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FILM SCRIPTOUF.153Project No: 00525/3019A.303/2THE OPEN UNIVERSITYPROBLEMS OF PHILOSOPHYOther Minds

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FILMED IN LONDON

OTHER MINDS

FADE UP

1. Problems of Philosophy
A Third Level Arts Course

2. QUESTION MARK ANIMATION

3. Other Minds

4. A discussion between
Sir Alfred Ayer
Wykeham Professor of Logic,
University of Oxford
and
Godfrey Vesey
Professor of Philosophy

5. 2-s. AYER/VESEY

VESEY: Can we agree on what the
'other minds' problem is. If words
like 'pain' and 'sadness' have meaning
for me in virtue of standing for
something I experience inwardly, how
can they also mean something which
I don't experience inwardly, such as
other people's pain and sadness?
Would you agree with that statement?

7. CU AYER

AYER: It's certainly part of the
problem. I think there are two parts
of the problem. First, how can I
attach meaning to attributing
experiences to persons other than
myself, and, secondly, given that this
is meaningful, how can I have any right
to believe they are having experiences?
I think there are two parts of the
problem.

8. CU VESEY

VESEY: You do, in fact, distinguish these two parts in the Problem of Knowledge.

9. CU AYER

AYER: I believe I did, yes. I can't remember now exactly what I said, but certainly I think that they are connected but distinguishable.

10. CU VESEY

VESEY: Now I think that the difference between us is going to be that, I think, that the way of tackling the problem, as I stated it, is to question whether words do have, these sort of words, do have meaning for me in virtue of standing for things I experience inwardly; whereas I think you accept that statement of what I call the 'meaning problem' and would go on to try and answer it in the terms in which it's stated.

11. BCU AYER

AYER: Well, yes. I mean I certainly do think that my understanding of words like 'pain', 'pleasure', 'anxiety', and any mental words, does derive certainly from my having certain experiences. I certainly hold that. And I think there's no question of that. But are you, are you disposed to dispute it?

12. CU VESEY

VESEY: It seems to me that these notions, like 'pain', and 'sadness', and so on, only have meaning for a person if he can do two things: he can both use them of himself but also use them of other people. And I'm not saying that one comes before the other. I think the Cartesians do rather suggest that 'first person' uses of psychological words come first and that then there's the problem of how to apply them to others.

13. CU AYER

AYER: Well it's complicated isn't it? I mean, clearly a child learns to use words like this by being in such situations where his parents, or his nurse or whoever, tell him, "Oh, it must have hurt so much", and because they observe him showing signs of pain, and then he comes to understand what 'hurting' is through having the feeling. And also he's told of other people whose similar behaviour, they're in pain also, and in some way he attributes the same feeling to them. Now I'm not sure of the question of 'which comes first?' makes much **sense** here. I mean, what I certainly want to claim is that unless he had these feelings, he wouldn't understand the word. And certainly he's

taught the word, the meaning of the word, in social situations. What I claim is that one can detach the word from the social situation from which one learns it, and make it refer simply to the actual experience.

14. CU VESEY

VESEY: So you do make the situation the sort of primary thing?

15. CU AYER

ZOOM IN SLIGHTLY

AYER: Well yes, I, you see, disagree with Wittgenstein and the Cartesians in supposing that the world is somehow saddled with the situation which is learnt. It seems to me that the fact that a situation is or, anyhow, comes to be irrelevant to its meaning.

16. BCU VESEY

VESEY: I think I disagree with Wittgensteinians insofar as they may suggest that the 'other person' use is primary. I mean I think there are some things which Malcolm says which lend themselves to this interpretation, and I disagree with that. But I would make what we've just called the 'situation' the primary thing and out of this situation emerge the two different uses: the 'first person' use and the 'other person' use.

17. BCU AYER

AYER: But do you want to make them different? I mean do you want to say that when I say of myself, "I'm in pain", and when you say of me, "I'm - he is in pain", and we are both speaking truly, we aren't referring to the same fact?

18. CU VESEY

VESEY: No indeed, we are referring to the same fact. I'm not going to go into - I'm not a behaviourist!

19. BCU AYER

AYER: You're not a behaviourist?

20. CU VESEY

VESEY: I'm not a behaviourist, no.

21. BCU AYER

AYER: And if you are not a behaviourist then you can't then suppose that, "He's in pain", said by me of you, refers only to your behaviour - it refers to something else besides, namely to a feeling I attribute to you. Then the question is: what is the connection between the two and what justification have I in attributing the feeling to you on the basis of your behaviour?

