the way we individuate rivers in the case of a metaphysical pronouncement like (10). Elsewhere I have defended Wittgenstein's controversial claim that necessary falsehoods are nonsensical, on the grounds that they defy coherent explanation of what would have to be the case for them to be true (Glock 2008). In this essay I shall confine myself to cases like (4)–(6) and (10). As regards these, Ryle joins hands with Wittgenstein and Carnap in regarding them as nonsensical.[5] He further tries to characterise this kind of nonsense through his seminal label 'category mistake' (Ryle 1971, p. 148ff.; 1980 [1949], pp. 10, 17ff.). The basic idea is that in such cases we predicate – explicitly or implicitly – of one kind of thing what can only be predicated of another kind; more generally, there is a mismatch between subject and predicate. Ryle's account of categories is supposed to furnish the basis for this critical diagnosis. It divides either things or expressions (depending on whether one employs, in Carnap's terminology, the material or formal mode of expression) into non-overlapping groups such that what can be said – truly or falsely – of (material mode) or with (formal mode) all the members of one group cannot meaningfully be said about members of the other.

Ryle's account of categories is a constructive one and part of the philosophy of language; yet he pursued it in a wider metaphilosophical context, namely with the aim of fashioning the idea of category mistakes as a tool for philosophical critique. He suggested that all or at least many philosophical errors and confusions can be characterised as based on category mistakes (Ryle 1980 [1949]). As regards both the constructive and the critical side, Ryle avoids some of the shortcomings of his venerable predecessors. He relinquishes the obscure notion of Aristotle's 'being qua being' and the contentious project of divining the essence of reality by an a priori *Wesensschau*. He eschews the oscillation between conceptual claims and quasi-empirical psychology that mars Kant's transcendental idealism. And he stays clear of the unfounded *TLP* prejudice that claims about the logical or semantic category of an expression must be nonsensical. Nevertheless Ryle's doctrine of categories faces a barrage of objections concerning its fundamentals rather than mere details of its execution. I shall address two of them. The first revolves around the very notion of nonsense or meaninglessness. It denies that nonsense is distinct from falsehood to begin with. The second line targets the idea of combinatorial nonsense, which Ryle shares with an otherwise disparate group of philosophers like Husserl, Wittgenstein, and Carnap, as well as with common sense. Certain types of nonsense – notably (4) to (7) – result from sentence components (words) that are themselves meaningful (in a language) being combined in a way that is syntactically licit (at least prima facie), yet semantically unsound in that language.

## 4 Quine's attack on 'no-nonsense philosophers'

The first line of attack was spearheaded by Quine. The pillar of his position is his famous refusal to accept that there is a fundamental difference between analytic and synthetic propositions. This refusal has important consequences for the doctrine of categories (see Quine 1960, pp. 228–30; 1987, pp. 189–92). In so far as analytic propositions either record or determine what an expression means, combinations that run counter to them run counter to the meaning of words or to concepts rather than to facts and hence would appear to be nonsensical rather than merely false. But if the very distinction between analytic or conceptual and synthetic factual propositions were untenable, this would also undermine the dichotomy between sentences that are nonsensical and those that are merely false.

Quine insists that standard analytic falsehoods like contradictions and mathematical falsehoods are false rather than meaningless (Quine 1980 [1953], ch. V). This view is indeed shared by many who would regard sentences like 'This stone is thinking of Vienna' and 'Quadruplicity drinks procrastination' as meaningless. However, if one does not banish mathematical falsehoods and like absurdities from language, what is the benefit of doing so in these cases? It appears, to Quine at any rate, that nothing but vagueness and complication is lost by declaring such sentences to be trivially false.

It is interesting, though rarely noted, that Quine combines this rejection of the idea of category mistakes with a commitment to a doctrine of categories. However, that doctrine does not draw on the linguistic idea of delineating the bounds of meaningful predication. Instead, it goes back to the ontological tradition. The task of philosophy is to describe the 'ultimate categories', which means the most 'general traits of reality', the 'furniture of the universe'. By contrast to the Aristotelian conception, metaphysics is replaced by science when it comes to deciding on the 'prime traits' of reality, and hence choosing a set of basic general terms.[6] But philosophy has the task of setting limits to 'scientifically admissible construction', the ways of deriving more complex predicates from these components. By contrast to Ryle's conception, however, there are no partitions of things and general terms according to what terms are significantly predicable of what things. Instead there is a 'single unpartitioned universe', and a 'single grammar of predication' provided by science.

In effect, Quine provides an empiricist update of the Aristotelian picture in which the quest for the ultimate features of reality is taken over by science. Given that it is at least unclear what an a priori, philosophical investigation of reality could look like, this may seem like a good idea. But that does not vindicate either Quine's general conception of philosophy as an appendix to the scientific enterprise, nor his hostility to what he labels 'no-nonsense philosophers' like Ryle. As regards the latter, he eschews the difficulties of a philosophical doctrine of categories, but at a price.

First, his perspective on necessary truth and necessary falsehood is itself problematic. Elsewhere I have argued at length that Quine's assimilations of the analytic to the synthetic, the a priori to the a posteriori and the necessary to the empirical are not supported by sound argument and ultimately founder (2003a, ch. 3). At present it must suffice to point out that Quine's repudiation of the idea of category mistakes relies on rejecting other ideas as well. At least some of these would appear both less optional than the dichotomies he rejects and less contentious than the behaviourist assumptions on which Quine himself relies. This holds in particular for the notion of linguistic meaning or sense. Quine does not shy away from bidding farewell to that notion, since he subscribes to a kind of meaning-scepticism. He also acknowledges that if one sticks to what he calls a 'rigid' conception of sense, one is led to regard category mistakes as meaningless. Quine notwithstanding, however, the rigidity at issue here is imposed not by philosophical prejudices but by our ordinary notion of meaning. For that notion distinguishes between the falsehood of 'My three-year-old baby understands Russell's theory of types', which we will fail to believe, and the nonsensicality of 'My three-year-old baby is an adult', which we fail to understand.

Quine himself pays heed to this point (unwittingly?) in his discussion of categorial doctrines. He concedes that it is possible to distinguish the different senses of words like 'cool' by pointing out that breezes are neither cooler nor less cool than a reception. 'Comparability thus serves as a convenient touchstone of sameness of sense' ('Senses of words': 1987, p. 190). At the same time he insists that the sentence 'The breeze is cooler than the reception' is false rather than meaningless. This, however, is at odds with the very notion of comparability for it reduces the claim that two things are incomparable – that is *cannot even be compared* – to the obviously different claim that *a certain comparison is false*. Consequently Quine's position on category mistakes casts doubt on the possibility of distinguishing between different meanings of words – by his own lights. And in doing so it ultimately casts doubt on the idea of linguistic meaning as well.

Irrespective of Quine's general rejection of the difference between falsehood and nonsense, his specific arguments against Ryle are uncharacteristically weak. Even if one accepts that contradictions and mathematical falsehoods should not be regarded as nonsensical (which does not go without saying), it is at least prima facie plausible to treat sentences like

(11) 'This stone is thinking of Vienna'

and

(12) 'The number 7 is green'

differently. Quine's 'no no-nonsense' position faces at least two objections:

(i) If someone points at a stone and proclaims (11), we would not disagree, but rather fail to understand what he is saying. Of course these sentences, like any other, could be given meaning by being explained in a certain way, for example (12) as saying that the number 7 evokes feelings of green. But this would amount to a new way of explaining and using the terms involved; it would not show that the sentences had been meaningful all along, in advance of such a novel stipulation.

(ii) There is no intelligible answer to the question of what would count as (11) or (12) being true. Such an answer can of course not be provided by simply repeating the statement. Neither can it be provided by going through certain transformations (e.g. 'It means that the heaviest object in this room entertains thoughts about the capital of Austria', etc.). For the same problem arises with respect to these sentences.

As regards (11) in particular, it should be noted that in the third-person case we apply or withhold psychological terms on the basis of behavioural criteria. But nothing a stone could do would count as displaying a thought.

## 5 Category mistakes and compositionalism

Ryle's idea of category mistakes has also been attacked on grounds other than Quine's general nihilism about meaning. One objection has been that category mistakes must be meaningful because they have a truth-value (namely false) (e.g. Haack 1971). Yet this obviously begs the question against no-nonsense philosophy, since having a truth-value presupposes being meaningful (Routley 1969). More recent lines of criticism avoid such circular reasoning.

By contrast to Quine, the New Wittgensteinians regard cases like (4)–(6) as nonsensical rather than false. They insist, however, that their components are nonsensical as well. For their conception of nonsense is 'austere' rather than 'substantial' (Crary and Read 2000, pp. 12–3; Diamond 1991, pp. 111–2; 2000, pp. 153, 165; Conant 2002, pp. 380–3). Whereas the substantial conception allows for 'positive nonsense', nonsense that results from combining meaningful expressions in illegitimate ways, the austere view allows only for 'negative nonsense', nonsense which results from our not having assigned a meaning to expressions in a certain context. The lack of sense in the case of (4)–(6) is a matter of *privation*; it results from a failure to assign meaning to the components in that context.

Elsewhere I have argued that the austere view goes wrong, both as an interpretation of Wittgenstein and as an account of nonsense (2004; 2014). Here I shall confine myself to discussing two other objections, from the direction of formal semantics (Camp 2004; Magidor 2010). One set of arguments appeals to compositionality.[7] The guiding idea is in effect the contraposition of the austere conception. Whereas the latter argues that a combination of signs can fail to have a sense only if at least one of its components lacks meaning, the no-nonsense position maintains that a combination of meaningful components must itself have a sense. By these lights, since category mistakes consist of meaningful components, they must be meaningful. Principles of compositionality are widely brandished in contemporary formal semantics. But they have been challenged precisely by those who recognise the possibility of combinatorial nonsense, such as Wittgenstein and Ryle. Still, Magidor (2010, p. 557) propounds a compositionalist principle which in her view does not to beg any questions against the no-nonsense view:

> (CP1) If S is a generally competent speaker of L and S understands the terms 'a' and 'F' of L, then S understands the sentence 'Fa', if this is a meaningful sentence of L.

However, this principle implies only that the sense of senseful sentences is always a function of the meanings of its constituents and their mode of combination, not that the meanings of sentence components can always be combined to compose sentences with a sense. For this reason, it does not appear to preclude combinatorial nonsense. Certain strings may simply violate principles of semantic composition.

At this juncture Magidor complains that combinatorial nonsense can be reconciled with (CP1) only if one can provide a semantic framework to explain both why certain combinations make sense and why other combinations do not. She rejects what she regards as the most promising attempt to discharge this obligation, namely appealing to type-theoretic semantics. But irrespective of the potential of that specific branch of formal semantics for solving the problem, there is no general difficulty here. Among the rules that are partly constitutive of the meaning of a word ‘a’, there will be rules that specify the combinatorial possibilities of ‘a’ – an idea implicit in the notion of logical syntax developed by the early Wittgenstein and the middle Carnap. Alternatively, the rules at issue may imply such combinatorial exclusions, such that understanding these rules, and hence the meaning of ‘a’, is incompatible with making sense of the combination ‘Fa’. Allowing for this second possibility avoids a potential liability of such an approach, namely that the numerous combinatorial possibilities and impossibilities of a word are all part of its explanation. Verificationism is a theory of meaning that affords this second option: rules about identifying the object to which ‘a’ refers and about deciding whether ‘F’ applies to an object are constitutive of the meaning of the respective words. And these rules may imply that ‘Fa’ makes no sense, without excluding that specific combination *expressis verbis*. An abstract object like a number that is identified through its position in a formal series defies the application of a rule of classification based on assigning visible properties to spatio-temporal objects.

By this token, the proper formulation of a compositional principle should rather be:

> (CP2) If S is a generally competent speaker of L and S understands the terms ‘a’ and ‘F’ of L, then S will know whether ‘Fa’ is a meaningful type-sentence of L, and if it is, S will understand ‘Fa’.

Far from excluding combinatorial nonsense, however, (CP2) explicitly takes account of it.

A more specific objection is that

(13) That is green

or

(14) What I am thinking of is green

make sense, notwithstanding the fact that they resulting in category mistakes when 'that' or 'what I am thinking of' refer to a number (Magidor 2010, p. 561). But while these forms of words – these type-sentences – make sense, in that they can be used to say something intelligible according to extant rules, they cannot be used to say something intelligible if the purported referent is a number. This is no more mysterious than the fact, highlighted in Strawson's critique of Russell's theory of descriptions, that one and the same form of words can be used to say something truth-apt in one kind of context, but not in another.

As regards the question of nonsense in cases like (13) and (14), the crucial point is this. Some expressions can be used to refer to any kind of object that is suitable as a logical subject of predication. But depending on the category of the specific object they are used to refer to on a particular occasion, certain predications will make sense while others won't. Concerning (14), although numbers and material objects belong to distinct categories if anything does, both are among the things that one can think of. This is simply a consequence of the fact that our cognitive faculties include the capacity not just of perception but also of abstract thought. Similarly for the demonstrative 'that' in (13). The paradigmatic use of this demonstrative pronoun is reference to material objects. Yet its employment also encompasses deferred ostension. For instance, by pointing to a numeral or a pair, I may be referring indirectly to the number two. Nonetheless, understanding deferred ostension to abstract objects implies appreciating that the objects thus referred to are not within the range of applicability of a colour predicate, by contrast to the objects through which the deferred ostension takes place.

By dint of revolving around indexicals, the objection just discussed is linked to another argument from compositionality. It concerns not the relation between subject and predicate in simple predicative sentences, but logical operators. Thus Magidor endorses

(CP3) If 'p' and 'q' are meaningful declarative sentences, then 'p and q' is a meaningful declarative sentence.

(CP3) implies that

(15) That is green and that is prime

is meaningful, even though (15) is a category mistake, provided that the two occurrences of ‘that’ are co-referential (Magidor 2010, p. 563).

Yet even if (CP3) were valid in principle, it could not be applied to cases involving indexical expressions. A principle like

> (CP4) If ‘That is F’ and ‘That is G’ make sense, then ‘That is F and that is G’ makes sense

is simply unacceptable, if F and G are categorially incompatible in the way in which ‘green’ and ‘prime’ are. In such cases, understanding the predicates implies recognising that they cannot apply to one and the same thing. If Magidor’s argument were sound, one might as well reason that since ‘This cake is edible’ makes perfectly good sense its extension by ‘and so is the number 2’ must as well (here you have not anaphoric reference but something like anaphoric predication). While Magidor would accept this consequence, a proponent of the possibility of combinatorial nonsense has no reason to do so, and I reckon that competent speakers without axes to grind would concur.

## 6 Translation, propositional attitudes, and metaphor

Not all objections to combinatorial nonsense rest directly on compositionalist assumptions. One line of criticism appeals to the fact that category mistakes can be translated (Magidor 2010, pp. 565–6). Since translation is supposed to preserve synonymy, the argument continues, category mistakes must be meaningful. However, delivering a meaningful sentence is a legitimate demand on translation only in cases in which the whole target string has sense to begin with. In other cases, the operative condition is simply that translation should preserve as much as feasible the meaning of sentence components and the mode of combination. In fact, yielding a meaningful sentence as the translation of a string that lacks sense overall is a sufficient condition of mistranslation. Once again, rejecting these two points not only begs the question against the idea of combinatorial nonsense, it is also inherently implausible.

A fourth line of criticism appeals to ‘propositional attitude ascriptions’ (Magidor 2010, pp. 566–71). Consider sentences like

(16) Jane said that the theory of relativity is eating breakfast
(17) John believes that π is green
(18) Sarah dreamt that her toothbrush was pregnant

We can employ and understand these sentences. But, the argument continues, this is possible only because the embedded sentence in the indicative is meaningful as well. Once again, this is the contraposition of the austere conception. Thus Diamond (2000, pp. 151, 161) argues that, if a grammatically well-formed sentence ‘p’ is nonsense, then so is ‘A thinks that/says that p’. Now, Magidor is right in claiming that we understand indirect speech reporting category mistakes. When commentators say ‘Hegel wrote that the True is the Whole’ or ‘Badiou maintains that truth is that which punctures a hole in knowledge’, it is not they who talk rubbish. At the same time, the conditional by which both the austere conception and Magidor set store is mistaken. The licitness of constructions like (16)–(18) does not presuppose that the embedded category mistakes are meaningful. It is simply guaranteed by the grammatical well-formedness of category mistakes. To that extent, they are part of a natural language. But what we understand in the case of (16) is to be spelled out in terms of ‘direct speech’. It is less clear that we understand belief ascriptions like (17). In so far as we do, what we understand boils down to understanding indirect speech constructions like (16). After all, what would it be for someone to really believe that π is green, apart from his being inclined to say thinks like ‘π is green’, ‘The ratio of the circumference of a circle and its diameter is green’, and so on? Could John display his conviction by trying to repaint π, for instance? Even tentative steps in that direction – as opposed, for example, to repainting a token-numeral – appear doomed. As for (18), in fairy tales this can make sense, although they involve treating toothbrushes as organisms, thus removing the licence for calling them inanimate artefacts and hence for condemning ‘Sarah’s toothbrush is pregnant’ as a category mistake.

Finally, opponents of combinatorial nonsense have appealed to metaphor. Since metaphors are understood, the story goes, and since many of them involve category mistakes, the latter must make sense (Magidor 2010, p. 571–2). However, there is a widespread and credible account of metaphors that easily blocks this line of reasoning. It is the idea that metaphors involve similes or comparisons. While ‘Juliet is the sun’ may be unintelligible taken literally, ‘Juliet is like the sun (in such-and-such respects)’ is anything but.

Magidor challenges advocates of a simile account to apply it to complex cases like

(19) John rides his mind at a gallop in search of an idea

Fortunately, this can be achieved by going beyond the paradigm of transforming ‘a is (an) F’ into ‘A is like (an) F’. (19) can be spelled out as

(19′) John exercises his mind intensively, in search of an idea.

Magidor insists that this tactic must account for the way in which the paraphrase respects the meaning not just of words, but also of complete phrases (2010, pp. 572–3). But this would not appear to be a problem. In spelling out (19) we start with ‘John rides’, and consider the question ‘What?’ If the answer is ‘his mind’, we gather that it is a matter of exercising his mind, just like one can exercise a horse by riding it. The addition ‘at a gallop’ informs us that the exercise of John’s mental faculties occurs at great speed or intensity. Next, when we hear ‘in search of’, we understand that the mind is exercised intensively for the benefit of identifying something that answers to a certain description. Finally, ‘an idea’ tells us that this something is an idea. This gives us a clue of the kind of search or identification procedure involved, since searching for an idea is different from searching for a fox, for instance.[8]

## 7 Categories and concepts

Several fundamental objections to the very idea of category mistakes have been found wanting. This does not, however, exempt its proponents from providing an adequate explanation of the notion of a category (mistake). There have been three noteworthy attempts.

One proposal by Ryle elaborates on Kant’s attempt to classify the category of terms through the logical form of the judgements in which they occur (‘Categories’: Ryle 1971, pp. 183–4; ‘Philosophical Argument’: Ryle 1971, pp. 198–200). The categories of certain ‘factors’ (constituents) of a proposition are determined by the logical form of the proposition, which in turn is identified with its logical powers – the totality of its ‘liaisons’, ‘logical powers’, or logical relations with other propositions.

This suggestion fails, since a difference in logical form as understood by formal logicians is neither sufficient nor necessary. ‘p&q’ and ‘pvq’, ‘∃xFx’ and ‘∀xFx’ have different logical form but (i) the types of the factors constituting the elementary propositions p and q may be identical; (ii) ‘&’ and ‘v’ themselves belong to same category. And ‘There exists exactly one number which is both even and prime’ and ‘There exists exactly one person who is both human and divine’ have the same logical form but their factors are of different logical types.

Ryle's second attempt defines categories as classes of expressions which can be substituted for each other in sentence-frames *salva congruitate*, that is without turning sense into nonsense and vice versa ('Categories': 1971, pp. 179–81; see also 'Theories of Meaning': 1971, p. 355). But now the question arises whether this condition applies to *any* or *all* sentence frames. In the first case there will be some contexts in which terms can be substituted for each other which intuitively belong to different categories, for example 'wisdom' for 'Plato' in 'Aristotle loved Plato'. On the other hand, if we insist on substitutability in *all* contexts, we equally run into difficulties. Consider the sentences-frames:

(20) A football field can be divided into x parts
(21) This x has lost one of its prongs
(22) X is a darker colour than red

The pair '2'/'1', fails frame (20), 'fork'/'knife', fails (21) and 'green'/'red' fails (22). However, we would not want to say that the paired expressions belong to different categories. But even if we could accept this counter-intuitive result, the consequence would be that *no two concepts* belong to the same category. For such frames can be constructed with respect to any concepts. Substitutability *salva congruitate* is, therefore, either too narrow or too wide a criterion for category-identity.

In view of these difficulties, Strawson made a third suggestion, namely to elucidate the notion of a category, namely via the *mismatch* between certain ranges of *subjects* and certain types of *predicates* (1980 [1974], ch. 6; cf. also Kneale and Kneale 1984, p. 671f.). This requires finding a basis for distinguishing between two kinds of predications which are a priori rejectable, those in which the denial of the predicate is equally unacceptable – category mistakes like (4) and (5) – and those where it is a priori acceptable – analytical falsehoods like (8). Strawson does so by noticing that in cases of the former kind there is always a predicate ('is the kind of thing that can Φ') which is a priori rejectable. If both 'is in the drawing room' and 'is not in the drawing room' are mismatched to a certain individual, 'has some spatial location' can a priorily be denied of it. This furnishes the idea of a categorical predicate, one which is a priori acceptable for some individual and either a priori acceptable or rejectable for all individuals, provided that the individual is 'adequately identified'. 'The item I have in mind has a colour' is only a priori rejectable if the individual is identified, for example as a natural number.[9] On this basis one can provide the following definitions: a *predicate* is category-mismatched to an *individual* if it falls under a categorial predicate which is a priori unacceptable for all adequately identifying designations of that individual; two *predicates* are mismatched if for every individual either the one or the other is mismatched.

This approach is instructive in several respects. Statements pointing out categorial mismatches are part of the bread and butter of linguistic philosophising:

> *X*s are not the sort of thing that can be Φ
> *X*s neither Φ nor fail to Φ
> Φing cannot be significantly predicated of *X*s.[10]

However, there are also difficulties. First, Strawson needs to go further, by providing an account of what it is for a statement to be a priori acceptable or rejectable, respectively. If one does so, one will be driven to the Wittgensteinian conclusion that categorial statements are conceptual statements that do not exclude a genuine possibility or contradict an empirical belief, but instead serve to indicate the use or role of a term. Or so I have argued elsewhere (see 1996, pp. 129–35; 2003b; see also Waismann 1965, pp. 99–100). This means that the a priori rejectability of the categorial predicate must be seen in a special light. 'We wish to say *sans phrase* that numbers have no spatial location' (Strawson 1980 [1974], p. 125). But this is not an empirical statement, since its negation is not meaningful. If Strawson were to deny this, how could he insist that 'is in the drawing room' results in categorial nonsense in the first place?

Second, Strawson's test for categorial mismatch stands in need of qualification. For example, it seems that both 'is in the drawing room' and 'is not in the drawing room' a priori fail to apply to the moon. One might object that in fairy tales the moon can appear in a drawing room. But fairy tales often trade precisely on ideas of dubitable sense. More importantly, whether

(23) The moon is in the drawing room

makes sense once more depends on how one explains 'the moon' and other components of (23). If it is ostensively, by reference to a disc in the night sky, (23) makes sense. If it is 'the large astronomic satellite of Earth', then it arguably does not. For then (23) would have to be glossed somewhat as follows:

(23′) The large astronomic satellite of Earth is in a space occupying a small fraction of a building on earth.

At any rate, the problem is not one of size. If one uses 'is in the solar system' as a substitute string, the same difficulties arise concerning the Milky Way. Perhaps only 'is in the universe' would do. But this introduces a problematic predicate, one which applies to a totality. Perhaps one could avoid this avenue by introducing a predicate like 'is in the drawing room or at a distance from the drawing room'. But even if this solution is adequate, it is clear that Strawson's categorial doctrine cannot take certain 'test-predicates' for granted.

Third, similar difficulties show that Strawson's theory does not yield a distinct set of categorial concepts. As regards Ryle's second notion of categories, the difficulties with substitution *salva congruitate* lead Strawson to introduce a distinction between absolute and relative categories: for the former substitutability applies only to some predicates. Strawson also concedes that any doctrine of categories has to introduce some such distinction (1980 [1974], p. 122). But he does not take this into account when he comes to his own suggestion. The point there takes the following form. Non-applicability (both a predicate and its denial are a priori rejectable) arises not just from predicates like '...is in the drawing room' (or a suitable replacement), but also from predicates like 'a forest grows on...' or 'books can be put into..'. The former is applicable to a mountain, but not to an ashtray or a dove-dill, the latter to a cupboard, but not to a chair or the tip of a needle.[11] As in the former case, this non-applicability gives rise to a priori acceptability of other predicates, in this case 'is a potential bearer of forests' or 'is a receptacle'. Alas, these are not the kind of predicates which Strawson or philosophers in general would like to honour as categories.

Strawson, among others, has observed that different predicates divide things up in different ways, namely into those to which they *apply* and those to which they do not. My point is that they also divide things up in a more fundamental way, namely into those to which they are *applicable*, and those to which they are not, and that different predicates do so in *different* ways. As a consequence, there is no absolute class of categories, but only categorial mismatches relative to certain predicates.

One might try to avoid this conclusion by developing another suggestion made by Strawson, which does not focus directly on the applicability of different predicates: category-mismatch arises from the fact that the way we *refer* to (i.e. identify or single out) individuals of a certain range may be incompatible with meaningfully applying a certain type of predicate to it.[12] It seems appropriate to distinguish types of things on the basis of how they are referred to. The fact that kinds of stuff (butter, sugar, water) which are not individuals nevertheless constitute a category could be taken care of by admitting not just *logical* subjects of predication (which cannot themselves be predicated of anything) but *all* subjects of predication. Different types of subjects would be distinguished by how one indicates which subject, of a certain range of possible subjects, one is talking about. We distinguish, for example, between Bramleys and Coxes by means of predicates. But we refer to them by way of singular terms which share a pattern of use. In contrast, the difference between concrete objects and, for example, numbers is based, at least partly, on the difference between objects we identify and re-identify via their location in space and time, and those we identify through the place certain expressions occupy in a calculus or symbolism. On this basis one might distinguish material objects (particulars), non-objects (stuff), non-material non-objects (fun, sadness), non-material objects (sounds, smells), and abstract objects (numbers, attributes, statements, justice, etc.).

One might object that even the paradigmatic division between concrete and abstract objects is fishy, since numerals can be explained ostensively, for example by pointing to three books (see Wittgenstein 1958 [1953], §28). But here remains the distinguishing feature of spatio-temporal identification. To explain a numeral ostensively is not to locate a number in space and time. One does not point at the number 3; one only explains the numeral '3' by pointing at a collection of three objects. It is not obvious, therefore, that one cannot draw *clear* and *illuminating* category distinctions of this kind. But these distinctions will not be hard and fast. For ways of referring form a continuum. The way we identify attributes, for example, shares features with the way we identify numbers, but also with the way we identify non-material non-objects. Consequently we have not found a way of avoiding the conclusion that the notion of categories is 'fluid' and that there are '*different sorts of similarity*' between words (corresponding to the predicates relative to which categories are defined), which can be exploited for different purposes (Waismann 1965, p. 96f.).

## 8 Philosophy, categories, and category mistakes

The conclusion of the preceding section is that there is a multitude of category distinctions which differ not just in their dividing parameters but also in the degree to which they are fine-grained. Given the relativity and diversity of category distinctions, we need to confront the question: What is the point of category doctrines? It seems that the answer is that different such doctrines may have different points. However, as the case of Wittgenstein shows, it is one thing to insist on logical distinctions between types of words, quite another to sublimate such distinctions as categorial, and yet another to claim that philosophy is primarily concerned with categories. There are two classic versions of this ambitious idea, the Kantian idea of indispensible concepts, and the Aristotelian idea of most general concepts. Both of them feature in Strawson's metaphilosophy, which is the rightful heir of Ryle's. But Strawson does not always keep them apart (see 1959, Pt I; 1992 chs 1–2). The categorial predicates which are 'implied' by the inapplicability of other predicates are candidates both for being indispensable and for being supremely general, provided that the inapplicability-test is run with appropriate strings to begin with, that is predicates that are not too specific.

Kant distinguishes between empirical and a priori concepts. While the former are abstracted from experience, the latter are themselves preconditions of the possibility of experience (1920 [1800], §3; 1998/1787, B747f.). Strawson understands necessary preconditions as features of our conceptual framework which are *necessary* in the following sense: operating from within that framework we cannot make sense of the suggestion of alternative conceptual schemes without these features. We cannot conceive of ourselves lacking these concepts without destroying any conception of experience and of ourselves, which we can make intelligible to ourselves (Strawson 1992, pp. 20–7; 1966, p. 44).

This suggestion parallels Wittgenstein's claim that there are conceptual limits to alternative grammars imposed by concepts like 'language' and 'rationality'. The boundaries of intelligible conceptions of experience will be set by investigating what kind of concepts a creature must possess in order to be said to have experiences. However, such categories delineate the bounds of sense from within our conceptual scheme, that is by what we call 'language', and so on. Consequently they do *not* provide *metaphysical foundations* for our conceptual scheme.

Nor do they constitute the *sole subject-matter of philosophy*. This is borne out not just by the philosophical perplexities concerning technical terms introduced in philosophy or science, but also by everyday concepts which are not indispensable in this sense, for example 'colour', 'law', 'intention', 'God'.

This leaves the Aristotelian idea that philosophical concepts are the most general or universal ones. Here it is necessary to distinguish three different ways of understanding this notion. The first one refers to the kind of abstraction which leads us, for example, from the notion of iron to that of metal. We disregard certain attributes, and focus on others. The procedure is based on empirical differences. There is no difference in the applicability of predicates, but only an empirical grouping of iron, brass, gold, silver, and so on. By the same token, to say that gold is a metal is to make an empirical statement. I shall refer to this as Porphyrian classification.

Philosophers from very different quarters have tried to distinguish this kind of empirical classification and abstraction from a different process, which delivers philosophical categories. Thus Husserl insists that there is a difference between 'generalization' and 'formalization' (1950 [1913], §13). Unfortunately, he neither explains nor justifies this claim. Tugendhat tries to develop this idea by claiming that formalisation is not abstraction (increasingly general predicates, which apply to all of the objects to which the previous object applies, for example 'Scotsman', 'Brit', 'human being', 'animate object', 'object in space and time') but reflection on the way various expressions are used. Finally, Waismann maintained that the step from 'red' to 'colour' does not correspond to the abstraction which takes us from 'iron' to 'metal'. For it takes us from one kind of word to another (1965, p. 103).

It is important to notice the difference between these two ideas. Tugendhat's reflection results in classifications of linguistic expressions, for example into predicates and singular terms. Waismann's suggestion differs from both this idea and empirical abstraction. There is a linguistic element, but not one of explicit reflection on language. The idea is that the (only?) legitimate use of certain concepts (the 'formal concepts' of the *TLP*) is in conceptual statements like 'red is a colour', which serve to indicate the role or function of a class of non-categorial expressions.

This is obvious in cases where there is no ordinary language term for the desired category, such as 'material object', 'substance' (which, in ordinary parlance, means 'stuff' and, in philosophical parlance, many other things). The point can be extended to cases where philosophers use ordinary expressions – 'colour', 'event', 'truth'. For although the non-philosophical uses of these terms may be 'first-order', their only function in the categorial propositions of philosophy is to indicate the role of certain types of expressions.

But this kind of classification is independent of whether we switch from the material to the formal mode by, for example, speaking of 'singular terms' rather than 'individuals'. For even the 'material' predicates in categorial propositions are best construed as indicating the role of other terms. Moreover, the result of this procedure is a *Porphyrian classification* of precisely the kind Tugendhat assigns to empirical generalisation. To be sure, it is a logical grouping, according to what it makes sense to say, not according to what is true, as in the case of empirical generalisation. We distinguish different *spheres of predication*, or different *spheres of ways of identification*.

This kind of procedure must be distinguished from the search for ultimate categories which Tugendhat pursues. These are the categories Aristotle had in mind, both in the *Categories* and the *Metaphysics*, notions like substance, quality, quantity, and relation. It is they which are derived not just from a difference between sense and nonsense, but from *reflection*, not just on what specific concepts have in common, but on what various kinds of linguistic or cognitive activities have in common, such as referring and predicating.

It seems to be in this final vein that Strawson claims that 'time', 'process', 'truth', 'knowledge', 'identity', 'person', and 'material object' are categorial concepts. Understanding them is presupposed in our practical explanations and employment of more particular concepts, but they themselves await an adequate explanation by descriptive metaphysics (Strawson 1992, pp. 5f., 32–6). The idea is not that *making statements* presupposes knowing the meaning of categorial concepts, but that *explaining* the meaning of specific concepts presupposes knowing the meaning of *categorial* concepts, even if one cannot in turn explain the latter.

In support of this suggestion one might enlist Wittgenstein's claim that 'ostensive definitions explain the use – the meaning – of the word when the overall role of the word in the language is clear' (1958 [1953], §30). But for an ostensive definition to be understood it is neither necessary nor sufficient that the category has been specified. An ostensive definition without such a specification is not for this reason elliptical (Wittgenstein 1958 [1953], §§28f.).

This is not to deny that there may be a 'stratification of concepts' (Waismann 1965, p. 106) as regards the order of (e.g. ostensive) explanation. But this order is not absolute or inescapable. And it certainly does not follow the direction prescribed by the above suggestion. In most cases we start with the more specific terms. We learn first '1', '2', etc., 'cube', 'column', etc., and only then 'formal concepts' like 'number' and 'shape'. In others the order is arbitrary. We may learn first 'oak' and 'maple' and only afterwards 'tree' or vice versa. Cases in which we first learn the categorial expression are hard to come by.

However, there is a more charitable interpretation of Strawson's suggestion. What is fundamental is not understanding the categorial concept, but rather mastery of certain fundamental structures or patterns of linguistic behaviour, for example the ability 'to ask a thing's name' (Wittgenstein 1958 [1953], §30), which in turn is linked to other linguistic abilities. Wittgenstein rightly stressed that the introduction to such basic abilities by way of training antecedes linguistic explanation in two ways. As a matter of empirical fact they are necessary to acquire more complex skills. But there is also a conceptual relation between these basic skills and the ability to understand genuine explanations.

