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PROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHY

The Concept of Mind

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## THE CONCEPT OF MIND

FADE UP

1. Problems of Philosophy  
A Third Level Arts Course
2. QUESTION MARK ANIMATION
3. The Concept of Mind
4. A discussion between  
Professor Gilbert Ryle  
University of Oxford  
and  
Susan Haack  
University of Warwick
5. Introduced by  
Professor Godfrey Vesey

6. MCU VESEY  
(sitting at desk)

7. BCU Book

8. MCU VESEY

ZOOM IN to  
CU VESEY

VESEY: In 1949 this book was published. It's one of the most influential philosophy books published in this country since the war. The Concept of Mind by Gilbert Ryle. In it Professor Ryle attacks what he calls 'the Official Doctrine' about the concept of mind. He says it comes chiefly from Descartes.

What is this doctrine? Well, suppose we ask 'How does intelligent behaviour differ from mere bodily movement?' According to the official doctrine the difference is in something preceding, or accompanying, the bodily movement - something that causes the movement to occur. And this cause of the movement is thought of as something the person

does on another plane of existence, so to speak - on a mental or, as Ryle describes it, a 'ghostly' plane. In The Concept of Mind Ryle suggests how Descartes may have been led to postulate these ghostly causes. People like Gassendi and Hobbes had reduced man to the status of something to be explained by the principles of mechanical causation. Descartes couldn't accept that, and yet he couldn't get away from the idea that some sort of causal explanation was what was needed. Ryle describes Descartes' position like this.

ZOOM OUT to  
MCU VESEY

(PICKS UP BOOK)

"He had mistaken the logic of his problem. Instead of asking by what criteria intelligent is actually distinguished from non-intelligent behaviour, he asked - 'given that the principle of mechanical causation does not tell us the difference, what other causal principles will tell it us?'. He realised that the problem was not one of mechanics and assumed that it must therefore be one of some counterpart to mechanics."

(PUTS BOOK ON TABLE)

In this programme, Susan Haack, Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Warwick, asks Professor Ryle about some of the main themes of his book. This was a long discussion - as philosophical discussions tend to be - and we've chosen the three parts which are most relevant to the correspondence material. Susan Haack begins by asking Professor Ryle precisely what he thinks Descartes was up to.

- 9. CU HAACK  
(sitting on settee)
- 10. CU RYLE  
(sitting in armchair)
- 11. CU HAACK

I'm not altogether clear whether you take Descartes, or perhaps we should say dualists in general, to be trying (and indeed if this is what they were trying to do they would, as you say, be failing) to distinguish between intelligent behaviour and non-intelligent behaviour by appealing to ghostly causes, the ghostly cause being an extra thing, such that if the action has it that makes it intelligent, if it doesn't it makes it non-intelligent. Or whether you'd accept that what Descartes and other dualists are trying to do (and this is what I think they're trying to do) is - given that we've made this distinction, to explain it.

12. CU RYLE

I don't think I'm going to mind about this one very much, I think Descartes, and the others at the time, had both objectives in view. One was they wanted to dish some contemporary reductionists, as we can call them - people like Hobbes and Gassendi, and so on - and so they did indeed want to say there's more to a man than his muscles and his muscular movements and so on, and what more? Oh, it's non-muscular actions, etc. So it was partly as a, partly a piece of inflationism to repair a piece of unwarranted deflationism. But it was also, as you quite rightly say, that they wanted to explain what the difference was between, say, me signing a cheque in my sleep, which I might do, and me signing a cheque in order to bequeath my wealth to a charity.

13. MCU HAACK

Yes. Now I think that they were at least also trying to explain and not simply to distinguish is apparent from the fact that Descartes clearly finds it embarrassing that he has to explain how the mental acts on the physical.

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: And if appeal to the fact that there was this mental event going on was

simply to distinguish the intelligent from the non-intelligent, that wouldn't be such an embarrassing question.

RYLE: No.

HAACK: If on the other hand it has to explain the intelligent behaviour...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...it becomes an embarrassment...

14. CU RYLE

RYLE: It becomes embarrassing, yes. Certainly.