22. CU VESEY

VESEY: I think it's that I don't go along with the language which talks of referring to the word having meaning in virtue of referring to something.

I think I question this, this, this way of talking - for probably Wittgensteinian reasons.

23. BCU AYER

AYER: But I mean, all right, let's give up the word 'referring' if this bothers you. I am saying of you that you are in a certain mental state. And I'm saying it on the basis of your exhibiting certain behaviour, you're, you're showing certain physical signs, perhaps including you're uttering certain words, making certain noises. Now this is in your view not an entailment. It doesn't follow from the fact that you simply, physical signs that you are in this state, and if it's not an entailment there must therefore be some other relation and I want to say, I think, that one is inductively connected with the other. It is a sign of factual influence that very often, as often as not, when people behave they do have these feelings, and I want to put, justify it in this way. Now, you, I think, disagree with this, but I can't work out what your position is.

24. 2s. AYER/VESEY

VESEY: Well I don't want to be driven into the position of having to choose between it's being an inductive

25. CU AYER

relationship involving an argument from analogy, and it's being an entailment relationship involving my being a behaviourist. I don't think one has to be driven into that.....

26. 2s. AYER/VESEY

AYER: Well if you, if you are not going to be driven to this position, or think you don't have to be driven into it, then you must provide some third possibility. What is it?

27. CU AYER

VESEY: Well, I think that it, to account for this one has to consider what sort of question. The question, "Does something have a mind?". One has to consider this question and relate it to, to questions that might be asked about other people. Whether, whether, whether Freddie Ayer has a mind. Now the latter question is the philosophical one. I think that I would characterise the philosophical question in this way: the question, "Has this thing a mind?", where we're confronted with something that's come from outer space, let's say.

28. 2s. AYER/VESEY

AYER: Yes. Well, let's take this dog. He hasn't come, in fact, from outer space. Has he got a mind?

29. CU AYER

30. CU DOG

31. CU AYER

32. 2s. AYER/VESEY

VESEY: All right, this dog. Now the way in which I'd answer the question, "Has this dog got a mind?", would be, would be to see in what way it resembled human beings. And if we could if we could somehow teach it to communicate with us, and not in the way in which dogs do communicate but in some rather more sophisticated way, then I think we would seriously start considering that the dog has a mind. Now the point is this, that the way in which we settle the question, "Has this thing, this dog, a mind?", is by comparing it with human beings.

33. CU AYER

34. CU DOG

35. CU AYER

AYER: Well is it? Yes, to a certain extent you're right, but it's not perhaps quite so elaborate as that. I mean I call it and it answers me: therefore it hears. So it has in some sense perceptions. I hit it, I don't, but if I were to hit it, it would squeal, and so it shows, this would be an indication that it, that it suffers pain, and so on. Clearly I'm not going to attribute anything of this sort to this chair because it doesn't react in the same sort of way. Now the question surely is, "What am I doing when I do this?". I mean when I call to it and it

responds and I, I say, "She hears me", is this simply saying, "Yes, she does respond and she always responds". Is this simply fitting into a pattern of her behaviour or am I going a little beyond this and attributing to her not only behaviour but also, well I use the old-fashioned word, consciousness. Now I, I think here, take the old-fashioned view, and I can't make out whether you take it or not. You seem to me to be hedging it if I may say so without being offensive.

36. CU VESEY

VESEY: No, by all means. If I may

37. CU AYER

develop the line that I was just

ZOOM IN

starting:

to answer the

question, "Has this dog a mind?", we

38. CU VESEY

compare it with human beings.....

39. CU AYER

AYER: Yes, I.....

40. CU VESEY

VESEY: ..in what respect it's like human beings. Now my saying this doesn't mean that I have to say that the question which we're answering isn't one about whether the dog has a mind, whether it has thoughts, whether it has feelings, and so on, the same sort of question as we don't raise with regard to other human beings. I mean I don't raise the

question with regard to you, have you thoughts? I mean this isn't a practical question - it's a philosophical question, and my position is that it's a philosophical question which arises only if you accept certain pre-suppositions of, of a Cartesian kind but also involving the notion that the mean, a word having a meaning for me is a matter of my associating it with something which is interior, private.....