But what is special about these concepts and why should they constitute the subject-matter of philosophy? Can these basic patterns be labelled by categories and do they correspond to the concepts of philosophy? According to our previous discussion categories result from the philosophical classification of types of linguistic behaviour (a generalisation of Aristotle's idea of types of predication). However, our linguistic abilities and techniques are a motley, without any logical hierarchy or strict order. It follows that categorial concepts cannot be *rigid* or *clearly separated* from less fundamental ones. For the 'extremely general' (categorial) terms of our language are not more but rather less solid and clear than other concepts, precisely because they relate to innumerable special cases (Waismann 1965, p. 103f.; Wittgenstein 1980, §648).

This goes some way towards pinpointing a reason why categorial concepts should be particularly prone to lead to philosophical perplexity. But they are *not the only possible* roots of such perplexity. Some philosophical trouble-makers cannot be accommodated either in a Kantian list of essential concepts, or even in the larger Aristotelian list of general concepts. For example, 'emotion' might still be considered a general concept comprising more specific ones. But even a particular emotion like love is a source of philosophical problems of a distinctive kind.

In defending and sharpening the notion of a category we had to acknowledge its context relativity and diversity. As a result, the notion loses its status as the central method of philosophy, the panacea of all philosophical ills. Category mistakes are neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for errors of a philosophical kind. It is not necessary since it does not cover philosophically important cases like (i) what one might call synthetic a priori falsehoods, for example, 'Some macroscopic events have no cause'; (ii) cases in which the predicate as such is incoherent, for example, 'This traffic light blinks black'; (iii) violations of internal relations between determinants of one determinable/category, for example, 'Black is darker than white'. And it is not sufficient, since there are plenty of philosophically irrelevant category mistakes like (6) and (7).

This means that no notion of categories suffices to single out the topic of philosophy. Nevertheless, the notion is useful in the methodological clarification of certain types of philosophical confusion. Obviously it does not do the hard work itself. We cannot reveal various kinds of confusion simply by invoking the notion of category mistake. For in every case we must find out whether expressions have been used senselessly, and what confusion between different types of expressions lies at the root of the problem. But a clearer idea of different kinds of confusion may sharpen our awareness. Moreover, it helps us in explaining what we are doing in resolving these confusions. The notion of a category mistake retains its rightful role as a valuable tool for the rare and rarefied, yet nevertheless legitimate purposes of philosophical critique and metaphilosophical reflection.

To be fair to Ryle, he reached a similar conclusion in the course of his seminal reflections on categories. In *Concept of Mind* he stated in no uncertain terms: 'Philosophy is the replacement of category-habits by category-disciplines' (1980 [1949], p. 10), the disciplines acquired through a theory of categories and the correction of category mistakes. In *Dilemmas*, he has altered his tune. The 'idiom' of categories and category mistakes 'can be helpful as a familiar mnemonic with some beneficial associations'. Ryle has abandoned the idea 'that there exists an exact, professional way of using it, in which, like a skeleton-key, it will turn all locks for us'; nonetheless there remains 'an inexact, amateurish way of using it…It gives the answers to none of our questions but it can be made to arouse people to the questions in a properly brusque way' (1973 [1954], p. 9). As on many other topics, Ryle was ultimately much less dogmatic and narrow-minded on categories than most of those who have charged him with these vices.

## Notes

1. Possibly, Plato's idea of 'five greatest kinds' (Plato 1984, p. 254Bff.) influenced Aristotle's idea of terms – predicabilia in various categories or 'transcendental predicates'.
2. As was pointed out already by Trendelenburg (1846). Kneale and Kneale (1984, ch. II. 2) maintain that in spite of a certain ambivalences, Aristotle's categories (i) classify things rather than words; (ii) do so irrespective of whether the terms signifying these things occupy predicate or subject position. But their argument for (i), namely that for Aristotle 'being predicated of something' equates to 'being in something' reveals precisely a combination of linguistic and ontological notions. And their defence of (ii) fails to do full justice to the special role accorded to primary substance.
3. Linking types of judgements to logical form is also part of Russell's idea of a propositional function and of the early Wittgenstein's idea of a variable (see Section 2). Just like Kant's types of judgement, these collect judgements of a logically significant kind.

4. This account disregards complications arising from Russell's 'no classes theory'. Reformulated in terms of the latter, types include individuals, propositional functions of individuals, propositional functions of those propositional functions, etc. This renders the position even closer to the linguistic conception of categories.
5. The idea of systematising ways in which statements can go wrong other than being false can also be found in the phenomenological tradition, in Husserl and Meinong, yet without the negative impetus or a linguistic turn.
6. Quine later moved away further from the ontological conception by casting doubt not just on Aristotle's essentialism, but on the usefulness of the idea of natural kinds (1969).
7. Several of the combinatorial principles invoked are closely related to Evans's 'generality constraint'. Ironically, Evans himself specifically excluded category mistakes from the scope of that constraint (1982, p. 101n.).
8. Magidor denies that simile can explain metaphors to begin with. She appeals to Davidson's objection that the theory cannot do justice to the fact that metaphors are difficult to figure out and defy paraphrase in literal terms. But analogies and comparisons can be complex, rich and unsurveyable. These kinds of comparisons defy straightforward paraphrase no less than ambitious metaphors do. For a convincing defence of the simile account against other objections, see Schroeder (2004).
9. This goes to show that Strawson had anticipated Magidor's objection concerning examples (13) and (14) above.
10. Rundle (1979, p. 54f.) suggests that category mistakes can be called false, on the grounds that we correct them by such reminders. But, as he himself acknowledges, this assumes that in doing so we reject a possibility which makes sense, which Wittgenstein, for one, would dispute. If the latter is right, then there are different types of incorrectness, and only one of them equates to falsehood.
11. Once more, these claims are subject to the way in which the relevant terms are explained.
12. This claim runs counter to the 'combinatorial' doctrine of categorial nonsense put forward by Williams, according to which a doctrine of categories should be expressed not in terms of 'reference' (to what objects can a predicate be applied?), but in terms of 'sense' (what predicates can be conjoined?): what can be categorially senseless, if anything, are not *applications of a predicate to an object* but only *conjunctions of predicates*, such as 'green and a prime number'. He bases this view on the claim that *meaning* is a feature of type-expressions (-words or -sentences). But from this it does not follow that making sense is a feature of type-expressions rather than their uses. In fact Ryle argued to the contrary, for example, in 'Ordinary Language' (1971, ch. 23).

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# 3

# Ryle on Hypotheticals

*Roger Teichmann*

In 'General Propositions and Causality' (1929), F. P. Ramsey argued that for a large class of general propositions of the form 'All Fs are Gs', any such proposition amounts to a sort of rule: 'If I meet an F, I shall regard it as a G' (p. 149).[1] For Ramsey, to express a rule of this sort is the same as expressing or reporting a psychological 'habit'. That wouldn't rule out genuine disagreement between somebody who uttered the quoted rule and somebody who, for example, uttered the rule 'If I meet an F, I shall regard it as a non-G', on account of its being possible for one to be proved right in what he believes (e.g. 'This F is a G') and the other wrong. Still, it would arguably be an improvement on Ramsey to infuse proper objectivity into the rule corresponding to 'All Fs are Gs' by re-phrasing it more impersonally, as 'If one meets an F, one should regard it as a G'.

Ramsey adopted this account of such general propositions especially because of problems connected with the view of them which he and Wittgenstein (in the *Tractatus*) had earlier maintained: the view according to which any general proposition is equivalent to the conjunction of all its instantiating propositions, so that 'Everything is green' amounts to '*a* is green and *b* is green and…' A proposition 'All Fs are Gs' turns out to be a conjunction of propositions of the form 'If x is an F, then x is a G'. The main difficulty Ramsey saw for this view was that it implied the existence of infinite conjunctions, when the relevant domain is infinite, which would be the case where the domain is that of the natural numbers, assuming one can 'quantify over' numbers – but also, apparently, where the domain is the universal domain, as it is alleged to be for many propositions of the form 'All Fs are Gs'. The notion of an infinite conjunction seemed to Ramsey to be a fudge, and at odds with the principle enunciated in the *Tractatus* that whatever can be said at all can be said clearly. If our domain is finite, then all well and good, 'All

Fs are Gs' may be looked upon as a conjunction, true or false;[2] but if it is infinite, we have what Ramsey called a 'variable hypothetical', and this sort of statement is to be understood as expressing a preparedness to move from 'This is an F' to 'This is a G', or a 'habit' of so moving, as Ramsey put it.

Ramsey summed up his dissatisfaction with his and Wittgenstein's earlier account with what became a well-known quip: 'But what we can't say we can't say, and we can't whistle it either' (1929, p. 146). As Cora Diamond has pointed out, it is ironic that this quip has come to be thought of as expressing Ramsey's doubts about Wittgenstein's ideas concerning unsayability, as embodied in the famous last words of the *Tractatus*, 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent'; for the quip was made in connection with a worry about general propositions, namely that if they amounted to infinite conjunctions they would violate *Tractatus*-style constraints on *sayability* (Diamond 2011).[3]

Ramsey's account of variable hypotheticals was a characteristically bold and imaginative proposal, but one which his early death prevented him from developing. A philosopher who subsequently put forward an account similar to Ramsey's was Gilbert Ryle in his paper '"If", "So", and "Because"' (1950).[4] Ramsey's phrase 'variable hypothetical' pointed to the connection between general propositions and hypothetical ones: 'Every F is a G' amounts to 'If anything is an F, then it is a G' (leaving to one side the question whether the former commits one to the existence of Fs). In his paper, Ryle looks at hypotheticals in general, mentioning variable hypotheticals as a species. But his account of hypotheticals is obviously similar to Ramsey's of variable hypotheticals.

Ryle writes:

> [I]f we ask what is the point of learning *'if p, then q,'* or what is the evidence that someone has learned it, part of the answer would be a reference to the learner's ability and readiness to infer from '*p*' to '*q*' and from *'not-q'* to *'not-p'*, to acquiesce in the corresponding arguments of others, to reject affiliated invalid arguments, and so on. But we should also expect him on certain, perhaps rare, occasions to *tell* his hearers or readers '*if p, then q*' .... [M]aking a hypothetical statement is sometimes giving an inference precept; and the first object of giving this precept is that the recipient shall make appropriate inferences. A posterior object of giving him this precept is, perhaps, that he shall in his turn give this inference precept to others, again with the same primary object, that they shall learn to perform the appropriate inferential operations. (1950, p. 239)

Ryle does not lead up to his view as Ramsey did, via a rejection of a truth-functional account of the statements under scrutiny. He does so by an examination of the nature of arguments ('p, so q'), and their relationship to the corresponding hypotheticals ('If p, then q'). In particular, he criticises the following views (pp. 237–8): (a) that the hypothetical is entailed by the argument (Ryle points out that an argument, not being a proposition at all, can't entail anything); (b) that the argument is equivalent to a conjunction of the hypothetical with its antecedent, 'p' (again, an argument isn't a proposition); (c) that the hypothetical is the same as the argument, just 'misleadingly worded'; (d) that an argument 'p, so q' is always invalid unless 'If p, then q' is among the premises, along with 'p'.

It is especially through a consideration of (d) that Ryle arrives at his 'inference precept' account of hypotheticals. Now there is a pedantic sort of way in which (d) can be faulted, namely by coming up with such cases as: 'p' means 'q', or is an appropriate truth-function of 'q' – or 'q' is a necessary truth – or whatever. We can ignore such cases. The more interesting problem with (d), as Ryle points out, is that if it were true it would generate the infinite regress to which Achilles succumbed at the hands (or feet) of Lewis Carroll's Tortoise. For in the case where 'p' is equivalent to 'r, and (if r, then q)', we should according to (d) have to add a further premise, 'If (r and [if r, then q]), then q'...and so on (see Carroll 1895). The argument 'r and (if r, then q), so q' must be fine as it stands. What's wrong with (d), it seems, is the word 'always'.

The main lesson of Carroll's Tortoise is that a rule of inference (e.g. *modus ponens*) shouldn't be thought of as a sort of (background) premise. To treat it as a premise is to generate the infinite regress. But Ryle goes further: he wants to say a similar thing of statements of the form 'If p, then q'. He considers the argument 'Today is Monday, so tomorrow is Tuesday', and says that its validity does not require us to add the additional premise, 'If today is Monday, tomorrow is Tuesday' (p. 238). Rather, he says, the argument is an *application* of the hypothetical, much as a given *modus ponens* argument is an application of a rule of inference. It is to the notion of an application that he then turns.

Evidently things have gone too far. We should start by noting that Ryle's example is a bad one, since the validity of 'Today is Monday, so tomorrow is Tuesday' rests on the conceptual or linguistic connection between 'Monday' and 'Tuesday'; and it is for *that* reason that addition of the corresponding hypothetical is unnecessary. We have an inference precept, or set of such precepts, just by virtue of knowing our days of the week – a form of linguistic competence. The same doesn't go, for example, for 'The kettle has been on for ten minutes, so the water will have boiled'. If validity is what's in question, then this last argument is, as it stands, invalid, and to render it valid we would probably reach for an additional premise in the form of a corresponding hypothetical.[5]

I say 'probably' because of course one could 'render the argument valid' in various ways – such as by adding the premise, 'It's not true that the water won't have boiled'. The reason why a hypothetical premise ('If the kettle has been on for ten minutes, then the water will have boiled') seems the natural addition is precisely because it adds much less, as it were, than do other candidate premises. It doesn't do violence to the original argument in the way other premises do. But what does that mean? It seems to mean something like this: a (rational) person who argued 'p, so q' would, *ipso facto*, be someone who believed that if p, then q. So if we've said they've argued thus, we don't need to attribute any further beliefs to them, on top of 'p' (and 'q'). And this is presumably what Ryle is getting at.

It might be objected that for a rational person to argue 'p, so q' they must already have the belief 'If p, then q'. But if that means they must have consciously entertained the thought 'If p, then q', then it seems false: no such mental episode need have taken place. Might the 'belief' in question be something other than a conscious mental episode? If it is there 'already', it looks very much as if it will be either (i) an unconscious episode or state, or (ii) a disposition. In general, postulations of unconscious events or states don't sit well with the prefix 'It must be that…'. And as for a disposition, we seem now to be back with Ryle, since the disposition in question will surely be none other than the disposition to infer 'q' from 'p', 'not-p' from 'not-q', etc.

It appears we can maintain two things which have a look of mutual inconsistency, but which are in fact consistent:

A. An argument 'p, so q' will be invalid without the addition of a corresponding hypothetical *premise* (assuming that 'p' is neither a truth-function of 'q' nor conceptually connected with it, that neither 'p' nor 'q' is necessarily false/true, and that quantifiers are not involved);
B. A person may rationally argue 'p, so q' without having any *beliefs* other than 'p', from which to infer 'q' (even where 'p' is neither a truth-function of 'q' nor conceptually connected with it, neither 'p' nor 'q' is necessarily false/true, and quantifiers are not involved).

Ryle's mistake, I think, is to argue from B to a denial of A, which he does because he takes premises of arguments to express certain beliefs of persons who argue using those arguments, namely the beliefs from which they derive their conclusions. This eventually leads him on to some curious claims, as that 'p' doesn't occur in 'If p, then q' in the way that it does occur in 'p and q' – indeed, cannot really be said to occur in the hypothetical statement at all. (I shall be looking at this part of Ryle's account later on.)

But if the premises of arguments don't necessarily express the beliefs from which people who use those arguments derive conclusions, what do they do? To answer this question, we need to say more about what an argument is.

I can produce an argument, for example as a logic exercise, without believing the premises I set forth. But can the same be true if I *argue* using the argument? Here we need to distinguish three sorts of case. First, the case where an argument is produced (e.g. written down), the production being used to get to, or show, the truth of some matter, as one might use a diagram; second, the case where someone explains a belief he has by adverting to reasons, presenting his explanation in the form of a produced argument with the reasons appearing as premises; third, the case where other people explain someone's belief by adverting to reasons, presenting the explanation in the form of a produced argument with the reasons appearing as premises.

Each of these cases involves arguments as productions: that is, as embodied in written or spoken or inwardly thought *symbols*. It is that sense of argument that was at stake when we said that one can produce an argument as a mere logic exercise. We can, of course, take an argument in English to be 'the same as' a certain argument in French, the one being a translation of the other; but this no more commits us to some Platonic argument-form than the statement 'It's the same time in Glasgow as in Manchester' commits us to Platonic times o'clock. The point to hang on to is that in giving an example of an argument, or in presenting or using an argument, one has recourse to symbols. In fact this is true regardless of the merits or otherwise of Platonism about arguments.

In the first of the three sorts of case just outlined, where the argument serves as a kind of aid, the person may well derive a conclusion from beliefs he has, those beliefs being expressed in premise form. But it needn't be like this. For you might want to see what follows from certain premises, being prepared to jettison them if they yield absurd conclusions. (You may be wondering *whether* to believe the premise propositions.) Or you might want to show the truth of a belief by means of a *reductio ad absurdum*, one of whose premises you must actually disbelieve.

This could be done, N.B., using our *modus ponens* argument: 'If p, then q – and p; therefore q. But q is false. So not-p.'

In the second of the three cases, the important point is that giving reasons for a belief is not the same thing as mentioning some beliefs of yours as the ones which led to your adopting the belief in question. The same goes, *mutatis mutandis*, for the third sort of case. Essentially this is because of the gulf first insisted on by Frege, between the logical and the psychological. It may be that my acquiring belief B led me to acquire belief B′; but if I am to *justify* my belief B′, I must give proper reasons for it, and B will only embody a reason if it stands in the right sort of logical or evidential relationship to B′. The fact that the one belief led to or produced the other is neither necessary nor sufficient for that relationship to hold. Against this it might be insisted that for me to have reasons for a belief, I must have *derived* it from those reasons – and won't those reasons then have to be *my* reasons, in the sense of being believed by me to be true?

But this need not be the case. For the reasons you can give for some belief needn't be things from which the belief was derived, if that verb carries the chronological implication: first the reasons, then the belief. In part, this has to do with the social nature of the language-game of giving and receiving reasons. If I ask you for your reason for thinking p, I am typically asking for a reason why *I* should think that p, alias a reason *to* think that p. You will, of course, typically believe the reasons that you give for thinking that p, since after all you think that p, and (we may assume) are happy to explain to me why p is the thing to think. But your *belief* in the reasons you give me may have effectively come into being along with your giving of the reasons. The reasons, in the form you give them to me, need not have occurred to you on some previous occasion.

And even if they did occur to you, we must ask: in virtue of what did you take these thoughts *as* reasons for the belief in question? A thought may occur to you without your even believing it. It may occur to you, and you may 'inwardly assent', whatever that means; but you may fail to see that it is a reason to think that p. What is it to see that it is a reason to think that p? 'Seeing the logical/evidential relationship' between r and p doesn't appear to be enough – don't you have to *draw* the conclusion, p? But what is that? Is it a further psychological process?

There is a useful parallel that can be drawn with cases of practical reasoning. Elizabeth Anscombe argues that when representing the (first-personal) reasons for an action in the form of a practical syllogism, we ought not to insert as a premise 'I want X', X being the goal or end. 'I want X', if it does occur among the premises, will be just one of the facts of the case – as in the following argument:

> Anyone who wants to kill his parents will be helped to get rid of this trouble by consulting a psychiatrist.
>
> I want to kill my parents.
>
> If I consult a psychiatrist I shall be helped to get rid of this trouble.
>
> *NN* is a psychiatrist.
>
> So I'll consult *NN*. (Anscombe 2005, p. 115)

(Anscombe says she owes the point and the example to Anselm Müller.)

If the operative want doesn't occur among the premises, how is it operating? The person decides to visit the psychiatrist *NN*. Anscombe writes: 'The decision, if I reach it on these grounds [i.e. on the basis of the given premises], *shews* that I *want* to get rid of the trouble' (pp. 115–6). My going off to visit *NN*, it might be said, is a criterion, in these circumstances, of my wanting to get rid of the trouble. This is what it *is* to 'draw a conclusion', a practical conclusion, from certain premises.

I have spoken of my going off to visit *NN* as showing what it is I want. After all, if I just *said* 'So I'll consult *NN*', that wouldn't yet show anything – I might be joking, or trying to get you to dissuade me (we're both terrified of psychiatrists), and so on. I have to, as it were, endorse my own conclusion. I have to be able sincerely to declare 'So I'll consult *NN*', and sincerity here would consist in my attempting at some point to visit *NN* (unless prevented).

Can something similar be said about drawing a theoretical conclusion? Yes; for a person's arriving at 'p' on the basis of the premises 'r' and 'If r, then p' *shows* that he reasons in a certain way (i.e. according to the rule of inference, *modus ponens*); and in a similar vein, Ryle would claim that a person's arriving at 'p' on the basis of the premise 'r' *shows* that he believes 'If r, then p'. It is for that reason that we don't need to attribute the belief 'If r, then p' in addition to the belief 'r', as beliefs from which the person rationally infers 'p'. It is not a complete accident that a similar point can be made about dispositions – thus you don't need to cite the water solubility of a sugar lump *in addition to* its having been put in water (plus its having a certain molecular structure, if you like), in order to explain why the lump has dissolved. A sugar lump's dissolving in water shows, is a manifestation of, its being water soluble.

The objection may now be made that *all* beliefs are dispositions, so that if disposition-ascriptions can't function as (elements in) explanations, then not only the belief that if p then q, but also the simple belief that p, will be unavailable for explaining actions – an absurd result. The objection is of particular relevance insofar as Ryle himself regards beliefs as dispositions, but it is of more than *ad hominem* interest. The most natural answer to the objection relies on distinguishing disposition-terms that semantically imply disposition-manifestations from ones that don't. 'x is soluble in water' is semantically related to 'x dissolves in water'. 'x believes it's raining' is not in the same way semantically related to 'x picks up what he takes for an umbrella'. (In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle registers this by calling the second sort of disposition-term 'determinable' (1963 [1949], p. 114)). If 'x believes that if p then q' is to be regarded as the ascription of a disposition, then there is a pretty good case for likening it to 'x is soluble in water', since, as Ryle says, a person who has been told 'If p, then q' can be expected to do certain things involving 'p' and 'q', such as infer the second from the first. There will then be a semantic connection between disposition-term and manifestation-statements, so long as (i) 'p' really occurs in belief-ascriptions, 'X believes that…p…' – and (ii) 'p' really occurs in 'If p, then q'. Ryle, as we shall see, actually denies (ii), but, as I shall argue, he shouldn't.

Whether beliefs are to be thought of as a species of disposition is a delicate question, raising among other things tricky issues of normativity. The sorts of consideration in favour of agreeing with Ryle that a person who rationally argues 'p, so q' need not be credited with the extra belief 'If p, then q' are not considerations that require the truth of a dispositional view of beliefs; my discussion of that view has been something of a diversion.

I said above that the following appears true: a person's arriving at 'p' on the basis of the premises 'r' and 'If r, then p' *shows* that he reasons according to *modus ponens* – and if Ryle is right, a person's arriving at 'p' on the basis of the premise 'r' *shows* that he believes 'If r, then p'. Two phrases that need examining are 'on the basis of' and 'arrives at'. In the practical case, my drawing a practical conclusion on the basis of the premises means something like my being disposed to give those premises as reasons if asked 'Why have you decided to do that?', at least in the paradigm situation. We can say something similar in the theoretical case: if asked why I believe that p, I can give as my reasons, 'r – and if r, then p' (or I may just say 'r', Ryle will insist). But my simply *saying* 'p' doesn't show that I have really drawn it as a conclusion, any more than my saying 'So I'll consult *NN*' shows I've drawn *it* as a conclusion. For me to arrive at 'p' on the basis of the premises requires more than my saying 'p' (for I might be joking, etc.) – it requires that I say 'p' sincerely, that is believing it to be true. The criterion of sincerity in the practical case was action – going off to see the psychiatrist. And that's hardly surprising, since it was a practical syllogism we were dealing with. What criterion of sincerity is on offer for the theoretical case?

In many instances, the answer will be, or will include, action – just as for the practical case. If I sincerely say 'That telephone doesn't work', then when I want to make a call I will not (except from forgetfulness) use the phone in question. But of course many beliefs are not straightforwardly manifestable in action, if that means non-linguistic action – such as the belief that Marco Polo probably got stung by a bee at some point in his life. We will have to include linguistic actions if we are to use action as a criterion of sincerity, and Ryle's account of beliefs as determinable dispositions quite properly includes dispositions to say things (see e.g. 1963 [1949], p. 129). 'You mean, to say them *sincerely*', will come the rejoinder; and the threat of circularity can only be avoided by (i) including further manifestations of (in)sincerity in our account, such as facial expressions or tones of voice, many of these manifestations being 'imponderable', as Wittgenstein puts it (1953, Bk II, p. 228), (ii) being pretty 'holistic' in our attributions of beliefs (the bigger picture to include (i)-type facts as well as actions and other beliefs), and (iii) being content with a non-reductive sort of philosophical account, one which would elucidate the concept of belief rather than giving necessary and sufficient conditions for 'S believes that p'.

The fact that the criteria for beliefs are or include actions allows us to see what is at stake in Chrysippus's famous example of a dog reasoning logically (mentioned, e.g., in Aquinas 1964 [1274], 1a11ae). In pursuit of a rabbit, the dog comes to a point where the road splits into three. Assuming for some reason that the rabbit will stick to a road and not flee across country (perhaps the rabbit is on a motor bike), the dog sniffs two of the three roads for rabbit scent, and *without bothering to sniff the third road* dashes down it. Chrysippus suggests that such a dog would evidently be reasoning as follows: P or Q or R; but not-P and not-Q; so R.

An argument, I have said, is a production using symbols, and we do not need to postulate that the dog produces this argument inwardly. Rather, *we* produce the argument, for example in schematic form as I have just done, when giving the reasons why the dog believed R ('R' = 'The rabbit went down road no. 3') – or alternatively when giving the dog's reasons for dashing down the road. What we have is an example of the third sort of case of a person's (or dog's) 'going by' an argument, mentioned above (p. 60).

Now there is in fact an independent question whether one can attribute reasons, for beliefs or for actions, to animals, given the impossibility of an animal's answering the question 'Why?' It may well be that we often *can* do so, and in a way that is compatible with the primacy of the case of a person's giving a reason (i.e. giving an answer to 'Why?'). But when we attribute reasons or intentions to animals, it is because some animal behaviour strikes us as describable in this sort of way; it is not that we form a *hypothesis* about the animal along the lines of 'It must have reasoned thus…' Many philosophers have, I think, taken Chrysippus's example as suggesting to us a (plausible) hypothesis of this sort. And that is because those philosophers think that where there is rationality there is reasoning, and the latter must be an inner process – a view of whose problems we have had a glimpse, and which Ryle among others very effectively combated.

I suggested above (p. 59) that the claims A and B were compatible, despite having an appearance of incompatibility. And I have endeavoured to show how this is so by making out that the premise of an argument is not, *qua* premise of an argument, the expression of a belief from which one who goes by that argument derives the conclusion of the argument. An argument can be used in various ways; arguments can even be used in describing the actions of dumb brutes.

None of this, however, actually supports Ryle's account of hypothetical statements as inference precepts. At best it merely saves him from having to draw some of the unpalatable conclusions which he does draw from his account. The most that I have said in support of Ryle's account is that there seems to be some reason to say that a person who argues 'p, so q' is *ipso facto* a person who thinks that if p, then q. No extra belief, on top of 'p' and 'q', is really attributed to such a person. The linguistic form, 'If p, then q', is therefore not needed in order to represent any such belief. What then *is* the function of the linguistic form? Ryle says it functions as an inference precept; but what does that mean exactly?

Well, we have an idea of what Ryle means from the above quotation (p. 57). One question that is raised by what Ryle says there is: Can a hypothetical proposition be called true or false? Now in fact Ryle himself is happy to say yes to this, for example when he writes, 'In some way the validity of the argument ['p, so q'] requires the truth of the hypothetical statement ['If p, then q']' (1950, p. 237).[6] But there are a couple of lines of thought that seem to throw doubt on this.

The first line of thought appeals to a correspondence account of truth, or something like it. What is it, it might be asked, that makes 'If p, then q' true, if that statement is an inference precept? What state of affairs ('out there', as philosophers like to say) could possibly make a *precept* true? Surely no state of affairs could do that. To say this, however, will likely involve us in a vicious circle, since the decision that there is (or is not) some state of affairs, or fact, ready and willing to make some statement true is a decision that typically waits upon the prior decision to allow (or not to allow) truth-aptness to that sort of statement – rather than vice versa. This indeed is one of the problems faced by correspondence theories of truth. So this line of thought doesn't really manage to throw doubt on the claim that inference precepts might be true or false. (There is a metaphysically innocent sense of the question 'What if anything makes a hypothetical statement true?', the answer to which *does* throw some light on our topic. I will be turning to this a little later on.)

The second line of thought is similar to the first, but does without any dubious correspondence account of truth. It appeals to the idea that a precept must be, or must be akin to, an imperative of some kind – and surely an imperative cannot be true or false? At this point we should clear things up a bit, taking note of the distinction between the modals 'may' and 'must'. Ryle speaks as if a hypothetical statement tells one that one *may* go from 'p' to 'q', for example where he compares such a statement to a railway ticket, and uses the phrase 'inference warrant' (p. 239), and where he writes: 'When I learn *"if p, then q"*, I am learning that I am authorised to argue *"p, so q", provided that I get my premise "p"*' (p. 244). And 'may' can indeed look preferable to 'must' here, to the extent that, after all, even if you've learnt that if p then q, you might just want to say 'p' and then shut up – surely you can't be faulted for not coming out with 'q'? Similarly, you surely can't be faulted if you simply fail to move straight from the belief that p to the belief that q. What you can be faulted for is coming out with 'not-q', or alternatively, believing that not-q (having said or come to believe 'p'). But then we might say that 'If p, then q' does issue a 'must' after all, specifically a 'must not': 'You must not, if you say or believe that p, also say or believe that not-q'. Ryle alludes to this aspect of things when he says that 'If p, then q' can be reworded as 'It cannot be that p and not that q' (see p. 245). And these facts bring home why it is that in many cases 'If p, then q' is required in addition to 'p', if 'q' is to be validly inferred; for although a merely *reasonable* inference, 'p, so q', may allow for the possibility that p and not-q (e.g. if the premise 'p' states defeasible criteria), the addition of 'If p, then q', by ruling out that possibility, renders the argument deductively valid.[7]

However, we distribute the 'mays' and 'musts', we seem to have modal statements, akin to imperatives or permissions, which because of that kinship (so the second line of thought goes) appear not to be truth-apt. Ryle's assertions that hypothetical statements are true/false is then most naturally defended by taking a fairly 'grammatical' approach to truth-ascription, and saying that, since 'If p, then q' is a normal indicative sentence, the 'correctness' of any given utterance of such a sentence just *is* its truth. That is what truth amounts to here. And we might well want to say something along these lines of such rule-statements as 'The bishop in chess moves diagonally': the statement is true, though naturally taken as tantamount to a sort of imperative (at any rate, in the context of teaching someone chess).

The 'grammatical' approach to truth-ascription I have mentioned shouldn't be over-generalised, since there are indicative sentences 'correct' utterances of which cannot properly be called true – such as 'I promise to pay you back'. (Of course, if Bloggs said this in the right circumstances, 'Bloggs promised to pay X back' would be true – but that is another matter.) Nevertheless, I think that Ryle probably can maintain his inference precept account of hypotheticals while calling such hypotheticals truth-apt, by invoking a basically 'grammatical' notion of truth. Hypotheticals differ from promises, declarations, and the like, on account of such things as their being susceptible of the same sort of justification or criticism as applies to paradigmatically truth-apt utterances: 'Why do you say/think that if p then q?' will typically make good sense, the same sort of sense as is made by 'Why do you say/think that p?' In both cases, an answer will typically give what we would call *evidence* for the assertion or belief.

What in that case distinguishes a hypothetical statement from, for example, a conjunctive one? Both sorts of statement are truth-apt, and both sorts of statement are useable as premises in arguments (whatever Ryle says). Ryle refers to the inferential operations that one who has been told 'If p, then q' will be prepared to make, the permissibility or mandatoriness of which operations he can convey to others by saying 'If p, then q'; but somewhat similar things can be said about 'p and q'. A rational person who learns the truth of 'p and q' will infer 'p', will be prepared to infer 'r' if he gets the premise 'If q, then r' – and so on. As to the last mentioned sort of inference, it would be difficult to maintain that the person's preparedness is *really* grounded in his learning 'If q, then r', not in his learning 'p and q', given that for such a person both acquisitions are necessary. It should be noted that 'preparedness to infer' can be associated with propositions none of which is a hypothetical: for instance, if you believe the truth of 'p or q', you will be prepared to infer 'p' from 'not-q'.

What then *is* the big difference between hypotheticals on the one hand, and conjunctions or disjunctions on the other? For Ryle, the big difference seems to be that a hypothetical is not 'a resultant, product, or truth function of any incorporated statements' (p. 245). You can explicate a conjunction or a disjunction by means of a truth-table, thus showing how the proposition in question is a truth-function of its incorporated (constituent) propositions. You cannot, Ryle thinks, do this for a hypothetical proposition.

The view that hypotheticals are non-truth-functional is familiar, and used to be backed up by reference to the so-called paradoxes of material implication, some of which arise from the apparent oddity of ascribing any truth-value at all to 'If p, then q' in cases such as that in which both 'p' and 'q' are false.[8] But Ryle is not thinking of the paradoxes of material implication. Unfortunately, his thoughts at this point involve, it seems to me, a fair amount of confusion. He not only denies that 'If p, then q' is a truth-function of 'p' and 'q', he wishes to say that the statements 'p' and 'q' *in no way* appear in, or are constituents of, the statement 'If p, then q'. If by 'statement' he means 'assertion', all well and good, since it is true that in saying 'If p, then q' one does not assert that p, nor assert that q. But Ryle also objects to our saying that 'p' and 'q' occur unasserted in 'If p, then q' (pp. 246–7). His reason is that it is the job of a statement to be asserted, so that an unasserted statement is not a statement at all. 'A statement bereft of its employment is not a statement' (p. 247). If this argument worked, we should have to say a similar thing about disjunctions, for in asserting 'p or q' one does not assert that p. But it would be odd to say that 'p' doesn't occur in 'p or q'. For that matter, we do not assert 'p' when we say 'Not-p'; nevertheless, as Wittgenstein put it, 'if I falsely say that something is *red*, then, for all that, it isn't *red*' (*PI*, para 429): it is, and must be, the same expression (predicate or sentence) that occurs after a negation sign as can occur on its own.

Ryle's mistake arises from a too simplistic conception of *similarity of function*. He writes that 'What tempts people to say this sort of thing [sc. that "p" and "q" occur unasserted in the hypothetical] ... is the patent similarity between protasis expressions and apodosis expressions (as commonly worded) on the one hand and statements on the other'. Here he means 'similarity in appearance', or something like that. A little earlier he has told us what he regards as the *functional* difference between, for example, protasis expressions and 'statements': 'What the hypothetical statement does embody is not statements but statement specifications or statement indents – bills for statements that statements could fill' (p. 245). So in 'If today is Monday, then tomorrow is Tuesday', the words 'today is Monday' are just a statement-shaped hole, with no genuine (logical) similarity to the statement 'Today is Monday'. And Ryle backs up his claim with a characteristic metaphor: 'In many ordinary cases there is no similarity whatsoever between bills and what fills them. The specification of a consignment of bicycles is not in the slightest degree like a consignment of bicycles' (p. 247).