15. MCU HAACK

HAACK: Indeed this seems to me to be precisely because it's so embarrassing, this is one of the most serious difficulties...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...with dualism. In a way the dualist, I suppose, is in a sort of dilemma, in that for, for explanation he appeals to postulation of these mental events. If he doesn't say that they interact with the physical, it's very hard to see what job they're doing. They're just sort of dangling, and why bother, they're only a problem. Whereas if, as it seems he almost has to, he says they do interact, he has this

awfully embarrassing question 'how' and no principles of interaction whatever to appeal to.

16. BCU RYLE

RYLE: No. In fact he's ruled them out by the terms in which he's set the question.

17. CU VESEY

ZOOM OUT to  
MCU VESEY

VESEY: It's one thing to say that Descartes was wrong about the analysis of intelligent behaviour. It's quite another to say what the correct analysis should be. If doing something - for example, signing a cheque or kicking a goal - isn't to be explained in terms of something extra the person does, something he does in his mind to bring about certain bodily movements, how is it to be explained?

This connects up with another question. What exactly is meant by the term 'behaviour'? There have been philosophers - A.J. Ayer for instance - who want to restrict 'behaviour' to mere bodily movement. Is this justified?

Having questioned him about Descartes' views, Susan Haack went on to ask Professor Ryle about his own views on these questions.

18. BCU HAACK

HAACK: Would I be representing you correctly if I said that you propose

that all those sentences which ostensibly refer to mental entities could and should be re-written, so that we might perhaps begin with a categorical statement about, apparently about a mental event, and that we should translate this thing, re-write it into a hypothetical or perhaps a quasi-hypothetical sentence which contains no terms which even ostensibly refer to mental entities but which only refer to behaviour? Would that be a fair way...?

19. BCU RYLE

RYLE: I want to take two precautions here. One is I think I didn't give nearly enough kinds of alternative re-wordings in the book. I think I've got a much richer stock now to go on with. I'll educe a few in a minute or two. And the other is this beastly word 'behaviour'. Now sometimes the word 'behaviour' is used in the most non-committal way possible, i.e. for the irreducible minimum which might distinguish what one person is doing from what another person is doing, e.g. purely muscular motions, or changes of colour, or shudderings, and things of that sort. Then quite often, you know, we slide back into using the word 'behaviour' as we ordinarily use it when



we say that throwing a rotten egg at your mother is bad behaviour, this is bad conduct, and this... and you're not here at all grumbling about the muscular movements that went to it, but the action as an action of unfilial offensiveness. Well now, it's the latter which is the natural use of the word 'behaviour'. But still, the fashion has grown up of using the word 'behaviour' for what behaviourists say that they believe only in.

20. CU HAACK

HAACK: There is a, there is a rather clear motivation for this.

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: I mean, I agree, on the unhappy shift, surely, which is that persons who used 'behaviour' in the way you don't care for, are apt to want to make what they're talking about as observable as possible...

RYLE: Yes. Yes.

HAACK: ...and to pare off from it...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...all those factors which might be thought not observable...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...where of course, observable is going to suffer from precisely the sort of range...

RYLE: Yes, yes.

HAACK: ...that behaviour does. I mean, there is a clear sense in which I can observe you...

RYLE: Yes, yes.

HAACK: ...throwing eggs at the speaker or something...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: Yes.

21. BCU RYLE:

RYLE: Let's take a case where, which isn't yet a body/mind case, but parallel to it in one or two ways, where we're inclined to say that some people would want to reduce something to something else and some people would say this reduction was wrong. I'm going to take the case where a person who is described, you see, as kicking a goal in football. And somebody says kicking a goal in football is nothing but propelling a ball with your foot so that it then flies between two posts, which are called goal posts. That's all that kicking a goal is. Then somebody says...

HAACK: Provided they aren't your goalposts? Presumably.

RYLE: Sorry?

22. BCU HAACK

HAACK: Provided they aren't your goalposts? Presumably.

23. BCU RYLE

RYLE: Well, I was going to say, provided they aren't your goalposts, provided it isn't a ping-pong ball which you've just fetched out of your pocket, provided that the game has begun and hasn't finished and there isn't an interval on at the time, provided that you haven't strolled in from an adjacent football field to have a little goal kicking practice despite the fact there's a game going on, provided that you're not off-side, and so on. Well, then, you see, the reduction of kicking a goal to just propelling a ball with your foot is beginning to look rather phoney. And now you ask, and what are these extra things that have been mentioned (provided that you're not off-side, provided that there isn't an interval, and so on), these are not extra things that the footballer is doing.

HAACK: Right.