41. CU AYER

AYER: You see, it seems to me that once you accept the distinction or the vision between behaving in certain ways and being conscious, once you are not a behaviourist or a physiolist of any kind, once you don't identify conscious with behaviour or with brain states, then you have a problem apart from, from your theory of reference. Now it's certainly true that I attribute

42. CU DOG

possibly consciousness to, to the dog in so far as it, she resembles a human being, if what you mean by this is that she exhibits something like human responses - showing signs of pain, something they've caught. I don't think it's much, a virtue of her physically resembling human beings, it seems to me possible but I think I would be conscious

43. CU AYER

also of machines. Supposing there were a machine that did seem to not only to display tendencies the way machines do, but also show signs of feeling, simply what is important is the behaviour.

44. CU VESEY

But then the problem we haven't really got down to yet is how the behaviour is related to the attribution of

45. C VESEY

consciousness. I'm prepared to settle for the difficulties for the sake of inductive theory, but if you want to say

46. CU VESEY

there is a third possibility - we haven't had this made clear. I'm perfectly prepared to say "No third possibility" so it's on, the onus on you to provide one.

ZOOM OUT to 2-s.
AYER/VESEY

VESEY: (PAUSE) I don't think I can say more than what I have just said, that, that the question, "Has this thing a mind?", is settled by comparing the 'thing' with human beings. For me the question, "Has, has this thing a mind?", doesn't arise with regard to a human being.

47. CU AYER

ZOOM IN

AYER: But it can very easily be made to arise, can't it? I mean all one has to do is separate the behaviour from the feeling and then say, "Well, given that someone is exhibiting his behaviour,

what ground have we for supposing that he also has the feeling?". Admittedly, I mean, there are words like 'depression', that are used indifferently to cover some, to cover, well, not indifferently, but to use in such a word that they cover both behaviour and what is supposed to lie behind the behaviour. But if one can dissociate these two logically then you can always put the question.

48. CU VESEY

VESEY: I think if you take that line though, then you have the same problem as you have in other cases of scepticism. For instance with regard to physical objects. I mean you can dissociate something looking like, something's ~~looking~~ blue with it's being blue. I mean there isn't a relationship of entailment there either.

49. CU AYER

AYER: Well I think the sceptical problems are genuine in all cases. I don't think they're quite the same in every case. I mean on another occasion I'd be very happy to, to discuss it in connection with, with physical objects. But I do think the sceptic has to be taken seriously, and I do take him seriously. For example, throughout our

discussion you've been assuming that there's no question of regard to human beings. When we raised the question of regard to the dog, and with regard to the machine, and you said, "Well, attributing minds to them is assuming they're like human beings", as though there were no question possible, not even a philosophical question about what human beings have minds. Now I think there is a question with regard to other than oneself. I think that obviously, in practice, I don't doubt that you are similar to myself to think and feel and suffer pain, and so on and so forth. But I think theoretically that there is a problem of what right I have to make this assumption about you, and I regard this as a perfectly genuine problem. I don't think you can start at the point where the sceptical problems have been dismissed.

50. CU VESEY

VESEY: I think it would be not right for me to say that I don't think there's any problem at all. I mean I am a sort of suppressed Cartesian. I think that you're more, the Cartesianism in you is more rampant than it is in me.

51. BCU AYER

52. CU VESEY

53. BCU AYER
- AYER: Yes, but I mean you, you suppressed it. But, well, let's now operate a kind of analysis on you and bring these dark suppressed things to life, bring it up into the open and what do you do about it? I mean, all right let, let me present myself as a Cartesian, what do you say against me?
54. CU VESEY
- VESEY: I - that you are saddled with the problem!
55. BCU AYER
- AYER: Certainly, and therefore have, have to set about trying to solve it. But now you don't abolish the problem by suppressing it. On the contrary, as we know from, from psychoanalytical theory, it's very, very dangerous to suppress things in this way.
56. CU VESEY
- VESEY: No, but I, I - what I can do is to show how the problem has arisen by, in virtue of holding wrong ideas about how words have meaning.
57. CU AYER
- AYER: No, but this, it seems to me, is what you conspicuously failed to show because in a sense at the very beginning you conceded that the behaviourism wasn't tenable, and once you concede this, it seems to me, then the problem
58. CU VESEY
59. CU AYER

must recur - whatever view of meaning you have. Once you allow that saying, "He is in a state of, he has a feeling of depression", isn't entailed by "He exhibits behaviour associated with depression"; then you have the problem of the passage from one to the other. And I think it is a very, a very serious problem, and I'm not entirely satisfied with the conventional answer which is the one in fact that I, I suppose, hold: namely that this is a reasonable hypothesis. I would, I would say that the attribution of mental states to other, others was justified as a way of explaining their behaviour. I mean this is the view I hold, and so it does remain an open question whether you, as far as I'm concerned, you have a mind or not. I regard it without any problem that you have. Now you, I think, once said it's certain, I mean in my position I should be certain that you had, and I, alas, I'm not.