The response to all this, in brief, is to reject the question: Does 'p' have the same function, or a different one, as it occurs when simply asserted and as it occurs in 'If p, then q'? The function of a proposition 'p', it might be said, is manifold – it includes both the sorts of occurrences mentioned by the question. The two occurrences are very different in one way, and yet very similar in another, insofar as they both belong to a unified package of possible occurrences, that package effectively constituting the sense of 'p'. 'The same or different?' presents a false dichotomy.

And yet when it comes to truth-functionality, Ryle may be on to something when he contrasts conjunctions with hypotheticals, something that can be brought out by invoking the notion of 'making true'. The truth-table for 'p and q' enables us to specify the way in which 'p and q' can be *made true*, namely, by its being the case that p and its being the case that q. Similarly, the truth-table for 'p or q' enables us to specify ways in which that proposition can be made true, namely, by the fact that p, or by the fact that q, or by both facts together. This notion of 'making true' is unmysterious, being innocent of any metaphysical commitments of the sort that typically go with correspondence accounts of truth. It is a notion to be explained by means of examples, such as the example of how 'p or q' can be made true – rather different from the way in which, say, 'Jim broke the law' can be made true by 'Jim forged his employer's signature'. So when we turn to 'If p, then q', it is going to be an open question whether it makes sense to say that a given statement of that form is (if true) made true by anything.[9] And indeed it seems that we cannot use the phrase 'make true' in connection with hypotheticals, taking that phrase in anything like the way it is to be taken in connection with conjunctions or disjunctions. Let us allow for the sake of argument that a truth-table can be given for 'If p, then q' that includes at least one line where 'If p, then q' is true (perhaps Grice is right that the truth-table should in fact just be that of material implication). Still, it would evidently be wrong-headed to infer from the truth-table that a given statement 'If p, then q' was made true, for example, by the fact that p together with the fact that q. Someone says 'If you press that button, a nurse will come to your bed'. You press the button and a nurse comes to your bed, looking for the thermometer she left on your bedside table. If we decide on this basis to call the hypothetical statement 'true', we will be employing a fairly minimal notion of truth, similar to the notion of innocence as embodied in the dictum 'Innocent until proved guilty'. There is then no point in referring to the events that occurred as having *made* the statement true; you might as well say that the cat's being on the sofa makes true the statement 'The cat is not on the mat'. (Why not say the cat's being on a green sun-dappled item of furniture makes it true, or the cat's being three yards away from the mat, or ... ?) If we ask, 'But what *more* is there to the hypothetical than can be specified by reference to facts that could make it true?', there is a ready answer: a hypothetical statement is an inference precept.[10]

We are back with Ramsey, who in presenting his account of variable hypotheticals pointed to the contrast between that account and one framed in terms of truth-conditions, the latter being inadequate for reasons to do with infinite conjunctions. There are in fact two different models of propositional sense now before us, one reliant on the giving of truth-conditions, the other reliant on depicting a kind of *use*. The Ramsey/Ryle model of the sense of (variable) hypotheticals, in eschewing truth-conditions, stresses instead a kind of use, and each philosopher effectively characterises that kind of use by comparing the propositions in question to other species of statement – precepts, rules, imperatives, and the like.[11] 'Comparing to' is the right phrase here, rather than 'classifying as'. Hypotheticals are *like* precepts – but they are also (obviously) unlike them in certain respects. But drawing attention to the respects in which the two species of statement are similar is what brings philosophical enlightenment.

As often in philosophy, the switch of attention from truth-conditions (or possible truth-makers) to aspects of use neutralises a certain metaphysical urge. The question 'What makes a hypothetical statement true?' all too often leads to a metaphysical search, though what is 'discovered' will of course simply be an excogitation. Ryle is well aware of this feature of his topic. He writes:

> Fascinated by the model of simple, singular, affirmative, attributive, or relational statements, theorists are apt to ask 'What exactly do hypothetical statements assert to characterise what?' .... or, more generally, 'What do such statements describe?' or 'What matters of fact do they report?' And they are apt to toy with verbally accommodating replies about Necessary Connections between Facts, or Internal Relations between Universals, and the like. (p. 243)

Remember that he was writing in 1950. David Armstrong's theory of laws of nature as necessary relations between universals was yet to be published (Armstrong 1983).[12] (There is nothing new under the sun.) Ryle's therapeutic method in '"If", "So" and "Because"' is to emphasise the relationship between hypotheticals and arguments, and what he would say to Armstrong can be gleaned from this passage:

> Hume might be doctored into saying: 'Causality is not a relation; for "*p, so q*" is an inference and not a statement, and so is not the statement of a relation. "So" is not a relation word, or a relational predicate, or a predicate of any sort. For "*p, so q*" is not a subject-predicate statement since it is not a statement at all. Predicting an event from another event is not describing a bond, for it is not describing.' (p. 243)

Armstrong and his followers would probably respond by asserting the priority of 'If p, then q' over 'p, so q', and armed with an indicative sentence would then hunt for its truth-maker. Ryle's claim that the priority is the other way around points us into rather dense thickets in the philosophy of language, where metaphysicians usually prefer not to roam, lacking suitable clothing; but the assertion that a true hypothetical must have a truth-maker can anyway be questioned, by putting pressure on the allegedly general notion of 'making true', as Anscombe does (see n. 9). One can only imagine what Ryle or Ramsey would have made of subsequent attempts to posit truth-makers for *subjunctive* hypotheticals, such as counterfactual statements. Infinite conjunctions and relations between Universals look like small beer beside 'the plurality of worlds' (see Lewis 1986).[13]

## Notes

1. In fact, Ramsey calls the general proposition 'a rule *for judging* "If I meet a $\phi$, I shall regard it as a $\psi$"' (author emphasis); but nothing much seems to hang on this way of putting it.
2. Ramsey allows this for 'Everyone in Cambridge voted', writing: 'the variable here is, of course, not people in Cambridge, but a limited region of space' (1929, p. 145). By 'variable' he clearly means something determining a domain.
3. The irrelevant comparison of Ramsey's quip with the last proposition of the *Tractatus* is even made by authors who must have known of the quip's original context, for example by D. H. Mellor in his Introduction to Ramsey (1990, p. xvi). Mellor goes so far as to state that the quip 'sums up a deep objection to the whole of the *Tractatus*', when in fact it expresses endorsement of one of the main claims of that work.

4. Basically the same account is found in *The Concept of Mind*, from the previous year; see Ryle (1963 [1949], pp. 116–8).
5. In the last paragraph of '"If", "So", and "Because"', Ryle says that there are inferences the validity of which requires to be vouched for by observation and experiment, and this may seem to suggest that it is the 'informal validity' (reasonableness) of arguments that he chiefly has in mind, not their formal validity. But his claim that an inference in no way needs a hypothetical to back it up is not simply the observation that a hypothetical is only needed for *formal* validity, and not for informal validity; for he clearly thinks the role of a hypothetical is closely analogous to that of a rule of inference, for example *modus ponens*, and that in both cases it is redundant (at least) to insert the hypothetical/rule as a premise, regardless of whether we have formal or informal validity in mind. Hence his talk of an argument's being an *application* of a hypothetical.
6. N. B. Ryle is not here saying that the hypothetical is needed as a true *premise* in the argument, in order for it to be valid; as we have seen, he denies that.
7. That is to say, 'If p, then q' rules out the possibility 'p and not-q' within the context of the argument – it need not rule it out *tout court*, if that means alleging logical impossibility or the like.
8. Remember that we are not talking of *subjunctive* hypotheticals, such as 'If the Spitfire hadn't been invented, the Germans would have achieved air supremacy'. There's no problem with having a false antecedent and false consequent for these.
9. In 'Making True' (2000), Anscombe discusses the ordinary notion of making true, and argues as I have done, that from such cases as disjunctive and existential statements no quite general concept of making true can be derived. To say of a given statement that it was made true by something may be to say nothing, and there is in general no necessity that anything should fulfil the role of 'truth-maker' for some species of proposition.
10. There are in fact good reasons for denying that the sense of, say, 'p or q' is *given* by its truth-table. There is more to a disjunction than its truth-conditions. See Anscombe (2000) and Teichmann (2008, ch. 6 sec. 1.2).
11. For Ramsey, it is the use to which a variable hypothetical is *put* (by the individual) that matters. Variable hypotheticals together 'form the system with which the speaker meets the future' (1929, 149).
12. Once again, Ramsey's opinion is worth quoting: 'But may there not be something which might be called real connections of universals? I cannot deny it, for I can understand nothing by such a phrase; what we call causal laws I find to be nothing of the sort' (1929, p. 160).
13. Interestingly, Ramsey does apply his theory about variable hypotheticals to counterfactual statements; see Ramsey (1929, p. 161).

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# 4

# Ryle on Motives and Dispositions

*Maria Alvarez*

## Introduction

In *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle discusses dispositions in some detail both in the chapter on emotions, especially in relation to the concept of motive, and, of course, in the chapter entitled 'Dispositions and Occurrences'. These discussions show that he regarded dispositional concepts as central to a proper understanding of the mind and of behaviour. He held that 'many of the cardinal concepts in terms of which we describe specifically human behaviour are dispositional concepts' (1949, p. 117) and he also thought that 'the vogue of the para-mechanical legend has led many people to ignore the ways in which these concepts actually behave and to construe them instead as items in the description of occult causes and effects' (ibid.). In other words, Ryle thought that 'the official doctrine' about the mind (see his 1949, 11ff.) tends to treat these psychological terms as 'episodic words' denoting occurrences, or as terms used to report 'particular but unwitnessable matters of fact' (117),[1] when in fact they express dispositional concepts. Moreover, according to the official doctrine, these occurrences are causes of behaviour, albeit ones that are not accessible for public inspection – hence the 'para-mechanical' label. Much of the discussion in the two chapters mentioned above is devoted to bringing out the logico-grammatical features of these mental dispositional concepts in order to show how ill-suited they are to play the role of cause in the production of behaviour that the official doctrine traditionally ascribes to them.

Chief among the dispositional concepts in terms of which we describe and explain human behaviour, Ryle thinks, are motives (other such concepts are habits, attitudes, instincts, etc.). And a central claim in *The Concept of Mind* is that 'to explain an action as done from a specified motive is not to describe the action as the effect of a specified cause' (1949, p. 113). The reasoning behind this claim will be examined below but it depends crucially on three doctrines held by Ryle: the first is that motives are dispositions; the second is that the cause of an event is a happening or occurrence, that is, another event or, perhaps, a process; and the third is that the explanation of an occurrence by reference to a disposition is not a causal explanation at least not if by causal explanation one means an explanation that refers to some event, state or condition. I shall examine these doctrines in turn in the next two sections.

My aim in this essay is to tease out and assess Ryle's position on the relationship between motives and actions, in particular his claim that this relation is not causal and that, therefore, the corresponding explanations are not causal explanations. I shall argue that, although Ryle mistakenly assimilated explanations by motives to explanations by character traits, he nonetheless has much of interest to say about how motives and character traits are related to the actions they explain, respectively, and also about whether we should think of explanations of either kind as causal explanations.

## 1 Motives and dispositions

In Chapter 5 of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle characterises motives as dispositions.[2] And, as is well known, he says that the way to understand dispositions is to focus on the logic of dispositional statements, which he took to be captured by law-like statements. Famously, he thought of dispositional statements as 'inference tickets', which enable their 'holders' to 'predict, retrodict, explain and modify the actions, reactions and states' (p. 124) of the thing that has the disposition mentioned in the statement.

Because he thought of motives as dispositions, and thought that the logic of the latter is captured by law-like statements, Ryle says that a statement that gives someone's motive for acting is to be understood by reference to such law-like statements: 'The expansion of a motive-expression is a law-like sentence and not a report of an event' (p. 113). And he adds that, for example, the statement that a man boasted from vanity should be construed not as 'He boasted and the cause of his boasting was the occurrence in him of a particular feeling or impulse of vanity' (p. 89) but, rather, as 'He boasted and his doing so satisfies the law-like proposition that whenever he finds a chance of securing the admiration and envy of others, he does whatever he thinks will produce the admiration and envy of others' (ibid.). While Ryle's negative claim about how to construe motive statements may be plausible, his positive claim is problematic. His proposal has been criticised on the grounds that it implies that it is not possible to act out of a motive, such as vanity or greed, only once – which is clearly false:[3] a person can act out of vanity or greed once or twice without being a vain or greedy person.

This is a fairly obvious point – so we might wonder why Ryle overlooked it and thought that an inquiry into someone's motive for acting on a particular occasion is 'an inquiry into the character of the agent which accounts for his having acted in that way on that occasion' (p. 89). One reason for his holding this view seems to be the thought that, in general, one of the most reliable clues to what someone's motive was on a particular occasion is their character. He writes:

> We should consider by what tests we should try to decide a dispute about the motive from which a person had done something; did he, for example, throw up a well-paid post for a relatively humble Government job from patriotism or from a desire to be exempt from military service? We begin, perhaps, by asking him; but on this sort of matter his avowals, to us or to himself, would very likely not be frank. We next try, not necessarily unsuccessfully, to settle the dispute by considering whether his words, actions, embarrassments, etc., on this and other occasions square with the hypothesis that he is physically timorous and averse from regimentation, or whether they square with the hypothesis that he is relatively indifferent to money and would sacrifice anything to help win the war. We try, that is, to settle by induction the relevant traits in his character. (p. 92)

But the importance of character traits as clues for establishing someone's motives does not sanction the conclusion that someone's motive on any one occasion must be a character trait of theirs – for at least two reasons. First, attributions of character traits depend *conceptually* on attributions of the corresponding motives to that person on particular occasions. What this means is that being motivated in the relevant way at least sometimes is part of what it is to have the corresponding character trait: only someone who has been motivated by generosity on a sufficient number of occasions is a generous person.[4] This is not simply a point about how we discover or decide whether someone is a generous person; it is about what it is to be a generous person (more on this in Section 3 below). And so it must be possible to impute the motive (vanity, generosity) without thereby (yet) attributing the character trait to the person; and, moreover, the character trait is attributed on the basis of imputing the motive, and not vice-versa. Ryle himself makes a similar point in the following passage:

> The tendency to ruminate and the habit of cigarette-smoking could not exist, unless there were such processes or episodes as ruminating and smoking cigarettes. 'He is smoking a cigarette now' does not say the same sort of thing as 'he is a cigarette-smoker', but unless statements like the first were sometimes true, statements like the second could not be true. (p. 119; see also p. 85)

In the second sentence of this paragraph Ryle seems to be saying that the presence of certain tendencies, dispositions, habits, and so on, in a thing depends logically on the occurrence of the corresponding episodes. And just as 'A is smoking a cigarette' does not say the same thing as 'A is a smoker', saying 'A acted vainly' is not the same thing as saying 'A is a vain person'. And conversely, unless A is motivated by vanity from time to time she cannot be said to be a vain person.

The second reason why motive explanations of action cannot be attributions of dispositional character traits is the mirror image of the first: although character traits are good clues to people's motives, they are not decisive in establishing someone's motive on a particular occasion because people can and do act out of character; that is, they occasionally act motivated by things that do not normally motivate them, and occasionally are not motivated by the things that normally motivate them. Both these considerations suggest that a motive is not in itself a disposition and, *a fortiori*, not a character trait.

A. R. White successfully identifies the cause of this blind spot in Ryle's understanding of motive statements. As White points out, the problem arises because Ryle conflates the concept of a motive with the things that can be motives; that is, he makes a 'category mistake' in supposing that 'a motive is, to use a vague word, some kind of thing; that motives are of the same general type as moods, agitations, habits, reflexes, traits, attitudes' (White,1958, 258).

But, as White goes on to say, to ask for the motive for an action is not to ask for one thing among a person's moods, habits, or character traits that may contribute to explain that action but rather it is to ask for a certain kind of explanation for that action. (I shall return below, at the end of this section, to White's claim that motives are 'not kinds of things which feature in our explanations of human conduct' but are, rather, 'kinds of explanation' of human conduct (1958, p. 259) making use of an idea of Anthony Kenny's that motive explanations work by bringing the agent's desires, goals, beliefs, etc. and behaviour under familiar patterns, and that motive terms ('ambition', 'jealousy', 'generosity', etc.) are precisely names for such patterns.)[5]

So Ryle may be right that vanity is a character trait that involves a tendency to act in ways that fall under the kind of law-like proposition he suggests, and be right also that vanity can be a motive. But he is wrong to say that the *motive* of vanity that leads someone to do something is a disposition (viz. to do vain things). The point may be seen clearly if one considers the difference between explaining an action by reference to a character trait of the agent's and explaining it by reference to his motive, *even when* the thing that is the motive in the second case is also a character trait in the agent. So consider the difference between saying that John joined the tennis club because he's very ambitious and saying that his motive in joining the club was ambition. In the first case, we do two things: we explain John's action by reference to a motive *and also* say that his action manifests a character trait of John's (a disposition); we say both that John's motive on this occasion was ambition (he did it out of a desire to get ahead) *and* also that John tends to be motivated by ambition. But the second explanation, which simply gives John's motive, says only that he joined the club in order to get ahead, without imputing to him ambition as a character trait. As Ryle himself notes, to say 'that a certain motive is a trait in someone's character is to say that he is inclined to do certain sorts of things, make certain sorts of plans, indulge in certain sorts of daydreams ...' (1949, p. 90). But, to repeat, the reverse is not true: to say that someone acted out of a motive is not to say that that motive is a trait in his character, so it is not to say that he is generally inclined to do certain kinds of things, and so on.

So motives are not dispositions, although something that is a character trait, which is a kind of disposition, can also be the motive for an action. For instance, a person who is compassionate tends to be motivated by compassion and, so, on particular occasions, his motive for action will be compassion: he will be moved to help those in need by his sympathy for their plight. But if so, his motive on any of those occasions will be compassion and not a disposition to be compassionate.

Thus, although Ryle is right that motives are not occurrences, acts, performances, events, states, and so on, that is not because they are dispositions, and so he is wrong to think that the logic (or logics) of dispositional statements gives the logic of motives. And, therefore, and to return to the construal of the statement 'He boasted from vanity', we might accept Ryle's contention that this statement carries no implication of the occurrence in the man of a particular feeling or impulse or 'psychological episode' of vanity which might be said to be the cause of his boasting. But we need not accept that it carries instead an implication that his boasting was the manifestation of a general *disposition* to say things that he believes are likely to secure the admiration and envy of others when the occasion arises, nor need we accept the related claim that motives are dispositions.

If this is right, if motives are not dispositions or occurrences and not, as White puts it, 'some kind of thing', what are they? I mentioned above White's remark that motives, far from being elements in the explanation of action are 'kinds of explanation'. And I want to explore that suggestion now. I will do so by examining some things Ryle says about the distinction between acting out of habit and acting out of a motive.

Ryle thinks that the two classes of action (those done out of habit and motive) are importantly different, even though both are explained by being subsumed 'under a propensity or behaviour-trend' (p. 110; which he thinks is true also of reflex and instinctive actions).[6] According to him, actions done out of a motive are characterised, by contrast to those done out of habit, because in them the agent acts 'more or less carefully, critically, consistently and purposefully' (111). Ryle goes on to add that these adverbs do not signify

> the prior or concomitant occurrence of extra operations of resolving, planning or cogitating, but only that the action taken is itself done not absent-mindedly but in a certain positive frame of mind…In short, the class of actions done from motives coincides with the class of actions describable as more or less intelligent. (p. 111)

These remarks capture a feature that is indeed defining of acting for a motive, namely that the agent acts purposefully and for a reason; that is, in order to achieve some end and in the light of, or guided by, certain facts. This is supported by the logic of motive statements.

I said above that, contrary to what Ryle says, motive statements do not imply that the action explained was a manifestation of a character trait of the agent's. But what such statements do imply is both that the agent had an aim or goal in acting as she did, and that she believed and perhaps knew that her acting so was, in some more or less direct way, conducive to achieving that aim. So, to go back to Ryle's example, the statement 'He boasted from vanity' implies, not that he always or often seeks to secure the admiration and envy of others when the right occasion arises but that, on this occasion, *his aim* in saying what he did was to secure the admiration and envy of others and that he believed that his boasts would or at least might do so.[7]

So we might say, again following White, that to give the motive for an action is to give the desire or value for the sake of which the action was done (the agent's goal or aim in acting), and, I would add, it is also to implicitly attribute some belief to the agent, namely that acting as he did was conducive to satisfying the desire or realizing the value. Thus, in knowing the motive why someone acted we know both the desire for the sake of which the action was done and his reason for acting – though neither his aim nor his reason need be explicit and fully conscious.[8] But to say that is not to say that motives are desires or agent's reasons – even though in giving an agent's reason, or the desire from which he acted, we may give (sometimes implicitly) the agent's motive for acting.[9]

Motives are then best thought of as explanatory patterns under which we can bring intentional behaviour and the goals and beliefs or knowledge that prompted and guided that behaviour, so that these are related to each other in intelligible and familiar ways. Thus, behaviour motivated by revenge corresponds to a pattern relating a desire to harm someone on the grounds that that person has caused some harm to oneself (or one's family, group, country, etc.) and a belief that the proposed action will be harmful. Acting out of revenge is acting *in order to* harm someone *because* of that previous (real or perceived) harm caused by the victim of revenge, and of a belief that the proposed action will be suitably harmful. The suggestion that motives are pattern-concepts under which we bring goals, beliefs or knowledge, and intentional behaviour in order to explain the latter gives substance to White's remark that motives are not items in the explanation of intentional actions but rather kinds of explanation of those actions.[10]

I shall leave here my examination of Ryle's doctrine that motives are dispositions and turn now to the second and third doctrines mentioned in the introduction, namely, that the cause of an event is a happening or occurrence, and that dispositions are not causes of their manifestations (and, relatedly, that explanations of events that cite a disposition are not causal explanations).

## 2 Causes, occurrences and dispositions

Ryle's causal doctrine is expressed in this passage:

> I have argued that to explain an action as done from a specified motive or inclination is not to describe the action as the effect of a

> specified cause. Motives are not happenings and are not therefore of the right type to be causes. (1949, p. 113)

Here Ryle seems to subscribe to the view, which was beginning to gain popularity at the time of the publication of *The Concept of Mind*, that an agent's motive for acting, and generally an agent's reason for acting, are not the causes of his action.[11]

Anyone familiar with the debates on intentional action that have dominated the literature since the 1960s will, on reading Ryle's remarks above, think immediately of Davidson's arguments in his paper 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. In that paper, Davidson famously outlines and defends a causal doctrine about the relation between reasons and actions, namely:

> C2. A primary reason for an action is its cause. (p. 692)

In his defence of this doctrine, Davison considers several objections, one of which is worded in ways that closely echo Ryle's remark above.[12] The objection is that a primary reason 'consist of attitudes and beliefs, which are states or dispositions, not events; therefore they cannot be causes' (1963, p. 693). (As we have seen, Ryle did not think that motives were states but he certainly thought they were dispositions and hence, he thought, not causes.) Davidson's reply to the objection is well known:

> It is easy to reply that states, dispositions, and conditions are frequently named as the causes of events: the bridge collapsed because of a structural defect; the plane crashed on takeoff because the air temperature was abnormally high; the plate broke because it had a crack. (p. 694)

One might object that, as a matter of fact, the statements Davidson gives in his reply do *not name* any state, disposition or condition as 'the cause' of an event: rather they are 'because'-statements that mention states, dispositions, or conditions in order to explain the occurrence of events. But Davidson's claim is, precisely, that these 'because'-statements are *causal*: the states, dispositions, or conditions they mention are causes of events – or more accurately, since Davidson also thought that only events are causes, causal factors or conditions, and therefore the because-statements provide causal explanations of the events they explain. Davidson goes on to say that this reply works on the assumption that there was always a suitable triggering event which is 'the cause' event – a claim that some of the philosophers Davidson was arguing against denied, at least in relation to human behaviour but which, as we shall see, Ryle is happy to accept.

So it might seem that Ryle's views on whether motives are causes of actions is diametrically opposed to Davidson's and, moreover, that Ryle's grounds for saying that motives are not causes (cited at the beginning of this section) are defeated by Davidson's response. However, consideration of other things Ryle says in *The Concept of Mind* suggests, rather, that his picture of the explanation of action by motives is in fact not so very different from Davidson's. For, having said that motives explain actions as dispositions explain their manifestations, Ryle adds:

> But the general fact that a person is disposed to act in such and such ways in such and such circumstances *does not by itself account for his doing a particular thing at a particular moment*; any more than the fact that the glass was brittle accounts for its fracture at 10 p.m. As the impact of the stone at 10 p.m. caused the glass to break, so some antecedent of an action causes or occasions the agent to perform it when and where he does so. (p. 113; author emphasis)

Indeed, in order to understand Ryle's claims about motives, causation, and explanation it is important to pay attention to a distinction he makes between two kinds of explanation. According to him, there are two different senses in which we explain why something occurred. First, there is the 'causal sense' in which we explain that the glass broke because a stone hit it. This 'because'-clause reports an event, the stone's striking of the window, which stands 'to the fracture of the glass as cause to effect' (p. 88). But, he adds,

> very frequently we look for and get explanations of occurrences in another sense of 'explanation'. We ask why the glass shivered when struck by the stone and we get the answer that it was because the glass was brittle. Now 'brittle' is a dispositional adjective…So when we say that the glass broke when struck because it was brittle, the 'because' clause does not report a happening or a cause; it states a law-like proposition. (pp. 88–9)

Davidson could reply to this by saying that what Ryle calls 'two senses' in which an event is explained ('The glass broke because it was fragile' and 'The glass broke because the stone hit it') are really two parts of the same *causal* explanation.[13] One gives a causal condition for the occurrence of the breaking, while the other gives the (trigger) event that stands to the breaking in the extensional relation of cause-event to effect-event. But even so, he seems to agree with Ryle that *what* we explain when we cite a cause-event is why something happened *when it did*, or why someone did what they did *when they did it*, for he writes:

> The signalling driver can answer the question 'Why did you raise your arm *when you did*?', and from the answer we learn the event that caused the action. But can an actor always answer such a question? Sometimes the answer will mention a mental event that does not give a reason: 'Finally I made up my mind'. However, there also seem to be cases of intentional action *where we cannot explain at all why we acted when we did*. In such cases, explanation in terms of primary reasons parallels the explanation of the collapse of the bridge from a structural defect: *we are ignorant of the event or sequence of events that led up to (caused) the collapse*, but we are sure there was such an event or sequence of events.[14] (p. 695; author emphasis)

So both Ryle and Davidson agree that explaining why something happened when it did requires citing the event (the 'cause' event) that triggered the causal process that culminated in the effect-event, while explaining why something happened at all does not require mentioning the trigger, although it implies that there was such a trigger.

It may seem, then, that the difference between Ryle and Davidson on the question whether explanations of action that cite motives (or reasons generally) are causal is no more than presentational. After all, Davidson agrees with Ryle that only events (or occurrences) are causes; other things, such as states, dispositions, or conditions are not properly speaking causes (for Davidson they are causal factors or causal conditions). And Ryle agrees with Davidson that when we explain why something happened by reference to a disposition, although we are not thereby citing a cause-event that explains why that thing happened when it did, we do nonetheless imply that there was such an event or sequence of events that was the cause of the happening and explains why it occurred then. Thus, Ryle says that 'an action's having a cause does not conflict with its having a motive, but is already prescribed for in the protasis of the hypothetical proposition which states the motive' (p. 114). To that extent, then, Ryle was *not* one of those philosophers who, in Davidson's words, felt 'a certain uneasiness' in 'speaking of causes of actions at all' (p. 700).

All this notwithstanding, an important difference remains – a difference about their respective conceptions of dispositions. For, although Ryle is happy to accept that actions have (event) causes, he would not accept Davidson's claim that reasons or motives are 'causal conditions' of actions, at least not in the sense Davidson intends that claim. This is because Ryle rejected the view that dispositions are causal conditions in the sense of being events or states or anything of the kind – that is, anything that can be said to happen or exist or obtain, to be overt or hidden, seen or unseen. According to him, dispositions are not of the right logical type to fit such attributes:

> To possess a dispositional property is not to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change; it is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realised. (p. 43)

Thus, one of the things that Ryle is at pains to deny in *The Concept of Mind* is that, when we explain an occurrence by reference to a disposition, we are explaining by citing some *thing* – some object, event, state, etc., some 'unobservable existence' – that is the disposition and that is 'causally efficacious' in bringing about that occurrence. Consider his remarks about the concept of a causal connection:

> Now there is no objection to employing the familiar idiom 'causal connection'. Bacteriologists do discover causal connections between bacteria and diseases, since this is only another way of saying that they do establish laws and so provide themselves with inference tickets which enable them to infer from diseases to bacteria, explain diseases by assertions about bacteria, prevent and cure diseases by eliminating bacteria, and so forth. But to speak as if the discovery of a law were the finding of a third, unobservable existence is simply to fall back into the old habit of construing open hypothetical statements as singular categorical statements. (p. 122)

Similarly, he might add, there is no objection to saying that there is a causal connection between someone's motive (which, remember, Ryle thinks of as a disposition) and their action – but for Ryle that is just another way of saying that we have identified a law-like regularity and thus provided ourselves with an inference ticket that enables us to predict, explain, retrodict, prevent, and so on, that person's actions.

Thus, Ryle's second ground for his anti-causal understanding of the relation between motives and actions is his conception of dispositions. For Ryle, motives, which fall under what he calls 'higher mental dispositional concepts' aren't causal conditions (in Davidson's sense) of the actions they explain, simply because they are dispositions.[15] To be sure, they are dispositions of a special kind, but this is not because they are mental, it is because they are not 'single-track dispositions, but dispositions the exercises of which are indefinitely heterogeneous' (p. 44). Motives are, Ryle thinks, not like the dispositional concept 'fragile', whose manifestation is single track (i.e. 'determinate'): shattering; but rather like the dispositional concept 'elastic' whose manifestation can take many forms [i.e. 'determinable' (p. 118)]: expanding, contracting, and so on:[16]

> 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 one 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'. (Ibid.)

In sum, what leads Ryle to reject the doctrine that motives are causal conditions in Davidson's sense is not a behaviourist tendency to deny the reality of the mental, but rather his view that motives are a particular kind of disposition, and his general conception of dispositions.[17] And this is an important issue on which he disagrees with Davidson, because for Ryle motives, being dispositions, are not things of any kind and hence not , for example, states that could play a causal role and have various descriptions. It is this view of dispositions , coupled with his belief that motives are dispositions that makes motives ill suited to play the role of causal factors, as Davidson suggests they do in 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. And it follows that Ryle could not accept Davidson's view that explanations by reference to the agent's reasons or motives are explanations that use psychological vocabulary to describe particular events and states that could also be picked out using the vocabulary of the physical sciences (see, for instance, 1949, p. 117).

We have seen, then, that Ryle denies that motives are causes of actions and that explanations citing motives are causal explanations on two grounds. One is that he thinks that causes proper are happenings (events or processes) and since motives are not happenings, they are not in the right category to be causes. The second is that he thinks that motives are dispositions and that dispositions are not causal conditions in the sense of being states that play a causal role. And we have seen that, although Davidson would agree with the first claim (for he also thought that causes, strictly speaking, are events), he would disagree with the second. And so it becomes clear that, in fact, the more significant disagreement between Davidson and Ryle on the relation between motives or reasons and actions does not depend on the doctrine, held by other anti-causalists among Davidson's targets, that intentional actions do not have causes but rather on their different views about dispositions *in general*.

It should be noted that Ryle's view of dispositions, though greatly influential, has been criticised on several grounds. First, he is associated with the view that dispositions can be analysed in terms of conditional statements. Whether he held that dispositional statements are susceptible to this sort of *analysis* may be debatable but it is clear that he thought that 'to say that this lump of sugar is soluble is to say that it would dissolve, if submerged anywhere, at any time and in any parcel of water' (p. 124). However, the 'simple conditional' analysis of dispositional concepts came under sustained attack in the 1990s. Arguments that point to the possibilities of 'finked', 'masked' and 'mimicked' dispositions, developed by several philosophers, show that the simple conditional analysis provides neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for something to have a disposition.[18] Since then, there have been different attempts to provide more complex conditional analyses of dispositions that avoid the problems faced by the simple view but there seems to be a consensus that the simple conditional analysis does not work.[19]

Moreover, in his treatment of dispositions Ryle says nothing about what is called 'the categorical basis' or underlying structure of dispositions.[20] As we have seen, he insists again and again that disposition statements should not be thought of as 'categorical reports of particular but unwitnessable matters of fact' (p. 117). But, critics have said,

> to speak of an object's having a dispositional property entails that the object is in some non-dispositional state, or that it has some property (there exists a 'categorial basis') which is responsible for the object manifesting certain behavior in certain circumstances. (Armstrong, 1968, p. 86)

Whether Armstrong is right that speaking of a disposition entails the existence of a 'categorical basis' seems debatable. For even if we agree with Armstrong that dispositions do in fact have categorical bases, and that such categorical bases are causally responsible for the manifestation of the disposition, we need not agree that this is *implied* by talk of dispositions. Indeed the fact that it is controversial whether all dispositions do in fact have a categorical basis surely suggests that talk about dispositions is not implicitly talk about non-dispositional properties or states.[21] Furthermore, some philosophers who claim that dispositions do invariably have categorical bases also claim that dispositions play no causal role in their manifestation, since (i) this causal role is played by a disposition's categorical basis, and (ii) dispositions are distinct from their categorical bases.[22] If this view about the causal role of dispositions turned out to be right, then Ryle's claim that explanations by reference to dispositions are not themselves causal would gain plausibility, even if it does not undermine the suggestion that a dispositional explanation of an event implies the possibility of supplying a corresponding causal explanation referring to underlying structures and trigger events.

These issues about the logic of dispositional statements, the nature of dispositions and the relation between them and their categorical bases (if any), as well as between dispositions and the causal powers of the objects whose dispositions they are, are complex and have been much debated recently.[23] It is not my aim here to make a contribution to those debates because the focus of my essay is to clarify Ryle's understanding of explanations of actions by motives. And, although Ryle says that motives are dispositions, as I indicated in Section 1, I believe that he was wrong to say this. So I shall leave here the issue whether Ryle was right that *in general* an explanation by reference to a disposition is not a causal explanation and turn instead, in the last section of this essay, to the more specific question of what Ryle says about explanations of action by reference to motives and character traits, respectively, when the two are properly distinguished.

