



The Concept of Mind

Gilbert Ryle , Daniel C. Dennett (Introduction)

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This now-classic work challenges what Ryle calls philosophy's "official theory," the Cartesians "myth" of the separation of mind and matter. Ryle's linguistic analysis remaps the conceptual geography of mind, not so much solving traditional philosophical problems as dissolving them into the mere consequences of misguided language. His plain language and essentially simple purpose place him in the tradition of Locke, Berkeley, Mill, and Russell.

The Concept of Mind Details

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Viviana says

An interesting book essential to a complete understanding of the history of philosophy of mind. However, I neither agree with the ordinary language philosophical methodology nor with the deflationary analysis of mind. I am grateful that most contemporary philosophers of mind agree with me here.

Joshua Stein says

Ryle is indispensable reading for folks in the philosophy of mind or 20th century philosophy. Part of the reason that I wanted to revisit *The Concept of Mind* was to see how it stood up historically, and whether it was important to read Ryle or whether one might be better off reading him through those on whom he had a large influence. I think my most significant finding in this discussion is that it is really important for philosophers of mind to read Ryle and come away with their own interpretation, for precisely the same reason philosophers of language should read Wittgenstein and come away with their own interpretation.

Ryle is one of those figures who did an enormous amount of work in philosophy of mind before the development of the analytic/continental divide, and his approaches had an enormous influence on how philosophers think about mind, especially those influenced by the early 20th century British tradition. In comparison to many of the philosophers who have written about mind in that setting (I'm thinking here of Peter Hacker, John Searle, and some others) Ryle is fundamental, often much easier to read, and very straightforward in his approach to problems. Even if you wind up disagreeing with a lot of what Ryle has to say (and, as someone who comes from a much more scientifically oriented background, and thinks less of natural language and conceptual analysis approaches to these issues, I certainly disagree with a lot of it) I think the presentation of Ryle's ideas is often illuminating.

The greatest strength of Ryle's work is becoming what I find definitive about the great modern philosophers (the most prominent other figure who jumps to mind is the late Hilary Putnam); reading their articulation of the problem and the context in which it occurs is far more useful than just looking at the bare-bones version of an argument. They make the flesh of their arguments matter, and they give a comprehensive account of the argument in a way that has both literary style and increased intellectual value. Ryle's use of metaphor, his focus on making complicated issues intuitive and accessible, is a part of what makes this book so useful. Instead of being an obscure philosophical work, Ryle shows that philosophy can simultaneously be deep and accessible. That's something that a lot of philosophical writing has to revisit.

With this in mind, I think the biggest challenge to reading the book in a modern context is that a lot of the content is outdated. Because Ryle was so influential, many of the ideas that he offers have been widely discussed for decades. The result is that the modern context of these arguments is totally different than what is in the book. In terms of finding a way to use Ryle, it isn't enough just to read *The Concept of Mind* or his other works; you also have to do the work to figure out where they fit in to modern discussions in the philosophy of mind and language. I think this is the hardest thing about recommending him, because the book really can't stand on its own very well; it's a heavily contextualized piece of the philosophical literature, for better or for worse.

Matej says

A valiant effort to analyse the ways in which qualities of the mind are invoed in both everyday and scientific discourse. The central thrust of the book is to give a deflationary account of the mental. Quite unlike the traditional Cartesian picture of the mental realm, where mental acts and mental entities dwell, Ryle presents qualities of the mind as modes of engaging with the world - as skills, modifications of behaviour, or processes.

This analysis points out serious difficulties with the traditional view, but also suffers from a number of problems. The insistence that the same idiom is applicable in both unstudied and scientific discourse about the mind is doubtful, leaving open the question whether Ryle's ordinary language account can serve as more than a preparatory study whose results are open to revision, just as other common sense concepts have been revised thanks to theoretical advances.

Even then, this book is essential for conducting philosophy of mind, as I believe that the common sense analysis given by Ryle is largely correct, and it is always better to start from an accurate characterisation of the object of study than from a mangled one rife with unjustified presuppositions.

Parinaz says

Chapter 1 - Descartes Myth

Roy Lotz says

Men are not machines, not even ghost-ridden machines. They are men—a tautology which is sometimes worth remembering.

The problem of mind is one of those philosophical quandaries that give me a headache and prompt an onset of existential angst when I try to think about them. How does consciousness arise from matter? How can a network of nerves create a perspective? And how can this consciousness, in turn, influence the body it inhabits? When we look at a brain, or anywhere else in the 'physical' world, we cannot detect consciousness; only nerves firing and blood rushing. Where is it? The only evidence for consciousness is my own awareness. So how do I know anybody else is conscious? Could it be just me?

If you think about the problem in this way, I doubt you'll make any progress either, because it's insoluble. This is where Gilbert Ryle enters the picture. According to Ryle, the philosophy of mind was put on a shaky foundations by Descartes and his followers. When Descartes divided the world into mind and matter, the first private and the other public, he created several awkward problems: How do we know other people have minds? How do the realms of matter and mind interact? How can the mind be sure of the existence of the material world? And so on. This book is an attempt to break away from the assumptions that led to these questions.

