Oxford Ordinary Language Philosophy, Wittgenstein and the Concept of Mind

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The Consummate Analysists

By

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To Mark, for always making me mindful of the extraordinary

"The past is never dead. It's not even past."
—William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun*

"Yet on the whole, the best philosophy is little affected by theory; the philosopher sees what needs doing and does it."
—J.O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis*

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PREFACE

Michael Dummett once wrote:

> I am always disappointed when a book lacks a preface: it is like arriving at someone's house for dinner, and being conducted straight into the dining-room. A preface is personal, the body of the work impersonal: the preface tells you the author's feelings about his book, or some of them. A reader who wishes to remain aloof can skip the preface without loss; but one who wants to be personally introduced has, I feel, the right to be.[1]

Part of what Dummett says certainly applies to the preface of this book. It is personal, since among other things it is a piece of intellectual autobiography. It also tells the reader some of my feelings about my book. But the rest of what Dummett says does not apply here. The reader cannot skip the preface without loss, since it contains essential information concerning my motivations, methodology, and argumentation that will give her a better sensibility for what is to come. Rather than merely a personal introduction or a *prix fixe* menu summarizing each course to be served, my preface is also an aperitif to whet the appetite and sharpen the palate for the entire meal.

In March of 1985, while I was still an undergraduate, I bought a copy of J.L. Austin's *Philosophical Papers*. I had also begun reading some essays by Gilbert Ryle in a survey course on the history of analytic philosophy taught by my mentor, Kathleen Bohstedt. Ryle and Austin, I learned, were the chief representatives of the ordinary language philosophy that flourished at Oxford University and elsewhere during the 1950s and 1960s. At the time, I did not really understand what I was reading. Even so, it all struck me as tremendously exciting and groundbreaking. On a visceral level, I sensed that what initially seemed to be rather far-removed from the concerns of Descartes, Locke, and other traditional philosophers I'd studied was in fact a radically original way of tackling the same questions and problems. A seminar led by Bohstedt introduced me to the version of ordinary language philosophy typified by Ludwig Wittgenstein in his later writings. Her emphasis on the importance of institutions and forms of life

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[1] Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, ix.

for an accurate reading of Wittgenstein's remarks on rule-following left an indelible impression on me. But I was still too callow to discern what, if any, fruitful connections might be made between the Oxfordian and Wittgensteinian variants of ordinary language philosophy.

      I did not return to these thinkers until several years later when I was a graduate student. Under the wise guidance of Gary Ebbs, I participated in a reading group in which we steeped ourselves in the writings of Ryle, Austin, and Wittgenstein, G.E. Moore, Norman Malcom, O. K. Bouwsma, Stanley Cavell, R.M. Hare, P. F. Strawson, W.V. Quine, Saul Kripke, and others. In tandem with the strict tutelage of my dissertation advisor, Thomas Ricketts, my participation in Ebb's reading group taught me how to be a professional philosopher. My strong interest in Oxford ordinary language philosophy, or Ox-Phi, was now complemented by an appreciation of the deeper issues that were at stake. However, I had not yet hit upon a promising strategy for conducting my own research in the area. Eventually I completed my graduate studies and moved on to other pursuits.

      Many years later, I had the good fortune to come across a book that provided me a partial answer to the question of how I should approach Ox-Phi. Appearing more than half a century after much of the material it discusses, Peter Hylton's magisterial study of early analytic philosophy[2] is a paradigm of how rich philosophical insight can be gleaned from historical reflection. The fact that a similar length of time stands between us today and the fluorescence of Ox-Phi encouraged me in the hope that we now possess sufficient historical distance to make a sober and cogent reassessment of the movement. I received further encouragement from a reply to G.J. Warnock's contention that those who worked with Austin personally are in a better position to understand his thought than the rest of us are:

> The crucial thing here is to recognize the possibility and legitimacy of a conception of past philosophical texts which is genuinely historical and yet not antiquarian. This is a conception according to which the achievement of a great philosopher can only come into clear view when the philosopher's thought is placed in relation to subsequent developments—developments which, though the philosopher himself would not have been aware of them, confer a special sort of significance on what he was able to do then and what we can still see now. The content

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[2] Peter Hylton, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*.

x   Preface

of a philosophical achievement, measured in this way, is of the
sort that unfolds and displays itself as time goes on.[3]

The call for "a cross-fertilizing mode of interpretation that integrates
exegesis and contemporary application"[4] of writings by Oxford ordinary
language philosophers certainly struck a chord with me.

My critical historical approach to Ox-Phi contrasts sharply with the
resolutely ahistorical understanding practitioners of the movement had of
what they were doing. One of them, Isaiah Berlin, reports that at a
colloquium given at Oxford by a Professor Ewing visiting from Cambridge,
Ewing alluded to what one of his colleagues used to say, prompting the
outburst from the young Oxford philosophers in attendance that they
weren't the least interested in that: "What we want is the truth!"[5] Ironically,
the very sensitivity to history they eschewed will enable us to place Ox-Phi
in a more favorable light from a contemporary perspective. Attention not
only to the work of familiar figures like A.J. Ayer and Paul Grice but also
of peripheral and often overlooked ones such as Peter Geach, Susan Haack,
Dudley Shapere, and J.O. Urmson is conducive to bringing out both what I
regard to be the most forceful objections to central aspects of Ox-Phi as well
as the most promising lines of reply to those objections. Where appropriate,
I will indicate places where Ox-Phi echoes important precedents in the
history of philosophy without thereby compromising its radical character.[6]

To implement my historiographical strategy, I had to reckon with
a major difference between the emergence of early analytic philosophy at
Cambridge and the rise of ordinary language philosophy at Oxford. As
Hylton explains, Russell and Moore developed their mature views in
conscious opposition to the tradition of British Idealism represented by T.H.
Green and F.H. Bradley. But the mature Ryle and Austin did not directly
respond to the idealism of R.G. Collingwood, the realism of John Cook
Wilson, or any other philosophical school. They simply changed the subject
to other topics they found more interesting. Ryle often targets some general
philosophical position he takes to be objectionable, such as the Cartesian
conception of the mind; Austin tends to go after specific philosophical
formulations he judges to be defective, such as the defenses of sense data

