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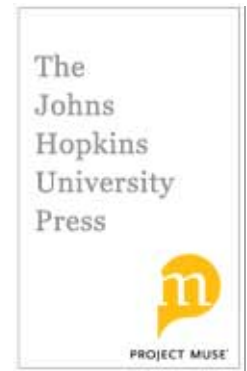
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Reinterpreting Ryle: A Nonbehavioristic Analysis

SHELLEY M. PARK

1. INTRODUCTION

GILBERT RYLE HAS BEEN VARIOUSLY INTERPRETED as a naive realist,¹ a pragmatist,² an instrumentalist,³ a functionalist,⁴ a nominalist,⁵ a verificationist,⁶ a phenomenologist,⁷ and even as a dualist.⁸ Most prevalently, however, Ryle has been interpreted as a behaviorist.⁹ As the title of this essay suggests, it is this

I wish to thank David Sanford, Tad Schmaltz, Carl Posy, and the reviewers for the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

¹Stuart Hampshire, "Critical Notice of *The Concept of Mind*," *Mind* 59 (1950): 242; Bertrand Russell, "What is Mind?" *Journal of Philosophy* 55 (1958): 10; J. N. Wright, "Mind and the Concept of Mind," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary volume (1959): 13.

²Ryle's project is likened to Dewey's by Albert Hofstadter, "Professor Ryle's Category-Mistake," *Journal of Philosophy* 48 (1951): 257; Morris Weitz, "Professor Ryle's 'Logical Behaviorism'," *Journal of Philosophy* 48 (1951): 301; and Arthur Pap, "Semantic Analysis and Psycho-Physical Dualism," *Mind* 61 (1952): 211.

³J. J. C. Smart, in Oscar P. Wood and George Pitcher, eds., *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1970), 294-306, and Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 102.

⁴Hofstadter, "Professor Ryle's Category-Mistake," 249; Hugh R. King, "Professor Ryle and *The Concept of Mind*," *Journal of Philosophy* 48 (1951): 286; P. S. MacLellan, "Professor Ryle and the Concept of Mind," *Hibbert Journal* 50 (1952): 140.

⁵Hofstadter ("Professor Ryle's Category-Mistake," 264-70) is especially vehement on this point.

⁶Hampshire, "Critical Notice," 245.

⁷Michael Murray, "Heidegger and Ryle: Two Versions of Phenomenology," *Review of Metaphysics* 27 (1973).

⁸J. N. Wright, "Mind and the Concept of Mind," 13.

⁹Cf. John Wisdom, "The Concept of Mind," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1950): 191; Russell, "What is Mind?" 8; Hofstadter, "Professor Ryle's Category-Mistake," 257; Dickinson Miller, "Descartes' Myth and Professor Ryle's Fallacy," *Journal of Philosophy* 48 (1951): 272; Campbell Garnett, "Mind as Minding," *Mind* 61 (1952): 349; Hampshire, "The Concept of Mind," 244; Weitz, "Professor Ryle's 'Logical Behaviorism'," 301 and *passim*; Pap, "Semantic Analysis and

last pervasive interpretation of Ryle that I will discuss here. Interpretations of Ryle as a behaviorist stem primarily from readings of *The Concept of Mind*.¹⁰ This work is difficult to interpret and several characterizations of Ryle can, with varying degrees of plausibility, be supported by passages from that text. In particular, Ryle often sounds like a behaviorist when he says such things as: “. . . in describing the workings of a person's mind . . . we are describing the ways in which parts of his conduct are managed” (CM 50) or “my mind” is simply “my ability and proneness to do certain sorts of things” (CM 168). Yet, as I will argue below, the behaviorist label yields a caricature of Ryle's position in *The Concept of Mind* that cannot be adequately fleshed out by reference to the larger corpus of Rylean texts.

Ryle was aware of the caricaturing effect of any “ism” and, for this (and other) reasons, stalwartly refused to ally himself with any philosophical camp. In “Taking Sides in Philosophy,” he explains:

There is a certain emotion of repugnance which I . . . feel when asked the conventional question, “If you are a philosopher, to what school of thought do you belong?” . . . The gist of my position is this. There is no place for “isms” in philosophy. The alleged party issues are never the important philosophic questions, and to be affiliated to a recognizable party is to be the slave of a non-philosophic prejudice. . . . To be a ‘so-and-so-ist’ is to be philosophically frail. . . .¹¹

Psycho-Physical Dualism,” 210; Peter Geach, *Mental Acts* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), sections 3 and 4; J. J. C. Smart, *Philosophy and Scientific Realism* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 89; D. M. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of Mind* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 54; David Lewis, “Psychophysical and Theoretical Identifications,” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 50 (1972): 255–56; Jerry Fodor, *The Language of Thought* (New York: Crowell, 1975), Chapter 1, *passim*; Daniel Dennett, *Brainstorms* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 119; Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, 98–106; and Steven Stich, *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1983), 247 n. 4.