## 3 Motives, character traits, and the explanation of action

Consider the following passage, which is representative of many contemporary discussions of dispositions:

> Disposition terms, such as 'cowardice', 'fragility', and 'reactivity', often appear in explanations. Sometimes *we explain why a man ran away by saying that he was cowardly*, or we explain why something broke by saying it was fragile. Scientific explanations of certain phenomena feature dispositional properties like instability, reactivity, and conductivity. (McKitrick, 2004, p. 110; author emphasis)

The statement 'The man ran away because he was cowardly' could be taken as either of the two types of explanation mentioned in Section 1: one that simply imputes a motive to the person on that occasion: (i) 'He ran away out of cowardice'; and one that in addition imputes the corresponding character trait: (ii) 'He ran away because he is a coward'. Now, it may be that both explanations involve reference to dispositions but, if so, the dispositions in question would seem to be importantly different, because only the second involves a general disposition to have cowardly thoughts and feelings and to behave in cowardly ways. I shall start by examining this second type of explanation.

First, it seems that, as this passage suggests, explanations by reference to character traits are indeed explanations by reference to dispositions. For to say that someone's action was a manifestation of a character trait is to say that it is a manifestation of a disposition the person has to think and feel and behave in certain ways: in the case of cowardice, a disposition *inter alia* to avoid danger or pain (physical or mental) when it behoves the person to face the danger or pain – either because the latter were not severe, or because it was the person's duty to face them, regardless of their severity.

But although it is plausible that we explain both human action and the behaviour of inanimate things by reference to their dispositions, it is also plausible that (at least some of) the relevant dispositions should be different in important respects in each of those domains. Indeed, the concept of disposition at issue in each case may be quite different – after all, the term 'disposition' as encountered in recent philosophical literature is something of a term of art. I shall not here try to give anything like a detailed account of the differences. I shall, however, highlight some distinctive features of explanations of human behaviour by reference to dispositions that are character traits, such as that found in construal (ii) of the example in the passage above, and at the same time comment on what Ryle says about them (once this is separated from what he says about motives in general).

An explanation such as 'He ran away because he is a coward' seems to be what Ryle calls a 'semi-hypothetical' or 'mongrel categorical statement', which he says is 'just as much an explanatory report of an actual occurrence as a conditional prediction of further occurrences' (p. 141). These mongrel categorical statements describe what the object or person is actually doing in a way that is, as he puts it, 'law impregnated' (p. 142): it makes it reasonable to expect, and allows us so predict, similar behaviour in relevantly similar circumstances. And Ryle says that such statements explain the action by placing it in a familiar pattern (that associated with the character trait) and sanction predictions about future behaviour in similar circumstances on the basis of a past regularity. And he adds:

> Statements of this type are not peculiar to descriptions of the higher level actions and reactions of people. When a sugar-lump is described as dissolving, something more episodic is being said than when it is described as soluble; but something more dispositional is being said than when it is described as moist. (pp. 141–2)

That all seems right. But statements of this kind involving character traits seem to have other distinctive features.

First, character trait dispositions are what I shall call 'manifestation-dependent dispositions': dispositions that are attributed to the individual on the basis of the manifestation of the disposition. In the case of character traits, they are attributed on the basis of the that fact that, in the relevant circumstances, the person to which they are attributed tends to behave, or tends to react emotionally, and have thoughts, and so on, which are characteristic of the character trait. And this dependence of attribution on behaviour or reaction is not merely epistemic but is, rather, constitutive. Frequent or regular relevant behaviour or related thoughts, feelings, etc. in the relevant circumstances is constitutive of what it is to have the corresponding character trait.

So someone who tends to behave in a cowardly manner, that is, often or regularly behaves cowardly when facing danger, has the character trait of cowardice and the trait is attributed on the basis of that regularity of behaviour. But note that it is not necessary that someone *actually* behaves in a cowardly manner regularly, and that is why I say 'tends to having feelings, emotional reactions, in the relevant circumstances' as well as 'regularly behaves'. For a character trait may be attributed to someone in spite of the fact that the person does not actually behave in the relevant manner if, for example, the person has the relevant reactions and is inclined to act in the relevant manner but she does not, because the behaviour is *supressed* by forces external to the agent, that is by others or by circumstances. So, consider, for instance, someone who, in the relevant circumstances, feels the inclination to run away or eat excessively but is not allowed, or does not have the opportunity, to do so. This person is cowardly or greedy (that is, has those dispositions) because he regularly or frequently has the inclination to do so – even though he does not often behave (perhaps even never behaves) in the relevant manner. So it may be enough that a person regularly or frequently has certain behavioural inclinations, emotional reactions, mental life, and so on for them to have this disposition even if they don't act in the associated manner. In other words, such a disposition may be attributed on the basis of regular actual behaviour and/or of regular manifestation of the tendency to such behaviour, and thoughts and emotional reactions typical of the character trait . However, in the absence of either the behaviour or the inclination, etc., a person cannot be said to have the disposition: someone who never behaves, nor has the inclination to behave in the relevant way, nor has the relevant emotions, thoughts, etc., does not have the relevant disposition, that is the character trait.

I already anticipated this point in Section 1, when I said that the attribution of a character trait to a person is conceptually dependent on the attribution of the corresponding motive to the person a sufficient number of times. That is, no person is generous who has never been motivated by generosity, or cowardly if she has not been motivated by cowardice. I am now refining that point by pointing out that a person may have a character trait even if she doesn't display the relevant behaviour so long as she regularly has the relevant feelings, thoughts, emotions, and so on.

Dispositions such as character traits are, in that sense, different from, say, dispositions like fragility, which can be attributed to an object despite the object's never manifesting the disposition in any way, that is never either breaking or otherwise manifesting the disposition. These dispositions may be attributed on the basis of knowledge of the kind an object is or the stuff it is made of, and may be so attributed even if they are never manifested by the particular object, and even if they are not manifested when the trigger conditions for the disposition obtain (or so it seems since, as many have argued, dispositions can be finked or masked).[24] But this is not true of character traits.

Note, however, that, while frequently or regularly behaving in the relevant manner is sufficient for the attribution of the character trait (i.e. the disposition), frequently or regularly having *the inclination* and so on to behave in that manner is not sufficient for the person to have the character trait.[25] A person who has the inclination to behave in the relevant way and has the associated thoughts, emotions, and so on but who does not actually behave thus may not have the disposition *if* the reason for the absence of the associated behaviour is *the agent herself*. Thus, it is possible for someone to have a tendency to cowardice and yet not be cowardly if she has the tendency to behave in a cowardly manner, and has the associated emotional reactions, mental life, and so on, but she does not allow such inclinations to prevail: she herself *checks* those inclinations. So someone who is inclined to act cowardly but stands firm in the face of fear and the inclination to run away, dismisses the associated thoughts and images, does not allow the emotional reactions to determine how she acts, and so on, is not a cowardly person, although she has the same inclinations as a cowardly person does.[26] Such as person does not have the character trait, though they may have *a disposition to having the character trait*.

This suggests that although what Ryle says about the predictive power of these dispositional statements is right it does not exhaust their explanatory power, for the attribution of a character trait to the agent, which underlies the licence to the predictions and so on that Ryle talks about, appears to add at least one more element to his regularity claims: it brings with it the idea that a person with such a disposition is such that certain forms of behaviour are *easier* for her, that is they require less effort of will, and so on, than the contrary behaviour (if the disposition is a vice) or than it would be without the disposition (if the latter is a virtue):[27] a mean person finds it easier to behave meanly than not to do so, just as a methodical person finds it easier to do things in a methodical way than a chaotic person.[28] And, consequently, suppressing the corresponding behaviour (in the case of a vice) requires some kind of effort and attention, and engaging in the corresponding behaviour (in the case of virtue) requires less effort than if one does not have the disposition.

This feature of character traits is related to the fact that the agent whose traits they are can check them and can (try to) change them by acting or trying to act on particular occasions contrary to the inclination concomitant to the character trait.[29] And if the effort is successful, the disposition may be weakened, lost, and even reversed: one may gain the opposite disposition. For instance, an untidy person may gain the disposition to tidiness, and an irascible person may become more mellow.[30]

Whether dispositions that are character traits should be thought of as the causes of acts that are their manifestations is, then, a point that seems to depend on the notion of cause one is operating with. Character traits are certainly not causes in the sense of being occurrences that trigger behaviour; but they are, we have seen, more than terms that denote regularities of behaviour: they seem, *pace* Ryle, to be causes in the sense of being conditions that involve a tendency or inclination to certain forms of behaviour, emotional reactions, and so on. On the other hand, if they are causal conditions, they seem to be importantly different from causal conditions for the occurrence of events that don't involve human actions, for whether the occurrence (action, and so on) for which they are conditions comes about seems to be, at least in some cases, up to the agent, *even* when the triggering conditions obtain (see note 32).

What of the other type of explanation I mentioned at the beginning, which imputes a motive to an agent without imputing the corresponding character trait, as (ii) above does?

I suggested in Section 1 that motive explanations bring an agent's reasons, aims and actions under a familiar pattern in a way that makes the action intelligible. Something like this idea is in fact to be found in *The Concept of Mind*, in, for example, the following passage:

> The two statements 'the bird is flying south' and 'the bird is migrating' are both episodic reports. The question 'Why is the bird flying south?' could be answered quite properly by saying 'Because it is migrating'. Yet the process of migrating is not a different process from that of flying south; so it is not the cause of the bird's flying south. Nor, since it reports an episode, does the sentence 'because it is migrating' say the same sort of thing as is said in 'because it is a migrant'. (p. 142)

In a similar way we might say that to explain why John ran away by saying that he was being cowardly, or that Jill betrayed James because she was avenging the humiliation of her father, we are explaining an episode (running away, betraying) by re-describing it as an episode of another kind (cowardice, revenge). In other words, explanations by motives are, effectively, explanations by re-description. That is why Ryle says that the episode reported in the *explanans* (he was being a coward) is not the cause of the one reported in the *explanandum* (he ran away), since these are not distinct episodes but the same episode differently described.[31]

This, it seems, is consistent with Davidson's claim that explanations by motives point to, or imply, explanations by reasons and goals, or as he would put it, beliefs and desires, and that such explanations are causal in the ways he suggested in 'Actions, Reasons and Causes'. Whether Davidson is right about that is an issue that has been hotly debated for decades and it is interesting to note that opposition to that view of Davidson's has been growing in the twenty-first century. With that in mind, consider this passage of Ryle's:

> we are perfectly familiar with the sorts of happenings which induce or occasion people to do things. If we were not, we could not get them to do what we wish, and the ordinary dealings between people could not exist. Customers could not purchase, officers could not command, friends could not converse, or children play, unless they knew how to get other people and themselves to do things at particular junctures. (p. 114)

This seems just another passage where Ryle accepts that actions can have 'triggering' events as causes. But it should be noted that the view Ryle expresses in this passage is consistent with the thought that the word 'cause' used to identify a triggering event given certain dispositions in people, though rightly applied there as it is in cases of inanimate occurrences and of human actions, has different importantly connotations in each case. For in the case of human actions, causing someone to act is often persuading, requesting, commanding, etc. them to act, while causing an inanimate object to do something (e.g. explode, bend, break) is never persuading, commanding, etc. it to do it. The reason for this is a central distinction between inanimate and human action: namely, that the latter but not the former can be the result of the agent's *choice*.[32]

Be that as it may, it seems that Ryle was right in holding that motive explanations are not causal explanations – even if, as Davidson claimed, they imply the existence of related causal explanations, and even if some of the reasons Ryle gives in defence of this claim are unconvincing because they depend, as I have tried to show, on a mistaken assimilation of motives to dispositions such as character traits.

## Notes

I would like to thank John Hyman and the editor of this volume for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

1. By 'reports of matters of fact' Ryle seems to mean reports of actual events, processes, and states of affairs but he excludes from these attributions of (actual) abilities, liabilities, capacities, etc. Thus Ryle says that when inquiring about the mental factors that explain action, 'our inquiry is not into causes (and a fortiori not into occult causes), but into capacities, skills, habits, liabilities and bents' (p. 45).
2. Here are some remarks of Ryle's to that effect (italics all mine): 'When we ask 'Why did someone act in a certain way?' [we are making] 'an inquiry into *the character of the agent* which accounts for his having acted in that way on that occasion'(89); 'to ask whether an action was done from force of habit or from kindliness of heart is therefore to ask which of *two specified dispositions* is the explanation of the action'(92); 'to explain an action as done from a certain motive is not to correlate it with an occult cause, but *to subsume it under a propensity or behaviour-trend*' (110); 'in ascribing a specific motive to a person we are describing the sorts of things that *he tends to try to do* or bring about' (112; see also p. 113 quoted above).
3. See, for example, Anscombe (1957, p. 21). Wilkins (1963) claims that Anscombe's criticism fails because it depends on attributing to Ryle the view that a vain person must 'always or very often' act vainly. But, Wilkins says, this is to misunderstand Ryle's remarks about dispositions and laws, since 'law-like propositions about how a person behaves when in certain situations do not imply propositions about the frequency with which a person does in fact behave in certain ways' (Wilkins 1963, p. 112). But this defence is simply off-target because Anscombe's objection is not that a man must act out of vanity *very frequently to be a vain man* but rather that a man may act out of vanity *once without thereby being a vain man* (i.e. without having a *disposition* to act vainly); but Ryle's construal of motive statements seems to exclude this possibility.
4. This is consistent with the fact that, in certain cases, because of the nature or circumstances of the action, imputing a motive on a particular occasion might be enough to impute the character trait to the person – still in these cases the character trait would be attributed on the basis of the imputation of the motive (and not vice-versa).
5. Kenny 1989, 59ff.
6. Though Ryle notes that the two classes of actions, viz. those done out of habit and those done for a motive, are not 'demarcated from one another as an equatorial day from an equatorial night. They shade into one another as an English day shades into an English night' (p. 110).
7. Davidson makes a similar point in his defence of the claim that actions are explained in the first instance by citing a 'primary reason'. He notes that Ryle's 'analysis is often, and perhaps justly, criticized on the ground that a man may boast from vanity just once. But if Ryle's boaster did what he did from vanity, then something entailed by Ryle's analysis is true: the boaster wanted

to secure the admiration and envy of others, and he believed that his action would produce this admiration and envy; true or false, Ryle's analysis does not dispense with primary reasons, but depends upon them' (1963, p. 689).

As is well known, Davidson thinks of a primary reason for an action as a combination of two mental states of an agent's, a pro-attitude and a belief, which together explain the action by giving the agent's reason for doing what he did.

8. I am using 'the agent's reason' to mean the reason in the light of which the agent acts, and not just any reason that could explain why the agent acted as she did. The former might be a premise in the agent's practical reasoning, and what she might give as part of her justification in answering the question why she acted (these may be what I have elsewhere called 'merely apparent reasons'). For a clarification of the issues involved in these distinctions see Alvarez (2010, ch. 5).
9. I say 'sometimes implicitly' because the same reason may be compatible with different motives. Thus, if A's reason for giving B a lethal overdose is that B has a painful chronic condition, A's motive in so acting may be compassion (if his aim was to alleviate B's suffering) or greed (if A's aim was to ensure that her inheritance wasn't used up on B's care). I discuss these issues in Alvarez (2010, §3.1).
10. As I say above, this suggestion is inspired by Kenny's discussion of motives (see Kenny 1989, 59ff.).
11. Ryle talks about motives while other participants in the debate about action explanations, for example, Davidson, talk about the agent's reason. In the previous section, I mentioned some differences between these concepts as well as some ways in which they are related. Nonetheless, those differences can be ignored for the purposes of the issues at hand – not least because, as Davidson notes (see note 7 above), talk of motives implies talk of (primary) reasons.
12. Davidson mentions Ryle explicitly in connection not with this but with the objection to the causal theory that holds that 'a reason for an action is not logically distinct from the action; therefore, reasons are not causes of actions', about which, Davidson says: 'In one of its forms, the argument was of course inspired by Ryle's treatment of motives in *The Concept of Mind*' (1963, 695 and note 6) though he does not specify where.
13. But consider Davidson's remark: 'The most primitive explanation of an event gives its cause; more elaborate explanations may tell more of the story, or defend the singular causal claim by producing a relevant law or by giving reasons for believing such exists' (p. 698).
14. Note that, contrary to what Davison implies, an explanation of why someone acted when he did does not give the agent's reason *for doing what he did* but only either the reason why he did it, or his reason for doing it *then*: 'I raised up my arm then because I noticed the turning coming up' does not tell us the agent's reason for raising his arm (presumably, that he was signalling), but the reason why he raised it when he did (that he noticed the turning). Likewise, 'I signalled because I saw the turning' does not tell us the agent's reason for signalling but his reason for signalling *then*. Admittedly, in both cases we can easily infer the agent's reason for acting.
15. By 'higher mental concepts' Ryle means concepts whose employment indicates the presence of intelligence.

16. For a criticism of this distinction of Ryle's see Lyons (1973).
17. Julia Tanney argues that Ryle's 'anti-causalist' position arises not from his views about the mind, for example from his alleged behaviourism, or from the 'logical connection' argument (which says that the alleged mental occurrences that are claimed to cause actions are 'logically' connected to actions and hence not suited to be their causes). Rather, according to her, Ryle's argument is that 'the existence of such [mental] occurrences is not required for the concepts of intention, motive, and reason, etc., to discharge their explanatory role, thus throwing into question the whole idea that this explanatory role is causal' (Tanney, 2009, 97).

    But as I argue above, it's not clear that Ryle's argument shows that the explanatory role of motives is not causal at all, as opposed to showing merely that their role is not that of a causal *trigger*.
18. See, for example, Martin (1994) and Bird (1998).
19. Mumford (1998).
20. For criticisms of this aspect of Ryle's view of dispositions see Armstrong (1968) and Lyons (1980).
21. On this see McKitrick (2003) and Mumford (2006).
22. See Prior et al., who characterise categorical (or 'causal') bases as follows:

    > By a 'causal basis' we mean the property or property-complex of the object that, together with the first member of the pair – the antecedent circumstances – is the causally operative sufficient condition for the manifestation in the case of 'surefire' dispositions, and in the case of probabilistic dispositions is causally sufficient for the relevant chance of the manifestation. (1982, 251)

    See McKitrick (2004) for a critical discussion of negative views about the causal relevance of dispositions.
23. For a summary see Cross (2012).
24. Thus, Cross says:

    > It's important to note that neither the activation conditions nor the manifestation conditions need ever actually occur in order for an object to have the disposition in question, and this lends dispositions their 'suspicious' quality, for they seem to be inherently modal; they are by nature about the merely possible. (2005, 322)

    Though he talks about this is true of all dispositions, I do not think this is right for things such as character traits.
25. To have a disposition to be mean or noisy is not the same as being mean or noisy: the former is a kind of second-order disposition.
26. The difference between the person who has the character trait of, say, cowardice, the person who has the tendency to cowardice but not the character trait, and the person who has the opposite character trait, namely courage, seem to correspond to the difference between the vicious, the continent, and the virtuous agents drawn by Aristotle.
27. See Kenny (1989, p. 85). 'Effort of will' is my term not Kenny's and it is meant to have its ordinary meaning here.
28. And this seems to be a difference between a person who endeavours and (frequently) succeeds to behave according to a virtue but does not have the virtue (Aristotle's 'continent man' *enkratês*) and a person who does have it (the virtuous person): only the latter finds it easier to act in a virtuous manner than not to do so. And the same seems true of vices.

29. I do not mean to say that an agent's choices is the only way in which such dispositions may be changed: there are many other ways, such as drills, physiological changes, etc.
30. The extent of, and limits to, the possibility for changing one's character traits is a complex issue well beyond the scope of this discussion.
31. This presumably is the passage Davidson had in mind when he says that the logical connection argument, in one of its forms, was inspired by Ryle's treatment of motives in the *Concept of Mind*. If so, it should be noted that Ryle's argument is not that the alleged cause and effect are not 'logically distinct' so they cannot be causally connected: his point is that they are not *ontologically* distinct as they are the same event or process differently described, and so could not be related as cause and effect.
32. It is of course a hotly contested issue, at the heart of some aspects of the controversy about the compatibilism of free will and determinism, whether choice can really make the difference that those who advocate a radical difference between explanations of human action and those of inanimate phenomena claim it does. That is beyond the scope of this essay; the point I am making is that, *prima facie*, the possibility of choice is a distinctive phenomenon characteristic of intentional action.

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# 5

# Ryle's Conceptions of Emotional Behaviour

*Rowland Stout*

## 1 Outline

Although Ryle avows admiration for Jane Austen's treatment of our emotional life, his own work on emotion in *The Concept of Mind* is somewhat primitive. He talks about pangs, glows, flutters, and throbs, on the one hand. And he considers character traits like vanity, patriotism, and indolence as well as commitments, like interest in symbolic logic, on the other hand. But what of things like glowing with pride that one's daughter has won a prize, feeling angry with one's friend for betraying a confidence, being terrified of a librarian's disapproval, being overwhelmed by a wave of adoration for a person, or being covered with embarrassment having been discovered having fast asleep at a seminar? While Jane Austen valued emotional restraint and mocked overly expressive displays of emotion, she never underplayed the significance of passionate emotional responses.

Within Ryle's painstaking categorisation of our talk of emotions what he calls 'agitations' may come closest to capturing these cases (Ryle, 1949, p. 93). Agitations, for Ryle, are states we are in when our motives are frustrated. They result in feelings (twinges, glows, throbs, etc.) and aimless disturbed behaviour. But they are not themselves motives for such behaviour. Emotionally expressive behaviour, on Ryle's view, turns out to be merely symptomatic of emotional agitation, and in no way a realisation of it.

Ryle is no eliminativist or reductionist about the mental or any aspect of the mental. If his work in the philosophy of mind is to count for anything it must be part of a resistance to both these tendencies, tendencies he thinks philosophers have been prey to through misunderstanding how the language of the mental functions. But I will argue that

Ryle's approach to emotions fails to do justice to the real phenomena, that he has made a mistake here, and one that he could have avoided. His conception of agitations does not properly accommodate emotion *within the concept of mind*. So, while he does not deny the existence of passionate emotions, he does not show why they belong to the mind. And his conception of the relationship between agitations and the behaviour they explain does not account for how emotionally expressive behaviour can be an aspect of human rational agency. I will suggest that the mistake may be avoided by acknowledging that agitations are motives, and that emotionally disturbed behaviour, while often not being goal-directed is nevertheless not best described as aimless. It is motivated behaviour, capable of being intelligent or unintelligent, appropriate or inappropriate.

I will proceed by describing the significance of Ryle's distinction between dispositions and occurrences and then by explaining his account of how emotions fit into this distinction. I will try to show how unsatisfactory this account is and defend briefly the alternative view that agitated emotions are motives for emotionally expressive behaviour.

## 2 Significance of the distinction between occurrences and dispositions

Now, perhaps Ryle is not trying to provide a philosophically satisfying account of emotions at all. His stated motive for discussing emotion is to deal with another manifestation of the pervasive tendency towards thinking of the mind as a ghost in the machine. He describes the target he is attacking as follows:

> Emotions are internal or private experiences. Emotions are described as turbulences in the stream of consciousness, the owner of which cannot help directly registering them; to external witnesses they are, in consequence, necessarily occult. They are occurrences which take place not in the public, physical world but in your or my secret, mental world. (p. 83)[1]

So the target would be the view that embarrassment, say, was an occurrence within consciousness – a 'feeling' – and thus immediately known by the subject, but which also causes certain outward signs, like blushing and flustered behaviour, which the external observer may be aware of and from which they may try to infer the existence of the feeling. The crucial aspect of this picture is that the feeling is a real occurrence but it is not out there in the world of observable occurrences.

Ryle's first move against this picture is to say that in describing such aspects of the mind we are not describing occurrences at all, but dispositions – dispositions of the subject to behave in certain ways.[2] The significance of this distinction for Ryle is that occurrences and dispositions explain behaviour in radically different ways. And corresponding to these different types of explanation are two different conceptions of the relationship between someone's mind and the behaviour that is explained by their mind. It seems that for Ryle it is only if we explain behaviour in terms of mental occurrences that we risk bringing in the ghost in the machine.

The first way of understanding the relationship between mind and behaviour is that the mind, by means of a mental occurrence, provides a causal impetus to a process that results in the behaviour. This is the Cartesian picture. The second is that describing the mind is just describing how people behave and are disposed to behave. This is to characterise at the most general level the process that results in their behaviour. The first way of explaining behaviour – what Ryle calls *causal* explanation – is like explaining why the glass broke because a stone hit it. The second way – which Ryle describes as subsumption under a law-like proposition – is like explaining why the glass broke because it was fragile (pp. 88–90).

Ryle claims that motives (including emotions when they are motives) explain behaviour in this second way, not the first. So such motives are not prior occurrences, but dispositions. I will adopt Fred Dretske's terminology by describing the former as triggering causes and the latter as structuring causes (1988, 42ff.).[3] Ryle does not call dispositions 'causes' at all, but this is just to make clear that dispositions are not triggering causes. He has no principled objection to using the word 'causal' in these contexts (p. 122). So Ryle rejects the idea that a motive is a prior mental occurrence initiating or triggering a causal process resulting in an action in the way that striking the glass initiates a causal process resulting in its fracturing.

Thinking of motives as occurrences would make it natural, according to Ryle, to think of them as occult. I take it that this is because such prior occurrences would have to be thought of as independent entities with their own mental nature. A prior occurrence is what it is independently of what it causes. And if it is a mental occurrence it owes this status to something other than its role in leading to behaviour. It must owe this status to its special mental nature – something Cartesian and occult.

Ryle did not at this time have functionalism about the mind in view as a possible position. Functionalism evades the argument I have just outlined by allowing that mental events do have their status as mental in virtue of what they cause. Such events have a dual nature. One aspect of their nature is independent of their causal roles; this is their physical nature. Another aspect of their nature is determined entirely by their causal roles; this is their mental nature. Neither needs to be thought of as particularly spooky. But even functionalists have to accept that mental occurrences take place not in the observable behaviour of the agent but in some unobservable place – say the mind or the brain – hidden behind the behaviour (though visible somehow to the agent). For Ryle, this may be enough to merit the label 'occult'.

Thinking of motives as dispositions rather than as initiating events avoids this risk, according to Ryle. Such dispositions are dispositions of people to behave in certain ways. Behavioural dispositions do not need to be thought of as having their own mental nature.

Why not? One possible answer is to say that dispositions are not real states of the agent but that disposition statements are just generalisations about what has happened. This answer is supported by several things Ryle says.[4] In particular in unpacking the disposition statements of someone being vain or indolent Ryle suggests the following: '"Whenever situations of certain sorts have arisen, he has always or usually tried to make himself prominent" or "Whenever he was faced by an option between doing something difficult and not doing it, he shirked doing the difficult thing"' (p. 85). Explaining someone's behaviour by appeal to such a disposition is doing nothing more than describing the behaviour as typical of what has gone before. That, of course, is no explanation at all. No occult cause is posited, but no explanation is offered either.[5]

But this is just a first approximation for Ryle. His actual conception of dispositions, developed more fully in Chapter 5 of *The Concept of Mind*, is incompatible with the idea that disposition statements just describe what has happened. The fact that someone is always eating fried eggs when they hear the chimes of Big Ben does not mean that they are disposed to eat fried eggs when they hear the chimes of Big Ben. It does not entitle one to infer that the next time they hear the chimes they will be eating fried eggs, nor would it explain this if it transpired. In talking about dispositions we are talking about 'what can be relied upon to happen' (p. 116), not what is or has been happening. Disposition statements do not report matters of fact. Rather they entitle one to make inferences. Their linguistic role is not that of description but that of inference ticket (p. 121).

This raises a question which Ryle does little to address: What entitles us to make these inferences? For Ryle the process of discovering people's motives is the process of discovering such entitlements, and Ryle says that this 'is or is like an inductive process' (p. 90). It involves testing hypotheses (p. 92). So Ryle does not think we have bare entitlements to make inferences about behaviour. We derive these entitlements from investigation and inference. Does this mean that what we discover in this process is something about the agent that grounds these entitlements? And, if so, shouldn't we identify what the disposition statement is describing with this thing, whatever it is? This is certainly what David Armstrong does in his response to behaviourism (1968, 54ff.), a response which introduces the functionalist approach to the mind.[6]

Ryle rejects this. One should not identify an entitlement with the ground of that entitlement. In explaining something by reference to a motive or a disposition one is not positing a 'third, unobserved entity' (p. 123). There is no mental entity with its own unknown nature explaining the behaviour. Ryle is no proto-functionalist. But this does not mean that he must be an anti-realist about dispositions. Although he does not quite say that when we discover someone's motives we discover something about them that grounds our entitlements to make inferences about their behaviour, this thought is not out of bounds for him. What he is explicit about is that, even if there is something about the agent that grounds our entitlements to make inferences about their behaviour, that is not what we are describing when we attribute a motive to them. The motive is not itself some third unobserved entity.

Something makes a glass fragile – perhaps some feature of its molecular structure. In discovering that a glass is fragile one is discovering that there is something that grounds our entitlement to infer that it will break if struck sharply enough. But in describing the glass as fragile one is not describing that feature of the glass that grounds that entitlement. One is describing its fragility and that is quite different from describing its molecular structure.

In explaining someone's behaviour by appeal to their motives one is not explaining it by reference to something lurking behind their behaviour, even if the explanation only works if there is something underlying their behaviour – a ground of the disposition. The ghost in the machine is only a threat if we take some mental entity – for example a motive – to be something that is itself what is lurking behind behaviour, as we may do if it is taken to be an initiating or triggering cause. It is not a threat just because there must be something else in or behind behaviour if we are to have motives.

## 3 Ryle's theory of agitations

The trouble Ryle faces when it comes to emotions is that emotions involve feelings and feelings seem to be conscious occurrences, not dispositional states. Not all our emotional behaviour can be explained by appeal to motives understood as dispositions, according to Ryle. Sometimes we act on the basis of feelings. And if emotional behaviour is causally explained by feelings it looks as if feelings must be construed as mental entities with their own mental nature, hiding behind observable behaviour like a ghost in the machine.

Ryle's strategy with respect to feelings is to downgrade their status to that of emotional side-effects. It is noteworthy that in an article entitled 'Feelings', in which Ryle lists seven different ways we talk about feelings, he acknowledges that he has not included 'feeling pleased, soothed, relieved, triumphant or exhilarated' (1951, . p. 197). And in *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle assimilates feelings to agitated bodily reactions. Squirming feelings and bodily squirmings are treated alike as manifestations of emotional disturbance (p. 106). Indeed Ryle is happy to accept something like William James's account of feelings as sensations of bodily reactions:[7]

> James boldly identified feelings with bodily sensations, but for our purposes it is enough to show that we talk of feelings very much as we talk of bodily sensations, though it is possible that there is a tinge of metaphor in our talk of the former which is absent from our talk of the latter. (p. 84)

So Ryle, like James, treats feelings as emotional effects not as emotional causes. Moreover they are not to be explained as realisations of inclinations or motives, but only as the signs or symptoms of emotional agitations. Ryle describes those emotional states that involve feelings as agitations and claims that they are after all turbulences (or as he puts it 'eddies'), though not, of course, in the stream of consciousness (p. 93). And he treats them as triggering causes and not as structuring causes, despite their being dispositions. They initiate causal processes that result in emotionally disturbed behaviour and feelings. So, having worked out a conception of states of mind that one should avoid in order to avoid the ghost in the machine, he then applies some of the main features of that very conception to emotionally disturbed states of mind.

What I take to be the central mistake in Ryle's treatment of emotions is the distinction he draws between inclinations or motives (Ryle speaks interchangeably of them here), on the one hand, and agitations, on the other. Ryle argues that when we talk about emotional dispositions we might mean either of these things but that they are in fact quite different (p. 93). Inclinations or motives are dispositions to act intentionally in various ways (p. 97). Such actions are done for reasons (p. 106) and done more or less intelligently (p. 111). But agitations are dispositions that manifest themselves in various disturbed ways of behaving. This behaviour is 'aimless' (p. 97), and not intelligent or done for reasons. So agitations for Ryle are not inclinations or motives.

Ryle introduces inclinations and motives using as examples being vain, considerate, avaricious, patriotic, indolent (p. 85), or interested in symbolic logic (p. 87). But it is very odd to think that these character traits and interests exemplify emotions. So suspicions are likely to be raised already. Ryle introduces agitations using the examples of being anxious, startled, shocked, excited, convulsed, flabbergasted, in suspense, flurried, irritated, or perplexed (p. 97). While these examples certainly get us closer to the world of emotions they do not encourage much more confidence that the complex world of human emotion is being treated seriously here. However, Ryle also takes many emotions words to be ambiguous, sometimes standing for inclination and sometimes standing for agitations. These include 'love', 'want', 'desire', 'proud', 'eager', and many others (p. 98). These are certainly more central examples of emotion words. I will argue that such dispositions are both agitations and motives – that agitations *are* motives – whereas Ryle insists that the words are sometimes used to pick out motives and sometimes used to pick out agitations but never both at once.[8]

Ryle assimilates the distinction between inclinations or motives and agitations to Hume's distinction between calm and violent passions, but argues that Hume was wrong to treat the distinction as one of degree rather than one of kind. 'In fact, inclinations and agitations are things of different kinds. Agitations can be violent or mild, inclinations cannot be either. Inclinations can be relatively strong or relatively weak, but this difference is not a difference of degree of upsettingness; it is a difference of degree of operativeness' (p. 94).

Ryle explains this with a little theory of agitations, which is that agitations are dispositions that result from having motives or inclinations that are interfered with or frustrated – either by other inclinations or by the hard facts of the world. Grief is affection blocked by death; suspense is hope interfered with by fear (p. 94). Patriotism and ambition coming up against one another lead to the emotional agitation of being torn. When an inclination comes up against an obstacle, eddies and agitations are generated.

Robert Wolff accuses Ryle here of illegitimate hypostatisation. He considers Ryle's idea that someone who is both patriotic and cowardly will, as a result of the conflict between these two motives, be in an agitated emotional state of being torn:[9]

> As soon as we speak of these two motives, or inclinations, as opposing and interfering with one another, we get into trouble. For "patriotic" and "cowardly" are descriptions of the man's behaviour, and therefore, the description of what he would do when confronted by conflicting interests must necessarily be a part of that self-same pattern. (1954, p. 240)

So if someone is a patriotic coward this should mean that they are disposed to behave in a cowardly patriotic way – a way which might involve them in running away from danger even when patriotism by itself would have meant they would accept the danger in the interest of their country. Why would agitation be part of such a disposition? According to Wolff's argument, it only makes sense to think of agitation as the result of such conflicting or frustrated inclinations if the inclinations are things that exist as entities – causally potent even when frustrated or conflicted. And this is precisely what he thinks Ryle denies. If inclinations are just inert patterns of behaviour, then it makes no sense to talk of conflicted or frustrated inclinations. There can be no such thing as a pair of conflicting *patterns* resulting in agitations and eddies. This is because the ideas of conflicting or frustrating or blocking are themselves causal ideas; all we can get with two incompatible patterns is a new pattern.