Ryle's philosophy is often compared with that of the later Wittgenstein, and justly so. The main thrusts of their argument are remarkably similar. According to what I've read, this may have been due simply to the influence of Wittgenstein on Ryle—though there appears to be some doubt. Regardless, it's appropriate to

compare them, as I think, taken together, their ideas help to shed light on one another.

Both Wittgenstein and Ryle are extraordinary writers. Wittgenstein is certainly the better of the two, though this is not due to any defect on Ryle's part. Wittgenstein is aphoristic, sometimes oblique, employing numerous allegories and similes to make his point. Ryle is sharp, direct, and epigrammatic. Wittgenstein is in the same tradition as Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, while Ryle is the direct descendent of Jane Austen. But both of them are witty, quotable, and brilliant. They've managed to create excellent works of philosophy without using any jargon and avoiding all obscurity. Why can't philosophy always be written so well?

There is no contradiction, or even paradox, in describing someone as bad at practising what he is good at preaching. There have been thoughtful and original literary critics who have formulated admirable canons of prose style in execrable prose. There have been others who have employed brilliant English in the expression of the silliest theories of what constitute good writing.

Ryle also has the quality—unusual among philosophers—of being apparently quite extroverted. His eyes are turned not toward himself, but his surroundings. He speaks with confidence and insight about the way people normally behave and talk, and in general prefers this everyday understanding of things to the tortured theories of his introverted colleagues.

Teachers and examiners, magistrates and critics, historians and novelists, confessors and non-commissioned officers, employers, employees and partners, parents, lovers, friends and enemies all know well enough how to settle their daily questions about the qualities of character and intellect of the individuals with whom they have to do.

This book, his most famous, is written not as a monograph or an analysis, but as a manifesto. Ryle piles epigram upon epigram until you're craving just one qualification, just one admission that he might be mistaken. He even seems to get carried away by the force of his own pen, leading to some needlessly long and repetitive sections. What's more, his style has the defect of all epigrammatists: he's utterly convincing in short gasps, but leaves his reader grasping for something more substantial.

Ryle is often called an ordinary language philosopher, and the label suits him. Like Wittgenstein, he thinks that philosophical puzzles come about by the abuse of words; philosophers fail to correctly analyze the logical category of words, and thus use them inappropriately, leading to false-paradoxes. The Rylean philosopher's task is to undo this damage. Ryle likens his own project to that of a cartographer in a village. The residents of the village are perfectly able to find their way around and can even give directions. But they might not be able to create an abstract representation of the village's layout. This is the philosopher's job: to create a map of the logical layout of language. This will prevent other foreigners from getting lost.

Ryle begins by pointing out some obvious problems with the Cartesian picture—a picture he famously dubs the 'Ghost in the Machine'. First, we have no idea how these two metaphysically distinct realms interact. How does mind influence matter and vice versa? Nobody knows. Thus by attempting to explain the nature of human cognition, the Cartesians cordon it off from the familiar world and banish it to a shadow world, leaving unexplained how the shadow is cast.

Second, the Cartesian picture renders all acts of communication into a kind of impossible guessing game. You would constantly be having to fathom the significance of a word or gesture by making conjectures as to what's happening in a murky realm behind an impossible curtain (another person's mind). Conjectures of this

kind would be fundamentally dissimilar to other conjectures because there would be, in principle, no way to check them. In the Cartesian picture, people's minds are absolutely cut off from all outside observation.

Ryle is hardly original in pointing out these two problems, although he does manage to emphasize these embarrassing conundrums with special force. His more original critique is what has been dubbed "Ryle's Regress." This is made against what Ryle calls the "intellectualist legend," which is the notion that all intelligent behaviors are the products of thoughts.

For example, if you produced a grammatically correct English sentence, it means (according to the "legend") that you have properly applied the correct criteria for English grammar. However, in this scheme, this must mean that you applied the proper criteria to the criteria, i.e. you applied the meta-criteria that allowed you to choose the rules for English grammar and not the rules for Spanish grammar. But what meta-meta-criteria allowed you to pick the correct meta-criteria for the criteria for the English sentence? (I.e., what anterior rule allowed you to pick the rule that allowed you to choose the rule for determining whether English or Spanish rules should be used instead of the rule for choosing whether salt or sugar should be added to a recipe?—sorry, that's a mouthful.) The point is that we are led down an infinite regress if we require rules to proceed action. This is one of the classic arguments against cognitive theories of the mind.

(I believe Hubert Dreyfus used this same argument in his criticisms of artificial intelligence and cognitive psychology. Considering the strides that A.I. has made since then, I'm sure there must be some way around this regress, though I don't know what. Hopefully somebody can explain it to me.)

These are his most forceful reasons for rejecting the Ghost in the Machine. From reading the other reviews here, I gather that many people are fairly convinced by these arguments. Nonetheless, some have accused Ryle of failing to replace the Cartesian picture with anything else. This isn't a fair criticism. Ryle does his best to rectify the mistaken picture with his own view, though you may not find this view very satisfying.