¹⁰ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1949). For Ryle's works, the following abbreviations will be used:

- CM *The Concept of Mind*
- D *Dilemmas: The Tanner Lectures, 1953* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956).
- RP “Introduction” to A. J. Ayer, *et. al.*, eds. *The Revolution in Philosophy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965), 1–11.
- R “Autobiographical” preface to Oscar P. Wood and George Pitcher, eds., *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 1–15.
- CP *Collected Papers*, 2 volumes (London: Hutchison and Co., 1971).
- OT Kostantin Kolenda, ed., *On Thinking* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1979).

Since Ryle's *Collected Papers* span several decades, I will specify the original date and place of publication in referring to these articles, although all page references will pertain to their appearance in CP.

¹¹ Gilbert Ryle, “Taking Sides in Philosophy,” *Philosophy* 12 (1937), reprinted in CP 2: 153–54. This entire article is devoted to Ryle's arguments and polemics against “isms” in philosophy.

In portraying *The Concept of Mind* as a behaviorist manifesto, Ryle's critics have systematically portrayed him as philosophically feeble. Early reviewers of the book explicitly accused him of being naive, confused, eccentric, deluded, and even pathological.¹² And, although such adjectives are seldom used any more in describing Ryle's views, the sentiments are implicit in the quick dismissals of "Rylean behaviorism" in contemporary treatises in the philosophy of mind.

In this paper, I hope to suggest that "Rylean behaviorism" is easily toppled because it is a straw target. There are two *prima facie* reasons for suspicion concerning interpretations of Ryle as a behaviorist. First, Ryle explicitly denies being a behaviorist, both in *The Concept of Mind* and elsewhere (CM 32, 84, 327–30; CP 2: viii and *passim*; OT 17, 18, 31, 97, 109). Secondly, Ryle explicitly asserts that his purpose in *The Concept of Mind* is simply to "rectify the logical geography" of our concept of mind, rather than to provide any information about minds (CM 9). Indeed, Ryle insists that philosophy is unable to verify (or falsify) assertions about minds (*ibid.*). Thus, if we are to take him at his word, we should hesitate to attribute any ontological theory about minds to Ryle.¹³

On the interpretation of Ryle that I will offer here, he is best characterized as an "ontological agnostic." Ryle's aim, I believe, is to develop a non-denotational theory of meaning for mental-conduct terms—a theory of meaning which does not presuppose any metaphysical or ontological theory and, hence, does not presuppose behaviorism.¹⁴

In order to show both 1) that Ryle's work ought to be reinterpreted and 2) that, if reinterpreted as I suggest, *The Concept of Mind* provides an important alternative to contemporary (ontological) positions in the philosophy of mind, I will proceed as follows: In section 2, I outline two different but related interpre-

¹² Cf. Russell, "What is Mind?" 7–11; Wright, "Mind and the Concept of Mind," 10–13; Hofstadter, "Professor Ryle's Category-Mistake," 257, 264–70; Hampshire, "Critical Notice," 240–43, 245; Pap, "Semantic Analysis and Psycho-Physical Dualism," 210, 214 n. 1; and J. L. Austin, "Intelligent Behavior," in *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 49.

¹³ Ryle's rejection of "isms" could also be plausibly interpreted as a rejection of metaphysical and ontological theories. In "Taking Sides in Philosophy," CP 2: 163, for example, he refers to "isms" as "Thingummisms."