My response to this argument is not to reject the idea of conflicting inclinations or motives, since after all we seem to be able to make very good sense of this idea. It is to reject the conception of inclinations as merely patterns of behaviour – patterns with no independent causal potency. As I said earlier, it may be a mistake to attribute to Ryle the view that dispositions are just inert patterns. It is a more charitable interpretation to allow Ryle the picture of dispositions as Aristotelian potentialities, although he himself does not embrace this idea. Such potentialities are presumably grounded in something, but what is crucial to Ryle's picture is that it is not the subject's state of mind that grounds such dispositions. As I said, we can reject the idea that the mind lurks behind behavioural dispositions without insisting that nothing underpins behavioural dispositions.

When the potentiality of a body to continue in a straight line at a constant velocity comes up against a brick wall there is something else generated – a more or less violent agitation. This agitation lasts just for a split second while the potentiality continues to exist (i.e. while there is still some momentum in the body) but while its realisation is frustrated. The potentiality does not disappear at the moment when it cannot be realised.

Now this is precisely to hypostatise such dispositions – to think of them as something like forces.[10] In this way, a behavioural disposition involves more than just the pattern that is its realisation but also requires something that generates that pattern and which may generate some chaotic agitation even when that pattern cannot be realised. This agitation is the aimless manifestation of an inclination that cannot be exercised properly. If the inclination were exercised properly it would be manifested in intelligent intentional behaviour.

So Wolff's criticism can be taken to be further reason for attributing to Ryle a conception of a behavioural disposition that is not that of an inert pattern of behaviour. Behaviour should be understood as the realisation of a potentiality not as a segment of a pattern.[11] A blocked or conflicted potentiality makes sense in the way that a blocked or conflicted pattern does not.

## 4 How best to understand Ryle's account of agitations

I think Ryle's account of agitations faces an intractable dilemma. There are two ways to understand agitations that Ryle seems to be working with simultaneously. The first is that an agitation is a propensity or disposition to behave or have one's body react in an agitated way or to have agitated feelings. The second is that an agitation is a conflict of inclinations. The problem is that these two characterisations of agitations are not logically dependent on one another. Ryle describes his goal here as follows: 'I am not trying to establish a novel psychological hypothesis; I am trying to show only that it is part of the logic of our descriptions of feelings that they are signs of agitations and are not exercises of inclinations' (p. 104). But it is precisely a novel psychological hypothesis that agitated bodily reactions and feelings are the consequences of conflicting inclinations.

Suppose to begin with we read Ryle as committed to the claim that an agitation is a propensity or disposition for a certain kind of disturbed, aimless, and agitated behaviour or bodily reaction and accompanying feelings. This places Ryle's approach to emotions in the same camp as those highly implausible behaviourist accounts given by such as the early Carnap.[12] Consider Carnap's analysis of the sentence 'Mr X is excited'. He argues that it has the same content as a sentence that asserts the existence of a physical structure characterised by a disposition of the following sort: to have a 'high pulse rate and rate of breathing, which, on the application of certain stimuli, may even be made higher, by vehement and factually unsatisfactory answers to questions, by the occurrence of agitated movements on the application of certain stimuli, etc'. (Carnap 1959, p. 172). Given this, an agitation is not *essentially* a conflict of inclinations or motives. Ryle does class agitations as propensities (p. 83). He says that agitations are moods (p. 97) and also that 'to be in a particular mood is to be in the mood, among other things, to feel certain sorts of feelings in certain sorts of situations' (p. 103). So this reading has some textual support.

The obvious problem with this way of understanding agitations is that such agitations would not have the intentionality that is characteristic of emotional states. This is the standard objection to William James's approach to emotions. Consider grief, which is one of Ryle's examples of an agitation. Suppose it manifests itself in a dreadful sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach and also in various 'aimless' bits of behaviour – like tearing one's hair or rolling around in one's loved one's clothes, to use Rosalind Hursthouse's example (1991, p. 58). Ryle insists that these manifestations of agitations are not directed or rational. But this also means that the disposition to produce these manifestations is not directed or intentional. Or, at any rate, we can say that if such a disposition does have intentionality, it is of a very limited nature. So the state of grief might be said to have as its intentional content the sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach. But the actual intentional content of grief ought to be something more like the fact that one's loved one is gone for ever. And the trouble is that this content is not essential to the disposition to feel and behave in these agitated ways.

This kind of criticism has been made against James's approach to emotions by philosophers from Anthony Kenny onwards (1963, p. 60). Jamesians, like Prinz (2003), try to respond by suggesting a causal theory of intentional content: the feeling of grief has as its content the fact that one's loved one is gone for ever in virtue of its being caused by that fact (or what it corresponds to) by means of a reliable mechanism that results in such feelings in such circumstances. Such causal accounts are difficult to defend, however. They essentially involve an attempted reduction of something normative to something merely causal. If the content of one's grief is that one has lost one's loved one for ever and one discovers that one's loved one is not lost for ever after all then the grief becomes inappropriate. This is a normative fact and it is part of what makes the grief the state it is with the content it has. The causal facts cannot fully account for such normative facts.

Perhaps Ryle would not be subject to such criticism as he does at least argue that some of our talk about emotions is about motives or inclinations, where the intentionality of the state can be secured by the rational structure of the behaviour that is manifesting the disposition. So attributing the inclination to eat some potatoes is appropriate if one is entitled to infer from the fact that someone is in a situation where there is some obvious way to eat potatoes available to them and which does not interfere with other goals the fact that they will take this way and do what is necessary to eat the potatoes. Here the behaviour is not aimless, but is goal-directed, and one can read off from the behaviour the goal and hence the intentional content of the disposition. In this way there should be no difficulty in thinking of an interest in symbolic logic, for instance, as being an intentional state. But Ryle does not extend this to any state which we would naturally describe as emotional (as opposed to merely motivational) and certainly to none that are associated with feelings of any sort. So Ryle cannot capture the intentionality of feelings this way.[13]

It certainly seems very odd, and indeed must be wrong, to align Ryle with Carnap and James here. So instead we should assume that Ryle takes agitations to be essentially conflicts between inclinations and only incidentally result in agitated behaviour, bodily changes, and feelings. On this view, the feelings and other agitated manifestations are not the realisations of agitations but their causal effects. There is rather more evidence for taking Ryle in this way. For example, he writes: 'What feelings do causally belong to are agitations; they are the signs of agitations in the same sort of way as stomach-aches are signs of indigestion' (p. 106). Indigestion presumably is not the disposition to have things like stomach-aches; it is not realised in stomach-aches. It is a condition with its own nature that *causes* stomach-aches and of which stomach-aches are a sign or symptom.

Identifying agitations with conflicted inclinations does at least secure their intentionality. If grief is affection blocked by death, as Ryle claims, and affection is essentially an intentional state – it is affection for someone – then the state of blocked affection for someone has the same intentional object – namely the person you are grieving for.

But this conception of an agitation as a blocked or conflicted inclination has implications for the relationship between the agitation and the agitated behaviour. Agitations must be taken to be causes of the emotional behaviour not in the sense of structuring causes but only as triggering causes. On this view we cannot think of the agitated behaviour or feeling as being part of the exercise or realisation of an emotional disposition. It is instead part of the exercise of some other causal potentiality triggered by the subject's being in a conflicted state.

Consider, for example, shaking with fury. For Ryle the fury is an agitation consisting perhaps of anger blocked by the lack of suitable means to vent it. This blocked disposition triggers a process resulting in various disturbed aimless gestures, internal bodily events and feelings. The furious person is not shaking *out of* fury as someone might act out of malice, pride or an interest in symbolic logic. Rather, they are shaking *as a result of* their fury. Or consider anguish. 'A woman wrings her hands in anguish, but we do not say that anguish is the motive from which she wrings her hands' (p. 97).

This distinction between behaviour being a venting of emotion and behaviour being a sign or symptom of emotion was developed at length by Austin just three years before the publication of *The Concept of Mind* (Austin, 1946). He argued that when anger is suppressed it might reveal itself in mere signs and symptoms – for example, tremor in the voice, pallor of skin, and so on (1946, p. 179). But when the anger is not suppressed but expressed, say in a violent tirade or a blow in the face, these are not signs or symptoms of the anger, but rather the anger venting itself.

This looks very much like Ryle's distinction between inclinations or motives being structuring causes of behaviour that realises these dispositions, on the one hand, and conflicted inclinations or motives – that is agitations – being triggering causes of aimless behaviour that is merely a sign or symptom of these agitations, on the other hand. But Ryle puts all emotionally expressive behaviour into the category of aimless behaviour – signs and symptoms of agitation – and limits the emotionally motivated behaviour to distinctively dry examples like manifesting an interest in symbolic logic. He lacks the category of emotionally expressive, passionate behaviour that is motivated by feeling.

Austin's concern in that paper was with the problem of knowing other minds, arguing that such knowledge cannot be understood on the model of inferring the existence and nature of other minds from mere signs or symptoms. We see other people's states of mind in their behaviour. Ryle cannot make this sort of claim about agitations; they are not perceived directly but inferred from what is perceived directly – the signs and symptoms. This certainly cuts against common sense, which suggests we can see someone's agitated state of mind in their distressed behaviour just as much as we can see their intentions in their goal-directed behaviour.

But it does not in itself lead to the more serious problems of scepticism about other minds. If we can see someone's motives and inclinations in the way they behave then we know *what it is* for them to have such motives and inclinations. This solves what Anita Avramides has called the conceptual problem of other minds (Avramides 2001, 217ff.). And if we know what it is for someone else to have a motive or an inclination then we also know what it is for them to have a conflicted or blocked motive or inclination.

The same goes for the so-called epistemological problem of other minds. For Ryle there is no difficulty in knowing that someone else has a certain motive or inclination; one just sees it in the way they are disposed to behave. Given this there should be no difficulty in knowing that they have a blocked or conflicted motive or inclination. Although one cannot see it in the way they are disposed to behave, one can work it out from the way they would be disposed to behave and from the signs and symptoms of conflict.

It is difficult too to accuse Ryle of having put agitations back into the realm of the occult. The problem with thinking of mental things as triggering causes is that this means they must have some nature independent of the behaviour they trigger, and this nature is going to be spooky. Ryle is very keen to avoid the idea of anything having a mental nature. Agitations are triggering causes, despite being states and not occurrences, but if they are essentially blocked or conflicted inclinations then their nature is that of the inclinations – namely of behavioural dispositions. If there is nothing occult about an inclination then there is nothing occult about a blocked inclination.

## 5 The challenge for Ryle's account of agitations

But even though Ryle has not obviously laid himself open to these threats (the threat of the problems of other minds and the threat of the ghost in the machine), I think that in his approach to agitations he does lay himself open to something similar. There are two ways to frame this new threat. The first is to ask why we should take the concept of mind to apply to agitations. What is it that makes it right on Ryle's view to describe a conflicted state of mind as itself a state of *mind*?[14] The second way to frame the threat that Ryle's account of agitations presents is to ask why we should attribute the signs and symptoms of an agitation to a person's agency. What makes it right to describe this aimless behaviour and these bodily changes as belonging to an agent at all? Ryle's response might be that it is *not* right to do so; but I will challenge this.

I'll try to make these threats a bit more precise. Ryle treats the mental as a multifarious category. But he does acknowledge that there are ways we talk about people that make it appropriate to bring in the concept of the mind. The central characteristic of such talk is that it be dispositional.

> To talk of a person's mind is not to talk of a repository which is permitted to have objects that something called 'the physical world' is forbidden to have; it is to talk of the person's abilities, liabilities and inclinations to do and undergo certain sorts of things, and of the doing and undergoing of those things in the ordinary world. (p. 179)

But of course, not every disposition or even behavioural disposition is described using the language of the mental. Ryle is reluctant to commit himself on precisely what sorts of dispositions are being described when we talk of a person's mind. But at least one context in which such language is appropriate is when the disposition is a disposition to behave in ways that are more or less intelligent – exercises of knowing how.

> The statement 'the mind in its own place', as theorists might construe it, is not true, for the mind is not even a metaphorical 'place'. On the contrary, the chessboard, the platform, the scholar's desk, the judge's bench, the lorry-driver's seat, the studio and the football field are among its places. These are where people work and play stupidly or intelligently. (p. 51)

Ryle rejects the 'intellectualist legend' according to which such behaviour is caused by some mental thing – some intelligence happening in the mind and then manifesting itself in the behaviour. Rather, the behaviour is intelligent in as much as it is the exercise of a disposition that results in different behaviour depending on what makes best sense. So Ryle is working, albeit rather vaguely, with something like a Kantian model in which manifestations of agency are such in virtue of their sensitivity to reason.

For Ryle, the signs and symptoms of agitations are not sensitive to reason. They are not manifestations of intelligence. They are merely the disturbances in a human organism whose motivated behaviour is being frustrated. So it is unclear why they should be taken to be aspects of human agency at all. Suppose I am motivated to pick up a stone and I try but am frustrated by the extreme weight of the stone. My muscles go into spasm, my face turns red, and sweat breaks out on my brow. These are the signs and symptoms of my frustrated attempt. There is nothing mental about any of them. For Ryle this is the same when my anger is frustrated by a concern not to hurt someone and I bang my fist into a door or feel my gorge rising within me.

But Ryle is quite wrong about this. Such manifestation of frustration are real aspects of agency; they are not merely signs of blocked or conflicted agency. What Ryle takes to be the aimless symptoms of agitations are really the stuff of human conduct. Rosalind Hursthouse presents a series of nice examples of emotionally expressive behaviour. Here is a selection: riffling your child's hair in passing, kissing a photograph, violently destroying the chair one's treacherous lover used to sit in, shouting at a tin opener, jumping up and down in excitement, leaping up to grasp some leaves from the lower branch of a tree, tearing one's hair in grief, rolling around in one's dead wife's clothes, covering one's face with shame (even in the dark), posturing in front of a mirror (1991, p. 58).

Hursthouse takes these actions to be intentional actions. While they are usually quite spontaneous, they very clearly manifest human agency in a full-blooded way. It is noticeable that most of these actions are often done in private. But many more obvious examples of expressive behaviour are done in society. In fury I shout and impose myself bodily, in pride I puff up, in anguish I wring my hands, in shame I diminish physically, in grief I weep, in fear my voice quakes, in love I kiss.

What Ryle thinks about such examples is not clear as, with the exception of the case of wringing one's hands in anguish, which he describes as an agitation (p. 97), he does not discuss them. For Ryle there is a no-man's land between expressing an interest in symbolic logic and suffering twinges and throbs. If Hursthouse's examples are taken by Ryle to be agitations then they 'are not propensities to act intentionally in certain ways' (p. 97). They are not 'things which I do for a reason; nor in consequence, are they things which I can be said to do cleverly or carelessly – or indeed do at all' (p. 106).

Now Hursthouse rejects this connection between acting intentionally and acting for a reason or in a way that is sensitive to reasons, but she agrees with Ryle in claiming that emotionally expressive behaviour of this sort is not sensitive to reasons. Her central claim is that the expressive actions I listed are both intentional and not done for a reason

> in the sense that there is a true description of action of the form 'X did it (in order) to…' or 'X was trying to…' which will 'reveal

> the favourable light in which the agent saw what he did', and hence involve, or imply, the ascription of a suitable belief. (1991, p. 59)

But it is not at all clear that these cases of agitated or expressive behaviour are as aimless and insensitive to reason as both Hursthouse and Ryle maintain. What does seem right is that such behaviour may not be instrumentally rational. The man need not be rolling around in his dead wife's clothes in order to achieve something else, not even in order to express or release his feelings. This seems even clearer in the case of the woman wringing her hands in anguish. But this does not mean that there is no description that reveals the favourable light in which the agent saw what he/she did. The relevant description is that the man was rolling around in his dead wife's clothes. He was not just rolling around in any old clothes. If he discovered that these were not his wife's clothes he would realise that he had made a mistake, stop what he was doing and find his wife's clothes.

The examples of wringing one's hands in anguish or weeping in grief are less obviously examples of intentional actions. But they are still clearly cases where the action is sensitive to reason. I am not just weeping. I am weeping in grief over the death of my mother. When I discover that she has not died after all, I realise my mistake and stop weeping. Or someone might say: 'Come on, get over it, she died ten years ago and your weeping is no longer appropriate.'

So emotionally expressive or disturbed behaviour may be mistaken or inappropriate. This could not be the case unless there was a contrast between being inappropriate and being appropriate, which suggests that there might be circumstances where such behaviour is not mistaken, but is appropriate. How is this possible? What makes *weeping* appropriate even when there is something to grieve about? Why wouldn't sweating or going red in the face be appropriate instead?

One thing that seems to favour weeping when grieving or wringing one's hands when in anguish is that such behaviour is natural and free-flowing. It is how you behave if you do not control yourself. But why does that make it appropriate? Perhaps it is good to be a natural, free-flowing person not controlling every movement. This might be a matter of how one identifies oneself – for example if one identifies oneself as a person with a creaturely nature.

It might also be a matter of social identity. To be a person among others one must be expressive, able to use natural and socially developed forms of communicating norms, values, and attitudes. I wring my hands as a natural expression of the unbearability of the fact that I am about to die and leave my children orphaned. This is understood by others. By acting in this way I am acting *with* the people around me. I am engaged in a shared form of activity. I am expressing a need for sympathy and others are able to respond sympathetically. Together we are able to respond to my situation.

So emotionally expressive or passionate behaviour is subject to norms of appropriateness: there can be reasons favouring such behaviour; it is not aimless. And people are sensitive to those reasons. We are certainly sensitive to the features of situations that merit such *types* of response. But we are also sensitive in our behaviour to whether a particular response is really appropriate given that. The latter sensitivity depends on having some control over how we express ourselves even when we are not actually controlling a particular manifestation. This means that we have dispositions to behave in expressive ways that are sensitive to these reasons. And these dispositions are the emotions which are realised in such behaviour. They straightforwardly motivate the expressive behaviour; they do not merely trigger or initiate it.

Feelings, as Ryle construes them, fit into this model just as easily. In his 1951 paper 'Feelings', Ryle reverses the claim in *The Concept of Mind* that feelings are occurrences and not inclinations. With respect to one of the seven ways he thinks we talk about feelings, he claims that feelings are inclinations to do particular bits of body-involving activity.

> To feel tickled seems logically and not merely causally to involve having an impulse to laugh… It will be noticed that, on very different levels, there is a close parallel between feeling a tickle and feeling like writing to the 'Times'. Both are bound up with not-yet-satisfied inclinations to do certain things. The big difference is that the one is a primitive, unsophisticated or merely 'animal' inclination; the other is a sophisticated and acquired inclination. (1951, p. 199)

An unsophisticated animal inclination to express oneself bodily in a certain way is appropriate or inappropriate in just the same way as is that bodily expression itself. The feeling of one's gorge rising may be something like the inclination to shout rising in one, and it may be appropriate or inappropriate just as the shouting itself may be appropriate or inappropriate. It is not triggered by being angry, but is a realisation of the anger. The sinking feeling of anxiety or the jittery feeling of fear may likewise be appropriate or inappropriate – and thus be the sorts of things that may realise the anxiety or fear. Describing them as throbs and twinges, as Ryle does in *The Concept of Mind*, gives the false impression that they are detached from this normative space. It sounds odd at first to criticise a twinge. But this is indeed a false impression. You can after all be told that it is a mistake to feel that twinge of remorse because you did nothing wrong, or that it is good to feel a throb of compassion for the suffering mother on the TV news.

Once feelings and bodily expressions of emotions are understood to be appropriate or inappropriate, intelligent or unintelligent, right or wrong, then we can see that they are things that can be *motivated*. Ryle's resistance to the idea that emotional agitations are motives can then be overcome. In addition to being motivated by an interest in symbolic logic a human being can be motivated by a rush of anxiety, a creeping feeling of guilt, a bout of violent rage, overwhelming terror, irrepressible joy, or passionate love.

## Notes

1. From now on, in making references to *The Concept of Mind* I will omit the date '1949', and just use page numbers.
2. Ryle sometimes objects to thinking of our mental predications as doing the work of *describing* at all (p. 121). But there should be no objection to saying that we are describing someone's behavioural dispositions when we say that they are disposed to behave in such-and-such a way, as long as we are clear that such talk does not bring with it any further metaphysical or pragmatic commitments.
3. I am not endorsing the details of Dretske's position by adopting these terms. Dretske takes structuring causes to be the *events* that structured the process that is triggered by the triggering causes, whereas I take the structuring cause to be the mechanism, disposition, or potentiality, whose realisation is that process. So, for me the structuring cause is the fragility of the glass, whereas for Dretske the structuring cause is the event that made the glass fragile.
4. For example, Ryle states more than once that propensities are not states (e.g. 83).
5. This thought of Ryle's that providing a motive for an action is equivalent to showing that action to be typical in some way of past behaviour is what Bill Lyons effectively criticises in Lyons (1976). He argues elsewhere (1973), in direct contrast to the position I am trying to establish here, that this is the only available sense in which motives might be described as dispositions.
6. See Mumford (2003) for a study of dispositions that endorses a position in which the dispositional properties are identified with the underlying 'physical' properties.
7. See James (1884).
8. Ryle also talks about moods. These are changeable propensities. They do not represent another category in addition to inclinations and agitations since agitations are generally moods according to Ryle. He distinguishes all such behavioural dispositions from feelings, which are not dispositions at all, but occurrences.

9. In fact, Ryle talks about being torn between patriotism and *ambition*, but that makes little difference to the example.
10. Ryle is in fact willing to describe someone who is subject to conflicting motives as being subject to opposing forces, though he betrays some qualms by calling this a 'hazardous metaphor' (p. 93).
11. As Hornsby (1997) observes, Ryle's examples of behaviour are things like skating warily, warning other skaters and keeping to the edge of the pond (Ryle, p. 135). *Keeping* to the edge of the pond is not a bit of an inert pattern, but can only be understood as the realisation of something with causal potential.
12. See Carnap (1959).
13. See Goldie (2002, Chapter 3) for a defence of the idea that feelings themselves have intentionality.
14. Ryle sometimes rejects this talk of 'states' of mind. But that is clearly because he is rejecting the idea of there being states of mind with a mental nature. There is an innocuous way of talking about states, which carries no metaphysical commitment. If S is F then S is in the state of being F. If I am happy then I am in the state of being happy; that is my state of mind. In the same sort of way we might describe the country as being in a state of recession; that is the state of its economy. But this does not commit us to talking of economical natures.

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# 6

# What Is *Le Penseur* Really Doing?

*Paul F. Snowdon*

Gilbert Ryle retired from the Waynflete Chair in 1968. In the year leading up to his retirement I was in my final year as an undergraduate and I attended the last undergraduate lectures that Ryle gave, under the title 'What is Le Penseur Doing?' I can recall with great vividness Ryle as a lecturer. He was dressed in a way which made me think of a well-heeled country squire. But the face above the clothes was craggy, in some ways like that of Auden, determined and intelligent. His lectures lasted just the right length of time – neither too short, nor too long, but he gave me the strong impression that he was not exactly worried that he had too much material to impart. His speech was unhurried, but frequently interrupted by a slight cough. The language and style of his lectures was the same as that of his writings. Although my recollections of the performance are, even now, vivid, I have no recollection of what Ryle was trying to tell us, of what his answer to his own question was. And I can remember being unsure at the time quite why Ryle found the whole business of thinking so puzzling. I suspect that this is because Ryle did not explain why it was puzzling for him, and equally he did not state any general thesis.

However, Ryle wrote a number of papers about thinking, including some published close to his retirement, and spurred by my failure to retain any memory of what he actually said, I want to scrutinise some of these papers to see what conclusions Ryle came to, conclusions, which, no doubt, he proposed at some stage in the lectures I heard.[1] My scrutiny will be rather selective since I do not want to become too immersed in textual details.

We can begin with a question to which, I have claimed, Ryle gave no answer that I can recollect in his lectures – why was Ryle so interested in saying what *Le Penseur* is doing? Now, it is striking that in the articles

I am engaging with Ryle does not, even there, explain his interest in the question. He simply gives the question or questions he is trying to answer. There are, it seems to me, two natural hypotheses to consider. The first is that Ryle was, in some way, dissatisfied with his own earlier account of thinking. The second is that on reflection Ryle felt that the case of *Le Penseur* presented itself as an especially strong objection, or putative objection, to his account of thinking and of the mind, and he needed to remove that objection. Two things make it impossible to decide this question, I think. The first is that Ryle himself gives no indication what his motive is. The second reason for the difficulty is more interesting. We can assume, it seems to me, that Ryle by and large agreed with his views in *The Concept of Mind* throughout his life. But the central and main mystery of that work is what the views it proposes are. It is clear that Ryle was opposed to Cartesian Dualism, regarding it as a category mistake. He was therefore committed to developing treatments of any mental phenomenon that were not Cartesian. But when Ryle wrote about any psychological element it is difficult to extract from what he wrote any clear summarisable theory. His style of writing was to pile on detail after detail, give example after example, building up a case, but it is not easy to state the doctrine he approves of in any brief way. So, it is hard to say what Ryle's dominant theory of thinking was. It is hard, in consequence, to locate a difficulty that Ryle might have felt in his treatment of thinking, and also hard to pin down a Rylean thesis about thinking that the case of *Le Penseur* might be taken as a powerful objection to.

If Ryle was committed to giving an account of any mental feature on the basis of theoretical postulates that are restricted to overt processes of behaviour, external stimuli, and behavioural dispositions, then *Le Penseur* would seem to be a difficult case, since it would, and should, strike anyone that *Le Penseur* is engaged in a non-overt inner process or activity which cannot be reduced to modifications in behavioural dispositions. The same difficulty is posed to such a theoretical behaviourist approach by, for example, sensations, as J. J. C. Smart, amongst others, subsequently proposed. The problem, which I myself do not propose to solve, is whether Ryle himself did believe in a theoretical approach about the mind which restricted itself basically to using those two (or three) elements. Ryle's way of doing philosophy, which in some sense is not theory-centred, disguises his basic commitments.

Ryle begins his paper 'Thinking and Reflecting', which is the first one I want to consider, by singling out two ideas about thinking that have appealed to people and declaring that they are wrong. The first idea is that of identifying thinking with 'either mere processions or with more or less organised processions of images' and the second idea is that of identifying 'thinking with something oddly called "language", namely with more or less organised processions of bits of French or English, etc'. Ryle implies that the latter idea was popular at the time he is writing. He then adds: 'Both views are entirely wrong; wrong not because thinking ought instead to be identified with mere or organised processions or bits of something else instead, but because this very programme of identifying thinking with some procession or other is radically misguided' (1966–7, p. 479). Now, in making this resounding announcement at the very beginning Ryle incurs two important obligations. He needs to provide solid evidence that thinking does not consist in a sequence of images, and that it does not consist in a sequence of 'language' either. I put the second idea in quotations because it is not immediately obvious what the proposal that thinking consists in organised bits of language means. It is not obvious either that the two big ideas he is dismissing are inconsistent. Maybe they can be combined. But Ryle also needs to convince us that the very general idea of identifying the elements in thinking with a sequence of items is mistaken. Indeed, this very general renunciation of the idea that thinking consists of a sequence of things that can be identified is puzzling. It seems to commit Ryle to regarding what in the world makes it true that *Le Penseur* is thinking is not a sequence of anything at all – since if it is a sequence of something or other those somethings or others must have an identity, that is be identifiable with something. This then looks very radical and makes one wonder what theoretical pressures Ryle is under to adopt such a radical negative view.

Ryle immediately gives what seems to be regarded by him as an argument against identifying thinking with a procession of images. He says,

> it is often the case, and nearly always before we fall asleep, that the thought of something bobs up, and then the thought of another thing. But their serial bobbings-up do not constitute the thoughts as thoughts; and I am not pondering or calculating if only this is happening. I can be thinking when nothing of the sort is happening. (1966–7, p. 479)

Now, this is a very curious argument against imagism. In the first place, the final claim is unsupported by the evidence. Ryle is claiming that there can be image sequences, namely those occurring just before sleep, which do not add up to, or constitute, the subject's thinking. Even if this is true, he cannot conclude that there can be thinking without images, since the description is of images without thinking. In the second place, Ryle himself describes what is happening to the subject having these images as the subject thinking of certain things. So he cannot even really claim that he has found an example of images without thought (or thinking). He can say, indeed, that such a subject is not engaged in thinking in the way *Le Penseur* is, but Ryle's own description encourages us to link images to thinking, rather than the reverse. The third problem is why Ryle cites such a curious case as that of images occurring before sleep. Did he think that such examples are particularly what talk of images brings to mind? If he did then he was, I suggest, mistaken.

Ryle has, I believe, another, longer line of thought that leads to the conclusion that thinking need not involve images, and equally arrives at the conclusion that thinking need not involve operating with language. Ryle works with a broad distinction between someone engaged in an activity such as tennis and someone like *Le Penseur* who is disengaged from what he is *physically* doing and from what is happening in his environment, since he is absorbed in the thinking. He stipulates that we say that *Le Penseur* is reflecting, which is, of course, a certain form of thinking (1966–7, p. 480). Now Ryle focusses on the former type of agent, and he claims that we talk of someone thinking (about) what he is doing, say, when he is playing tennis. Thus, we can tell a learner at tennis to think about what he is doing, and we can tell an expert too. Ryle's view is, evidently, that there is an equivalence between saying that someone is thinking what they are doing and saying something like: he is being careful about what he is doing, or he is doing it with care, or, perhaps, he is doing it with attention. Ryle then simply claims that when someone, for example, does something, say, play tennis, with care that describes a manner in which he engages in the activity, and it does not ascribe to the agent, the tennis player, another accompanying activity happening alongside the tennis playing. As Ryle puts it, 'His thinking is not an autonomous action or activity; nor a concurrent procession of autonomous anythings' (1966–7, p. 483). Since the thinking that is spoken of in such a case is not an accompanying process, but is, rather, a manner of performance, it cannot consist in anything like a sequence of images or events involving the use of language.

Ryle develops an interesting way of speaking to express his ideas here. He points out that there are verbs (in English) which say things that can also be expressed by using an adverb attached to another verb. Thus, we say 'S hurried while walking to the dentist' and here we use the verb 'hurried', but we could equally say 'S walked hurriedly to the dentist', but in this sentence the notion of hurrying is introduced adverbially. This point leads Ryle to talk about 'adverbial verbs', those are verbs which are used to say things which could be said not using a verb but simply an adverb. So, he says that in such a sentence as 'S thought about his tennis playing' we could equally say 'S played tennis thoughtfully'. 'Thinking' is then taken to be one of these adverbial verbs, at least as it is used in talking about thinking about playing tennis. Ryle's language is surely very striking here.

Ryle develops these ideas with many more and equally engaging examples of so-called adverbial verbs than those I have presented. The question is: What exactly does this line of thought and its impressive terminology show? Now, it is not entirely clear where Ryle himself thinks this line of argument gets us. Thus, he says two, rather opposed, things. He says first of all that

> the notion of engaged thinking [i.e. thinking as in thinking what you are doing]..., that is the basic notion, while that of disengaged thinking or reflecting, like that of Le Penseur, is supervenient. The notions of being pensive and having thoughts, do not explain, but need to be explained via the notion of intelligently X-ing, where 'X' is not a verb of thinking. (1966–7, p. 485)

The precise meaning here is hard to determine, but Ryle seems to be implying that the nature of what the term 'thinking' imports in talk of 'thinking what you are doing' somehow explains what it imports in other contexts, including that of *Le Penseur*'s reflection. One naturally infers from this remark that Ryle supposes that if 'thinking' does not stand for a process of any kind, including having images or doing things in a language, in the basic case then it will not do so in what we might call the secondary case. However, a little later on Ryle says of certain things we say about thinkers of the Rodin-depicted kind, that they do not entail that 'while tackling a philosophical problem he is saying things to himself in German or in ... English'. But he then adds, 'I am not saying that there are no such grounds for, inter alia, philosophical reflecting', and remarks, 'I am not following this up ...' (1966–7, p. 486). In this section, Ryle seems to be saying that maybe the type of thinking that *Le Penseur* is doing does involve doing something with language, in which case it can hardly be of the same nature as goes on when 'one thinks what one is doing', since Ryle is quite clear there is nothing linguistic involved in that. So, I believe, we are left at this stage not really knowing what Ryle's view of 'reflecting' is.

Leaving aside the obscurity of what Ryle is proposing, I want to make a few comments on the overall line of thought I described above.

1. Suppose we agree with Ryle to the extent of accepting that in talk of 'thinking what one is doing' the verb 'thinking' does not introduce a process that involves images or language; indeed, that it does not introduce a process of any kind at all. From this interim conclusion nothing at all follows about what the verb 'thinking' introduces when it is used of *Le Penseur*, or of lots of other cases. Why cannot 'thinking' amount to an adverbial verb sometimes and not at other times? Nothing here supports regarding the non-reflecting use as more basic or explanatorily primary.
2. We should not be over-impressed by Ryle's talk of 'adverbial verbs'. Ryle talks this way because we can re-express a claim which can be made using a certain verb by another sentence in which the same is said using a matching adverb. When this is possible for a verb Ryle labels it 'an adverbial verb'. But the equivalence between two ways of speaking could equally lead us to talk of 'verbal adverbs', which are adverbs which say the same as verbs, and so which are properly 'verbal'. The re-expressibility in an adverb of what is said by a verb itself shows nothing about the nature of what the 'verb' (or adverb) introduces. I suspect that Ryle supposed that re-expressibility in adverbial constructions implies more than it does.[2]
3. I am claiming that there is no clear relevance to what the nature of the thinking of *Le Penseur* is in what the term 'thinking' signifies in so-called engaged thinking. However, questions can certainly be raised about Ryle's claims about 'engaged thinking'. In particular two assumptions can be questioned. First, Ryle seems to believe that for someone to think what they are doing is for them to perform the activity with care or attention, or, perhaps, intelligently; the point for Ryle then being that these latter descriptions can treated adverbially. The question is whether there is an equivalence here. It seems perfectly reasonable to suggest that the engaged agent who need not engage in occurrent reflections as he acts and responds with attention and care is precisely *not* thinking what he is doing, but is, rather, acting with care and attention. We can back this up, to some extent, by considering how to describe the difference between an attentive *learner* driver who does have to actually think about what he is doing and repeat to himself the advice of those teaching him, and the *experienced* careful driver who can, as we say, do it automatically. The obvious way to capture this difference is that the former agent has to *think about*

> what he is doing but the latter agent does not. I think we should be sceptical that attentive engaged agents are accurately described as 'thinking what they are doing'. The second point that merits some scepticism is that exercising attention, or being attentive, is 'purely adverbial'. The, or at least an, alternative way of thinking about this is to regard paying attention, or attending, as something that we do. It can be thought of as a mental action that we perform. It is, like many actions we perform, something that we can only do in the right context. Thus we cannot eat food, perform that action, unless there is food to eat, and with attention we cannot attend to something we are doing unless there is something we are doing. Attention is directed at something to be attended to. It is a mistake to think that attention to action has an adverbial status because it requires the truth of a properly verbal ascription of action. That dependence does not imply that what we are reporting when we talk of attention is some adverbial aspect of that required action. I cannot here do more than suggest this as a way to think about attention which is quite different to the way Ryle proposed. If one does think this way then it is important to note that the supposed mental action of attending is not the same mental action as that of thinking, assuming that that is the right way to characterise thinking. Attending (of the kind we are talking about here) is a focussing on some performance and the elements related to the performance. Thinking is the active consideration of a problem. If both are mental actions then they are quite different ones.