[3] Gustaffson, "Introduction: Inheriting Austin," 5. I have slightly altered
Gustaffson's wording to convey what I take to be the gist of his remarks.
[4] Gustaffson, "Introduction: Inheriting Austin," 3.
[5] Berlin and Hampshire, "I'm Going to Tamper with Your Beliefs a Little," Part 3.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=soIBA2JQYHA, 4:30–4:50.
[6] For an engaging portrait of the lives and personalities of many philosophers at
Oxford University during the mid-20th century including but not limited to disciples
of Ox-Phi, see Krishnan, 2023.

advanced in the writings of A.J. Ayer and H.H. Price. Although both Ryle and Austin see ordinary language as a valuable source for attaining philosophical clarity, Ryle focuses primarily on ordinary sentences while Austin typically investigates ordinary words and phrases. In the absence of any unifying point of controversy, their respective contributions may seem too disjointed and fissiparous to allow for a retrospective assessment of Ox-Phi.

Fortunately, a single thematic thread runs throughout two of their most influential works. It is the question of whether our perceptual, psychological, and epistemic vocabulary—the range of expressions that includes "sees," "looks," "appears," "imagines," "thinks," "believes," "desires," and "knows"—describes interior mental objects, episodes, states, or processes. Ryle's attack in *The Concept of Mind* on the Cartesian "ghost in the machine" and Austin's critique in *Sense and Sensibilia* of the notion of "sense data" as special perceptual objects of direct awareness are both attempts to erase parts of the traditional philosophical picture of our mental life as consisting in a variety of internal phenomena distinct from our external behavior. By comparing the different approaches Ryle and Austin pursue in moving against this picture, explaining how Austin's approach is superior to Ryle's in at least one respect, and then considering what objections might and indeed were raised against both approaches, I could begin to tell a historically accurate and critically informed story about the rise, decline, and the renewed relevance of Ox-Phi.

With considerable verve and aplomb, Ryle devotes several of his early essays to the nature of negation, propositions, and thinking. His analyses are informed by his lively participation in "the Wee Teas," a discussion group consisting of junior philosophers at Oxford, and by his impressive familiarity with pertinent texts from both the analytic and Continental philosophical traditions. Ryle's 1930 analysis of what someone is doing when she thinks of a thing X as having a specific property Y is especially interesting. Difficulties with his analysis may have prompted Ryle to curtail his involvement in the Wee Teas and devote himself to a solitary search for a suitable method capable of unraveling a broad range of other philosophical puzzles including but not limited to the nature of thinking. The result is his highly ambitious yet deeply ambiguous position paper "Systematically Misleading Expressions" published in 1932. There, Ryle devises a method of paraphrasing ordinary language sentences which give rise to a particular philosophical perplexity with other ordinary language sentences which do not engender the same perplexity. My portrayal of Ryle's method seeks to strike a balance between doing justice to the exegetical complexity of understanding just what the method is

supposed to be and conveying the palpable sense that something truly new and exciting in the history of philosophy is afoot here.

In his best-known work, *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle then applies his new paraphrastic method to the philosophical Gordian Knot he polemically labels "the ghost in the machine." His multi-pronged assault targets a whole slew of "para-mechanical" mentalist hypotheses about the intellect, the will, emotions, self-knowledge, sensation, and imagination. Rather than trying to sift through everything Ryle touches upon, I have concentrated on mining the main vein of analysis connecting his regress objection against any mentalist account of intelligent capacities, his idea of a category mistake, his proposal that sentences attributing beliefs and knowledge can be paraphrased by sentences ascribing multi-track dispositions, the role so-called "mongrel categorical" sentences play in his non-mentalist account of sensation, his notion of assuming, and his heroic effort to explain why the activity of imagining something need not be conceived as an interior process of introspecting some queer mental entity. Many of Ryle's contemporaries, among them an up-and-coming young philosopher named Susan Haack, were not at all persuaded by Ryle's non-mentalist view of imagining. In video footage of a cordial yet spirited debate between her and Ryle, Haack draws upon empirical psychology to raise a powerful objection against his view that Ryle more or less concedes. Haack's objection serves as an apt coda to my treatment of Ryle and as an appropriate transition to my treatment of Austin.

Already in *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle expresses reservations about how the philosophical use of a word like "sensation" or "conscious" diverges from its ordinary use. This concern is taken even more seriously by Austin. In his essay "The Meaning of a Word," Austin outlines a term-rather than a sentence-based methodology that highlights various discrepancies between the use of a word or phrase in a particular philosophical context and paradigmatic uses of the same word or phrase in ordinary language. Austin describes cases where the philosophical use has features which are entirely foreign to the ordinary paradigms, as well as cases where features which are native to the ordinary paradigms are absent from the philosophical use. The danger, Austin warns, is that the philosophical use of a word or phrase becomes detached from the ordinary, everyday situations giving it whatever meaning it has for us. While some occasions may call for the introduction of technical terminology, doing so carries its own philosophical risks. A new technical term cannot be created simply by extracting desirable features from available ordinary paradigms and then combining them, since the features in question might cancel each other out. Even the successful introduction of a formal language is not

immune from the vagueness and ambiguity that can either be inherited from informal explications of the formalism or creep in through unforeseen circumstances.