After doing his best to discredit the Cartesian picture, the rest of the book is devoted to demonstrating Ryle's view that none of the ways we ordinarily use language necessitate or even imply that "the mind is its own place." This is where he most nearly approaches Wittgenstein, for his main contentions are the following: First, it is only when language is misused by philosophers (and laypeople) that we get the impression that the mind is a metaphysically distinct thing. Second, our intellectual and emotional lives are in fact not cut off and separate from the world; rather, public behavior is at the very core of our being.

Here's just one example. According to the Cartesian view, a person "really knows" how to divide if, when he's given a problem—let's say, 144 divided by 24—his mind goes through the necessary steps. Let's say a professor gives a student this problem, and the student correctly responds "six." The professor conjectures that the student's mind has gone through the appropriate operation. But what if the professor asks him the exact same question five minutes later, and the student responded "eight"? And what if he did it again, and the student responded "three"? The following dialogue ensues:

PROFESSOR: Ah, you're just saying random numbers. You really don't know how to divide.

STUDENT: But my mind performed the correct operation when you asked me the first time. I forgot how to do it after that.

PROFESSOR: How do you know your mind performed the correct operation the first time?

STUDENT: Introspection.

PROFESSOR: But if you can't remember how to do it now, how can you be sure that you did know previously?

STUDENT: Introspection, again.

PROFESSOR: I don't believe you. I don't think you ever knew.

The point of the dialogue is this. According to the Cartesian view, introspection provides not merely the best, but the only true window into the mind. You're the only person who can know your own mind, and everyone else knows it via conjecture. Thus the student, and only the student, would really know if his mind performed the proper operation, and thus he alone would really know if he could divide. Yet this is not the case. We say somebody "knows how to divide" if they can consistently answer questions of division correctly.

Thus, Ryle argues, to "know how to divide" is a disposition. And a disposition cannot be analyzed into episodes. In other words, "knowing how to divide" is not a collection of discrete times when a mind went through the proper operations. Similarly, if I say "the glass is fragile," I don't mean that it has broken or even that it will necessarily break, just that it *would* break easily. Fragility, like knowing long division, is a disposition.

According to Ryle, when philosophers misconstrued what it meant to know how to divide (and other things), they committed a "category mistake." They miscategorized the phrase; they mistook a disposition for an episode. More generally, the Cartesians mix up knowing *how* and knowing *that*. They confuse dispositions, capacities, and propensities for rules, facts, and criteria. This leads them into all sorts of muddles.

Here's a classic example. Since Berkley, philosophers have been perplexed by the mind's capacity to form abstract ideas. The word "red" encompasses many different particular shades, and is thus abstract. Is our idea of red some sort of vague blend of all particular reds? Or is it a collections of different, distinct shades we bundle together? Ryle contends that this question makes the following mistake: Recognizing the color red is knowing *how*. It's a skill we learn, just like recognizing melodies, foreign accents, and specific flavors. It is a capacity we develop; it isn't the forming of a mental object, an "idea," that sits somewhere in a mental space.

Ryle applies this method to problem after problem, which seem to dissolve in the acid of his gaze. It's an incredible performance, and a great antidote for a lot of the conundrums philosophers like to tie themselves up in. Nevertheless, you can't shake the feeling that for all his directness, Ryle dances around the main question: how does awareness arise from the brain?

Well, I'm not positive about this, but I believe it was never Ryle's intention to explain this, since he considers this question outside the proper field of philosophy. It's a scientific, not a philosophical question. His goal was, rather, to show that the mind/body problem is not an insoluble mystery or evidence of metaphysical duality, and that the mind is not fundamentally private and untouchable. Humans are social creatures, and it is only with great effort that we keep some things to ourselves.

I certainly can't keep this review to myself. This was the best work of philosophy I've read since finishing Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* in 2014, and I hope you get a chance to read it too. Is it conclusive? No. Is it irrefutable? I doubt it. But it's witty, it's eloquent, it's original, and it's devoid of any nonsense. This is as good as philosophy gets.

Robert Tessmer says

While I think I agree with the main premise of the book, I did not find the writing very interesting.

Michael Dorais says

This book is "must read" in the subject of philosophy of mind even if it is a bit tedious in parts. Rather than taking it as reducing the mind to observable behavior, I took it as showing how what we talk about as mind is a natural part of our dispositions and activity as a living human animal that is not necessarily as mysterious and hidden as some philosophy and religion makes it out to be. His challenge to Descartes's dualism (as the ghost in the machine) it's classic. It is worth contending with Ryle's challenges even if you don't end up agreeing with the totality of his thesis.