Although I have not said enough to refute Ryle's proposals about so-called 'engaged' thinking, I hope that I have located two assumptions in the proposals which are not impossible to resist. Independently of that, I have claimed nothing follows about what Ryle calls reflecting even if he is right about so-called engaged thinking.

A part of the title of Ryle (1968) is 'What is Le Penseur Doing?' Does Ryle assemble there anything more definite about how to answer that question than, according to me at least, he assembles in Ryle (1966–7)? The central point that Ryle makes in this paper is really about the significance of asking about someone, call him S, who is doing something – say he is just winking – what it is that he is doing. What Ryle makes clear is that when we ask what someone is doing we can be, and usually are, interested in the purposes for performing the core actions. Thus, we can contrast someone who is simply moving his eyelid in the winking movement, say because he has realised he can. He is simply winking for the pleasure of it. Someone else though might be winking at someone with the aim of passing them a message. We can say of this person, when asked what he is doing, that he is sending a message to the other person. But a third person might be doing the winking movement in an effort to improve his winking performance. Of him if asked what he is doing we can say that he is practising winking. We can, then, say that the correct answer to the question 'What is S doing?' is not determined by the simple movements that he is performing, but is sensitive to the intentions and purposes that the agent actually has. As Ryle puts it, the thin description of what he is doing – namely moving his eyelid in a certain way – does not fix the thicker descriptions that can be truthful answers to the question. He also points out that with these different descriptions come different criteria of success and failure for the action.

These remarks by Ryle do not amount to a complete account of the different levels of action descriptions, but he has undoubtedly illustrated, with characteristic ingenuity and vivid expression, some different levels of action descriptions and answers to the question – what is S doing? The question that presents itself to us, though, is what does this reveal about what *Le Penseur* is doing? Now, Ryle points out, in effect, that a person could be thinking and be seated in the manner of *Le Penseur* and in the sense he has illuminated be doing rather different things. One person could be composing a piece of music, and another could be trying to recite the alphabet backwards to himself, and another could be trying to solve a philosophical problem. This is all true.

The response that I wish to make, though, is that when philosophers are inclined to ask, what is *Le Penseur* doing?, or, putting it in another way, what is thinking?, their primary aim is to say what the correct relatively thin description of thinking is. The winker is moving his eyelid, but what is the thinker basically doing? Given whatever that is we can agree that the thinker might be doing lots of different things, with lots of different success and failure conditions, but we want to know what the correct thin description is. It is in connection with that issue that some propose he is having images, and others propose he is employing language, and perhaps some propose both. If this response is correct then Ryle is taking the analysis away from the level that we are really interested in.

At the end of the paper Ryle says:

> None the less it may still be true that the only thing that, under its thinnest description, Euclid [a specimen thinker] is here and now doing is muttering to himself a few geometrical words and phrases, or scrawling on paper or in the sand a few rough and fragmentary lines.

> This is far, very far from being all that he is doing; but it may very well be the only thing that he is doing. (1968, p. 510)

What is striking about this conclusion is that Ryle restricts his own thin description to something like overt behaviour – mutterings or making marks – whereas the problem of what the thin process is really starts from a recognition that *Le Penseur* need be doing none of these things at all. And even if he is doing these things we have a strong sense that they are not the basic thin components of the thinking process.

I am claiming then that the conceptual distinctions that Ryle quite rightly makes in Ryle (1968) tend to lead us away from the central philosophical problem of the nature of thinking. And Ryle himself tends to restrict himself to offering thin characterisations of the basic process which imply it is movements; an implication that we are disinclined to accept, and from which disinclination the philosophical problem really starts.

If Ryle himself shies away from the fundamental problem how should we respond to it? It seems clear that when we engage in the type of thinking that *Le Penseur* is doing we have, as one might say, before our minds, images. Now, since thinking is a deliberate and intentional activity that means that we have control over the images we have, and in that control lies the fundamental ground of thought. We do not, of course, know how we control the images, merely that we can. Creatures who cannot control their images cannot engage in thinking of the sort that humans do. It also seems clear to me that the images that we produce and respond to in thinking are what we might call images of language. We in effect imagine conversations, and being English, we and I imagine conversations in English. Why is this valuable? The answer is that we have a prior understanding of that imagined language from which derives the significance of the process. If this is correct then it means that thought does not strictly involve language, any more than imagining something red actually involves colour. In both cases it involves the image of something not there and then actually present. The basic mistake of traditional imagistic theories of thinking is not, according to this model, that they invoke images, but that they only invoked images of what was being thought about – say an image of red – when what is standardly involved is an image of language which itself signifies, say, red. The third clear thing to recognise is that these imagistic processes controlled by subjects are so linked to their cognitive structures that they tend to result in modifications of those cognitive structures or, to put it simply, their beliefs. The process loops back on what we believe, that is on what we think in another sense. Fundamentally, thinking is a controlled sequence of images, of language, linked to cognitive structures in highly complex ways.

This is of course highly conjectural, but it seems to me that it fits what goes on when I engage in thinking. Ryle's clear reluctance to say anything like this strikes me as an exercise in denying the more or less obvious. None of this was obvious to me, of course, when I heard his original lectures all those years ago, nor for a long time afterwards.

## Notes

1. The two papers I shall primarily concentrate on are Ryle (1966–7) and Ryle (1968).
2. We could put this point in the following way. The expression 'adverbial verb' can mean either a verb the significance of which can be expressed by an adverb, or it can mean a verb that does not pick out a process or activity. There is no inference to the second feature simply from the first feature.

## References

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# 7

# A Peg for Some Thoughts

*Julia Tanney*

## 1

A few years before he passed away, Ryle discussed his work with Bryan Magee in one of a series of conversations with influential philosophers first broadcast on BBC radio in the winter of 1970–1 and later published, with extensive revisions, as *Modern British Philosophy* (Magee 1971). At the end of the discussion Magee asked Ryle if his work on *thinking*, which he had begun in earnest the year after the publication of *The Concept of Mind* and was still in train 20 years later, would reveal its fruits in a forthcoming book. Ryle's response was that though he had collected various items – a hat, a cap, a mackintosh, a scarf, and a few other things – he had not yet found a peg on which to hang them. Although some of Ryle's lectures and talks were assembled posthumously (with an admirable introduction) by one of his students (Ryle 1979), there was no book-length treatment and, it must be said, no particular peg which would tie together the several nuanced and detailed observations that his survey of the landscape occupied by the concept of thought and thinking reveals. An unfortunate result is that the more prominent commentaries on Ryle's attempts to chart the concept have taken him, mistakenly, to be offering a traditional philosophical 'account' (as do most commentaries on Ryle's work on mental and other concepts more generally), which of course are then found wanting (e.g. Sibley 1970). In what follows, motivated by my own interests in bringing Ryle's arguments to bear on contemporary theorising, I have forged my own peg upon which to hang some of the items he collected; and in a way, incidentally, which reveals their similarity with those assembled by the later Wittgenstein.

## 2

In the *Meditations* Descartes figures that when he looks outside he does not really see men passing by: ‘Yet what do I see from the window but hats and coats which may cover automatic machines? Yet I judge these to be men’ (Descartes 1931b, p. 155). The judgement that there are men in hats and coats is one that would only be justified, he thinks, if the beings had been bestowed minds – ‘the whole of the soul that thinks’. We cannot have direct access to others’ minds, so how do we infer their existence? Language, he suggests, is the one certain indication of the ‘latent cognition in a body’ and such an ability belongs to all men, including the most stupid or even those deprived of their tongue and vocal organs (Descartes 1970, quoted in Avramides 1996, p. 39). Though it is evident that parrots and magpies are able to utter words just like ourselves, and yet they cannot speak as we do, that is, so as to give evidence that they think of what they say’ (Descartes 1931a, p. 117, quoted in part in Avramides 1996, p. 39).

These passages are among several that suggest a view about the mind, and its relation to the body – or about mental properties, and their relation to physical ones – that still dominates philosophy, psychology, and medicine today. The ability to think makes the difference between man on the one hand, and machines and possibly living organisms on the other. We cannot have direct access to another’s thoughts, so when I judge that others are thinkers this is based on inferences from what they do. But the thinking itself is hidden: it is ‘inner’ or ‘internal’. Because no particular inference from behaviour to the existence of thought is a logically valid one, I may be wrong about the occurrence of these inner processes. Thus, I may be wrong in my judgement that the other is minded. But again, because the truth of the matter is hidden, I may never know that I am wrong.

This Cartesian view has ontological, epistemological, and semantic accompaniments. The *mind–body problem* is still alive in discussions about the nature of mental properties and mental causation. The *problem of other minds* illustrated in the quotations above survives in arguments about zombies and other ‘behaviourally indistinguishable’ creatures.[1] The idea that the meaning of certain words is given by our own conscious experiences or private representations of the objects presumed to be named by these words invites scepticism about our ability genuinely to communicate.

The temptation to say that *thought* marks the difference between behaviour which is rational and that which is not is a more generalised version of the practice of invoking specific mental concepts to perform similar tasks of demarcation. For example, when differentiating an action that meets the standards of moral criticism from photographically similar behaviour that is not so apt we may characterise it as intentional, the result of agency, or performed for reasons. Similarly, we may say that what marks a person's utterance from a phonetically similar sound made by a magpie or parrot is that the former is meaningful. What distinguishes acts of hearing from acts of listening is understanding. What delineates accidental or non-intentional behaviour from a witty or tactful performance is that in the latter case the performer was thinking about what he was doing. Each of these mental concepts has been construed as picking out some sort of interior mental process or property whose nature and relation to the body (or brain) remains a mystery.

I shall simply suggest here that any view of the mind that leaves conceptual space (however vastly improbable) for creatures about whom it can be said that we will never know if they mean what they say, act intentionally, understand, and so forth, is absurd on the face of it and should be rejected outright. We make reasoned judgements all the time about who is and is not responsible for his or her actions based upon assessments of their rationality; and we apply the verb 'to think' and its associated adjectives and adverbs as a matter of course. Either the sceptical conclusions show us that there is something seriously wrong with these daily practices, or there is something rotten in the philosophical view that generates it. And although thought-experiments about zombies do not extend far beyond the lecture theatre and the study, some of the fundamental aspects of the Cartesian view – those which generate scepticism about other minds and suggest ontological puzzles about mental–physical interaction – extend much more widely. The focus on zombies – and the reassurance of their 'overwhelming improbability' – may serve to reassure us nature will cure us of our philosophical delirium as soon as we shut the study door. But the view of the mind and its relation to the body that sets up the sceptical problems when taken to its extreme is to be found in deep-rooted assumptions of modern medicine and infects standards that are set for research in the 'sciences of the mind' such as psychology, psychiatry, and neuroscience. So, it is worth continuing Ryle's (and Wittgenstein's) struggle to remove the tap root of the Cartesian doctrine.

Although Ryle's polemic in *The Concept of Mind*, which caricatures the view in terms of a 'ghostly inner theatre', has been accepted as a successful rebuttal of the traditional substance dualism espoused by Descartes, most philosophers today think that a modified property dualism is still tenable. But Ryle's arguments present a challenge to *any* view which finds in its train the various puzzles emanating from the mind–body dichotomy, as well as those that accord such a prominent role to 'inner experience' as to give rise to the problem of other minds and the 'conceptual possibility' of zombies. I shall argue that, in common with Wittgenstein's, Ryle's arguments can be marshalled to show that the bifurcation between the mind and the body, inner and the outer, or the internal and the external, is a mistake: and in what follows I shall attempt to tease out those bits which are responsible for generating some of these puzzles. Innocuous and puzzle-free senses in which we can talk of people picturing with their mind's eye, or of thinking in their head, or imagining, dreaming, and fantasising, will remain intact. But these idioms and the phenomena they reveal give no support to the picture which sets up the problem of other minds, for example, described at the beginning of this section, nor to the idea that thought is logically prior to our social-linguistic activities and practices.

## 3

The dissolution of the puzzles generated by the Cartesian view – and this tactic is shared by both Ryle and Wittgenstein – requires accepting that the picture is one which should not tempt us in the first place. The picture exploits, in effect, several different uses of the verb 'to think' and its associated adjectives and adverbs. Becoming clear on these differences will help us to see that the Cartesian depiction of the mind, and in particular the tendency to view mental concepts, including thought, as serving in general to denote an inner process, and thus in some sense hidden, is a mistake.

But before embarking on the project to elucidate (here, only some of) the various ways we talk about thinking to help show what is wrong with the Cartesian view that generates perennial problems about mind–body interaction, on the one hand, and, at its extreme, scepticism about other minds and communication, on the other, it is worth pausing to ask what language has to do with what really interests philosophers, scientists, and others; namely, the nature of thought or of thinking. Surely that is our quarry and not the use of common, English words.

How we use expressions involving the concept of thought or thinking, so the complaint might continue, may enable us to home in on a phenomenon that we wish to study, but strictly speaking its role is finished once the target is isolated and other investigatory techniques, preferably those with solid empirical credentials, can be brought to bear. But on behalf of those who, like Ryle, approach philosophical questions from a conceptual cartographical approach, I should immediately reply that it is, indeed, thought and thinking that we are investigating when we take a close look at the way the relevant expressions are used.

More will be said about this at the very end but, for now, consider the possibility that thought does not have *a* nature. The category-concept *thought*, for example, may be like that of *tool,* to use an analogy of Wittgenstein's, or like *work*, *housekeeping*, or *gardening* to use those of Ryle, in the respect that there is no general answer to the question what thinking consists of. Like the concepts of working, housekeeping, and gardening, the concept of thinking is, Ryle suggests, a polymorphous one: it is unlike the concept of apple-picking or boxing in this respect. For just as there are hundreds of widely different operations in doing farm work, so too are there hundreds of different sorts of toilings, idlings, problem-solvings, and so forth that count as thinking. Consequently, though there are a lot of helpful things one can say about the kinds of things that count as tools, work, or thought, the attempt to find some thread that that ties together these various items, functions, and activities that we characterise thus, results not in a theory but, at best, in saying something unenlightening (such as 'tools are used to modify objects' or 'no thought without adverting to something or other') (Wittgenstein 1953, §11; Ryle 2009 [1958], p. 418).

Having suggested that there is not one particular thing, occurrence, or process that constitutes thinking, which, if true, will thwart any attempt to give a general account or theory of thought, let us also put to one side for this discussion the several uses of 'thought' and 'thinking' and its cognates that clearly do not yield any temptation toward the Cartesian view that is our target here. Consider, for example, those occasions when we use 'think' to mean 'is of the opinion that' or 'believes that'. Most philosophers accept – contra Hume, and in part thanks to Ryle's arguments in *The Concept of Mind* – that there is something 'dispositional' about beliefs or opinions, which cannot be captured on a model that would construe them as ideas, vivid impressions, or even mere tokenings of symbols or representations. It is less appreciated that his arguments show that there is something inherently dispositional about the concept of thought, even on those occasions when we do not use 'thinks' as a synonym for 'believes'. We shall also set aside those many circumstances in which we use 'think' to mean 'has her wits about her' to characterise successful performances; I have discussed Ryle's arguments against 'the Intellectualist Legend' and Wittgenstein's polemic against theoretical, rule-following explanations in detail elsewhere (see Tanney 2012a, esp. ch. 4 and ch. 12; Tanney 2009e).

Instead let us focus on those occasions that puzzled Ryle most in his later years: those in which we are inclined to describe someone as thinking when there is no visible performance, for these are the cases which incline us to agree that there is something going on inside the agent's head that is inaccessible to us. But what does 'inside the head' mean? And to the extent that there are such incidents, are they the hidden accompaniments that would assure us of our right to confer upon the individual the title of 'rational being', 'intelligent', or 'minded'? And if this is the case, what exactly is going on inside that assures us so? Is this the sought after conscious experience that supposedly marks the difference between zombies, on the one hand, and human beings, on the other? Or are these 'tacit' and therefore not conscious, but nonetheless 'internal' events? Perhaps these are the tokenings and interactions of semantically valued syntactic structures embedded in the neuronal recesses of the brain; just one example of today's *theoretical posits* that provide the causal crux between the mind and body, now hovering uneasily between mental, semantic, or content-laden features and the physical properties or events of the brain.

Philosophers and many psychologists today concede that it is enough for their purposes to show that the operations of the mind are 'natural phenomena' even if there are no mental essences. Perhaps a recoil from the 'spiritual' or simply the desire to pave the way for a scientific study of the mind as opposed, for example, to the kind of study one finds in great works of literature, history, biography – or talking therapies? – prompts 'naturalist' philosophers to hold that their explanatory models must conform (by and large) to those adopted for the natural sciences. Michael Tye, for example, argues that:

> there is no reason to think that the methods of psychology are different from chemistry, biology, and geology, which support a hierarchy of constitution and realisation relationships between higher- and lower- order physical items, and which has as its foundation in the microphysical realm. (1992, p. 436)

Ryle recognises this tendency and agrees that '[w]hen we start to theorise about thinking, we naturally hanker to follow the chemist's example, namely, to say what thinking consists of and how the ingredients of which it consists are combined' (2009 [1951], p. 271). Or, we model it on processes like perspiring or digesting which can be broken down into ingredient processes which have been co-ordinated in a certain way. But this is a mistake, he warns, for '[w]e know in our bones that our theories about them, because couched in factual idioms echoing those of chemistry, mechanics, hydraulics, or physiology, have inevitably omitted something...' (2009 [1965], p. 161).

What they have omitted, he argues, is cardinal to their being thoughts at all. Thinkings, when they are not reveries, dreams, obsessive thoughts, or casual musings, are often purposive *doings* as opposed to natural *happenings*. In these cases, thought is not 'something that just happens to us and in us, like digestion. It is something that we do, and do well or badly, carefully or carelessly, expertly or amateurishly' (2009 [1965], pp. 161–2). And, as we shall discover, it is difficult to see how these increasingly complex purposive and evaluative elements can be captured by a model that conforms to those of the natural sciences.

Thus, even when we focus on examples of thinking in which specifiable processes or events occur and even when they are *in a sense to be examined* in the head, it is difficult to see how we can reduce these purposive and evaluable *doings* to a hierarchy of constitution and realisation relationships between higher- and lower-order items that (it is to be hoped) bottom out with the 'natural' or non-semantic physical. In order to develop this suspicion, let us, with Ryle's help, construct a case which gives the most promise to the view that what distinguishes the human mind from that of zombies or animals is a matter of what goes on inside the head. In other words, let us consider theoretical thinking at its best.

Consider Pythagoras as he is trying to work out the relationship between the legs and the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle. Suppose that he starts muttering something like the following. 'If I were to square the length of one of the legs...let's see, that comes to 4...Now suppose I square the length of the other: let's see, that comes to 6. Hmmmm. Now what if I do the same to the hypotenuse, I wonder?' We are also to imagine that his son, a mimic, comes to join him and begins to echo what he hears his father saying. For good measure, Ryle suggests there is also a parrot and (forgetting chronology) a tape recorder.

> So there are four things, or creatures, all producing Greek sentences, in which the Greek equivalents of phrases like 'right-angle' and words like 'hypotenuse', etc., keep on cropping up. We certainly don't want to say that the tape recorder is thinking out a proof, or trying to think out a proof of Pythagoras's theorem. We certainly don't want to say it of the parrot either, because the parrot is simply parroting. (The tape recorder isn't even doing that.) (Magee 1971, p. 143)

The boy, like the parrot, is not working out a geometrical proof, but neither is he simply parroting. This may be (as Ryle suggests) because he is familiar with some of the words, but it is also because mimicking is something other than parroting. But what makes it so? And what does working out a geometrical proof entail that is different from that of mimicking?

One response, which Ryle does not consider and I mention only to put aside, is that the intention is different in the case of Pythagoras and his son. Although this is true, it is unhelpful at this point in the discussion. Our study of thinking in the present context is more general than one about, because it comprehends, the having of certain intentions, reasons for acting, or meaning something by an utterance. These cases, too, tempt us to posit something inner or internal and it is this temptation we are trying to understand. Indeed, the appeal to intentions or having something in mind is not appropriate and so cannot mark the difference between the tape recorder and the parrot in any case. The question remains: what does?

And now it is extraordinarily tempting to suppose that because the difference is not outer – in the sounds produced, for example – then it must be in some sense inner. The sounds, it seems, must be imbued with something *mental* that makes the difference between these cases. Is it to be found in the 'conscious experiences' that (according to the qualia-loving foes of functionalism and physicalism) allegedly mark the difference between zombies and minded creatures? After all, as Magee points out to Ryle, there is a difference between calling up in the mind's eye an image of a hippopotamus and that of a horse. Or, as the qualia-doubting friends of functionalism and physicalism believe, does it involve mental events which may or may not be conscious that are presumed to supervene on neuronal events in the brain?

As advertised, we will reject these suggestions because *both* lead to the untenable consequences sketched at the beginning. Instead we shall examine the temptation to suppose that whatever makes the difference between the sounds produced is what occurs in the head and see how it might be combatted. One possibility as to why this picture is so tempting is that some thinking *is* (at least in some sense) in the head. For example, at Magee's suggestion, let us imagine Mrs Pythagoras sitting down next to her husband with her knitting. So as not to disturb her, Pythagoras continues to work out the proof in his head. Does this not show that thinking is an inner process?

No. First, there is something odd about calling this 'inner'. The idiom 'in the head' does not support the idea that something is taking place inside the head, like, for example, the muscular contractions that take place when you have a headache, or even like the cold sensation that rises up your nasal passages when you swallow your first bite of ice cream too quickly.[2] It merely marks the difference between someone who, in doing what he is doing, is speaking out loud and the one who is remaining silent. And, indeed, it seems that any sequence of sounds one utters out loud can be uttered *sotto voce*, so what makes it *thinking* does not depend upon whether it is in the head or *à haute voix*.

Second, let us agree that Pythagoras's visualisations of triangles and numbers, say, are markedly different from those of the face, say, of his favourite student. Let us even agree to call these imaginings 'conscious experiences' or agree that there is 'something it is like' to for him to see triangles with his mind's eye or even to be constructing a proof which is different from his musings about his protégé. But these 'experiences' surely cannot mark the difference between those who think and those who do not. For clearly Pythagoras is working out a geometrical proof – a clear example of theoretical thinking – when he calls up no images in his mind's eye: he could be muttering out loud, confining his picturing and sentences to paper, or just sitting on a rock with his hand on his chin thinking in a non-pictorial or even non-sentential way about triangles. Indeed, it is a higher-order, often quite difficult task to articulate thoughts by means of words or diagrams. Moreover, Pythagoras could be having the same pictures or sentences run through his head and not be working out a geometrical proof. So it seems we would still require that extra something to enchant the images and *sotto voce* words when they do so function.

We are asking what tempts us to think that something internal marks the differences between Pythagoras, his son, and the parrot when they utter the very same words. It seems the idiom 'in the head' gives no support to the idea that whatever this elusive occurrence or power is, it occurs in the head or, for that matter, in the brain. Nor does the ability which some people have and others do not to 'see things with their mind's eye' or to imagine sounds, feelings, and so on, lend support to the idea. We are not denying that such phenomena occur; we are just pointing out that when they do occur, their occurrence cannot mark the distinction between occasions when thinking involves constructing a proof, mimicking, parroting, and so forth.

Even if we acknowledge the differences between these tasks – problem-solving as opposed to mimicking, for example, we could still continue *ad infinitum* to make more and more complex distinctions within each of these categories. The younger daughter may be mimicking the father, not to practise the art of mimicry but to tease him; an even younger daughter may be mimicking him with an eye towards getting the same negative attention from the mother as the others are, and the mother might be mimicking the youngest daughter in her attempt to get her husband to notice that she needs help disciplining the children, and so on.

Some stretches of thinkings, as we saw earlier, are *doings* as opposed to *happenings* and as such they have a purposive as well as an evaluative element that are essential to an understanding of their nature. Saying words (out loud or *sotto voce*) in mimicry *in order* to perfect one's ability to mimic, to learn to mimic, with an eye towards making fun, irritating, or demanding help, all signal different activities, each with their own separate standards of accomplishment. The youngest daughter's act of mimicry succeeds when she irritates her mother; the older daughter's task, like her mother's, succeeds when she rouses Pythagoras's attention, but only if he laughs with her instead of taking sides with his wife.

A report or a description of what Pythagoras and his family are doing, in 'tokening' the same Greek words, cannot, as Ryle says, be given by mere sentences including verbs strung together with 'and's. Full descriptions will necessarily embody subordinate clause introducers such as 'not', 'in order to', 'unless', 'when', 'any', 'at the same time as', 'most', 'either…or', or 'in order not to'. As Ryle reminds us, 'There is no top step on the stairway of accomplishment-levels' (2009 [1968], p. 498). It follows that there is no end to the list of subordinate clauses that will be needed to describe the possible tasks in which one who utters or 'tokens' the same words might be engaged. In other words, there is no thin level of description ('tokening' symbols) that will allow us to get to the heart of what makes these cases of problem-solving, mimicry, parroting, or recording, let alone the indefinitely many problem-solving or mimic-involving tasks they might embody.

What marks the differences, then, between different kinds of thinking, or performances that involve thinking as opposed to those that do not? My answer on behalf of Ryle and Wittgenstein: the very kinds of considerations we have just illustrated in our descriptions of the Pythagoras family. In order to specify what makes these stretches of thinking as opposed to parrotings or recordings, or kinds of stretches of thinking they are, we will not get by with meaning-endowed 'thought-words' combined in rule-governed ways that make up 'thought-sentences'; we need the multiply embedded social-linguistic activities which the long list of subordinate clauses help us to identify. Thus, these social-linguistic activities comprise language and cannot be explained by some ostensibly prior notion of thought. For stretches of thinkings, as we see, also comprise these very activities.

Even when thoughts are not *doings* as opposed to *happenings*, for example when they are reveries, dreams, obsessive thoughts, or casual musings (and so forth), there is something 'proleptic' about them: where our thoughts tend to lead is an incipient part of what they are. This notion of thinking 'under an aspect', to borrow Wittgenstein's expression, cannot be captured by articulating only the words, if any, that might have given expression to a train of thoughts.

In order to illustrate the idea, consider my singer teacher, who suggested that although I managed to hit the 'middle' of the high notes, I was doing so as if I were at the bottom of the mountain struggling to reach the top. To think of myself standing on top of the mountain, peacefully surveying the view around me, was her advice as a singing teacher, just as a golf professional suggested to Ryle that he think of his driver not as a sledge-hammer but as a rope with a weight on the end (Ryle 2009 [1958], p. 416).

Ryle's visitor, who is taking tea in the garden, says 'What lovely roses!' and then sighs. Might he have sighed because roses were the favourite flower of his dead wife? He was not thinking of the wife in the sense that he said to himself: 'What lovely roses: Myriam would have loved those.' It is rather that roses are, for him, her favourite flower: when he sees or thinks of roses he does so *as* of her favourite flower. He need not have articulated this, but Ryle suggests that nonetheless the thought of roses is an incipient thought of her. The difference between thinking the roses are lovely and thinking the roses – under the aspect of the wife's favourite flower – are lovely is not a difference marked by the number of happenings to be recorded. For 'our story of a particular piece of thinking seems in the nature of the case to terminate in nothing stronger than a semi-colon. It is not incidental to thoughts that they belong to trains of thought' (Ryle 2009 [1958], p. 417). But are these sorts of incipient associations not a part of all or most of our musings, reveries, ponderings, and idlings?

> A person who thinks of something as something is, *ipso facto*, primed to think and do some particular further things; and this particular possible future that his thinking paves the way for needs to be mentioned in the description of the particular content of that thinking – something as the mention of where the canal goes to has to be incorporated in our account of what this adjacent canal-stretch is. Roughly, a thought comprises what it is incipiently, namely what

> it is the natural vanguard of. Its burthen embodies its natural or easy sequel. (Ryle 2009 [1958], p. 416)

Although these passages from Ryle may suggest to today's readers that thought-contents are to be identified by their causal roles, this suggestion should be resisted. Understanding the proleptic feature of thought will, I suggest, help us to understand the vast difference between mere chronicles of events, on the one hand, and narratives, histories, or stories, on the other. What matters when the chess-player ponders his next move is not the particular images or words or sentences, if any, that run through his head. The idioms in which a piece of chess-strategy history is couched come from a different fount, as Ryle tells us, from those in which the corresponding chronicles would be told. Similarly, the fount in which we couch the narratives of our stretches of thinking, which of course give them the explanatory import that they have and therefore the means we need to manipulate, adjust, control, or encourage them, is not one that could be captured by alleged tokenings of representations in their computational-causal economies. Remember, it is not just a string of 'and's, 'or's, 'not's, or 'if, then's that give these narratives their structure and content: the job performed by thinking concepts requires not, as we saw, just some simple auxiliary nouns, simple adjectives, or simple verbs but a host of syntactically variegated subordinate clauses. These clauses are part of the thickness of the concept: it is these syntactically variegated clauses that make reduction to mere episodes, happenings, or to what can be merely chronicled, impossible. As we saw earlier when considering thinkings that are *doings*, we see here too in our discussion of the proleptic nature of thoughts – that may occur in mere musings, ponderings, or idlings – that the complex web of social-linguistic activities, some of which are extremely high up on Ryle's 'ladder of sophistication', are necessary to characterise them.

## 4

Although it is clear that stretches of thinkings can be aided by words, sentences, diagrams, pictures, objects, spatial manipulation, and so on, one consequence of the foregoing discussion is to bring under scrutiny the assumption that thought *has* vehicles. In certain cases we can adduce particular episodes, word-flashings, sayings, images, sensations, or feelings that occur, but in all those cases in which we recollect our thoughts it has to be admitted that no such episode needed to have occurred in order for us to have just that thought for they could be replaced by any of indefinitely many other episodes and still count as the same stretch of thinking. We are often able to recount a particular stretch of thinking without difficulty, but would be stumped if forced to recollect whether words were spoken *sotto voce*, or if we saw certain things in our mind's eye. Indeed, we may insist that there was no particular episode to be identified. Wittgenstein touches on a similar theme when discussing intention:

> 'I was going to say…' – You remember various details. But not even all of them together show your intention. It is as if a snapshot of a scene had been taken, but only a few scattered details of it were to be seen: here a hand, there a bit of face, or a hat – the rest is dark. And now it is as if we knew quite certainly what the whole picture represented. As if I could read the darkness. (1953, §635)

Ryle, for his part, denies that there must have been any 'concrete apparatus of some specifiable kind or other, linguistic or pictorial or something else'.

> The generic term 'symbol' is sometimes used to cover all the postulated vehicles of thinking. [The presupposition is that it] is a psychological necessity, or perhaps even a part of the very concept of thinking, that when thinking occurs, there occur, internally or externally, things or symbols that the thinker thinks in. (2009 [1958], p. 409)

The problem is that we can find no way of filling in the gap to complete the phrase 'No thinking, without…' with the candidates we have considered. Perhaps it is this that inclines us towards the idea that there must be 'something else' as well. Descartes struggled with the idea that what enchants these mere happenings and elevates them to the status of thought is the mental or spiritual stuff that dreams are made of; philosophers recoil against this by nominating something *natural* instead. Thus, we arrive at the hypothesis that these are mental representations that are somehow realised in the neuronal structure of the brain. But Ryle's response is that:

> [t]he seeming mysteriousness of thinking derives from some sophisticated theoretical presuppositions, presuppositions which induce us, though only when theorising, to try to squeeze out of our reminiscences of our introspections some evasive but pervasive drop of something, some psychic trace-element the presence of which, in bafflingly minute doses, is required if thinking is to occur. (2009 [1958], p. 412)

This presupposition that 'something else' is required seems to be based, as Wittgenstein would say, on a sort of mis-assimilation or mixing up of different pictures. 'No singing without noises, no testimonial-writing without ink-marks, no thinking without…' (Ryle 2009 [1958], p. 412). Perhaps, Ryle suggests, the idea that we think *in* such and such is encouraged by the naturalness with which we say that an Englishman who has become adept at French can now think in French. But this is just a shorthand way of saying that he does not have to grope for French words, or translate English words into French ones, and so forth and so on. But '[s]trained though it may be, save in the one special context, to speak of a person thinking in French or in English, it is worse than strained to speak of him as thinking in, say, mental pictures' (Ryle 2009 [1958], p. 410). An architect may work out her problem by manipulating a cut-out model; a sculptor, her clay; a chess-player, the chess pieces; a jeweller, her metals; and so on and so forth. But these are items that one thinks with, or with the aid of, not items one thinks *in*.

It seems that the question 'where?' has no application in this context and we are still in thrall to Descartes in supposing, even if we reject the idea of a separate substance, that mental phenomena must nonetheless be somewhere. Compare, for example, the question 'Where is the purchasing power enjoyed by this credit card?' Or, more philosophically, 'What and where is the categorical base of its disposition to enter into the trade of goods and services? Since this cannot be a mysterious, spiritual power, it must be physical. It is not detectable upon close examination of the card: so it must be internal'. But as we can see from the analogy, this 'either–or' reasoning has, as Ryle would say, too few 'or's. For it does not follow, even with its complex chip, hologram, and magnetic tape, that the card's purchasing power is to be found in the card, or indeed in any particular place. The question 'where?' has no application; the best one can do is tell a long story about economic practices and the institutions that serve them. Perhaps the situation is the same with the jobs that mental predicates perform. They are tools we use, with greater and lesser success and precision, to tell a sense-making story of those creatures we are attempting to understand.[3]

## 5

In the end, are these conclusions about thought and thinking so surprising? Are the negative conclusions not *of a piece* with those about language that Ryle and Wittgenstein tried to bring home to us? For their work amounts to a complete rejection of the idea that there is some 'core' or 'lexical' meaning to serve as the 'cargo-contents' of sentence- or subsentential 'vehicles'. An understanding of concepts cannot be severed from the multifarious activities or jobs played by the predicate expressions which embed them. As I see it, this radical pragmatic slant belies the widely held view that concepts are the 'significance cargoes' or the contents, references, meanings, or extensions of words which, together with the structure of the expressions in which they figure, determine the meaning of those complex expressions.