The book-length series of lectures published as *Sense and Sensibilia* occupies a place in Austin's oeuvre comparable to that of *The Concept of Mind* in Ryle's. Austin deploys his term-methodology against the philosophical conception of sense data A.J. Ayer sets forth in his monograph *The Foundations of Empirical Knowledge*. To gauge the effectiveness of Austin's critique, I have found it useful to begin by reviewing Ayer's sophisticated, quasi-Carnapian version of phenomenalism and then showing why several of Austin's objections to it miss their mark. The heart of Austin's critique, I argue, is a justified skepticism towards Ayer's attempt to introduce a new technical language of sense data for epistemological purposes by falling back on ordinary language. Briefly, Ayer incoherently tries to combine mutually exclusive implications carried by familiar uses of "sees" and other perceptual vocabulary in divergent contexts. Austin's counsel to look carefully at what people actually say and do also has consequences for the objection Haack raises against Ryle: looking carefully at the various things subjects of the Perky Experiment actually say and the different assumptions they actually make regarding what counts as "real" mental visualization vitiates her argument that the experiment provides empirical support for the philosophical idea of introspecting a special type of interior entity common to all instances of imagining. In the hands of Austin and his likeminded Oxford colleagues, the movement begun by Ryle was soon taking the Anglo-American philosophical world by storm.[7]

Yet within only a few years, the revolution emanating from Oxford had sparked a cognitivist counterrevolution from philosophers who were eager to propound theories of internal mental states, acts, and processes. Prominent counterrevolutionary texts include Noam Chomsky's writings on generative grammar and early papers by Jerry Fodor and others at the crossroads of philosophy of mind and cognitive psychology.[8] I have chosen to foreground two other philosophers, Peter Geach and Paul Grice, who pinpoint and effectively exploit potential weaknesses in the views of Ryle

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[7] In Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, xv, Cavell speaks for many when he writes of Austin's work on performative utterances, "This material, together with the procedures inspiring them—procedures some of us called ordinary language philosophy—knocked me off my horse."

[8] See Chomsky *Syntactic Structures* and especially the papers in Part I of Fodor, *Representations*.

and Austin.[9] Geach rejects Ryle's analysis of belief and other mental states as multi-track dispositions in favor of a theory of mental judgments as interior acts of saying which are analogous to the use of natural language expressions to perform overt acts of stating. Grice replaces the vague notion of implication taken for granted by Austin in his critique of sense data with the seminal idea of conversational implicature, opening a Pandora's box replete with internal acts of intending, implying, and indicating which are central to the mentalist theories of perception, speech acts, and meaning advanced by Grice, Strawson, Schiffer, and Searle.

To be sure, the mentalist positions defended by Geach and Grice are hardly unproblematic. Geach's characterization of internal "assertions" as basic acts presupposes a vague, insufficiently explicated distinction between basic and non-basic actions. Grice fails to elucidate how the meaning a perceptual sentence is supposed to possess independently of the sentence's conversational implicature has anything to do with sense data, and he is insufficiently attentive to the qualms of phenomenalists like Ayer have concerning external objects and the sense data they allegedly cause. Nonetheless, Geach's doubts about Ryle's account of sentences attributing mental states and Grice's dissatisfaction with Austin's unexplained notion of implication are legitimate challenges that must be met by anyone who is sympathetic to Ox-Phi, as I am.

A resource that has aided me in overcoming the first of these challenges is a once widely read yet now scarcely cited essay by J.O. Urmson, a member of Austin's circle at Oxford, entitled "Parenthetical Verbs."[10] Like Geach, Urmson disputes Ryle's paraphrastic analysis of "belief"-sentences as sentences ascribing multi-track dispositions. Yet unlike Geach, Urmson does not maintain that "belief"-sentences attribute internal psychological states to subjects; instead, Urmson takes the distinctively parenthetical character exhibited by first-person uses of belief-sentences to be a way in which a speaker signals the logical or epistemological status that some propositional claim has for her vis-à-vis standards of reasonableness common to her and the other members of their community. The parenthetical use exhibited by "belief" also applies to the use of "think" in the sense of "judge" in sentences that Geach takes to describe interior acts of judging. Urmson thus brings us one step closer to an understanding of these concepts as logical rather than psychological. An

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[9] The principal texts I consider are Geach, *Mental Acts*, along with related material from Geach, *God and the Soul* and Grice, *Studies in the Ways of Words*, 224–247.
[10] Urmson's essay is published in *Essays in Conceptual Analysis*, ed. Antony Flew (London: Macmillan, 1960), 192–212.

important caveat is that a non-mentalistic construal of signalizing is still needed to rule out a Gricean interpretation of it.

Up to a certain juncture, my reconstruction of the dialectic between Oxford ordinary language philosophers and their mentalist critics makes only scant references to the white elephant in the room: Wittgenstein. But a key part of the story I want to tell is that more interaction between ordinary philosophy at Oxford and Wittgensteinian ordinary philosophy at Cambridge (Wi-Phi) would have been immensely beneficial to both. A conduit of Wittgensteinian ideas to Oxford was John Wisdom, who wrote extensively on the logical atomism of the *Tractatus* and themes from Wittgenstein's later thought.[11] While Wisdom's writings are interesting in their own right, they strike me as too idiosyncratic to facilitate the kind of exchange I believe to be necessary for making progress on the issues I discuss. A more promising candidate is Urmson, who published a critical history of analytic philosophy up the mid-twentieth century, including Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*.[12] Urmson also compares and contrasts the Oxford- and Cambridge-styles of ordinary language philosophy without sharing Austin's notorious hostility to Wittgenstein.[13] Accordingly, I have decided to use Urmson's very Austinian essay on parenthetical verbs as my entry point into Wittgenstein's later investigations of rule-following, private language, institutions, forms of life, and general facts of nature.

Wittgenstein's *prima facie* (and often *secunda facie*) obscure remarks on these matters acquire a new lucidity when we approach them in the more Austinian spirit exemplified by Urmson, where philosophical conceptions are tested against a judicious appreciation of what we actually do and say, how we actually live, and how the world actually is. For example, it can be seen why the much-discussed "paradox" of rule-following that Saul Kripke ascribes to Wittgenstein is fundamentally flawed and totally alien to Wittgenstein's objectives in philosophy. It also becomes crystal clear why Wittgenstein is correct to claim that a "private language" is unintelligible because it would eradicate any distinction between following a rule and only thinking one was following a rule.

Reciprocally, the relevant material from Wittgenstein allows us to give a precise, non-mentalistic elucidation of Urmson's indefinite notion of

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[11] On the logical atomism of the *Tractatus*, see Wisdom, "Logical Constructions." On themes from Wittgenstein's later thought, see Wisdom, *Other Minds*.

[12] See J.O. Urmson, *Philosophical Analysis*.