ralowe says

i might not be that into "analytic philosophy", but i just keep reading it. cybernetic social analysis for what? was brought here by the grace of the little description debates, queer literary sociologist heather love's co-organizing of "description across the disciplines" academic conference held at private ivy league columbia university in the city of new york in upper manhattan in the wood auditorium of avery hall thursday, april 23, 2015, wherein professor love's point was a criticism of the practice of thick description in the humanities (this long sentence is supposed to be an illustrative joke). love's disregard of "thick description", a term traced to anthropologist clifford geertz who got it from ryle, is a challenge to all my seemingly inexhaustible and ongoing research labors. it's the effect of when the hermeneuts have contact with the social scientists, and it's apparently a little bit of an ethical debate of description vs. narration. on the description side, if you're an anticolonial analyst who feels exegesis only serves to transmit the human (or, merely someone with not a lot of free time), is a lot of folks that i'm just gonna go ahead and characterize as mechanistic reductionists, no better than the descartes y'all loathe. i read this book to dissolve my own caked-in dualisms. what i found was agency as a rigid causal machine that eschews all refusing to yield to empirical perusal. and i don't really care for language philosophy because of the endless confusing analogies. a woman at a noise show offered that i should take the analogies as "thought experiments." compare whenever a heremeut got a point they have an object that makes the idea easier to track. i gather the canonical significance of this text but i found it so plodding. i didn't disagree with the woman at the noise show when she emoted that ryle's writing is beautiful. i just couldn't stop thinking about systems theory and the cold detachment it accompanies and tech bros in my neighborhood. why do i keep reading these things? okay, so this is ryle's example of a non-dualistic world; the intangible occult mystery of how the mind interacts with the body, a single motion. the mind must obviously be something tangible, materiality of agency. but why is it so cold here? but then what of the occult netherworld of the affective unseen? i can't let the (illusion... ah, don't read wegner!) of mind and all of its intoxicating fantasies go...

Taojie Wang says

Avoiding the real question of mind, but still a classic, for behaviourists.

Paul O'Leary says

Gilbert Ryle's Concept of the Mind is a work that has an honored and earned spot in any history of philosophy. Yes, that does imply this is a "dated" work. It is an important work, nevertheless, for the author's investigation into how we ordinarily think of the mind, or, rather, our own mind in an everyday sense and how metaphysics creeps into our relationship with "it" through loose language. Written during a period when many philosophers thought it was of paramount importance to ascertain what good philosophy shouldn't be doing, Ryle wears the mantle of debunker of smuggled mental nonsense with easygoing distinction. Ryle dismantles "the ghost in the machine" (I believe he coined this phrase in this book) by slicing off common absurdities and myths our species has developed to explain "mental" processes. As these mental processes cannot be witnessed, it is completely reasonable a less advanced culture than our own (we're so wonderfully reasonable now!) would construct rather numinous language to explain what goes on interiorly as a "thoughtful" mirror of what we witness exteriorly. Thus, when we witness a splendid bird alight from a tree we might imagine there's a second world theatre inside us thinking "I've just seen the most splendid bird fly from that tree." Perhaps this may extend into thinking that we are thinking we are seeing a splendid bird now fly away, and so on. Ryle pours his scorn thick where he believes scorn is due. This can give his examination a rather negative air. On the constructive side, and there certainly is one, Ryle collapses the imagined exchange between an acting agent thinking he's uncorking a bottle of wine from the bodily act of physically uncorking a bottle. Ryle never waives from his stance that "(o)vert intelligent performances are not clues to the workings of minds; they are those workings." Certainly Heidegger and his mental musings, at their height of popularity when this book was written, play offstage villains. Also, I was frequently reminded of Dennett's Consciousness Explained reading through this. Especially with Ryle's frequent use of examples involving music and my thinking back to Dennett's humorous anecdote of the neurosurgeon and his rock n roll loving patient. Dennett has contributed an introduction to the latest edition of this work (alas I have an older version). Though Dennett traded out Ryle's ghost for a more materialistic homunculus, one feels Dennett owes much to his worthy predecessor.

Tyler says

Descartes helped establish the idea of the mind as a separate entity from the body, separate, perhaps, to the point of having altogether different origins. His theory bridged a gap opening up in his day between a newly natural conception of the universe and the traditional supernatural one. Cartesian dualism, in other words, made the intellectual arena safe for both scientists and theologians. Three centuries later comes this book, whose author, Gilbert Ryle, has decided to put paid to the two-track account of the mind and the mess it creates.

Ryle's heart is in the right place. As an example he asks how we develop abstract thought. Well, the ability to abstract an idea from concrete examples, Ryle notes, is too often described as a "seeing." You see the real examples, then your mind "sees" the abstract idea linking them.

But this is part of the mess dualism has left us, because this *seeing* is taken to be an intuition from who know where -- why not from the supernatural? Looking at it closer, though, it turns out that what the mind does when it "abstracts" is that it *creates*. It creates the new insight; it doesn't "see" it.

This is all good enough, but I wondered if Ryle was behind the times. Dualism hasn't been killed off. Rather, it has fallen into gradual disuse once scientific reasoning offered better accounts of man's place in the world. Is there a real need to deliver a *coup de grace* such as this?

Ryle dismantles dualism with the help of logical positivism and language. But does it help to urge upon us a distinction between introspection and retrospection? I, for one, had trouble seeing how *introspection* serves only a dualistic worldview. He goes on to tackle ideas or terms that appear to have already fallen into disuse. So he's either behind the times or he's attacking straw men.

Maybe it's not his methods so much as the times that influence Ryle. The book's thesis is bound by a materialistic worldview and a behaviourist psychology. He writes during their heyday, but these fashionable propositions can't do what he wants them to do. Ryle finds it necessary not to explain the human mind, but to explain it away.