On Ryle's view, the germ of which he credits to Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* but develops independently of Wittgenstein's later work, the traditional view of concepts, harking back to Plato, gets things back to front: concepts are not the (immutable, determinate) extra linguistic items that give meaning to our (contingent and fluid) linguistic practices. Indeed, concepts are not objects, as the traditional view supposed. They are therefore not the designata of concept-nouns such as 'thought', 'intention', 'reason', and so forth. For these concept-nouns are not names; a *fortiori* they are not names of the 'ideals' at which our language-adulterated thoughts can only gesture. They are rather abstractions from propositions in which the correlative live verbs, adjectives, and adverbs perform their roles. These concepts, like the formal 'syncategorematic' ones that interested Russell, embody the logical structures of the propositions from which they are abstracted. We discern their features, not by inspecting them 'in isolated splendour' as we would coins in a museum, withdrawn from their native transactions, but by comparing and contrasting the logical powers of live sentences at work. The diverse and circumstance-dependent modes of assessment by which we evaluate the various employments of live sentences in which the target concepts are embedded reveal their meaning; their meaning is not, by contrast, uncovered by examining the alleged references of the words combined in contextually inert sentences-in-formaldehyde.

Propositions can still be understood, correctly, as abstractions from what sentences of different languages, idioms, authors, or dates say when these sentences say the same thing. So, too, can proposition-factors such as concepts (as well as particulars, qualities, relations, complexes of concepts, or entire propositions) be understood in abstraction from the sentence-factors or phrases or words which 'express' them. But the logical priority is reversed by what Ryle calls the 'Cambridge transformation of the conception of concepts': it inverts the natural assumption that the meaning of words and phrases can be understood (learned, classified, or discussed) before consideration begins of entire sayings. Instead, to consider the meaning of an expression is to consider what can be said, truly or falsely, with it, as well as what can be asked, commanded, advised, or – I would like to add – explained, deduced, inferred, predicted, 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.' (Ryle 2009 [1957], p. 372).

As I understand the idea, then, concepts are double abstractions from propositions and these in turn are abstractions from sentences at work; the 'nature' of these concepts qua double abstractions is discernible only through examination of the employments or activities of the live sentences in which they are implicated. Because all if not most of our expressions have indefinitely many 'inflections of meaning', the 'logical threads' of a statement embodying the concept – its implications, its compatibility, or incompatibility with different affiliated statements, its being evidence for or against different corollaries, the tests required for truth and falsehood, and so on – will change with the particular inflection that it assumes in the circumstances of its employment. This phenomenon was revealed in my brief survey of just some of the 'elasticities of significance' enjoyed by the verb 'to think' and its cognates. Any particular application of the concept (which takes a certain place on what Wisdom calls the conceptual 'manifold') is linked to others not by some one thing that is common to the situations or objects to which it is applied, but by the 'overlapping' and 'criss-crossing' justifications or backings that we (those who speak the language and engage in the practices) offer and accept when the application of the concept is taught or challenged. It is these employments, and the justifications and backings that we study, when we embark upon a conceptual cartographical investigation.

In contrasting this view with the traditional one, in which cognitive grasp of a concept (on this picture, an abstract object signified by an abstract noun) is explanatorily prior to the ability to wield it, we might say instead – to borrow a metaphor from Wittgenstein – that when we mark an expression's place within the conceptual manifold and tease out its logical threads, we are identifying the post at which it is stationed. In contrast to the traditional view, to inform someone of the post at which an expression is stationed allows her to trade with it only if she already *knows how* to engage in the permissible transactions. Or to adopt one of Ryle's metaphors, the afternoon task which involves talk about concepts is useful only to those who know how to engage in the morning task – those who know how to operate with these concepts.

Now we can see why a conceptual cartographical approach is indicated as the remedy for the myriad of views that engender the mind–body problem and the problem of other minds. The kinds of philosophical misunderstanding that interest Ryle and Wittgenstein, as we have seen, arise from a tendency to assimilate to each other expressions that have very different functions in the language. We use expressions such as ‘is thinking’ or ‘thoughtfully’ or ‘has a thought’ for example, in all sorts of different cases. By taking a close look at these kinds of cases, we will see that what we call ‘thinking’ and its cognates do not have one underlying thing in common. A perennial risk in any kind of theoretical activity is to oversimplify; in philosophy this might take the form of supposing, wrongly, that when we use the same expression there is some underlying thing which ties these uses together, the nature of which it is the philosopher’s job to investigate. It is this assumption that tends to generate the intractable puzzles and logical paradoxes that have stumped philosophers for millennia.[4] There is also an attendant risk that in remarking on the differences one might be inclined to underestimate the way our expressions share the same roots. In central applications of a concept the differences between uses may blur or work together. As Frank Cioffi has suggested, they work together, or are held ‘in solution’ and it is only when a philosopher ‘crystallises them out’ that we can see those differences (see Cioffi 1963–4). These become salient when we examine the way the expressions are used on a case-by-case basis.

Understanding the more abstract phenomena such as thought (as opposed, say, to apple-picking) as amorphous abstractions from the practices in which the relevant expressions have their functions liberates us from a search for the essences or the ‘nature’ of that which the concepts were, on the view we are rejecting, assumed to represent. That is, again, because their function is precisely *not* to represent. It is to collect or categorise a polymorphous group of instances that we find useful, for various reasons, to gather under a single term. To understand the nature of thought, we descend, as it were, from the abstract characterisation to the practices themselves in which the relevant expressions are deployed to explore their functions in omnifarious and changeable circumstances and trace their ‘logical threads’ from one occasion of use to another.

It was suggested in Section 2 that to examine the variety of ways in which the concept of thought is wielded in the actual practices of employing the verbs, adverbs, and adjectives of thinking *is* to examine the phenomena of thought. How can we understand this idea in the light of familiar idea that language is one thing, the world another? The proper response to this complaint is that it is precisely this view about 'how language makes contact with the world' that Ryle should be credited, along with Wittgenstein, with calling into question. The idea that there is a sharp distinction between how we use expressions in descriptions and allegedly 'real' facts about the phenomena so described is difficult to maintain when the conviction that the function of language is to represent the world is challenged, as Ryle, throughout the 1930s and up until the 1970s, made a point of doing.

This view under dispute is of a piece with the idea that language hooks up with the world either by referring to it or by representing it. Words and sentences, so the traditional view goes, function when not naming things in the world, to *express* concepts and propositions; these *represent* the world of facts, states of affairs, properties, events, and other allegedly 'real' phenomena, where 'real' in this context means something like 'would occur naturally, independently of our ways of life, or socio-linguistic practices'. It is only on this view, in which 'language is one thing, reality another' that one can reasonably be accused of committing a mistake by conflating what a thing is called, how the use of the expression is defended, and what 'really' exists. But this is a growth of the very tap root that, as we are coming to see, needs to be eradicated.[5]

## Notes

1. For more discussion, see Tanney 2004.
2. For Ryle's own discussion of the idiom, see Ryle 2009 [1949], ch. II, sec. 5.
3. For more detailed discussion of this theme in the context of reason-explanation and its contrast with causal explanation, see Tanney 2000, 2005b.
4. For Ryle's attempt to dissolve some of these puzzles, see Ryle 1954.
5. This work makes use of my other published and unpublished writings on Ryle, including Tanney 2005a, 2009a, 2009b, 2009c, 2009d, 2009e, 2012b, 2012c and a book on Ryle, in progress.

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# 8

# Ryle on Perception

*Christoph C. Pfisterer*

The philosophy of perception is certainly not Ryle's main preoccupation, though he turns his attention to it on several occasions. His most extensive treatment of perception can be found in *The Concept of Mind*, where he dedicates a whole chapter to the topic. Some of the ideas are fleshed out and elaborated later in *Dilemmas* and in the article 'Sensation'. Among the recurring subjects is the difference between perception and sensation, the critique of sense-data and the grammar of perception verbs such as 'see', 'hear', 'observe', and so on. However, the reception of these writings is neither extensive nor well-disposed. Most commentators concentrate on the negative and critical parts of Ryle's discussion of perception, and on his dismissal of sense-data in particular. Yet, Ryle's considerations about perception contain many constructive suggestions, which in my view are paid too little attention. In my contribution to this volume, I will take account of these suggestions in order to give a fairer and more comprehensive picture of Ryle's account of perception.

## 1 Sensation and perception

I shall start with some terminological remarks. First, Ryle's reservations about the expression 'perception' throughout his discussion of the topic are striking. The title of the chapter in *The Concept of Mind* is not 'Sensation and Perception' as one might expect but 'Sensation and Observation'. Likewise, the index redirects the reader from 'perception' to the term 'observation'. It has been conjectured that Ryle's preference for talking about observation rather than perception is motivated 'by nothing more than a desire for elegant variation' (Quinton 1971, p. 107). I think that Ryle's choice of words is deliberate and that it has its source in philosophical, rather than stylistic, considerations.

One explanation for his preference could be as follows. Ryle notices that many verbs like 'see' and 'hear' are used to describe *successful* observational undertakings.[1] This is different with verbs that are 'used to record observational undertakings, the success of which may be still in question' (Ryle 1949, p. 222). If someone is reported to be observing birds this does not mean that his observation is successful; he might be trying to find out something by watching and listening, but observing a robin in contrast to seeing a robin does not entail success; that is 'observation' is a *task word*, not an achievement word (Ryle 1949, pp. 149–53). Ryle endorses a wide notion of perception, since for him perception is essentially something that we can learn and improve. But it would be absurd to say that we can learn and improve a skill which is already perfectly mastered by the mere fact that it is exercised; for example we can improve our bird-watching but not our seeing birds. For this reason, I conjecture, Ryle prefers 'observation' to 'perception'.

As for the word 'sensation', Ryle is calling our attention to a less welcome ambiguity. Ordinarily, he says, the noun 'sensation' is used to describe a certain *kind of perception*; that is tactual and kinaesthetic perceptions, as well as the perception of temperatures and localisable pains and discomforts (Ryle 1949, p. 200). In this unsophisticated use we would describe the perception of the heat of a fire as a sensation. However, in philosophical literature 'sensation' is often used to refer to *what is perceived*. In this sophisticated use of the word 'sensation' does not describe a kind of perception but refers to the *objects of all kinds of perception*. Ryle's discussion of perception is to a great extent a demonstration of the philosophical confusions that arise from the technical notion of sensation.

The distinction between the different uses of 'sensation' is important to Ryle for another reason. In *The Concept of Mind* he regretfully confesses he has 'fallen in with the official story that perceiving involves having sensations' (Ryle 1949, p. 200; see also p. 240). His dissatisfaction with this claim can in part be traced back to the ambiguity just mentioned. Whether perception entails sensations in the technical sense of the word is a debatable question, but it would be an absurd thing to say that all kinds of perception entail tactual or kinaesthetic sensations. In one of his later writings Ryle elaborates on the various uses of 'sensation' (1956).[2] However, he maintains the view that the non-technical use of 'sensation' and the technical use of the word need to be kept apart. Concerning the claim that perception entails sensation in the technical sense he then comes to the same conclusion: So when philosophers and psychologists assert that all perceiving involves the having of sensations or the feeling of something, either they are dead wrong, or else they are using a…quite different notion of feeling or sensation (Ryle 1956, p. 354).

But what does Ryle have to say about this different, technical notion of sensation? First, he deliberately avoids adopting the technical vocabulary of the sense-data theorists, and mostly he does not even differentiate between sense-data and sense-impressions. Instead, he uses 'glimpses' and 'whiffs' as if these expressions were standing for sensations; though he concedes that these are observation-words rather than sensation-words (Ryle 1949, p. 206). The idea that perception entails sensations is thereby given some credit: sensations can be said to be perceptual ingredients insofar as there is no bird-watching without getting a single glimpse, and no smelling cheese without at least catching a whiff. Strictly speaking, when you caught a glimpse of a bird you only briefly saw it, and hence were *not* observing it, but Ryle's point about sensations can in principle be made, even if less illustratively, with looks and sights as well.

Second, the technical notion of sensation is *derivative* in the sense that it does not enjoy logical or conceptual priority to perception. This is in contrast with many physiological and philosophical theories of perception that take sensations to be explanatory fundamental. To treat sensations as explanatory basic might be appealing, since having sensations neither requires concepts, beliefs, awareness, nor other cognitional capacities. To have a sensation, so the argument goes, is simply to be sensorially affected, and sensory affection must serve as a suitable basis for an explanation of perception. Yet, Ryle takes the direction of explanation to be the other way around: We do not and cannot describe haystacks in terms of this or that set of sensations. We describe our sensations by certain sorts of references to observers and things like haystacks (1949, p. 203). There is no description of the objects perceived in terms of sensations, since we do not talk about sensations 'neat', but mention them 'only in reference to the things or events which we are observing or trying or claiming to observe' (Ryle 1949, p. 201). This is not a mere observation about the way we *talk* but about the conceptual dependence of sensations. Ryle does not deny that people often describe objects in terms of sensations, and thereby use words like 'glimpse' and 'whiff'. His point is that glimpses and whiffs essentially are glimpses and whiffs *of* something. The notion of sensation is dependent in the sense that there is no such thing as a sensation without there being particulars or events it is a sensation *of*. This is a *conceptual* truth, and Ryle wants us to keep it in mind when we theorise about perception and sensation: 'the procedure of describing sensations by referring...to common objects...is of great theoretical importance' (1949, p. 202).

A similar argument is given against the priority of looks and appearances. Looks are parasitic on objects for exactly the same reasons as sensations: 'When I say that something looks like a haystack...I am describing how it looks in terms of what anyone might expect a haystack to look like...' (Ryle 1949, p. 202). Even if I am wrong, and what I see is not a haystack but a rock, or a blanket on a clothes line, I am not in a situation which can be described without reference to haystacks. Looks and appearances are the results of comparisons; and a comparison between the way something looks to me and what people would expect to see essentially is a relation, of which one of the relata is a common object. Nothing can look like a haystack if there are no haystacks, for the same reasons as there is no counterfeit money if there is no money. Therefore, looks and appearances as well as sensations are conceptually derivative and cannot serve as a basis for the description of what is perceived.[3]

Third, and most importantly, Ryle argues that the technical notion of sensation is ill-motivated and confused. He finds two 'theoretical allegiances' which in addition to the argument of illusion have driven people to postulate the existence of sense-data; one is the causal theory of perception, and the other is a misguided assumption about thought and inference in perception (see Ryle 1956, pp. 356–60). Advocates of the causal theory of perception have argued for the existence of sense-data as links in a causal chain. Ryle objects that this kind of suggestion rests on the explanatory misunderstanding 'that our questions about perception are merely causal questions' (1956, p. 360). As related to the causal mechanism, sense-data would not help to understand perception – any more than the causal conditions of checkmating help to understand the strategy of an opponent.

Another reason for postulating the existence of sense-data takes them as the 'given' material, from which perceptual inference inaugurates. Since perception is infused with thought and knowledge (e.g. seeing a misprint), and since all thinking is inferring, an infinite regress looms if there is no initial given data which is not acquired by inference itself. Ryle questions both premisses of this argument. First, he denies that all thinking is inferential; in particular, he doubts that the thoughts involved in perception require some kind of inference. Second, it is wrong to call it 'thinking' in the first place, when seeing a misprint requires abilities like reading and spelling (see Ryle 1956, p. 358). The conclusion we should draw is that the perception of many things requires skills and abilities, and, moreover, that perception itself is an acquired skill. I will come back to these issues in the last section of this essay.

Ryle's deepest concern about sensations is that the technical sense of the term is confused with its ordinary sense. He complains that

> philosophers and psychologists have nearly always tried to equate their technical notion of *sense-impression* with ... non-technical notions of *sensation*. They pass without apology from saying that without optical or auditory sense-impressions there is no seeing or hearing, to saying that seeing and hearing involve the having of sensations, as if the one assertion were a mere paraphrase of the other. (Ryle 1956, pp. 350–1)

Thus, to sum up, Ryle reminds us to be extremely careful with technical notions, which at the same time have an ordinary use, too. We will easily fall into philosophical confusion when we adopt the features of the ordinary use in technical discourse. One striking example of this kind of confusion concerns the claim that perception involves sensations, as I shall argue in the next section.

## 2 Ryle's master argument

In this section I will give a reconstruction of what is widely seen as Ryle's master argument against sense-data. Ryle wants to prove that the sense-data theory 'rests upon a logical howler, the howler, namely, of assimilating the concept of sensation to the concept of observation' (1949, p. 213). This assimilation, he argues, results in unacceptable absurdities. The argument takes the form of a *reductio*, the mistaken premiss of which leads to an *infinite regress*. Ryle gives two versions of the argument, a rather general one, and one that is particularly directed against the sense-data theory. I will discuss both versions of the argument as well as some fundamental objections that have been raised against it.

The general version of the argument reads as follows:

> If sensations are proper objects of observations, then observing them must carry with it the having of sensations of those sensations analogous to the glimpses of the robin without which I could not be watching the robin. And this is clearly absurd. There is nothing answering to the phrases 'a glimpse of a glimpse' or 'a whiff of a pain' or 'the sound of a tweak' or 'the tingle of a tingle', and if there was anything to correspond, the series would go on for ever. (Ryle 1949, p. 207)

This argument simply states that an infinity of sensations would occur, if sensations are conceived as the proper objects of observation. To observe a robin, I would have to observe a glimpse of a robin, and for this to happen, I would need to observe a glimpse of a glimpse of a robin first, and so on. This is clearly absurd – an absurdity that is mirrored in linguistic usage. But how does Ryle arrive at this conclusion? What are the premisses of the argument?

In my interpretation the argument rests on two claims about sensations in the technical sense of the word. Both claims are hard to dismiss if you try to explain perception in terms of sensations, but taken together they involve a harmful kind of circularity. The first premiss allows for the obvious truth that perception entails sensation; nobody can watch a robin without catching a single glimpse of it. Although Ryle accepts the *entailment claim* with reservations, as we have seen, this is not the premiss at which his argument takes aim. The second premiss identifies sensations with the proper objects of perception; it would not make sense to postulate the existence of sensations without granting epistemic access to them. The *accessibility claim* has drawn most criticism, as we will see. However, if the perception of an object entails the having of sensations, and if at the same time sensations are identified as the proper objects of perception, then to epistemically access these sensations would involve further sensations. This is Ryle's master argument as I read it. I therefore suggest the following structure:

(P1) To perceive an object entails the having of sensations of that object.
(P2) Sensations are the proper objects of perception.
(C) To perceive an object entails the having of sensations of sensations.

In other words, Ryle wants to keep us from the idea that sensations or sense-data help to understand the perception of objects in the external world. We would be stuck in the description of an infinite series of inner processes, since, at every stage of holding our epistemic relation to the sensations involved in perception, our very being in that relation generates new sensations to capture.

The most common reaction to this argument is to deny the accessibility claim (P2). It has been protested that glimpses and whiffs are not the kind of things that we can perceive, let alone observe. Hence, Ryle is forming a regress on the basis of a premiss that nobody has to be willing to accept in the first place – not even the sense-data theorist.

In this spirit Quinton objects that the sense-datum theorist 'has no commitment to the view that sense-impressions are strictly *observable*. It is enough for him that they can be noticed and reported' (1971, p. 114). Lyons quotes this objection with approval and adds: 'All the sense datum theorist need commit himself to is the claim that they are *knowable'* (1980, p. 118; author emphasis). Both philosophers seem to have a more sophisticated theory of sense-data in mind. Quinton argues that Ryle's regress is avoided if sense-data are 'self-intimating', that is if it is impossible to have them without knowing (1971, p. 111). Likewise, Lyons objects that all that a sense-datum theory needs 'is a physico-chemical causal chain plus, at times, the epiphenomenon of awareness' (1980, p. 124). In other words, Ryle is attacking a straw man's position, for sense-data are not the proper objects of perception, but links of a causal chain, of which perceptual awareness is just an epiphenomenon.

I will make two remarks in response to this objection. First, it might be worth noting that the philosophers Ryle had in mind in fact claimed that sense-data *are* the kind of things we are perceptually aware of. Russell, for instance, defines sense-data in his *Problems of Philosophy* as 'the things that are immediately known in sensation', whilst 'sensation' denotes 'the experience of being immediately aware of these things' (1912, p. 12). Ayer summarises in *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge* that 'in all cases of perception the objects of which one is directly aware are sense-data and not material things' (1963 [1940], p. 25).[4] Hence, Ryle's master argument is by no means an instance of the straw man fallacy.

On the contrary, the argument allows for the main reason that has been put forward for the existence of sense-data. The accessibility claim (P2) captures the point of the *argument from illusion*: the squinter who reports to see two candles, where there is only one, does so because he perceives the sense-data of two candles (Ryle 1949, p. 213). It is not at all clear what should motivate the sense-data theory if not the possibility of explaining illusory experiences; hence, giving up the accessibility claim (P2) is not an option for the sense-data theorist.

Second, Ryle's argument does not hinge on the premiss that sense-data are perceived or observed; this is evident in Ryle's alternative formulation of the argument, where he addresses the sense-data theory:

> The theory says that when a person has a visual sensation, on the occasion, for example, of getting a glimpse of a horse-race, his having this sensation consists in his finding or intuiting a sensum, namely a patchwork of colours. This means that having a glimpse of a horse-

> race is explained in terms of his having a glimpse of something else, the patchwork of colours. But if having a glimpse of a horse-race entails having at least one sensation, then having a glimpse of colour patches must again involve having at least one appropriate sensation, which in its turn must be analysed into the sensing of yet an earlier sensum, and so on for ever. (1949, p. 213)

Unlike the first version, the second version of the argument does not include the controversial premiss that sensations are the proper objects of perception – at least not explicitly. Instead, the sense-data theorist is taken to hold that sense-data are 'sensed' or 'intuited'. Thus, Ryle must be thinking that the regress gets going independently of the verb describing our knowledge of sensations. It will do to say that sensations are *epistemically accessible*, just as Quinton and Lyons both agree. Note further, that the second formulation of the argument is explicit about the *explanatory* nature of the regress; that is the analysis of perception in terms of sensations leads to a regress, but nothing about perception itself.

Advocates of the sense-data theory might still protest that sensing a sensum or having sensations is very unlike the perception of objects and does not involve further sensations as stated by the entailment claim (P1), since it is not a case of sensual affection at all. Ryle anticipates this objection and replies that such a defence 'explains the having of sensation as the *not* having of sensations' (1949, p. 215). That requires explanation. Ryle notices that verbs like 'intuit' or 'sense' have no proper meaning in ordinary discourse, but borrow the ordinary force of verbs like 'observe' (1949, p. 212). This observation turns out to be crucial for Ryle's argument; it reveals the parasitic nature of 'sensing a sensum'. We just do not know how to understand this locution if it is not analogous to familiar cases of perceptual reports, that is locutions with a perceptual verb and the name for an object. But if 'having a sensation' and 'sensing a sensum' have to be modelled on familiar cases of perception, then Ryle's master argument seems to hold. If sensations are conceived as epistemically accessible objects, we are off on an infinite regress; if they are not conceived in such a way, we lose our hold on the locutions we need to describe the position of the sense-data theorist. On the one hand, the sense-data theorist has to assimilate the notion of sensation to more familiar perceptual notions but, on the other hand, it is just this assimilation that gets him into trouble. I believe that Ryle has this predicament in mind when he says the theory of sense-data rests upon a *logical* howler.

As a matter of fact, Ryle's master argument is vulnerable to attack, and I am far from being in a position to defend it against every sort of objection. However, my aim in this section was to give a reconstruction of the argument as well as to address a few paradigmatic objections. There are, of course, various other ways that Ryle's argument could be challenged.[5] I have mainly focused on the accessibility claim (P2), because this is the premiss ultimately rejected by Ryle himself. He argues by analogy that sensations are neither observable nor unobservable, just as letters are neither easy to spell, nor hard to spell (Ryle 1949, p. 206). Words can be spelled and letters are components of words, but it is nonsense to say that letters can be spelled. Similarly, even if sensations are perceptual ingredients, it is nonsense to hold that they are perceived. According to Ryle, the sense-data theorist is committed to this nonsensical claim, if sensations or sense-data are doing explanatory work. Whether or not this argument against the sense-data theory is compelling, it is beyond all question that Ryle has touched a sore spot. His argument reveals a certain tension between two claims that are on the table when philosophers take on sense-data or sensations.

## 3 Seeing as an achievement

The second predominant topic in Ryle's discussion of perception addresses the question whether perception is a psychological process open to empirical investigation. He argues that many perceptual verbs like 'seeing' and 'hearing' are used to report achievements and not tasks or processes. The point of this distinction is often demonstrated by analogy: seeing a tree is no more a process than winning a race; a fortiori, seeing a tree is not a causal process and consequently cannot be explained by empirical science. However, Ryle's linguistic arguments against the scientific investigation of perception have not convinced many philosophers, not even those who in principle agree to the categorisation of achievement words. In this section I will present Ryle's arguments for treating seeing as an achievement against the background of his comprehending theory of perception as an interplay of skills and capabilities. This will help us to appreciate Ryle's positive contributions to the philosophy of perception, which will be discussed in the final section.

The distinction between achievement words and task words as well as its application to perception verbs occurs for the first time in *The Concept of Mind* (Ryle 1949, pp. 149–53, 222–3). Achievement words are used to report the termination of a process. Verbs like 'win', 'find', 'cure', 'solve', and so on, signify 'not merely that some performance has been gone through, but also that something has been brought off by the agent going through it. They are verbs of success' (Ryle 1949, p. 130). The labels 'termination' and 'success' easily lead to misunderstandings, for they set us on the wrong track that time and success are essential to the use of these words. But achievements have to be neither clockable nor successful.[6] To get a better grip of achievement verbs it is helpful to contrast them with the corresponding task verbs: play/win, treat/heal, travel/arrive, and so on (Ryle 1949, p. 149). Notably, many perception verbs have corresponding task verbs: look/see, observe/descry, listen/hear, feel/touch, and so on. The first word of each pair is used to describe a process, whereas the second word is used to refer to the result of this process.

I will confine myself to just saying a few things about this distinction. First, many verbs can be used for tasks as well as for achievements. This is not blurring the distinction but refines it as a distinction between the *uses* of certain verbs. Second, adverbial modification can help determining achievements, since adverbs like 'carefully' and 'attentively' are proper to task verbs and do not go together with achievement verbs; for example, it does not make sense to say that she was carefully checkmating her opponent, but it is unproblematic to say that she was playing very carefully. Third, there is an obvious conceptual connection between an achievement verb and the corresponding task verb: one cannot win the game without playing, cannot arrive without travelling, and cannot see the tree without looking at it. Hence, achievements involve tasks insofar as 'in applying an achievement verb we are asserting that some state of affairs obtains over and above that which consists in the performance, if any, of the subservient task activity' (Ryle 1949, p. 150). Of course, we can find things unexpectedly or without searching at all, hence this rule does not exclude lucky achievements and achievements without antecedent tasks. But, in general, achievements are successfully completed tasks. Note that from the fact that most achievements typically involve tasks, it does not follow that achieving something is a cumulatively compound activity; in achieving something one is not doing two things, but 'one thing with a certain upshot' (Ryle 1949, p. 150).

In *Dilemmas* Ryle fleshes out an argument that has only been indicated so far. On the basis of his analysis of perception verbs as achievement verbs he argues that science will not be able to give a comprehensive account to perception, since perception verbs like 'see' and 'hear' do not refer to mental states or processes: 'The verb "to see" does not signify an experience, i.e. something that I go through, am engaged in. It does not signify a sub-stretch of my life-story' (Ryle 1954, p. 103). Thus, for Ryle, my seeing a tree is neither a psychological process, nor the end stage or the effect of such a process, no more than that it is a phenomenon, which can be discovered either by the scientist or introspectively by myself (1954, pp. 101–2).

To establish these claims Ryle makes use of an analogy between seeing and winning: 'In some respects, though certainly not in very many, the verbs "see" and "hear" function like the verb "win". They do not stand for bodily or psychological states, processes or conditions' (1954, p. 106). Seeing a tree is like winning a race, whereas looking at a tree is like running. The winning athlete must have been running for five minutes or so, but reaching the end of the race track takes no time. Similar things can be said about seeing a tree. Unlike looking at a tree or scrutinising a tree, seeing a tree is not a process with a beginning and an end; it takes no time. But the analogy is further reaching. Winning a race involves more than just reaching the end of the race track; for example, there must be at least one competitor, the winner has to run faster than all competitors, and this might require intense training. Likewise, seeing a misprint not only requires normal eyesight and lighting conditions, but also learning, training, and practice. The point of the analogy is this: 'where winning is the scoring of an athletic success, perceiving is the scoring of an investigational success. We find things out or come to know them by seeing and hearing' (Ryle 1954, pp. 108–9).

What Ryle means by 'investigational success' is spelled out in his essay on sensations:

> I am arguing that some questions about perceiving, and particularly those which are of interest in epistemology, are not causal questions... but questions about, so to speak, the *crafts* or *arts* of finding things out by seeing and hearing... finding out something by seeing or hearing is, so to speak, a success or victory in the game of exploring the world. This seeing or hearing is of course susceptible of a complete and very complex causal explanation, given in terms of optics or acoustics, physiology, neurology and the rest; but the player's interest is not primarily in the contents of this explanation, but in the exploratory task itself and its accomplishment. (2009, p. 361)[7]

Hence, Ryle does not deny that empirical science can investigate perception. In fact, he explicitly acknowledges that special sciences such as physiology and psychology have 'rightly come to incorporate the study of... the structures, mechanisms, and functionings of animal and human bodies qua percipient' (Ryle 1954, p. 99). This is not doing any harm. But it is a mistake to think that empirical science will answer *all* our questions about perception. In particular, it is a mistake to think that they will find out about success in the game of exploring the external world. This mistake results from assimilating questions like 'How do we see trees?' to questions like 'How do we digest our food?' in expecting the same sort of answers; 'namely reports of modifications in some of our internal states and processes' (Ryle 1954, p. 100). Like digestion, perception involves complex internal physiological states and processes, but unlike digestion, perception is an achievement with standards external to bodily happenings.

Again, the analogy between winning and seeing might help to clarify this. Ryle invites us to imagine an athletics coach with a scientific training, researching into the physiology and the psychology of runners (1954, p. 105). Now, there is a lot for the coach to find out about anatomy, muscular co-ordination, breathing, adrenalin, and electrical impulses, and so on, but he will not find anything under the athlete's skin about winning or losing the race, for winning and losing are not physiological phenomena but achievements with external standards. According to Ryle, the same holds for perception: empirical science has a story to tell when it comes to the perception of trees, but science will not be able to give a full and comprehensive account of seeing trees, because this kind of achievement is not explicable in terms of science. The substance of words like 'see' and 'hear' is not revealed by scientific investigation but by philosophical analysis.[8]

Ryle's considerations about perception gave rise to criticism. It has been objected that his meditations about seeing as an achievement are simply 'irrelevant' and do not 'banish out of existence the process of visual experience' (Hardie 1955, p. 108). In a similar vein, Russell (not *the* Russell) asks 'how these arguments affect looking at and observing, which are processes' (Russell 1955, p. 348). Strawson in his review of *Dilemmas* laments that the chapter about perception is the 'least satisfactory essay in the book' (1955, p. 364). In particular, he argues that Ryle's parallel between 'see' and 'win' is exaggerated since, after all, if not a state or a process, seeing is still a happening, which is 'related to its physical and psychological conditions as their outcome' (Strawson 1955, p. 365). The same kind of criticism has been recurring ever since. Lyons argues that even if we accept Ryle's account of 'perception' as an achievement word, the 'investigation of the causal links is germane to its correct use'; therefore, 'Ryle is wrong to conclude from this that causal considerations are not relevant (Lyons 1980, p. 123). However, from what I have said so far, this criticism is untenable, since Ryle is not contesting that causal processes are going on in visual perception.

More recently, Scott Soames raised a different objection. He finds a 'significant fallacy' in Ryle's general pattern of reasoning; namely, to conclude 'that my doing so and so isn't a process that takes place during [an] interval' from the fact 'that normally it would be odd or inappropriate for me to say during a certain interval that I am doing so and so', because 'there may be some other explanation for the oddness' (Soames 2003, p. 89). He gives two examples of 'durational' achievements to demonstrate Ryle's fallacy: 'After I have solved a problem, I can look back and say that I was solving the problem between 1:30 and 2:00 in the afternoon' (Soames 2003, p. 89). Sure enough, this is no strange thing to say, but the reason being is that with this utterance I just indicate the time frame for my achievement, but I do not say that I was solving the problem for half an hour. For the same reason it is not a strange thing to say that the athlete arrived at the finish after five minutes, though it would be odd to say that he was arriving for five minutes. Many achievements can be localised in time, but from this it does not follow that the achievement itself is a process with a certain duration.

Soames's second example is flawed, too. He imagines a telephone conversation in which someone makes the following comment: 'When I told you, repeatedly, over the phone that I had never seen or heard a yellow-bellied sapsucker, I didn't realise that in fact I was seeing one, and hearing it sing, throughout our conversation'. From this Soames concludes that one can see and hear something for a period of time. But 'seeing' and 'hearing' in this example are not used as achievement verbs. We can modify the sentence with task verbs, and we will get an even better sentence: 'I didn't realise that in fact I was *looking at* one, and *listening to* it sing'.

The general lesson to take away is that achievements should not be reduced to the time aspect, and that some verbs can be used for tasks as well as for achievements. But there is something else that all these objections neglect. An achievement for Ryle is not something that individuals can decide upon *privately*. This is explicit when he declares achievement verbs to belong to the vocabulary of the referee:

> Perception verbs...do not stand for performances, or ways of being occupied; *a fortiori* they do not stand for secret performances, or ways of being privily occupied. To put it crudely, they belong not to the vocabulary of the player, but to the vocabulary of the referee. They are not tryings, but things got by trying or by luck. (Ryle 1949, pp. 151–2)

The same can be said of the words 'deduction', 'judgement', and 'abstraction' – 'they are referees' nouns, not biographers' nouns' (Ryle 1949, p. 286). But in the case of perception verbs Ryle's claim is more daring, for there is nothing public about my perception of a tree, as one might protest. My seeing a tree is not a kind of rule-governed behaviour, and it does not involve rules or norms the adherence to which a referee would take care of. But Ryle seems to think otherwise. He does admit that we are all 'trained in some degree to be our own referees' (1949, p. 148), but he thinks of perception as an essentially public affair just like language and games. However, the conception of perception as a game with referees who are blowing the whistle when they see a tree is in need of explanation.