RYLE: They're extra qualifications upon what he's doing without which he hasn't

kicked a goal. But they aren't extra things which he's doing. So, to be rude to Descartes, not for the first time: Descartes might say, "Well, kicking a goal doesn't consist merely in propelling a ball with your foot between two sticks, it's that and doing something else as well, but a non-muscular thing! And then he makes it a spiritual thing, you see, and of course that doesn't do any good either. It isn't an extra action that's wanted, it's extra qualifications on the action without which it won't be kicking a goal.

24. CU HAACK

HAACK: Yes indeed, I mean, that would be perfectly clear from a parallel that's a slightly different case. One could, I imagine, concoct a machine ingenious enough to, one would have to Christen it, to sign its name...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: For example, and this machine could, could write its name. But it couldn't, unless we told an exceedingly complicated legal story, do such a thing as, I don't know, sign its Will.

RYLE: No, no.

HAACK: And this not because it was failing to do some special mysterious

ghostly thing, but simply because it wasn't embedded in a suitable legal context.

RYLE: Yes, yes. Certainly.

HAACK: I imagine that in a situation in which machines could own property and pass it on it would become possible...

RYLE: Yes, yes.

HAACK: ...for it to do that, wouldn't it?

25. CU RYLE

RYLE: Yes, and those conditions have got to be satisfied.

26. CU VESEY

VESEY: Could I just sum up that last bit? We think of signing a Will as something a person can do, but not as something a machine can do. Now why? According to Descartes: because it involves some mysterious ghostly thing, which is peculiar to people. According to Ryle: because we don't have conventions about machines owning property and so on. Ryle's procedure here is to explain what is involved in doing something in such a way that we no longer need Descartes' story about something mental preceding or accompanying the doing. I think this works for things like kicking goals and

signing cheques, but aren't there some things for which it doesn't work? Take imagining for instance. We talk of people imagining things, but we don't talk of machines imagining things. Why not? Isn't it because imagining is seeing in your mind's eye, and you can't see something in your mind's eye if you haven't got a mind - and machines haven't got minds. In other words imagining, on the face of it, seems to cry out for a Descartes type analysis. So it's understandable that Susan Haack should ask Professor Ryle how he can explain imagining in a way which doesn't mean surrendering some territory at least to Descartes.

27. CU HAACK

HAACK: I think we could connect what we've just been talking about with some parts of The Concept of Mind. For example, you discussed visualising or imaging at some length, and if we take the example, which is yours, of someone quotes seeing Helvellyn, you offer some analysis of X fancying that he sees Helvellyn...

28. CU RYLE

29. CU HAACK

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...and of X pretending that he sees Helvellyn, each of which come out in behavioural terms rather neatly.

I think one can't help feeling that there's a set of cases, and what's more an important set of cases, which have somehow fallen down the middle of these. And if we take the analysis that you do give - I know what it's like to pretend to see Helvellyn, I mean you and I are on a mountain walk and you're flagging and I'm making a great show to you and saying 'There it is - not far to go', and that's pretending to see it...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: Fancying that I see it is at least being disposed to be taken in. But there are cases of visualising where one isn't putting on a performance for anyone else, nor is one at all disposed to be taken in. Now, first of all, I have a feeling that these cases have somehow not received their fair share of attention from you. And secondly that they do have - that there are facts about them which suggest that appeal to the physiological may not be entirely irrelevant at this point. I mean if I were, for example, to appeal to a very old experiment like that of Perky... who invited his experimentees to visualise a specified item at a particular point on a ground glass

30. BCU RYLE

screen that they were offered. As

31. CU HAACK

I understand it the upshot of this experiment is that while inviting them to visualise a specified item there, there was projected, extremely faintly, a picture of that sort of item, and although the subjects weren't aware there was indeed this picture they were disposed to report that the particular item they'd visualised was in relevant respects like the one that was projected.

RYLE: Oh, yes.

HAACK: But if invited to visualise a book...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...they would report in all innocence that they'd visualised a blue one...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...when there had actually been an exceedingly faint...

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: ...picture there. Now this suggests that there's more connection between 'seeing' something and 'seeing something' than you allow and it suggests to me that there might be room



for a further explanation.

32. BCU RYLE

RYLE: Ah, well now, I'm certainly going to say that the central ice in that chapter about...

HAACK: Imaging.