[13] See J.O. Urmson, "The History of Philosophical Analysis," 294–301. Searle shares some amusing and alarming anecdotes about Austin's hostility to Wittgenstein in the brief video clip "John Searle on Austin and Wittgenstein." www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9BXHqiosnI.

signaling. Supplemented with this Wittgensteinian elucidation, Urmson's parenthetical analysis reveals that our belief-discourse and think- discourse neither describes nor presupposes any private mental states or acts but places our propositional claims within a public space of rational and other cultural standards. The same analysis carries over to our implying- and assuming-discourse, so that Austin's techniques of limning the implications of how we use perceptual terminology and of ferreting out the operative assumptions we make regarding mental visualization permit us to dispense with purportedly private objects like sense data and mental images without reintroducing private mental acts or episodes of implying and assuming through the backdoor. What begins to take shape is the recognition that our perceptual, psychological, and epistemological vocabulary is on a par with our logical vocabulary; perceptual, psychological, and epistemological concepts are, in a suitably extended sense, logical concepts. Returning once more to Wittgenstein, this extended sense of "logical" can be made apparent by reflecting on the normativity and ubiquity exhibited by our pedagogical use of the vocabulary in instructional scenarios where we are teaching someone how to use it properly.

As Warnock observes, a disadvantage of looking back on Ox-Phi from our current vantagepoint is that we no longer have direct access to the conversations among Austin and his pupils, let alone to talks given by Ryle or his discussions with other members of the Wee Teas. This disadvantage is somewhat mitigated by the happy fact that we now have at our disposal a wealth of video content featuring some of the proponents, opponents, and reliable eyewitnesses of the movement, including Ryle, Austin, Urmson, Haack, Ayer, Berlin, Stuart Hampshire, Bryan Magee, Bernard Williams, and John Searle. I have at times introduced or expanded upon a philosophical theme by citing an excerpt from one of these previously televised programs, all of which are all available on YouTube. In each case, I encourage the reader to view the entire segment from which a specific clip has been excerpted to get a feeling for how the informal style and iconoclastic spirit of ordinary language philosophy at Oxford stimulated its most ardent advocates and provoked its most determined foes.

Mine is not the only story that might be told. Avner Baz has recently presented a non-historical defense of Ox-Phi that merits scrutiny.[14] I conclude my study by augmenting some results gleaned from my critical history of Ox-Phi with some Wittgensteinian insights in order to undermine a problematic picture of knowledge underlying contemporary epistemology

[14] See Avner Baz, *When Words Are Called For: A Defense of Ordinary Language Philosophy*.

that Baz's non-historical approach leaves untouched: namely, that knowledge is a theoretical concept requiring further explanation.

In tracing the trajectory of inquiry that begins with Ryle and Haack, proceeds to Austin and Ayer, continues through Geach and Grice, and culminates with Urmson and Wittgenstein, I present a counternarrative to the conventional wisdom that Oxford revolution of the 1950s and 1960s was quashed once and for all by the cognitivist counterrevolution of the 1970s and 1980s, with Wittgenstein's eccentric later writings being nothing more than an oddity no current philosopher of mind needs to take seriously. It may be high time to rethink the conventional wisdom. With its bewildering proliferation of Mary's and Chinese rooms, madmen and Martians, subjectively inscrutable bats, irreducibly phenomenal properties, swamp-beings, zombies, eliminativists, illusionists, idealists, mysterians, and pan-psychics, something seems to have gone badly wrong with contemporary philosophy of mind. Maybe lessons from the recent past that should have been taken to heart weren't, leaving us in the current lurch from which we have not yet succeeded in extricating ourselves. To convert "maybe" into "certainly," these lessons must be retrieved and relearned. The task that lies before us is to open the books, balance the accounts, and weigh how their philosophical assets might be reinvested into more profitable intellectual ventures.

CHAPTER 1

SOME THEMES IN RYLE'S EARLIER PHILOSOPHY

Ryle reminisces that during the 1920s, when he had recently begun teaching as a young don in the college of Christ Church at Oxford,

> Philosophy in the English-speaking world—including Oxford but not including Cambridge—was still in a very tepid condition. We had the impression that there was still dragging on a Victorian-Edwardian election campaign between one thing called "idealism" and another thing called "realism." What this election issue was all about was made difficult to discover by the fact that the spokesmen of the opposing sides never seemed actually to confront one another. I remember thinking that it would be rather hard to convince my skeptical brothers that my peculiar subject of philosophy could matter very much, if it amounted only to championship of "realism," or else alternatively, championship of "idealism." Verily said, why not just stop bothering about both "isms"? And this we pretty soon did. We had to. For real philosophical crises were partly imminent and partly already on us. But to say what these crises were would be to tell the philosophical history of our half-century.[1]

The "crises" to which Ryle alludes were disagreements about the nature of logic, propositions, concepts, thinking, and even the task of philosophy itself. The chief protagonists were Bolzano, Brentano, Frege, Husserl, Meinong, Moore, Russell, and Wittgenstein, followed in later years by Carnap and the other members of the Vienna Circle, Ayer, and, once again, Wittgenstein.

Ryle reports that while continuing to participate in "the Thursday Teas" dominated by senior Oxford philosophers, in the late 1920s he and five of his junior colleagues escaped the doldrums of the realism-idealism

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[1] Ryle and Urmson, "A Philosophical Conversation Between Prof. Gilbert Ryle & J.O. Urmson," Part 1, www.youtube.com/watch?v=0XRwygBUd2Y, 6:09–7:11.

debate by convening "the Wee Teas," a fortnightly informal discussion group in which "our tongues wagged more freely and our wits moved less deferentially."[2] Traces of the Wee Teas' non-dogmatic, exploratory atmosphere can be found in some of Ryle's early writings. Three essays written between 1929 and 1932 are especially of note. In them, Ryle grapples with several of the aforementioned "philosophical crises." Sometimes he holds, implies, or leaves open the possibility of positions which are plainly at odds with his later views. Although his criticisms are often inconclusive and his own theories are problematic, at key junctures they anticipate the methodology that Ryle sets forth more thoroughly in "Systematically Misleading Expressions" and then puts to work in *The Concept of Mind*. Thus, an examination of these three early essays will give us considerable insight into the course of Ryle's philosophical development.