## 4 Perception recipes

The criticism of other philosophical views features so prominently in Ryle's work that its constructive aspects often remain untold. Since this is strikingly true of his account of perception I will turn towards Ryle's positive contributions to the philosophy of perception in this last section. In particular, I will follow his suggestion that an analysis of the recognition of a tune might help to understand all kinds of perception. This will bring us to the notion of *perception recipes*, which is central to Ryle's theory of perception. Perception recipes are learned rules for the perception of particular things. Seeing and hearing are therefore considered as acquired skills just as cooking or riding a bicycle. This idea is articulated in *The Concept of Mind* and is not revived in Ryle's later writings.

Ryle's outline of a theory of perception starts with an extensive excursus about the recognition of a tune (1949, pp. 226–9). I suggest that this move must be taken seriously, since for Ryle the recognition of a tune is a *paradigmatic* case of perception in general, and an appropriate description of what goes on when we recognise a melody, therefore, could lead to the correct analysis of seeing a tree.

Consider the situation in which a person is listening to music and recognises a particular melody. For this to happen the person not only has to be conscious and not deaf, she also has to have heard the tune before and not forgotten it. The recognition of a tune requires learning and remembering, but it certainly does not require the person to know the notes, nor to be able to tell the name of the tune; she does not even have to be able to hum or whistle the melody. But she must have some expectations about the musical progression; that is, she 'expects those bars to follow which do follow' (Ryle 1949, p. 226). This is very vague, of course, for the actual performance might slightly differ from what she knows – it might be off-key, transposed, played at a different speed, or with different intonation. However, it might be very difficult or even impossible to spell out the expectations involved in the recognition of a tune in all details, but as a matter of fact, if the performance differs too much from what the person knows, she might not recognise it, or at least be very surprised. Since surprise presupposes expectation, I take it that *expectation* is a key term in Ryle's account.

If someone recognises a tune, he hears the notes 'according to the recipe of the tune, in the sense that what he hears is what he is listening for' (Ryle 1949, p. 227); he is 'listening according to the recipe' (Ryle 1949, p. 228). By this Ryle does not mean that the recognition of a tune is *conceptual* or *propositional*. Listening according to the recipe is not subsuming what one hears under the concept of the tune, nor does it involve propositional thought (Ryle 1949, p. 227). Rather, we might say that listening according to a recipe is *expectational*: 'to know how a tune goes is to have acquired a set of auditory expectation propensities, and to recognise or follow a tune is to be hearing expected note after expected note' (Ryle 1949, p. 228). However, the notion of *perception recipes* raises the important question to what extent does perception involve cognition, or 'thinking' as Ryle prefers to put it. On the one hand, Ryle explicitly denies that following a tune requires extra intellectual endeavours such as conceptual thought; on the other hand, he concedes that in saying this sort of thing we also have 'one foot on the right track', since, for instance, one cannot detect a mosquito without knowing what mosquitoes are (1949, p. 225). But as carefully as Ryle describes the role of the intellect in perception, his remarks about perception recipes have led to misunderstandings. I shall address one widespread misconception before I turn to some generalisations of Ryle's account.

Ryle introduces the notion of perception recipes in connection with his critical discussion of sensations. This was an unfortunate move as it has set some commentators on the wrong track of thinking that perception recipes are needed *in addition* to the having of sensations to carry us from sensation to the perception of the external world. Indeed, when Ryle says that a perception recipe is 'applied to the actual look' of a thing (1949, p. 217), and that 'talking about looks, sounds and smells…is applying learned perception recipes' (1949, p. 219), he seems to suggest that perception recipes *supplement* sensations and looks. To recognise a tune according to a recipe would thus be a combination of sensing and expecting. But this is a mistake; following a tune is not doing two things at once. This mistake is made most prominently by Fodor who characterises Ryle's analysis of recognising as 'sensing and expecting' (1966, p. 375; see also p. 378, 379).[9]

Ryle explicitly denies that when recognising a tune we are 'coupling an intellectual process' with a 'sensitive state' (1949, 225). His locution 'hearing according to a recipe' in no way suggests that two things are going on, but that one thing is done *in a certain way*. Hence, hearing according to a recipe is a way of hearing a tune, that is the way of listening to music one is engaged in when one knows the tune. Hearing a tune is 'mongrel-categorical', to use Ryle's label, it is hearing with expectations, or expectational hearing, but not listening and expecting.

I suggest that if this misunderstanding is cleared once, Fodor's general objection that Ryle is committed to *conceptualism* becomes ill-founded. Conceptualism is supposed to be a disqualifying label for the general view that perception requires the capacity to apply abstract concepts. Fodor argues that the performances of one and the same piece of music can differ in so many respects that the corresponding recipe has to be abstract: 'Having the recipe must be more like having the sheet music than having the record' (1966, p. 377). He concludes against Ryle that 'once the recipe story is made explicit, it is indistinguishable from a most elaborate conceptualism' (1966, p. 378). But this objection supposes that perception according to a recipe involves extra mental operations such as the application of the recipe to actual sensations, and this is exactly what Ryle denies. Following a tune is not conceptual, but 'semi-hypothetical' or 'mongrel-categorical', as Ryle expresses at the end of the excursus:

> That a person is following a tune is, if you like, a fact about his ears and about his mind; but it is not a conjunction of one fact about his ears and another fact about his mind, or a conjoint report of one incident in his sensitive life and another incident in his intellectual life. (1949, p. 229)

These remarks give a better grip on what Ryle calls 'mongrel-categorical' statements. To describe a person as following a tune is making a hybrid statement about what the person is hearing given her background of expectations. Following a tune does not include the application of an abstract recipe but is a way of listening to the music which is only open to those listeners who know how the tune goes.

Last, and most importantly, Ryle goes about generalising his analysis of recognising tunes to other cases of perception. When a person is described as having seen a thimble, she must be seeing the thimble according to the 'thimble recipe'; that is, she 'has already learned and not forgotten what thimbles look like' (Ryle 1949, p. 230). Since 'there is no difference of principle…between recognising tunes and recognising gate-posts' (Ryle 1949, p. 233), there must be perception recipes for cows, gate-posts, and for all the other things that we can see. Ryle further allows for perception recipes for the other sense-modalities, as well as for the co-ordination of these recipes.

Why does Ryle introduce the notion of perception recipes in the first place? The main reason for his general claim that we perceive according to recipes is related to the conviction that perception is not a mere happening, but the exercise of an acquired skill, which involves learning: Perceiving…is exercising an acquired skill; or rather it embodies the exercise of an acquired skill. Seeing a misprint is an impossibility for someone who has not learned to spell (Ryle 1956, p. 360). Seeing a misprint, just like following a tune, are both achievements that require learning. Hence, at the root of Ryle's account is the idea that perception is something we can learn. The notion of a recipe is introduced to accommodate for this important feature of perception. Learning perception recipes for the detection of misprints, thimbles, and robins, or for the recognition of a tune is just like learning how to ride a bicycle by practice.

Yet, one might protest that the recognition of a tune and the detection of a misprint are very specific cases of perceptual experience and thus are not suitable to serve as a model for all kinds of perception. Ryle would presumably agree that some kinds of perceptual experience are unlike these cases; nevertheless, he could insist that perception is to a large extent comparable to cases involving perceptual expectations just like following tunes and finding misprints. We should keep in mind that perception as an epistemological category is, according to Ryle, an achievement, and the postulation of recipes for success appears to be less controversial if we accept this first claim.

It goes without saying that Ryle's account invites much criticism. Yet, in my brief outline I have tried to present his arguments not uncritically, but as charitably as possible, for I believe that contemporary debates in the philosophy of perception are well advised to take the ideas of this original and profound thinker seriously.

## Notes

1. The terminology is Ryle's. It is often said that perception verbs are factive, since their correct use implies the truth of the following embedded clause. I will not investigate the differences between implications of truth and implications

of success, since for the present purpose it will do to note that both kinds of implication hold for the general verb 'perceive' as well. For Ryle's qualms about these issues see (Ryle 1949, pp. 152–3).

2. There he discriminates between sensations and feelings like pain, tickles, thirst, and other kinds of discomforts, on the one hand, and kinaesthetic, tactual sensations on the other. Thus, he no longer takes pains to be in the same category as the sensation of warmth, because these feelings are strictly speaking not cases of perception at all. Pains typically leave no room for all the constitutive features of perception, such as mistake, training, detection, and discrimination.
3. I should add that according to Ryle, look-statements exhibit a further complexity, since statements of the form 'x looks F' are 'mongrel-categorical' or 'semi-hypothetical' (Ryle 1949, p. 141, 217). These are hybrid statements expressing two proposition – one is about the way x actually looks, the other proposition is about the way things look, when they really are F. I will address the issue of mongrel-categorical in my discussion of Ryle's positive contributions to the philosophy of perception (see Section 4).
4. Ayer defends his conception of sense-date against Ryle at length in (Ayer 1956, pp. 116–24).
5. For instance, Hirst points out that Ryle is not justified in equating sense-data, sensations, and looks, glimpses, or whiffs, since glimpses and whiffs are 'internal accusatives and have no existence apart from the catching of them, which does not fit the act/object analysis of sense-data' (Hirst 1959, p. 56; see also Quinton 1971, p. 115). This is an interesting objection which undermines the underlying assumption that sensations are conceived as epistemically accessible objects.
6. Bede Rundle indicates that he prefers Ryle's later label 'terminus-verb' because 'achievement' wrongly focuses on time, and not on success (1972, p. 96). But success is not an essential component either, for to make Ryle's point that many cognitive words do not refer to psychological states or processes, we can equally draw the distinction between task words and 'failure words' or 'missed it words' (1949, p. 149). The fact that most of Ryle's examples for achievement words are verbs should not bother us either; the reason for this being that he examines the language of human performances and activities.
7. Note that this passage does not sound entirely consistent with Ryle's earlier claim that 'see' and 'hear' are used to describe achievements. However, we can avoid this difficulty dissociating from the idea that 'achievement word' and 'task word' denote two definite classes of verbs. Rather, they are used to indicate a contrast and hence involve a certain *relativity*; i.e. 'seeing a robin' is used to describe an achievement in contrast to the task of watching the birds, as well as 'finding out' can be used to describe an achievement in contrast to the task of seeing. I thank David Dolby for calling my attention to the alleged inconsistency in Ryle's use of language.
8. See also Ryle's pleading for the method of analysing ordinary language (1953, p. 185). For a helpful discussion of Ryle's analysis of achievements see Malinovich (1964); he uses Ryle's insights against Ayer's theory of sense-data. For detailed criticism and refinement see Sibley (1955).
9. Yet, it is unfortunate already to characterise a perception recipe as 'knowledge of the look of a thing' (Kvernbekk 2000, p. 360; Soltis 1966, p. 28), since this suggests that the looks of things have to be interpreted before the background

of a certain kind of knowledge. I should mention that Soltis seems to be aware of the problem; after all he confesses in a footnote that it is difficult to explain the function of perception recipes without making it sound as if there were two things going on.

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# 9

# Mental Occurrences and Terminus Verbs

*Bede Rundle*

Looking back on present-day writings, a future historian of philosophy may conclude that this was the time when *theory* came to usurp the place of *grammar*. With the linguistic turn in the subject, due largely to Wittgenstein, metaphysical theorising gave way to conceptual or 'grammatical' investigations, but we are now beginning to see theorising of an ostensibly more scientific character in turn taking over from the more purely analytical concerns which followed on the demise of traditional metaphysics. More accurately, we are beginning to see a hankering after scientific theorising, the only progress to date towards the eventual triumph of theory over grammar taking the form of an increasing neglect of the latter, many philosophers, particularly those with an interest in psychology and the neurosciences, being impatient with the detailed matters of analysis which, a short time ago, were considered to give the raison d'être of their discipline. We should, I believe, be sceptical of any invocation of theory based on a scientific model; certainly, a preoccupation with theory should not be at the cost of ignoring the questions of meaning which are prior to issues concerning explanatory fruitfulness, comprehensiveness, elegance, and simplicity which theories might be called upon to provide.

Much, of course, depends on what the term 'theory' is taken to comprise. As with any other body of thought, a philosophical position which has not been established may be said to have only theoretical status, but such status is often invoked when it is wrongly thought that established truth is for ever excluded. Take the example of 'folk psychology', the network of everyday psychological concepts and propositions which we use to characterise and explain associated behaviour. There can be difficulties in the application of certain terms, such as *lazy*, *vain*, *stubborn*, and *depressed*, but so long as the difficulties reflect a shortage of information, rather than uncertainties in the use of these terms, there is no serious threat to our concepts. Propositions featuring the principal terms at issue, such as *fear*, *believe*, *remember*, and *hope*, can in favourable circumstances be demonstrably right or demonstrably wrong, in which case we have a contrast between theory and fact in which it is the latter rather than the former that is apposite. If it is said that this vocabulary is part of a theory, we may complain that we do not know what that theory is, and we may remain none the wiser when told that the causation of the outer by the inner is at its heart. How does causation enter in a relevant way with *grumpy*, *gloomy*, and *gullible*? We shall shortly give attention to other concepts for which relevance of causation is unclear.

Ryle's writings are of interest in that they reveal a concern both with theory, in a harmless enough sense, and with grammar. There is an interest in theory in so far as there is a concern with a wider view. You do not find with Ryle anything like Austin's readiness to pursue linguistic nuances for their own sake, regardless of any connection with philosophical issues. With respect to the philosophy of mind, for instance, *The Concept of Mind* can be said to favour a general framework, commonly called 'logical behaviourism', in which key psychological concepts are lodged. However, this is not by way of a pseudo-scientific theory, and the general view is worked out in great analytical detail. The contrast between this approach and the approach today, which thinks in terms of a theory but without the benefit of detailed supplementary analysis, is a contrast in which Ryle comes off much the better.

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In showing something of the kind of contribution to philosophy that we owe to Ryle, I shall draw a comparison between his treatment of issues in the philosophy of mind and that of Wittgenstein. My starting point will be a sketch of an approach to which both were opposed, an approach to the analysis of psychological concepts which, while natural, harbours a number of pitfalls for the unwary. On the approach rejected, the way we are to advance our understanding of a mental state or act is to give our full attention to what is going on when we are seeing, believing, hoping, wondering, feeling, and so forth. As Locke put it, '*the mind* furnishes the understanding with ideas of its own operations' (1690, II. i. 5); or, as a more recent example: 'Purpose is one of various mentalistic notions drawn from introspection of one's mental life' (Quine 1990, p. 75). The approach is undeniably natural. After all, it is not as if we were attempting to find out about something which, as with a material substance, might reveal its nature only after further probing and examining with the help of scientific instruments, but the phenomenon appears to be given in its entirety to the enquiring mind. As, indeed, do our very selves, the referents of 'I' supposedly encountered in introspection. However, natural though it is, this approach is a cul-de-sac: directing our attention to our state of mind tells us nothing about the *concepts* of seeing, believing, and the rest (cf. Wittgenstein 1958, §§314–16, p. 188). It gives no inkling of the network of relations in which the concepts are located and which fixes their place in the language, no inkling of what it makes sense to say by their means. For instance, such an exercise will not reveal that we can be said to have a belief even when fast asleep. Nor will it bring home to us the possibility of speaking of a creature as seeing without having to attribute to it an undisclosed mental state. Indeed, if the preoccupation with one's own case makes for a distorted account of human psychological phenomena, it risks making any animal variants utterly incomprehensible.

It is with respect to the language of sensation that this mistaken picture is especially familiar. How do we come by an understanding of this language? We supposedly concentrate on our sensations and read off their character as painful, as sensations of warmth, pressure, and so on. More generally, our mental life is presented as something which, in the first instance, we might report on, an array of thoughts and feelings there to be taken in much as we take in the scene before us, and commented upon, divulged, or not, as we see fit. In fact, the picture is one that is likely to hold us in its grip outside the area of the mind. If our concern is with concepts from a very different domain of discourse, as with space, time, mass, and force, we may find ourselves futilely staring at a clock or gazing into space as if somehow that was going to lead to a deeper understanding of these concepts.

At all events, one of the most striking features of Wittgenstein's approach to problems of philosophical psychology is to be found in the way phenomenological reflections give way to grammatical considerations, considerations which may at first strike us as ill-suited to telling us anything of substance about the nature of thought, say. So, thinking, understanding, meaning, and so forth, these are not going to give up their secrets to one who attends more closely to the deliverances of introspection; what is required is not a phenomenological, but a grammatical investigation: we are to consider the difference in behaviour between first and third person present uses of psychological verbs, the latter being verified by observation, the former not, but being akin to an expression; we are to consider how temporal notions apply; whether we can think in terms of genuine duration, of a beginning and an end; whether and how notions of location and causation apply; and so forth (Wittgenstein 1967 §§472, 488).

This attention to more formal characteristics was shared by Ryle, who in some respects took the analytical programme a stage further. Certainly, there is some movement in Ryle, found also in Austin, towards a more systematic development of pertinent distinctions and categories. Not an approach which Wittgenstein might be expected to favour unreservedly, but it can result in the clarity which he sought. Thus, the relevant apparatus of formal categories is treated to extensive discussion, with particular emphasis on categories which divide on, roughly, a temporal basis. So, on the one hand, varieties of state or disposition, as with capacities, tendencies, liabilities, and competences; on the other hand, various forms of occurrence or episode.

The grammatical reminders which Ryle assembles to make his points are many and various. Indeed, their richness, and the manner of their presentation, are very much Ryle's trademark. An example which captures something of the distinctive flavour of his approach is given with his discussion of knowledge and belief. Having put down some of the confusions surrounding 'know' and 'believe' to a failure to appreciate that these verbs do not signify occurrences, Ryle goes on to produce a whole thesaurus of qualifications aimed at showing how they are further to be distinguished from one another. To give you something of the flavour of his treatment, let me quote the following passage from *The Concept of Mind* (1949, pp. 133–4):

> 'Know' is a capacity verb, and a capacity verb of that special sort that is used for signifying that the person described can bring things off, or get things right. 'Believe', on the other hand, is a tendency verb and one which does not connote that anything is brought off or got right. 'Belief' can be qualified by such adjectives as 'obstinate', 'wavering', 'unswerving', 'unconquerable', 'stupid', 'fanatical, 'whole-hearted', 'intermittent', 'passionate' and 'childlike', adjectives some or all of which are also appropriate to such nouns as 'trust', 'loyalty', 'bent', 'aversion', 'hope', 'habit', 'zeal' and 'addiction'. Beliefs, like habits, can be inveterate, slipped into and given up; like partisanships, devotions and hopes they can be blind and obsessing; like aversions and phobias they can be unacknowledged; like fashions and tastes they can be contagious; like loyalties and animosities they can be induced by tricks. A person can be urged or entreated not to believe things, and he may try, with or without success, to cease to do so. Sometimes

> a person says truly 'I cannot help believing so and so'. But none of these dictions, or their negatives, are applicable to knowing, since to know is to be equipped to get something right and not to tend to act or react in certain manners.

In the light of his concern to develop such detailed contrasts, we might surmise that Ryle would have been happy to subscribe to the motto to which Wittgenstein was attached – namely, 'I will show you differences'. It is also noteworthy how he insists, as does Wittgenstein, on the variety of uses to which language is put. Leaving aside interrogative, imperative, and optative sentences, there remain many significant indicative sentences which have a function other than that of reporting facts (1949, p. 120). One of the most noteworthy of Ryle's analyses in accordance with this conception relates to the construal of certain forms of words as inference licences. This is so with, for instance, law statements, where his treatment is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's account of mathematical propositions in terms of rules: 'A law is used as, so to speak, an inference-ticket (a season ticket) which licenses its possessors to move from asserting factual statements to asserting other factual statements' (1949, p. 121). It is interesting to note Ryle's further comparison of laws to grammatical rules (ibid.).

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In *The Concept of Mind* Ryle states that 'this book as a whole is a discussion of the logical behaviour of some of the cardinal terms, dispositional and occurrent, in which we talk about minds' (1949, p. 126). One of the most fruitful of the distinctions which enters into this scheme concerns a subdivision of the occurrent into task and achievement verbs, a distinction which received extensive discussion some years back, but which now appears all but forgotten. Before indicating its possible uses in respect of issues of current interest, I shall illustrate the distinction in terms of the main topic to which it was applied by Ryle, namely to verbs of perception.

Suppose we ask ourselves what kind of process constitutes seeing. Is it to be described as psychological, as spiritual, as behavioural, as physiological, or what? Ryle's reply, at first sight disconcerting, is that seeing is none of these, since it is not a *process* of any kind. The notion of a process is the notion of something that continues *over* time, but seeing does not have a duration, however brief; rather, it is an occurrence which occurs *at* a point of time. More generally, we have, on the one hand, what Ryle calls 'tasks' – temporally extended activities, states or processes, such as running, treating, searching, and looking for something; on the other hand, we have happenings such as winning, curing, finding, and seeing, happenings which constitute the way such tasks terminate – what Ryle calls 'achievements' – and which occur *at* a moment of time (1949, pp. 149–53). Take the very general example of movement. While moving goes on over time, the same cannot be said for stopping. This is just the ceasing to be of the moving, not itself another enduring, though briefer, event. Compare the spatial parallel. The edge of a body is the edge of something physical, extended in three dimensions, but the edge is not itself thus describable; it is simply the limit of the body. Likewise with the body and its surface.

Ryle notes that the possibility of saying 'I have seen' as soon as one can say 'I see' testifies to the instantaneous character of seeing. Clearly, a happening which is without duration cannot exist in isolation any more than there can be a surface without a body, but whenever there is seeing there must be some temporally extended event of which the seeing is the limit, as might be given with *looking for* something. You have mislaid your keys. You cast your gaze about you, and your visual search successfully terminates with your seeing them. Unlike your looking, but like finding or arriving, the seeing is over and done with in an instant. Not being process words, experience words or activity words, such verbs as 'see', 'descry', and 'find' do not stand for perplexingly undetectable actions or reactions. They do not stand for performances, or ways of being occupied; *a fortiori* they do not stand for secret performances, of ways of being privily occupied (1949, p. 152). Once more the difference between the two categories is brought home by appeal to the qualifications which make sense with the one but not the other, as with the adverbs proper to task verbs – 'carefully', 'attentively', 'pertinaciously', and so forth – which are not generally appropriate to achievement verbs (1949, p. 152).

This analysis has met with understandable objections. It is not correct to claim that seeing cannot go on *over* time: we frequently say such things as that we saw something for a full minute. However, this does not render the account worthless. It is not uncommon for a verb to allow of both a task and an achievement use – as might have been noted with respect to 'stop' – and a more elaborate scheme might credit 'see' with both. In devising such a scheme we might also generalise the notions of task and achievement. Tasks involve trying, and achievements involve success, but if our concern is with the basic contrast in temporal terms, we could do away with such restrictions. We might also, for the same reason, extend the category of achievements to embrace episodes which begin, as well as with those that end, an enduring state, an extension which Ryle subsequently acknowledged with his talk of verbs which 'declare a terminus' (1954, p. 103). What makes for the significance of an achievement is its lack of duration. Whether it occurs as the first or as the last point of a temporally extended state, its distinctive character vis-à-vis that state is essentially the same. In either case the difference is not one of degree, of relative duration, but we have to do with a distinct logical category.

Returning to the example of seeing, we note that much seeing does not arise as a successful termination of a search – think of seeing the scene about you on waking up – and here it is more illuminating to regard the achievement use as signalling the *initial* point of an extended state. When we see our bedroom on awakening we *become* aware of the room – an achievement – and we can *continue* to see the room – task use – for a period of time.

It is interesting to note that Wittgenstein ran afoul of Ryle's analysis of seeing when he wrote that the 'essential thing about seeing is that it is a *state*' (1980, §44). Given that Ryle's account has to be modified to accommodate non-achievement uses of 'see', we may be inclined to side here with Wittgenstein, but I think that, while there may be uses where it is appropriate to speak of a state, there is something in the character of 'see' which Wittgenstein did not spot and which Ryle made clearer with his delineation of the achievement category.

An important concept to which the notion of an achievement has application is that of understanding. While not contradicting Wittgenstein's discussion of this concept, the notion, in its extended sense, can be usefully invoked in sharpening Wittgenstein's account. In that account, Wittgenstein's aim was in part to show that the appeal to mental processes has nothing to offer by way of clarifying the concept (1958, §§149–55). Instead of moving in this direction, intuitively appealing though it is, Wittgenstein draws attention to the affinities of understanding with a capacity or an ability. You show that you understand the differential calculus in a variety of ways – notably by solving problems using this technique and explaining it to others. What matters is what you *can do*, not what thoughts or images should accompany or proceed the exercise of the ability.

So construed, understanding is clearly a state which may continue over the years, but is there not also an *act* of understanding, an act which might be reported with a triumphant 'Now I understand!', and what might these words report if not a *mental* act? Take understanding language. Our understanding of words might be said to be dispositional, something that is repeatedly brought into play as the occasion arises. Understanding a sentence, on the other hand, involves grasping the meaning of an assemblage of words which we may have never before encountered. This is now a matter, not of a capacity, disposition, or ability, but of an occurrent episode. We there and then make sense of something that someone has put to us. Such an objection appears to be presented in the following remarks by Michael Dummett:

> Grasping a sense, understood dispositionally, is evidently not a mental act, but a kind of ability: and this tallies with Wittgenstein's dictum that understanding, which he expressly compares to an ability, is not a mental process. But Frege allowed that, while thoughts are not mental contents, grasping a thought is a mental act, although one directed towards something external to the mind; and he must here be construing the notion of grasping a thought in its occurrent sense. Wittgenstein strove to dispel the idea that there is an occurrent sense of 'understand': but it is difficult to see how this can be successfully maintained. We cannot, for instance, simply reduce the conception of understanding an utterance to that of hearing it while possessing a dispositional understanding of the relevant words and constructions: for it is possible to be perplexed by a sentence on first hearing, through a failure to take in its structure, and to achieve an understanding of it on reflection. (1981, pp. 274–5)

The question is how we are to interpret the claim that there is an 'occurrent' sense of 'understand'. If we are required to acknowledge an occurrent mental *act*, then presumably what is occurrent must take some time, however short, to accomplish. Allying understanding to such a conception would doubtless attract Wittgenstein's criticisms, much as with the corresponding conception of *meaning* something as an occurrent mental act. On the other hand, if 'occurrent' is not tied to the notion of a happening which takes time, but mere datability or episodic character is enough, then we need acknowledge no more than is given with an achievement. This is not a category which, as far as I know, Wittgenstein explicitly acknowledges, but if understanding is, for him, an enduring state or disposition, it is a state or disposition which we can meaningfully speak of as dating from a certain point, and in so far as an occurrence might be said to be bound up with an initial point, it is not something which Wittgenstein would, presumably, wish to deny. Moreover, such forms as 'I've got it!' or 'Now I understand!', which are so inviting as reports of a mental act, are readily allotted the job of signalling an achievement, the dawning of understanding, where it is precisely the extended state whose beginning is thereby signalled. What is then announced is not some elusive mental act tacked on to the subsequent state; it is simply the onset, the coming into being, of the requisite ability. What should pass through the person's mind when he declares that he understands, what might be a mental preliminary to the subsequent state, is of no great consequence for the truth of that declaration, but the crucial question is whether the speaker has the ability, the capacity, to which he has laid claim with his avowal. To echo *Philosophical Investigations*, p. 218: no inner happening could have the *consequences* needed to constitute understanding, since no such happening could ensure that the requisite cluster of abilities had come into being.

In this example, then, there is an episodic happening which has to be acknowledged, but which proves to be no more than the beginning of an enduring state. Moreover, if it can be called a *mental* episode, it is not a mental *act*, if this is, like musing or reflecting, something that takes time, and it is questionable whether 'mental' is appropriate. That, surely, depends on the character of the state initiated. To the extent that this is an ability to do certain things, 'mental' may not give the best characterisation.

I turn now to a second topic which can profit from considerations concerning status as an achievement verb. This is the problem of mind–body causation. Many contemporary discussions in this area show a total disregard for grammatical considerations. It is supposed that, if the question is whether thoughts, desires, decisions, or intentions can be causes of behaviour, the appropriate procedure is to construct a theory in which they have such a role, a theory which is to be judged in terms of its explanatory fruitfulness just like any scientific theory. No attention is given to the more fundamental question whether it makes sense to speak of a thought, say, as causing anything. We shall look at the grammatical question as this arises with one central concept, that of *decision*.

Are decisions ever causes of actions? To claim that they are not may be thought to make nonsense of our beliefs about the importance of reaching the *right* decision:

> I would not trouble to struggle over a difficult decision were it not for the conviction that the decision, once formed, would *matter*: i.e., would causally determine other parts of my behaviour, including its more obviously overt aspects like its effects, often physical, upon other people. (McCracken 1952, p. 169)

Again, that deciding to move, say, can have one's moving as an effect may be thought so evident, we have no alternative but to tailor our theory of causation to accommodate this truth (Mellor 1995, p. 2). We should certainly be loath to give up the idea that how we decide may matter, and at first sight there seems much to be said for the suggestion that it is as a cause that a decision has what importance it has in this connection. Actions do not just follow on decisions, they follow on as their upshot, and what can this mean if not that they are brought about by the decisions? You agonise over a difficult choice; you reach a decision; you act. What other than your decision might reasonably be supposed to have instigated your action? It is far from clear that we can dismiss a causal role for deciding while at the same time trusting to the perception we have of its significance.

There are two kinds of decision that might be at issue here, decisions to act and decisions that something is so. The former is our main concern, and the suggestion of a causal role, while inviting in the abstract, becomes much less so when set against instances of this kind. If asked why you are cutting back the hedge you will hardly reply: because I decided to. Since the decision does not itself constitute your reason for acting, even those who believe that reasons are causes are as yet without grounds for thinking that the lot of decisions. Similarly, a reference to intention may explain something, make something clear – 'It wasn't an accident, I really meant to do it' – but 'Because I intended to' would not be offered in explaining *why* one acted.

More importantly, however, a decision does not appear to be the kind of happening which *could* cause anything, for a reason which by now will not be hard to guess: deciding belongs with achievements; 'decide' is a verb which declares a terminus. From the time when a decision is reached we can look back to a period when we were in two minds about a course of action, and forwards to a state of determination or resolution. The moment of decision is both the end point of the period of indecision and the initial point of a period of firmness of purpose, a point which, unlike these extended periods, is quite without duration. If, then, deciding is merely making a transition to a certain frame of mind, then we have with the decision no more the cause of the action than the beginning of a movement is the cause of that movement, or the onset of old age is the cause of old age. True, the formation of an intention, the taking of a decision to do something, brings with it a systematic change in our attitudes to possibilities of action, but this bringing with it is not a matter of causing such change; the change in attitude is just what the having of the intention consists in. We become liable to favour courses of action which may be thought to increase our chances of success, which make it easier to carry out the intention when the time comes. Similarly, our reaction to possibilities which might frustrate the intention is different from what it would have been had we not taken the decision. With the decision our pattern of responses aligns itself with the intention, this redirection in many cases being effected without our taking further decisions: we simply act in a way appropriate to the demands of the situation and in the light of the intention. To repeat, in saying this I am seeking to explain what it is to have an intention, not what intentions commonly cause. There is doubtless some indeterminacy in the matter of what intending demands, but the shift in our attitude to possibilities of action is a mark of having an intention, not something contingently related thereto, something which is seen to be bound up with the intention only by being found to be somehow generated by it. Nor, correspondingly, is the relation between deciding and the subsequent readiness to act a causal relation, but deciding just *is* becoming ready to act. With our decision we move from irresolution to resolution. The decision marks the point of transition, the beginning of the latter state rather than its cause.

So how *does* the mind link up with behaviour? As a durationless happening, deciding might be held to have no reality. That would be wrong, but it is true that it is dependent on the extended state whose inception it marks, and what it marks in general is the beginning of an intention to act. With intention, moreover, the link with behaviour is plain. So, after some dithering you announce that you have decided to put in for a job. If you genuinely have decided, then we shall expect certain action from you; to such a point that, if you do not do certain things, we shall not be able to reconcile your inactivity with your declared decision. You announce your decision, the means for carrying it through are made available, yet you do nothing. Perhaps you are having second thoughts, perhaps something more dramatic has happened to inhibit you. At all events, without some explanation of your failure to act we shall justifiably doubt that you did decide in the way you claim, or at least that you still have the intention that this would give rise to. The relationships here are as with the more general notion of wanting to do something. There are various senses of ‘want’, but in one common use we can rightly say that a person who failed to act did not really want to do so, whatever he should say. If the action was not within his power then of course we do not draw this conclusion from his failure, but if it is, if he has the opportunity, if there is nothing he regards as more desirable which acting thus would preclude, then we are at a loss to know what wanting might mean in the face of inaction. To sum up, then, thought, in the form of decision, impinges upon behaviour through its relation to a behavioural disposition, a readiness to do certain things, the possibility that a state of mind can be at the same time of this character being what provides the bridge between the mental and the behavioural. And crucially, the relation between deciding and the subsequent readiness to act is not a causal relation, but the deciding just *is* the becoming ready to act.

If decisions do not cause our intentions, what do? It is true that many intentions do not result from our having made up our minds to act. As I read, I turn the pages of the book, and I do so intentionally. Not as the result of weighing up the possibilities and coming down in favour of turning the pages, but the intentional character of my behaviour is revealed when it goes wrong, when what I do is not what I meant to do, as when I mistakenly turn two pages rather than a single page. But whether or not my intention is prefaced by a decision, there is surely something that causes the intention. After all, we can ask why I intend to act, and to answer that surely demands the specification of a cause. However, in answer to the why-question, we would surely detail what acting in the way intended is hoped to lead to; a matter of the consequences of fulfilling the intention rather than of its origins. Very well, but we still have the latter to consider. So how did it come about that I intended to act? This takes us directly to matters of what I want and what I consider possible to achieve. So, I intend to turn off the lamp. That is something I want, something I find sufficiently desirable to try to bring about, something within my power and not a rival to some other course of action which I want more. So how do I come to have the desire that is at the heart of my intention? Once more a why-question here may take us in the direction of specifying the supposed advantages in acting in the way proposed: I wanted to turn off the lamp because I found its light glaring, or as serving no purpose. Reasons follow reasons here, but eventually we may have to say that such-and-such is simply something we do not like, and nor do we know why. There is no guarantee that we shall emerge from such analytical observations as that we find the glare painful, and that is why we want to get rid of it. But I suggest that our engagement in causal issues, if it takes place at all, takes place at the end of our investigation. It is not an inescapable starting point that dictates the shape of subsequent questions and answers.

It is interesting how both the examples we have considered have enlisted grammatical considerations in furtherance of something like Ryle's more general project. We acknowledge episodic happenings, as associated with the verbs ‘understand’ and ‘decide’, but we refuse these happenings the standing of substantive mental acts which might stand to any subsequent behaviour as cause to effect. Rather, attention shifts to the extended state or disposition whose initial points these verbs may signify in their episodic uses, and in elucidating these states and dispositions an appeal to behaviour will surely be central. Which is just what Ryle’s more general programme would hope to establish.

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