The materialist account reduces much of mental activity to "dispositions," for example. The rest could be offloaded, if one were so inclined, onto the science of psychology. But the approach that seemed so solid at the time has since come under strong criticism for implicitly accepting Descartes's either/or approach and simply arguing the other side of it.

Ryle's flashy writing gives readers an idea of the issues involved in philosophical dualism, and it shows how logical positivism, linguistic analysis and psychological behaviourism can be used in philosophical argumentation.

Dan Cohen says

I found this a long hard struggle to read through. Maybe because it's been nearly 30 years since I read any analytical philosophy, maybe because I found his arguments obscure, or maybe because I found the book repetitive. His attack on "the ghost in the machine" starts off well and he introduces his main technique of categorising concepts to illustrate how concepts of the wrong category can be misapplied. So far so good. He also introduces his infinite series argument (the ghost in the ghost in the machine, etc.) But I quickly tired of how unconvincing I found many of the specific assertions - it's difficult to maintain the motivation to continue following an argument when you find a premise completely false, and this happened to me over and over.

The arguments, in so far as I was able to follow them, also relied too heavily on categorising the uses of a term and then addressing each type individually, while I was never convinced he had got the initial categorisation right - I often felt his categories were neither mutually exclusive nor, more damagingly, collectively exhaustive, so the subsequent arguments had little persuasive power and again I found it difficult to maintain the motivation to continue following the argument.

It's also, as has been pointed out by other reviewers, a rather negative approach - Ryle criticises other theories but seems to offer absolutely nothing to replace them. I do get that his view is that no such theory is required but this seems untenable.

In summary, the book is worth reading to introduce the reader to identification and criticism of Cartesian dualism and for the concept of category errors. But you can get this from the first chapter or two and the rest

of the book does not justify the effort.

Anthony says

i've read 5 chapters of this (the first four and the last). i don't know if i'll ever read the middle chapters so i may as well review it. ryle is an engaging writer, so the text moves quickly. the comments of two professors on the section where he lays out the "category mistake" at the heart of cartesian dualism led me to re-read this section in particular, and conclude that it's a rather sketchily drawn analogy that doesn't give you much reason to reject cartesian dualism. (for the record, i think there are any number of other, better reasons for rejecting cartesian dualism). in any case, it's worth reading, at least to dissect his argument and then pat yourself on the back, reassured that you can (in fact) do philosophy. the last chapter also contains some entertaining (perhaps unjustified) criticisms of the entire enterprise of psychology.

sologdin says

lotsa fun. presents the well known "ghost in the machine" thesis, and develops the fallacy "category mistake." presents a persuasive deductive critique of the concept of "volition." eat that, objectivists!

Frank Spencer says

certainly a classic; still has information that makes you think

Alexander Francis says

Concept of Mind

The common conception of how minds work is engrained in every facet of western society and culture. For centuries philosophers have been operating on various assumptions that without putting them to the test. This belief is that all humans, except possibly infants and idiots, have both a body and a mind. Human bodies are in space where human minds work outside of space. Being outside of space minds are not observable and therefore the possessors of these minds have privileged access to them. In *The Concept of Mind* Gilbert Ryle decides to challenge these assumptions at their very core, suggesting that they are broken backed from the start. Ryle's main thesis is illustrated in Chapter IX where he discusses the intellect. In that chapter he is able to reference and make use of the previous arguments made throughout the book. In the end it is shown that Ryle's theory withstands objections and is indeed preferable to the more common occultist theory of dualism.

According to Ryle, a person's intellect is not something private that only he has access to, it is something that can be demonstrated. A way that we know about someone's mind is to see that they are prone to do certain things. This is speaking of it as a disposition; this means a person may not be thinking particular thoughts now but that she tends to do so in certain situations. This makes it so that the mind and the actions are no longer separated. That which the person writes down, says and does shows what kind of person he is. If he tends to do the same sorts of things then we can know that he is disposed to a certain type of action. We

see certain people as vain only because they do and say vain things. The only way for him to know that he is vain is by the same process. We on a great many occasions claim that someone is vain and does not know it. One of the main ways that a man can demonstrate his intellect is through his speech. We judge a person based on how he speaks when he is guarded and careful with what he says, such as when he is theorizing. It would be a mistake to believe that the difference between this way of speaking and that of regular chat is only by degree for they are in different categories; chat is not just low level theorizing. This is due to theorizing being didactic which is intended for learning which is work where chatting is idle. Many intellectual tasks are those of which only the schooled can perform. These tasks are brought about by didactic discourse which is itself a skill learned through study. The conversational tone in didactic discourse is fake and is a higher order ability. A higher order ability is one that is complex and builds upon less complex lower acts, in this case not only does one know how to speak in didactic conversation but one knows how to cover it with a more casual tone. Didactic talk is not to be responded to but to be kept in mind. This means that it is supposed to be used for the receiver to improve and strengthen his powers of thought by being remembered and employed later. It is more like other sorts of learning than other sorts of talking. Learning lessons is becoming competent, not just able to parrot back sayings. These lessons can be taught to another or self taught through thinking things out.