"Negation"

Ryle defends the thesis that negative predicative statements express genuine facts. The statement "Mrs. Smith's hat is not green" does not perform the psychological function of excluding the idea of greenness from our idea of Mrs. Smith's hat or the epistemological function of indicating our current ignorance regarding the actual color of Mrs. Smith's hat. Instead, the statement purports to express a genuine truth about the world as it is independently of our acts of thinking. At the same time, Ryle rejects any bloated ontology encompassing non-existent entities such as *not being green* or the negative fact *that Mrs. Smith's hat is not green*.[3]

After distancing himself from a purely psychological or epistemological account of negative sentences, Ryle outlines his own analysis:

> And I wish to maintain, too, the further point, that while the denial of a certain quality to A seems to have A for its subject, exactly as an ascription of it to A does, in fact the real subject of the denial is not A but the (perhaps) unidentified quality of A. When I say that 'the hat is not green' I am not ascribing a positive character to the hat, though I am necessarily presupposing that it has the positive character of being colored; but I am positively characterizing what is a positive character of

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[2] Ryle, "Autobiographical," 6. According to Ryle, the membership of the group was always six but changed over time.
[3] Ryle, "Negation," 1. Ryle is responding in part to the view of John David Mabbott, a junior colleague of Ryle's who was also a member of the Wee Teas. See Ryle, "Autobiographical," 6.

> the hat. I am charactering, namely, the determinate color of the hat as being one of the colours other than green.[4]

In a way that is reminiscent of Frege, the key to the logical character of the statement "Mrs. Smith's hat is not green" is its predicate position. In "Mrs. Smith's hat is green," a determinate color that is the color of being green is ascribed to Mrs. Smith's hat; in the negation of the same statement, a determinate yet unspecified color that is other than the color of being green is ascribed to the hat. Hence the proper analysis of the negative statement "Mrs. Smith's hat is not green"[5] is "Mrs. Smith's hat is some color that is other than the color of being green."

More generally, a negative statement to the effect that an object A does not have a characteristic C is elliptical either for the positive statement that A has some characteristic other than yet in the same category as C or for the positive statement that some object other than yet in the same category as A has C. Which kind of positive statement is made in a given situation can be signaled by italicizing or vocally stressing one of the expressions in the negative sentence "A is not C" that is used to make it. Hence a negative sentence like "Jones is not the Club secretary" can be used to make different positive statements. "*Jones* is not the Club secretary" states that some other Club member than Jones is the Club secretary. "Jones is not the Club *secretary*" states that Jones holds some other office in the Club than secretary. "Jones is not the *Club* secretary" states that Jones is secretary of some other organized body than the Club. "Jones *is* not the Club secretary" states that some time other than the present is Jones' tenure as Club secretary. In some cases, the semantic type of the italicized/stressed word indicates the relevant category (e.g., the color word "*green*" in "Mrs. Smith's hat is not *green*" indicates the category of colors; the present tense of "*is*" in "Jones *is* not the Club secretary" indicates the category of temporal dimension). In other cases, the relevant category becomes clear from the surrounding context.[6]

There is a tension between Ryle's earlier analysis of negative statements and Ryle's later philosophy of mind. A person engaged in a mechanical process consisting of overt muscular movements and other physical behavior might either be thinking or not thinking. Therefore, thinking itself is not a mechanical process. Hence the sentence "Thinking is not a mechanical process" expresses a fact. What positive statement might

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[4] Ryle, "Negation," 6.

[5] More precisely, to anticipate the next two paragraphs, "Mrs. Smith's hat is not *green*."

[6] See Ryle, "Negation," 7.

the negative sentence be used to make? One Ryle's earlier analysis of negation, one possibility is "Thinking is not a *mechanical* process" as elliptical for the positive statement that thinking is some other kind of process than mechanical—namely, a non-mechanical one. But Ryle later rejects what he calls the Cartesian "para-mechanical hypothesis" according to which "The differences between the physical and the mental were thus represented as differences between a common framework of the categories of 'thing', 'stuff', 'attribute', 'state', 'process', 'change', 'cause' and effect'."[7]

Another possibility is "Thinking is not a mechanical *process*" as elliptical for the positive statement that thinking is some other kind of mechanical entity than a process—perhaps a mechanical (physical) property like brittleness or ductility, or maybe a mechanical state like solidity. But, as chapter 3 explains, Ryle's mature philosophy of mind also excludes any such view of thinking. The possibility of "*Thinking* is not a mechanical process" as elliptical for the positive statement that some other kind of phenomenon (e.g., melting) is a physical process, though true, is beside the point; and the possibility of "Thinking *is* not a mechanical process" as elliptical for the positive statement that at some other time than the present (e.g., last month or next year) thinking is a mechanical process conflicts with the *Concept of Mind* conclusion that thinking itself is not and never is a mechanical process. Even "Thinking is not a *mechanical process*" as elliptical for the positive statement that thinking is something other than a mechanical phenomenon and something other than a process" is unsatisfactory, since it remains compatible with the thesis that thinking is some other kind of non-mechanical entity—something the later Ryle would never accept.

The problem is compounded by the earlier Ryle's remarks concerning so-called "infinite negations" like "Virtue is not square [round, purple, heavy, . . .]". Ryle contends that the question "Has Virtue a shape" is nonsensical because neither the infinite negation nor its contradictory "Virtue is square" can be true.[8] However, it is not obvious why the infinite negation in question cannot be used to make a true assertion. "Virtue is not *square*" could be elliptical for the positive statement that Virtue has some other property other than yet in a common category with the property of being square, where the relevant category here is not the category encompassing all and only *concrete* properties like being square, being purple, being heavy, and so forth but rather the category encompassing all and only *properties* simpliciter, including the aforementioned concrete properties as well as purely abstract properties like being nonspatial, being

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[7] Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 9.
[8] Ryle, "Negation," 8.

nontemporal, or being immaterial. Thus, denying that Virtue is square could be a way of affirming that Virtue has some purely abstract property like being immaterial. Countenancing the possibility of immateriality as a purely abstract property makes it much easier to read "Thinking is not a *mechanical* process" as a positive statement of the Cartesian ghost-in-the-machine myth that thinking is a non-mechanical, i.e., an immaterial, process.