RYLE: ...imaging is very, very thin. But I'm not going to allow that the way to thicken it up would be to say: well, really, seeing in your mind's eye and seeing things with your eyes open have got much more in common than I had supposed, that really seeing in your mind's eye is three quarter seeing, or half seeing, or being a bit active in the retina, or something of the sort.

HAACK: That would be faintly seeing or dimly seeing.

RYLE: Sorry?

33. MCU HAACK

HAACK: That would be faintly seeing or dimly seeing.

34. BCU RYLE

RYLE: Faintly seeing or embryonic seeing or something of the sort. It wouldn't be seeing in quotes, i.e. seeing in your mind's eye.

35. MCU RYLE

VESEY: Susan Haack then asks Gilbert Ryle: if 'seeing in your mind's eye' wouldn't be faintly seeing, what would it be?

RYLE: Well I haven't got the final answer. I think I, I think I can thicken the ice a little bit but not enough to satisfy me. Certainly a person who suddenly sees in his mind's eye his mother's face, or certainly a person who just runs through in his head a tune without humming it or playing it or anything of the sort, we want to say that he is seeing so and so in his mind's eye or hearing so and so if you like in his mind's ear, but here there's no question of his going through any motions - the motions of so and soing as in pretending, nor is he reacting in the way in which a person who fancies that he is ill is behaving in an anxious way and so on. So here there seems to be something describable perfectly definitely by the man himself, but no behavioural filling to be given. Well what I would do if I hadn't decided indolently to leave the question to other people - an invitation which they don't seem to be very quick to take up - would be develop an idea which I did mention in the C. of M. but I don't quite remember what I said about it now. One's rather apt to suppose that behaviour either in the technical sense or the untechnical sense always involves

ZOOM IN to  
BCU RYLE

some visible movement or some visible bodily change. But now this is forgetting that there are a great number of things that in a sense we do which are perfectly passive and I'll simply give as an example, for example, waiting on the platform. What is the difference between person A who is waiting on the platform waiting for a train and person B who is standing still on the same platform until the rain is over? We certainly want to say: one's waiting for a train, the other is keeping dry. And there's no muscular difference between the two because neither is moving at all. However, we do want to say there's something they're both doing and we describe what they're doing in positive terms. One is waiting for the train to Reading the other is hanging around to keep dry until the shower is over. Well, there are plenty of other kinds of, if you like, 'non-actions' like refraining. Supposing you say something very impertinent to me at a dinner party and I'm rather inclined to come back with a very crisp retort, and then I think I'd better not - wait 'til afterwards, and so I hold my tongue. Now if I hold my tongue there need be no muscular

movement visible and no noise audible and yet holding my tongue isn't simply, isn't describable simply as not making any noise - it is deliberately not making a noise of a very particular sort, which I could indeed perhaps quote afterwards. I was about to say to you so and so. Well what I'd like to do is to see whether I couldn't, by developing this notion of negative inert behaviour, find a place for the non-behaviour that goes with e.g. hearing a tune running through your head or seeing your mother's face in your mind's eye. Whether it could be done or not I don't know, but that's what I'd like to try out. Because otherwise one's left with, so to speak, a Cartesian relic, something which seems to be mental and hasn't got any thickening behind it.

36. CU HAACK

HAACK: Do you think that the refraining suggestion is perhaps more likely to be successful in the case where your mother's face pops into your mind's eye, rather than the case where you, so to speak, call it up? One can, one can try to visualise so and so.

RYLE: Yes.

HAACK: Or so and so's face can just pop into one's mind?

37. CU RYLE

RYLE: Yes. I think so. You see the case that I gave was when I was inclined to come out with a very crisp retort and here I held it back, but this was a very specific action. I held back not just rude words in general but the following five rude words that I can now quote to you. So here there were five words which I refrained from uttering but the camera wouldn't have registered anything, nor would the tape recorder.

38. 3-s. HAACK/VESEY/RYLE

VESEY: Well, I'm afraid we're going to have to refrain from uttering any more words, rude or otherwise, because our time is just about up. I would just like to say how glad I am that we have been able to add a little bit to The Concept of Mind on the subject of visualising.

39. Taking part were  
Professor Gilbert Ryle  
and  
Susan Haack

40. Introduced by  
Professor Godfrey Vesey

41. Lighting Cameraman    A.A. Englander  
Sound Recordist        Andrew Boulter  
Film Editor             Adam Dawson

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Mary Hoskins

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