60. CU VESEY

61. CU AYER

62. BCU VESEY

VESEY: No, I don't think I do want to say 'it's certain' because to say 'it's certain' is to - I suppose that there is a problem here which we can settle in one way or another. I, I think I would rather say that the question doesn't arise.

63. CU AYER

AYER: But it, well it, it has arisen! I posed it, and now you've got to show me that in posing it I've made some mistake. I say that once you allow, as you do allow, that the fact that you have a feeling of depression doesn't logically follow from the fact that you look, you may sound gloomy and so on, then, it seems to me, that this alone commits you to the problem. I mean the problem arises once this admission is made. You say it doesn't, why doesn't it?

64. CU VESEY

65. CU AYER

66. CU VESEY

VESEY: Well I think, I think if you, if you put the problem in those terms then, as I said before, it is one that also arises with regard to physical objects but yet.....

But what? Don't you draw, don't you draw a distinction between the two sorts of problems? I mean, aren't you more ready to be a phenomenist with regard to physical objects than you are to be a behaviourist with regard to 'other minds'? I think that the 'other minds' problem is more of a problem for you than.....

67. 2-s. AYER/VESEY

AYER: This is true. I am more ready to be a phenomenist with regard to physical objects, though I would no longer be a complete phenomenist. I have a very complicated theory which still leans a bit towards phenomenism. I, I don't want to say that the problems, in all these cases, are solved in the same way. I do want to say that they arise in each case - there is a, a question to discuss in each case. Now it seems to me that you want to get rid of the 'other minds' problem by saying it isn't a genuine problem at all, and I have argued that it is a genuine problem once you take the first step, which it seems to me you have taken, of not making a logical equivalence between behaviour and feelings. Now you want to argue that even though one takes the first, this first step, still there's no problem - and here I am puzzled - and you don't, you haven't yet explained to me why you think there isn't, or how you can justify your claim.

68. CU VESEY

69. 2-s. AYER/VESEY

VESEY: I think I'd want to distinguish between a question about a particular case. We have a particular case where there is behaviour, is there the corresponding feeling and the, the

question about, about the whole class of 'other minds'? Now, in the particular case, certainly you can have the behaviour without the feeling, but I don't feel that this is the case, that, that this raises the philosophical problem. The philosophical problem is rather the one where you, where you distinguish between behaviour statements and 'other mind' statements as a whole.

70. CU AYER

AYER: I don't know so much that I follow you. Do you want to say, though, that it, that it might be true in a particular case that I was mistaken in attributing feelings to someone; let us say that if someone constructed an extremely plausible robot, I couldn't be mistaken in general?

71. CU VESEY

VESEY: Well, it is a different sort of question, isn't it, about the whole class?

72. CU AYER

AYER: Well, I'm prepared to say that, logically speaking, I could be mistaken in general, and I, I'm prepared to deny this as a sort of question. I'm, I'm quite prepared to say that, that logically speaking it is not contradictory for me to suppose that I am the only person in

the world who has feelings and thoughts,
and so on.

73. CU VESEY

VESEY: Yes, I don't think I'd put it
in the form, not contradictory, but
rather it's a question which, whether
it's somehow illegitimate to ask with
regard to a whole class.

74. CU AYER

AYER: Well, how could it be illegitimate?
I mean someone's said you shouldn't ask
it - Wittgenstein, for example. I mean
I don't accept that authority and.....

75. CU VESEY

VESEY: I mean, don't put me down as
somebody who argues from Wittgenstein
as though Wittgenstein was the Pope, or
something - no, I don't either.

76. CU AYER

AYER: Well, then in one sense there's
a limit to it. I mean I think in regard
to the question, it seems to me to be
contradictory or nonsensical, and now
it seems to me that this question is
neither contradictory nor nonsensical
and, therefore, why illegitimate?

77. CU VESEY

VESEY: I think one can only do it by
going to some other realm of questions
like: can we question in general
whether physical objects continue to
exist when unperceived?

78. CU AYER

AYER: Yes, we can. Though I don't.....

79. CU VESEY

VESEY: You, you'd say we can question?