¹⁴ This theory of meaning could be characterized positively as a theory of "meaning as use" or, alternatively, as a theory of "warranted assertion." Ryle hopes to persuade philosophers of mind to replace their *denotational* notion of truth with an *epistemological* notion of the evidential circumstances warranting our use of mental-conduct terms. Since the primary purpose of this paper is to distinguish Ryle's position from behaviorism (and other theories of the mind which presuppose a denotational theory of meaning), however, I will simply speak of Ryle's nondenotational theory of meaning. In the latter sections of this paper, I label this theory "linguistic Antirealism" in order to compare and contrast it to a variety of other Realist and Antirealist positions, but nothing much hangs on the use of this—or any other—label.

tations of *The Concept of Mind* as a work that advocates ontological behaviorism. Following this, in section 3, I discuss some difficulties that those interpretations encounter. Specifically, I argue that such behaviorist interpretations are unable to account for the style, substance, and avowed metaphilosophical purpose of Ryle's work. In sections 4 and 5, I examine the interpretation of Ryle as a "logical behaviorist," arguing that while this interpretation correctly captures Ryle's interest in language, it still fails to make adequate sense of Ryle's methods and claims. This is due, at least in part, to the fact that logical behaviorism ultimately presupposes ontological behaviorism. Finally, in the concluding sections of this article, I explicate how interpreting Ryle as advocating a non-denotational account of the meaning of mental-conduct terms enables one to account for Ryle's conclusions and strategies of argument in a systematic, and not merely an ad hoc, way.

2. RYLE AS AN ONTOLOGICAL BEHAVIORIST

There are three stances one might take with regard to the ontological status of minds. These are as follows:¹⁵

- Nonreductive Realism (O): (1) Minds exist; and
 (2) They exist immaterially.
- Reductive Realism (O): (1) Minds exist; but
 (2) Their existence is material.
- Antirealism (O): (1) Minds do not exist; and therefore
 (2) The question of their materiality or immateriality is a pseudo-question.

The first position encompasses idealism and dualism,¹⁶ while the second encompasses both type- and token-physicalism (including such diverse theories as Central State Identity Theory, Functional State Identity Theory, and certain reductive forms of behaviorism), and the third position is otherwise known as Eliminative Materialism, which may also take a behaviorist form.

¹⁵ The distinction between various ontological and linguistic formulations of the Realism/Antirealism debate I sketch in this section is modelled on a distinction utilized by Carl Posy in order to distinguish Kant's transcendental idealism from Berkeleyan idealism. See, for example, his "Autonomy, Omniscience and the Ethical Imagination: From Theoretical to Practical Philosophy in Kant," *Proceedings of the Conference on Kant's Practical Philosophy* (Jerusalem, 1986), 106–35; and "Kant's Mathematical Realism," *Monist* 67 (1983): 115–34. I think, however, that this distinction can be analogously utilized to distinguish Ryle's position in the philosophy of mind from a behaviorist position.

¹⁶ Idealism can be described as a position which seeks to "reduce" matter to mind and thus, the label "Nonreductive Realism" is, in some sense, a misnomer. The contemporary use of the term "Reductivism," however, signifies positions that seek to reduce mind to matter and thus the label should not be too misleading.

Many readers of *The Concept of Mind* have interpreted Ryle as adopting one of the latter materialist stances with regard to the mind, but there has been little consensus regarding which of these two positions Ryle adopts. According to one interpretive opinion, Ryle seeks to make an ontological reduction of minds to (actual or hypothetical) physical behavior, while according to another interpretive opinion, he seeks to make an ontological elimination of minds in favor of such behavior.

D. M. Armstrong provides the paradigmatic account of Ryle as a reductive behaviorist. According to Armstrong, Ryle is a "scientifically oriented philosopher" who (rightly) ridicules the Cartesian view of spiritual substance and (wrongly) offers a modified version of Watsonian behaviorism in its place. According to Armstrong's Ryle: "the mind was not something behind the behavior of the body, but was simply part of that physical behavior. My anger with you was not some modification of a spiritual substance which somehow brings about aggressive behavior; rather it is the aggressive behavior itself. . . . Thought is not an inner process that lies behind, and brings about, the words I speak and write: it is my speaking and writing. The mind is not an inner arena, it is outward act."¹⁷ On this interpretation of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle is attempting to reduce all of our mental conduct to merely physical conduct, or, more accurately, to our behavior patterns and dispositions.¹⁸ This interpretation of Ryle is implicitly supported by a number of authors, but is most explicitly supported by J. J. C. Smart, who claims that for Ryle "fear . . . is a characteristic behavior pattern,"¹⁹ and by Jerry Fodor who portrays Ryle as a behaviorist whose "ontological impulse" was "reductionistic."²⁰

In an early review of *The Concept of Mind*, Dickinson Miller provided the latter, eliminativist interpretation of Ryle. According to Miller, Ryle is "denying the facts of private consciousness" and arguing that we have "only" various behavioral dispositions, tendencies, and capacities. For Miller, Ryle's views can only be understood by placing scare quotes around all of Ryle's uses of the intentional idiom, because "what Professor Ryle is doing . . . is denying that *we* exist." For Miller's Ryle, persons are simply bodies "without consciousness."²¹ J. L. Austin concurs that Ryle has persuaded himself that "'occult' episodes 'in the mind', which are 'private' to one person, simply do not occur at all—not merely that . . . their numbers and varieties have been exaggerated." Ryle is,

¹⁷ Armstrong, "The Nature of Mind," in C. V. Borst, ed., *The Mind/Brain Identity Theory* (London: MacMillan, 1970), reprinted in Ned Block, ed., *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980), 1: 193.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 194.