   When Ryle wrote "Negation" in 1929, he seems to have been open to the traditional Cartesian dualist view of the mind as an immaterial substance. He analyzes the negative statement "The *soul* is not a fire-shovel" as elliptical for "the trivial truth" that some substance other than the soul is a fire-shovel.[9] A further indication of Ryle's earlier Cartesian sympathies is provided by a remark from J.L. Austin's review of *The Concept of Mind*:

> Those who, like Professor Ryle, revolt against a dichotomy to which they have been once addicted, commonly go over to maintain that only one of the alleged pair of opposites really exists at all. And so he, though he does not believe that the body is a machine, does believe that it alone, and not the "ghost" exists: he preaches with the fervor of a proselyte a doctrine of "one world."[10]

In his introduction to *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle himself says of the dualism he goes on to attack:

> Some readers may think that my tone of voice in this book is excessively polemical. It may comfort them to know that the assumptions against which I exhibit most heat are assumptions of which I myself have been victim. Primarily I am trying to get some disorders out of my own system.[11]

But since the earlier Ryle still regards the mind as an immaterial substance that engages in non-mechanical inner processes, he would be unperturbed by any tension between the dualistic implications of his analysis of negation and the later nondualism of *The Concept of Mind*.

   Nevertheless, a deeper understanding of the evolution of Ryle's thought requires a plausible story about how Ryle makes the transition from his earlier forays in analysis to the conception of analysis he presents in "Systematically Misleading Expressions" and puts to work in *The Concept of Mind*. Already in "Negation," the method of elucidating initially opaque

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[9] See Ryle, "Negation," 8.
[10] Austin, "Intelligent Behavior," 47–48.
[11] Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, lxi.

negative statements by reading them as elliptical for lucid positive categorical statements foreshadows the later method of paraphrasing philosophically problematic sentences of ordinary language with other ordinary language sentences which are philosophically unproblematic. Two other early essays by Ryle also anticipate important aspects of his later work.

"Are There Propositions?"

Ryle begins by drawing up a balance sheet comparing the advantages and disadvantages of postulating propositions as abstract entities that do not exist in space and time but non-spatiotemporally subsist in a Platonic "Third Realm" distinct from both the totality of physical facts and the totality of psychological phenomena.[12] On the one hand, if propositions are independently subsisting entities correlated with the "that" clauses in sentences used to express acts of thinking and judging (e.g., "Marissa believes that the planet Neptune has 14 moons"), then contrary to subjective idealism the objects of our consciousness are not automatically reducible to our consciousness of them. Since propositions, unlike an individual's acts of thinking, are common cognitive currency, they also enable us to do justice to what Ryle calls "the operations of identity" according to which different people can think the same thing, the same person can think the same think at different times, and the same person can think the same thing in different ways at different times as when she conceived it yesterday, believes it today, and knows it tomorrow. Propositions standing in inferential relations to one another and in contingent relations to the sentences of our language are natural candidates for, respectively, the subject matter of logic and the meanings of declarative sentences.[13]

On the other hand, we know propositions without any intermediary between them and our knowledge of them; otherwise, we would be confronted with an infinite regress in which we require an intermediary between propositions and our knowledge of them, a further intermediary between the first intermediary and our knowledge of propositions, and so on, ad infinitum. But if we directly know propositions, then it is obscure

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[12] Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 13–28.

[13] Ryle does not consider the possible objection that a sentence like "The President of the United States is in the Oval Office" can have the same meaning yet express different propositions depending on the circumstances in which it written or uttered. It is unclear whether he would have been willing to identity the meaning of a sentence capable of being true or false with a function from the sentence and various circumstances of its use to different propositions.

why we can't dispense with them and directly know the facts to which true propositions correspond. Moreover, the nature of the relation between a true proposition and the fact to which it "corresponds" remains unexplained, and how false propositions can be *false* if there are no false facts to which they purport is enigmatic. Finally, since we are interested primarily in coming to know facts about existing objects in the actual world, introducing a whole slew of subsisting abstracta in a Third World at best distracts us from our primary interest and at worst thwarts it. If the proper object of Marissa's belief that the planet Neptune has 14 moons is the proposition to that effect, then why isn't Marissa's belief about that proposition rather than Neptune and its moons?

Having weighed the pros and cons of a commitment to propositions, Ryle then presents his own theory that aims at retaining their benefits while avoiding their drawbacks. Taking a cue from ordinary language, he distinguishes knowledge and belief as standing conditions of an agent, such as my knowledge that $2^3=8$ and your belief that Paris is the capital of France, from acts of coming to know or to believe as episodes or occurrences, such as when I come to know that someone has stolen the cookies from the jar or when you come to believe that you are being followed.[14] Ryle demarcates acts of knowing from acts of apprehension such as coming to understand, to imagine, to doubt, to believe, or to opine that some object X has some characteristic X.[15] Common to all these acts of apprehension is the act of thinking of X as Y. For example, my coming to believe that X is Y and my coming to doubt that X is Y equally involve my thinking of X as Y: in the first case I accept the thought, while in the second case I question it. The focus of Ryle's theory is a proper analysis of thinking of X as Y: "What then am I doing when I am thinking of X as being Y?".[16] Later, Ryle expresses the goal of his analysis somewhat differently: "*what* am I thinking when I am thinking of X as being Y?"[17] As will become apparent momentarily, this difference is crucial for the evaluation of Ryle's theory.

Ryle observes that both verbal expressions like proper names and indicative sentences as well as nonverbal expressions like diagrams, maps,

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[14] "For even an *actus* is something that occurs at a moment and lasts only through the moment. But, anyhow, as ordinarily used, the verbs to know, believe, be of an opinion that, etc., denote not momentary occurrences but more or less standing conditions" (Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 32).