A thought that comes with a word or phrase is not a secret happening but the same thought coming to oneself prior to it being spoken. If that thought needed a corresponding thought then it would be the same utterance and its necessity would go ad infinitum. To say something with significance and to be aware of it is doing one thing, not two. It is to say something with a specific frame of mind.

Another way that we decide if another person is a good intellect based on how she makes intellectual advances. Many of these are good inferential thinking but not all of them are, some are just by paying attention to what one is doing and making sure it is done well. Thinking can be progressive since a conclusion can become a premise but some have the instructive effect of teaching us how to do something. One may know something but finds it difficult to observe and has to instruct himself or remind himself to mind what he knows is right. This is because learning that can be imparted and learned relatively quickly where learning how is to improve an ability which takes a gradual process.

When talking about someone's intellect it is important to note a division between the work that he puts into the thinking and the results from the work, this distinction is the same as being "searching" words for the former and being "got it" words for the latter. "Got it" words are achievement words and can only be used when something is done. "Searching" words are only to be used in finding out or doing. Many people will make the category mistake of using "got it" verbs such as deduce, abstract, judge and so on in their gerund form making them seem to be "searching" verbs where they are not. This is also seen with the distinction between having a theory and building a theory. Having a theory is a "got it" phrase where building a theory is a "searching" phrase. This is because having a theory is to know it, and be able to use it when necessary and make a didactic exploitation of it, being able to teach it or being willing to act on its precepts, but it does not imply that they theory is currently being used. Though one must do certain mental acts after being schooled, it does not imply that the person has to review all previous schooling to apply concepts that build on them. This is because you have those teachings and do not have to repossess it. Having certain knowledge is being disposed to know the answers to the problems presented or presenting the theory in its strongest light. Building a theory is preparing oneself to get to the point of having a theory; this can be done through researching, or investigating either formally or informally. Having a theory is to manipulate and use it with ease, for the work is already done where building a theory is the hard work to prepare for having the theory. At times we use abstractions, judgments and inferences all of which have meanings but none of which are occurrences. By not being occurrences in the world they are therefore not in need of a causal explanation, instead they are words used to indicate that an occurrence is over. To have a theory and for it to have meanings, abstractions, reasoning, inferences and judgment is to have one thing, not many. These belong to having a theory because they are what one uses when the theory is built. Judgments belong to having a theory because they are what one has at the end of building. Inferences belong to having a theory because

they are the passing to the conclusion, what one does when the theory is done and can do over and over again. These things come about gradually until they are completed. The actual possessing of an inference is not gradual or instant but is a “got it” term, when you infer something it is the end, not a process. If a possessor of a theory is expounding it with care, she is also doing one thing, not two. If we readily see its implications that is due to the work was already done and the person having “got it.” Abstractions are things that are more general than the syntax would suggest. In order to use an abstract term one must use it significantly and know its significance. Having an abstract term is being able to use it.

In employing arguments or jokes a person is showing that she has it but in receiving them the audience is searching and doing to work to have them as well. We first see an argument and draw an implication, the conclusion is already there and the theory is already “got.” The one giving the argument is the executive and the receiver is contemplative. You “see” implications of done theories and you solve those that you are building. To think is not to be shown something but to work something out, not be told a theory but to build one. Being able to argue is not having a theory but having a skill. Drawing a conclusion is a mental act but it does not need to be done to oneself, one may do it vocally or on paper.

The occultist would say that there is no possible way to know someone else’s mind. To them it would just be a guess based on many of the things that Ryle suggests are ways of knowing what is in other people’s minds. They would say that though a person may be able to perform a certain intellectual act that it makes their thoughts known the act may be just luck or knowing only the syntax of the argument but not the semantics. Though a person may be prone to certain things, he may just be deceiving all onlookers. Possibly that person is prone to do the opposite when alone but in front of people the person resorts to what would be socially acceptable. Guarded speech would be the last place to look for how the person’s mind works because it is the least genuine. To have the best guess one must catch the person off guard and challenge his thoughts and beliefs. Though a person may be able to show what he knows through didactic discourse it would be impossible to know what he actually believes about the subjects. The ease with which the person is able to perform the higher order act of didactic speaking in a casual tone is just another layer to the ruse. We are not even able to know if the person finds the subject challenging or not. One may never know if the recipient of the didactic talks is actually just parrotting back phrases or is actually able to understand the material. With this only I can know the contents of my own thoughts and abilities. I would have not only the best access to know if I am deceitful but the only access. I can know what I am prone to do because I can see my will. The main objection is that even though we might be able to test what a person may syntactically know, we never can know what he knows semantically or believes about the subject. This means we cannot distinguish this person from the workings of a machine.