¹⁹ J. J. C. Smart, *Philosophy and Scientific Realism*, 89.

²⁰ Jerry Fodor, *Representations* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), 3–4.

²¹ Miller, "Professor Ryle's Fallacy," 272 and *passim*.

according to Austin, revolting against the dualist's dichotomy by maintaining that "only one of the alleged pair of opposites really exists at all." Although Ryle does not believe that the body is a machine, he does believe "that it alone, and not the 'ghost' exists."²² This interpretation of *The Concept of Mind* also derives explicit support from Morris Weitz, who argues that "Ryle is at pains to show that the consciousness, sense-data, images, and sensations of Cartesianism are non-existent."²³

Although there is no unanimity concerning the specific form of behaviorism that Ryle holds, both Ryle's critics and his sympathizers agree that he is advocating *some* version of behaviorism which is "congenial to physicalism."²⁴ Few would disagree with Stuart Hampshire's characterization of Ryle as a materialist whose central thesis in *The Concept of Mind* can be summarized by the "slogan": "Not Two Worlds, but One World; not a Ghost, but a Body."²⁵ The notion that Ryle must be advocating some version of materialistic monism results from the following implicit line of reasoning: There are (as stated above) only three positions with regard to the ontological status of minds, and Ryle emphatically rejects Nonreductive Realism (O). Therefore, he must be either a Reductive Realist (O) or an Antirealist (O). Hence, Ryle claims either that minds are *nothing but* publicly observable behavior or that minds are *nothing*. This is, indeed, the explicit reasoning of J. N. Wright, who sets forth his conclusion more tentatively than most: "It is difficult to determine whether in rectifying the logical geography of mind concepts Professor Ryle is committed to a doctrine of physicalism, and if so, of what sort, for if there is one process and not two, an unsophisticated person would naturally conclude, in view of the deeply ingrained dualism that besets us all, that the denial of the occult leaves the physical as the sole candidate for occupancy."²⁶ Having reached this conclusion, Wright goes on to make the "well-worn" objection to Ryle's "behaviorist" project: The mind's behavior, "if we mean by behavior, some form of physicalism, cannot exhaustively be delineated in physical terms nor theorised about as if it could be so delineated." Thus, *The Concept of Mind* seems to Wright "to fall short in the recognition of precisely those characteristics which have been recognised by most philosophers as being the prerogative of mind and which present to them such stubborn problems."²⁷ This common objection to "Rylean behaviorism" is not, perhaps, without its merits if Ryle

²² J. L. Austin, "Intelligent Behavior," in R 47-48.

²³ Weitz, "Professor Ryle's 'Logical Behaviorism,'" 297-98.

²⁴ Cf. Smart and Armstrong.

²⁵ Hampshire, "Critical Notice," 238. Cf. J. L. Austin, "Intelligent Behavior," in R 48: "he preaches with the fervour of a proselyte a doctrine of 'one world'."

²⁶ J. N. Wright, "Mind and the Concept of Mind," 20.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

was in fact proposing to either reduce mind to behavior or eliminate it in favor of behavior. There is, however, a mistake in the line of reasoning which culminates in a behaviorist interpretation of Ryle. Underlying the general interpretive argument is the unargued-for assumption that Ryle is undertaking an ontological project. This assumption, which is pervasive in interpretations of *The Concept of Mind*, can only be dissipated by a closer look at Ryle's larger corpus of works.

3. PROBLEMS WITH THE ONTOLOGICAL BEHAVIORIST INTERPRETATION

In the "Introduction" to Volume I of his *Collected Papers*, Ryle suggests that "to elucidate the thought of a philosopher we need to find the answer not only to the question 'What were his intellectual worries?', but, before that question and after that question, the answer to the question 'What was his overriding worry?'" (CP 1: ix). According to Ryle, his own overriding concerns were metaphilosophical (ibid.) and *The Concept of Mind* was a book "written with a meta-philosophical purpose." In the autobiographical remarks prefacing *Ryle: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Ryle describes *The Concept of Mind* as "an example of the [philosophical] method really working, in breadth and depth and where it was really needed" (R 12). Thus, *The Concept of Mind* needs to be viewed as a case study of a broader method, as part of a larger project which Ryle is pursuing.