[15] See Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 30.

[16] Ryle, "Are there Propositions?", 30.

[17] Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 37.

and visual images can function either as symbols or as quasi-symbols.[18] An expression functions as a symbol when it symbolizes something real, whether it be a real object denoted by a proper name, a fact stated by using an indicative sentence, or relationships among real things persons, or places depicted by diagrams, maps, or images. An expression functions as a quasi-symbol when, in virtue of its grammatical form or non-linguistic structure, it is suitable for symbolizing something real even if it does not actually do so. "Pegasus" functions as a quasi-name, since it is grammatically suitable for denoting a real object even though it doesn't. "Snow is green" functions as a quasi-indicative sentence grammatically suitable for yet not actually being used to state a fact, and a geographical drawing of Middle Earth is a quasi-map cartographically suitable for yet not actually depicting a place. The two functions are not mutually exclusive. When Martina utters the true indicative sentence "Snow is white," it functions both as a quasi-symbol, since it is grammatically suitable for being used to state a fact, as well as a symbol, since Martina uses it to state the fact that snow is white.

Ryle concentrates on the connection between thinking of X as Y and the indicative sentence "X is Y." On his theory, thinking of X as Y is properly analyzed as knowing a certain fact about "X is Y." It is not the fact that "X is Y" is being used to state a fact, since merely thinking of X as Y does not involve using "X is Y" to state anything, let along to state any fact. Rather, it is the fact that "X is Y" functions as a quasi-symbol. More precisely, thinking of X as Y is knowing the hypothetical fact that "X is Y" would state a fact if and only if X were Y.[19]

Ryle extends the theory to cover both verbal propositional quasi-symbols like indicative sentences that are grammatically suitable for stating facts and non-verbal propositional quasi-symbols like diagrams, maps or images that are pictorially suitable for "presenting" or setting forth facts.[20] Thinking of X as Y is knowing the hypothetical fact that a verbal or non-

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[18] For Ryle's discussion of symbols and quasi-symbols, see "Are There Propositions?", 34–36.

[19] "And here too, as in the case of understanding another's statement, the statement ['X is Y'] is not *presentative* or a known fact [i.e., that X is Y], but it is a *constituent* of one, namely, the hypothetical fact about it that if, and only if, X is (or were) Y, the statement 'X is Y' does (would) state a fact" (Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 38). Here I take Ryle to mean 'indicative sentence" by "statement," since strictly speaking "X is Y" is not a statement but an indicative sentence capable of being used to make one (provided that suitable expressions are substituted for "X" and "Y" or "X" and "Y" themselves are given suitable interpretations).

[20] For the use of "proposition" in Ryle's theory to cover both sentential and non-sentential quasi-symbols that are structurally suitable for setting forth facts, see "Are There Propositions?", 39.

verbal propositional quasi-symbol Ø possesses a suitable structure in virtue of which Ø would set forth a fact if and only if X were Y.

Ryle argues that his theory has all the advantages but none of the disadvantages of postulating propositions as abstract, subsisting entities. The quasi-symbols figuring in Ryle's analysis of thinking of X as Y are concrete objects that exist independently of our consciousness of them and are accessible to different people and to the same person at different times through the same or varying psychological attitudes. Indicative sentences (and pictorial symbols to the extent that they resemble such sentences) have both semantical and logical properties. We know a fact directly by knowing a propositional symbol setting forth the fact in the absence of any abstract proposition acting as an intermediary.[21] Without abstract propositions, there is no puzzle about how an abstract proposition can be false in the absence of a false fact to which it corresponds, and there is no temptation to say that our beliefs are about the abstract propositions with which they are correlated as opposed to the facts in the actual world. Finally, since "there is a relation between the grammatical structure of a statement and the logical structure of the fact that it states if it states one,"[22] the correspondence between an indicative sentence used to state a fact and the fact it is used to state is clearer than the "correspondence" between a true abstract proposition and a concrete fact. Here, as well as in his willingness to countenance diagrammatic, cartographical, and mental pictures as non-verbal propositions, Ryle is influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* with its theory of propositional signs as pictures or models logically isomorphic to the possible states of affairs they express.[23]

Further influence of the *Tractatus* is apparent in the answer Ryle suggests to the question of what someone is thinking when she thinks of X as Y: "The quasi-symbol *exhibits* but does not symbolize a fact which is in part *about itself*, namely, that it has such grammatical properties that it may state a fact and does so if there is such and such a fact."[24] Ryle's distinction between *symbolizing* and *exhibiting* echoes the difference between *saying* and *showing* in the *Tractatus*. The following remark by Wittgenstein begins to shed light on Ryle's suggested answer:

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[21] For this point, see Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 39.

[22] Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 39.

[23] In a 1972 televised interview (*Logic Lane: A Philosophical Retrospective*, www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEiNOs9yzk, 3:55–4:26), Ryle reports that from 1925 onward he was trying to learn as much as he could from Wittgenstein. For Ryle's later assessment of Wittgenstein's earlier and later philosophy, see Ryle, "Ludwig Wittgenstein," 258–266.

[24] Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 38.

> 5.542 But it is clear that "A believes that *p*", "A thinks *p*", "A
> says *p*", are of the form "'*p*' says *p*": and here we have no
> coordination of a fact and an object, but a coordination of facts
> by means of a coordination of their objects.[25]

The second part of Wittgenstein's remark recapitulates the previously
mentioned point that an indicative sentence ("*p*") is a fact consisting of
concatenated expressions that is coordinated or logically isomorphic with a
possible fact (*p*) consisting of an array of objects in the world. If the latter
fact is merely possible, then the sentence is false; if it is actual, then the
sentence is true.[26]

In the first part of his remark, Wittgenstein is not falsely claiming
that "A believes that *p*" or "A thinks *p*" is equivalent to " '*p*' says *p*," but
indicating that in virtue of its grammatical structure and linguistic meaning
"*p*" specifies what A believes or thinks under the appropriate conditions. If
A believes that it's snowing, then "It's snowing" specifies what A believes.
The sentence specifying what A believes itself does not *say* "A believes that
it's snowing"; instead, the sentence in question *shows* what A believes.[27]
Ryle incorporates Wittgenstein's view into his own analysis of thinking of
X as Y. Whether I am judging that X is Y or doubting that X is Y, in either
case I am thinking of X as Y. The quasi-indicative sentence "X is Y" (or
some structurally suitable non-verbal propositional quasi-symbol) does not
itself *symbolize* my thinking of X as Y when I am or judging or doubting
that X is Y; it symbolizes X's being Y. Instead, "X is Y" (or the relevant
non-verbal propositional quasi-symbol) *exhibits* what I am thinking either
when I am judging that X is Y or when I am doubting that X is Y: in each
case, I am thinking of a possible situation where X is Y.