Ryle’s position withstands these objections with a few simple answers. The truth is that on though there are situations where a person may know their intents and thoughts better than I do; there are situations where I can know their dispositions and workings of mind better than they do. The problem is with bias, the person can be too proud to admit to their dispositions or beliefs even if it is most obvious to everyone else. He may be lying to me but they could just as easily be deceiving himself. There are also certain things I can do to recognize his lies. He could be caught in a lie which would show to me that he is disposed to lying. He could offer contradictory positions at different times suggesting that he does not know the subject as well as he may claim. The only way for him to know that he understands and argument is by being able to work with it and show its premises and conclusion, its benefits and shortfalls as well as where it may be attacked. By discussing the argument with him I would be able to know how well he understands the arguments. If he suggests that he really does know it but just can’t say or write it then barring other circumstances he is most likely deceiving himself. Guarded speech is the best way to find out what a person knows. He is able to carefully present a theory or problem that he has previously worked out, this gives him the best possibility to show that he knows what he is talking about. In order to know if he believes it you can ask him and, if he is disposed to be reasonable, if the argument is valid for why he holds such a position. The fact that he is able to casually discuss complicated topics does not say much about his ability to deceive but it says a great deal as to his skill in understanding the topic and having “got it.” He is talking with ease because he had already

done the work, though the didactic talk is work the delivering of an already understood and adopted theory is not. We are able to know if he understands the semantics of it by asking him questions about the theory such as in what different situations can it be applied as well as the implications of the theory. In short the person is just as capable of being deceived as he is to deceiving, his dispositions are not hidden but can be evident through experiment and examination, to know what he knows is simply by having him explain different components of a theory.

The occultist would believe that there are too many vagaries to make a real distinction between “got it” and “searching” words. There are too many degrees and that one quite possibly will never fully “have” a concept in the mind. Deducing, judging, and abstracting are in fact occurrences. A person can judge whether something is the case even when he is in the process. While a person is using abstract terms he is able to abstract and while he is reasoning he can be deducing. A theory can never be fully built because it can always have more premises as well as the conclusion can become a premise in a different argument. All theories are then in the building phase and are never truly built. A person is able to teach or explain parts of theory when he does not fully understand the whole thing. She can at do a wide range of things with parts of a theory without fully understanding its implications. Even the founder of a theory may not fully understand everything that the theory entails. A person may forget vital parts of the theory and have to be re-schooled in them; this means that she may have it less than previously thought. On top of that it is impossible to know if another person “has” a theory. They may go over implications but still might not be aware of the biggest ones or they may not understand how it all fits together.

The defense of Ryle’s position is yet again simple. It is easy to concede that there are degrees without conceding that there is no possibility of “getting it.” Ryle would not claim that to “have” a theory is to be able to have command of every aspect of it. In fact, that would be absurd since it would lead to needing infinite knowledge. Instead Ryle would claim that in order to “have” a theory is to be able to recognize and utilize new aspects as they come up. If a person understands the theory so well that he is able to manipulate it and use it then he would know it well enough to hold a discussion with any implication that he might come across and see exactly where his theory fits in. The theory may in fact have more premises but he has at least produced one where the conclusion follows from the premises by necessity. That the conclusion can be adopted as a sub-conclusion of a bigger argument means that he may have not yet “gotten” the big argument, he still “has” the smaller one, which is the only thing that he implied. If the person forgets pieces of the theory then he no longer has the theory and that is acceptable as well, he just needs to “have” the theory at the time it is suggested that he “has” it. To know if another person “has” a theory then he must be able to show an understanding of it and where it fits in to any seen or unforeseen questions or implications.

Ryle’s theory is able to withstand the major objections and is therefore preferable to the position offered by the occultist theory. Though it is not as engrained as the opposition in western society and culture it is in fact a better explanation for how we conduct our daily affairs. It is able to bring back together mind and action. In order to function when relating to people one must operate with at least a few assumptions about the minds of those with whom he speaks. If a person is able to put forth a theory, what is better evidence for how the person thinks than to see how the theory works? We see people as vain because of what they do and say but that same person may not believe it because of his bias. We operate with these beliefs about one another every day. There is no such thing as privileged access because we can at times understand others better than they understand themselves. We believe that we know people and act on those assumptions all of the time, it is more fruitful to have a concept of minds that reflects that knowledge and sears together our “mental lives” and our “physical lives.”

Rhonda says

This is a monumental book in modern philosophy which sets out to destroy the issue of dualism, expressed most succinctly by Descartes and often referred to as the mind/body problem. As a graduate student perusing this text, I was dismayed to read as Ryle apparently destroyed argument after argument which sustained Cartesian thinking.

Though this left me profoundly impressed at the time, I did not realize until much later that destroying a series of arguments concerning a given thing is not the same thing as proving its complement. In fact, it is a far cry from doing so, especially if one supposes that the method by which one provides his arguments (snidely referred to by one reviewer as epigrams which leave rubble and doubt in their wake,) is insufficient.

The primary difficulty with Ryle's point of view is that it is rigidly empirical. While he attempts to glue a world back together which Descartes divided, it is the difference in method to which we ought to attend carefully. That said, if Descartes were able to respond, I suggest that he would be able to offer amplification of his arguments which Ryle would not accept. Thus this is an excellent example of how oftentimes what we argue about can be reduced to the method by which we approach the problem.

Another reviewer suggested, although I am not sure how seriously, that Ryle's reunification argument was merely recycled Schopenhauer. While it is not a stretch to see the metaphysical glue which looks remarkably similar between the two men, the methods of explication differ greatly.