80. CU AYER

AYER: Yeah, I think we can, although I do think this is rather a special case because one isn't there questioning as a matter of fact, I mean does the lamp actually disappear when I, when I'm not looking? Does it behave oddly, and so on? It's not that, but when one can say: is this a useful postulate to make? I mean I, I would regard this as a postulate, an assumption that we make in order to organise our experiences in certain ways. And one can say: well, possibly that one could do without it; and then the answer is: if you try to do without it, you get into such complications, such very derogative laws, it would really be not at all servicable.

81. CU VESEY

VESEY: I think what I'd query in this is your use of the term, 'postulate', and, 'assumption'. I mean there is a perfectly proper use of the term, 'assumption'. Bertrand Russell is said to have assumed that what he read in The Times could be taken on trust, and so he came down in a, in an aircrash off

Norway and then said that when he read in The Times that he had been killed he no longer.....

82. CU AYER

AYER: Yes, it was another occasion, in fact. He was reported to have died in, in China, by some Japanese Journalist who was an interviewer, and he was so angry that they reported him to be dead.

83. CU VESEY

VESEY: Now in that case there is a, a, there is a possibility of finding out that the assumption was justified or not justified. Now in the case of 'do things exist unperceived?' is there a possibility of finding out if the assumption is justified or not justified?

84. CU AYER

AYER: Well there is a way of finding out if the assumption is justified or not, but in not, of course, quite the same way. I mean it's justified by the coherence and simplicity which, which it introduces into one's general picture of the world, one, where one's organising one's experience. So it is an assumption - it's not an empirical assumption in the same way.

85. CU VESEY

VESEY: Not an empirical assumption, no.

86. CU AYER

AYER: And of course, equally, attributing conscious experience to others is, isn't something that I'm going to find out about in the way that I'm going to suddenly get inside your head and see, well, what is there there, sawdust only, or, or pulsating life, or whatever. No, this again is, is not a matter I'm going to find out about in the same way. But I, there is a difference and possibly I'm confused in making this difference. I mean there's a difference, as it seems to me, in that I'm much more inclined to treat the attribution of the experience to others - as a matter of fact, than I am in the case of the unperceived to distance of objects. I mean in a philosophical sense where I regard this as a choice of a concept, a certain form of conceptual system, and the analogy would rather be with scientific hypothesis where you postulate positions, or whatever, as a way of, of organising certain empirical data. I mean, it seems to me that your behaviour becomes coherent to me if I do attribute thoughts and feelings to you in a way in which it wouldn't otherwise. But I do regard the attribution as not simply a deduction from the behaviour - and there you agree with me.

87. CU VESEY

VESEY: Yes - though I think that we could argue about, about the meaning of the term 'behaviour' because a distinction is to be drawn between simple motions of people's bodies and, and, and water coming from their eyes, and things like this.

88. BCU AYER

AYER: That's what I mean by behaviour.

89. CU VESEY

VESEY: And ... that is what you mean by behaviour?

90. BCU AYER

AYER: Yeah.

91. CU VESEY

VESEY: Let's say, so that the.....

92. BCU AYER

What, what they do, their actions you

93. CU VESEY

wouldn't count as behaviour because

94. BCU AYER

it has a sort of intentional

95. CU VESEY

aspect?

96. BCU AYER

AYER: Indeed, indeed. And talking of actions, I'm really putting in, on an interpretation. I mean what I observe is just the water coming from the eyes, and if I say, "He's crying", I'm already attributing, I mean, implying that there is a feeling of sadness or whatever - which is already explanatory in my view. I mean it, what occurs in the primary level is just the, the observation of the

movements and the water flowing, hands moving, or whatever. And then I make sense of this by attributing experiences, feelings, intentions, beliefs, to you. But this is all theoretical. What, what I'm given originally to play with is just the water falling.

97. CU VESEY

VESEY: Do, don't you feel that you're at odds with common sense on this?

98. CU AYER

AYER: If I were, I wouldn't care twopence. Yeah, at odds with common sense - common sense doesn't see things in these terms. I mean, common sense, on the whole, doesn't philosophise - when it does it philosophises badly. I mean this is no stick to beat them with.

99. 2s. AYER/VESEY

100. Taking part were
Professor Sir Alfred Ayer
and
Professor Godfrey Vesey

101. Film Cameramen Ian Hilton
Brian Easton
Sound Recordist Bill Chesneau
Film Editor Adam Dawson

102. Production
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103 A Production for
The Open University
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