What is Ryle's answer to the question of what someone is *doing*
when she thinks of X as Y? According to Ryle's analysis, she comes to
know the hypothetical fact that a verbal or non-verbal propositional quasi-
symbol Ø possesses a suitable structure in virtue of which Ø would set forth

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[25] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 143.
[26] As Mounce explains in *Wittgenstein's Tractatus: An Introduction*, 83–84,
Wittgenstein is rejecting Russell's view of someone's belief that A loves B as a
relation between the believer, A, B, and love partly on the ground that a relation
among the believer, A, B, and love also obtains when someone believes that B loves
A. Similarly, Ryle maintains that thinking of Bristol as bigger than London is more
than simply knowing what Bristol, London, and being bigger than are, since the
same knowledge is required for thinking of London as bigger than Bristol; see Ryle,
"Are There Propositions?", 31.
[27] See Mounce, *Wittgenstein's Tractatus*, 85–86.

a fact if and only if X were Y. This answer is problematic given the following claim Ryle makes:

> I may be said to be thinking of X as being Y: (*a*) when I come to know that X is Y; (*b*) when I believe it; (*c*) when I opine it; (*d*) when I guess it; (*e*) when I wonder about it, question, or doubt it; (*f*) when I merely entertain or imagine it; and (*g*) when I understand it stated by another.[28]

When someone comes to know the hypothetical fact that a particular quasi-symbol would set forth a fact in a counterfactual situation where X is Y, she is imagining or thinking of the quasi-symbol as setting forth a fact in a counterfactual situation where X is Y. But then she is imagining or thinking of a counterfactual situation where X is Y, which is merely another way of saying that she is imagining or thinking of X as Y. Since it takes for granted the notion of someone thinking of X as Y that it is supposed to analyze, Ryle's "answer" to what someone is doing when she is thinking of X as Y begs the very question at issue.

Ryle suggests a possible reply to the foregoing objection by adding the following rider to his analysis: "The phrase 'to think of . . . as' gives us a clue. It simply means to think of X as if it is (or were) Y, i.e., to think of X in the same way as one would think of it if it were Y and—we must add—one knew it."[29] The idea is that someone who is comes to know the relevant hypothetical fact about the quasi-symbol is thinking of it as setting forth a fact when and only when *she knew that X were Y*. As Ryle has previously explained, knowledge that X is Y is a standing condition entirely distinct from the act or episode of coming to know that X is Y. So even though coming to know that X is Y requires imagining or thinking of X as Y, it does not follow that knowledge that X is Y requires imagining or thinking of X as Y. To be sure, Ryle might argue, someone who comes to know the hypothetical fact that a particular quasi-symbol would set forth a fact when and only when she knew that X were Y is thinking of the quasi-symbol. But that by itself is not imagining or thinking of X as Y. If not, then at least Ryle's proposed analysis of thinking of X as Y is not patently question-begging.

Unfortunately, someone who comes to know the relevant hypothetical fact about the quasi-symbol does not necessarily know that X is Y since, after all, X might not actually be Y. Rather, she is imagining or thinking of herself as if she knew that X were Y. Imagining or thinking of

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[28] Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 29.
[29] Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 37.

herself as if she knew that X were Y is ipso facto imagining or thinking of herself in a counterfactual situation where she knows that X is Y. Since she knows that X is Y only if X is Y, imagining or thinking of herself in a counterfactual situation where she knows that X is Y is ipso facto imagining or thinking of a counterfactual situation where X is Y, which is just the same thing as imagining or thinking of X as Y. Ryle's amended analysis of what someone is doing when she is thinking of X as Y, if not viciously circular, is totally non-informative.

On this assessment of Ryle's theory, Ryle accepts that thinking is a mental activity but offers no non-question-begging analysis of it. However, two other tendencies at work in Ryle's essay should be accentuated. One is Ryle's Wittgenstein-inspired interest in the logical properties of verbal propositional quasi-symbols like indicative sentences and non-verbal propositional quasi-symbols like diagrams, maps, and images in virtue of which they can state or set forth facts and can show what someone is thinking when she is judging, doubting, entertaining, guessing, opining, or coming to hold some other psychological attitude. A more radical development of the same tendency challenges the assumption shared by Ryle's theory and the objection against it: namely, that thinking is a psychological or mental activity rather than a purely logical phenomenon to be elucidated by the appropriate sort of conceptual investigation. We will return to the possibility of regarding thinking as something purely logical later in the book.

The second tendency is Ryle's bifurcation between knowledge as a standing condition of an agent and thinking as the common denominator of an agent's acts of judging, doubting, and coming to hold other psychological attitudes:

> I want to distinguish knowing that X is Y from all the others; so—and I think ordinary usage supports me—I shall reserve the umbrella-title 'thinking' for all these varieties of apprehension other than knowing. If I *know* that X is Y I am not to be described as *thinking* that X is Y or vice versa. We say: 'I don't *think*, I *know*', and 'I don't *know* but I *think* so and so.[30]

Apart from Ryle's willingness to follow ordinary usage as a guide to drawing crucial distinctions, the notion that our knowledge is independent from our psychological attitudes potentially allows our knowledge to play an essential role in explicating them. As will become clear in chapter 3, in *The Concept of Mind* Ryle appeals to what we know not only to analyze

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[30] Ryle, "Are There Propositions?", 29.