The most interesting part about 20th century analytic philosophy is that although it is remarkably adept at casting doubt on the interpretation of issues as others see them, it very rarely makes more than a limited convincing argument about what it does see.

In Ryle's case, like many before him, his efforts to destroy a particular point of view is only valid if and only if one accepts that eliminating certain possibilities as methodologies are essential truths. He would not have much difficulty in talking about ideas of the world, but Schopenhauer's Will would get him kicked out of the scientific/analytic community. It is, after all, far too human for legitimate empiricism, isn't it?

Fergus says

I remember when I picked up my first copy of this landmark brain-bamboozler - I was travelling to Britain, and I saw it at the airport. Can you imagine that nowadays? Really brainy books at a little airport bookstop?

I read the blurb on the back and grabbed it. It was to be an endlessly amusing and BEMusing flight! Can this guy be SERIOUS, I thought? In university I had read a great deal of literature and had been immersed in learned tomes in which great authors had described the mind as an infinite store of treasures - and here someone was talking about the mind being a "ghost in the machine", a myth started by Descartes.

But he WAS serious. Just like the ancient Buddhist sages confirmed, old Gilbert WAS saying that we don't HAVE a mind. And there's no such thing as a mind/body split.

He was funny, though - and he wrote rings around most other thinkers. When you read him talk you could almost hear Bertrand Russell's mocking grandmother laughing out loud in the background:

"All matter?

Never mind!"

And, of course, dear Gilbert, your point is ENTIRELY academic.

Josiah says

Gilbert Ryle's classic philosophical work, *The Concept of Mind*, is now best remembered for the least philosophical part of it, the rhetorical dubbing of Descartes mind/body dualism as the "dogma of the ghost in the machine." Ryle's own particular brand of philosophical behaviorism hasn't weathered all that well, and so this book's surviving interest is primarily as a negative work. Nevertheless, the book is interesting as a crucible for Cartesians and those interested in the philosophical merits of the Cartesain theory of mind.

Ryle's book is chock full of arguments, long ones, short ones, simple ones, subtle ones, with a particular predominance of infinite regresses. Even if you think, as I do, that many of these arguments are misguided, you will still be put through a variety of mental gymnastics as you try to diagnose the various faults they hide.

One note of caution, because many of Ryle's arguments are of the ordinary language variety, his linguistic distance from us (the book is over 50 years old, and British to boot) does hinder understanding. It was not always clear to me whether Ryle was misusing a word, or whether its use is different for us than it was for him.

Rand says

My father's father's name is Gilbert Royal, Sr.

A riel is a monetary unit in one of those Asian countries, I forget which.

Sometimes I get riled up in a solipsistic muddle. It can become rather uncomfortable.

The copy of this book I was given early one morning was from a shared bookshelf in a shared rental residence that included at least one cat, at some point in time.

I am severely allergic to cats. I have been told by various health professionals that that allergy is in fact due to a specific protein in cat spit, not their hair or parasites or anything else.

When I pick up this book to read, from time to time, I invariably become severely allergic. This makes reading the particular copy I was gifted problematic, as my nose invariably begins to drip mucus and my eyes water and my throat itches.

Invariably this sort of reaction brings my solipsism around to thinking about other things, usually involving sex. And the person, who is quite nice, as far as mild acquaintances go, who chose to give me this book.

Most objects and events make me think of sex, or at the very least, food. Gilbert Ryle seems more prone to

using food analogies than sex. But I could be wrong, not having read the entire think.

I need to get rid of this book as I have developed an allergy to it as an object of bound paper/thought.

My father's father is interred in Arlington, VA.

At one point in time I rented a room in Arlington, MA. Sometimes I would sleep there, on an air mattress.

I remember being six years old and riding in a limousine during the day of that funeral. I remember my father and his brothers not getting along on that day. I remember not understanding what was going on, having known my father's father as an increasingly weaker and weaker body as my mind incrementally progressed in time.

I remember my father's mother getting a speeding ticket on the way back from Friendly's, after having bought me multiple Reese's Peanut Butter Cups. I believe that this process is known as "conditioning" in the clinical sense.

My father's mother had a BLT. I think I had the chicken tenders, being disappointed that the chicken was not available in nuggets.

The copy of this book I was gifted is currently sitting on the front porch of my mother's house. My father passed away when his eldest granddaughter was about the same age I was when my father's father passed.

They both died of cancer. In some traditions, the behavior of the body on a cellular level is said to mimic the thoughts entertained by the mind. And vice versa. I do not believe that Gilbert Ryle explores such co-incidence, though he does tackle Descartes. Descartes puts me to sleep, as a general rule. Gilbert Ryle would put me to sleep, and in fact did the first time I tried to drunkenly read this book, were it not for the fact that the triggering of the severe allergy to cats wakes me up.

The room I rented in Arlington, MA may have at one time contained a book by Ryle. A lot of students shuck their philosophy books in the greater Boston area and I was in the habit of collecting books while diminishing the time available to read. This habit continues today, although other habits I was in the habit of in Arlington, MA have since passed on.

Excuse me, I have to sneeze now.