Ryle clearly believes *the* correct method of philosophy is the Socratic or dialectic method, and he exhibits a predilection for *reductio ad absurdum* arguments throughout *The Concept of Mind* and, for that matter, throughout his career. In "Philosophical Arguments," an inaugural lecture delivered in 1945, just four years before the publication of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle claims that "a pattern of argument which is proper and even proprietary to philosophy is the *reductio ad absurdum*," an argument which "moves by extracting contradictions or logical paradoxes from its material."²⁸ And in both earlier and later papers, Ryle indicates an explicit sympathy for the Socratic method which is "intended to drive the answerer into self-contradiction."²⁹ In fact, he sometimes goes so far as to identify philosophy with dialectic.³⁰

A satisfactory interpretation of *The Concept of Mind* should make sense of this characteristically Rylean method of argument and should also charitably explain the frequent appeals to ordinary language that are to be found

²⁸ Ryle, "Philosophical Arguments," Inaugural Lecture (1945), reprinted in CP 2: 197.

²⁹ Ryle, "Dialectic in the Academy," in R. Bambrough, ed., *New Essays on Plato and Aristotle* (1965), reprinted as "The Academy and the Dialectic" in CP 1: 99.

³⁰ Ryle, "Taking Sides in Philosophy," CP 2: 163.

throughout that work. Why does Ryle think that a theory is ridiculous if it leads us to say things that no one ever says? This is something that most behaviorist interpretations of Ryle have been completely unable to answer. Indeed, rather than trying to explain Ryle's procedures, many who have given behaviorist interpretations of *The Concept of Mind* have simply claimed that the entire book fails to hit its mark. Miller's comments in "'Descartes' Myth' and Professor Ryle's Fallacy" are typical: "Ryle's book turns out to be a perpetual skirmishing that never comes in contact with the main body of the enemy." Even if we grant the truth of what Ryle has to say about the usage of language and the importance of behavior, "we still find that he has not touched the facts that decide the question at issue. . . . His fallacy is that of presenting an argument irrelevant to his conclusion. His book is one long *ignoratio elenchi*."³¹ While this is a rather uncharitable view of *The Concept of Mind*, it is the view of Ryle's work that one is naturally led to, if that work is interpreted as a behaviorist attack against dualism. As Hofstadter claims, "if dualism is false or improbable, it will have to be shown to be so on grounds of the sort used to invalidate a scientific theory, not on the grounds that [Ryle] alleges. If dualism is a mistake, it is not merely a logical one. To suppose that it is, is itself a mistake, an *ignoratio elenchi*."³² Hofstadter is right. *Reductio ad absurdum* arguments will only demonstrate a claim's absurdity, they will not demonstrate its falsity or improbability. Nor will ordinary language demonstrate the scientific accuracy or inaccuracy of an ontological position. These facts should, however, indicate that Ryle's arguments against "the Cartesian myth" are misconstrued as arguments for replacing a two-world view with a one-world view. Although almost all philosophers produce *some* fallacious arguments, one should suspect that a philosopher's position has been misinterpreted if *all* of his arguments turn out, on that interpretation, to be fallacious. This is especially true if the philosopher in question, like Ryle, has made it "part of [his] business to be able to tell people, including [him]self, what philosophy is" (R 6).

What the philosopher does is typically described by Ryle in metaphorical terms: the philosopher attempts to "chart" or "map" "the logical geography" of our concepts. *The Concept of Mind*, as an example of this task, attempts to rectify the logic of our mental-conduct concepts, since "Descartes left as one of his main philosophical legacies a myth which continues to distort the continental geography of the subject" (CM 8 and *passim*). The metaphor Ryle employs here is instructive and should not be viewed as a merely decorative device. Ryle frequently likens philosophy to cartography and contrasts it with science,

³¹ Miller, "'Descartes' Myth' and Professor Ryle's Fallacy," 271. Hofstadter, Smart, Austin, and Rorty all concur.

³² Hofstadter, "Professor Ryle's Category-Mistake," 258–59.

which he likens to sleuthing. This distinction between philosophy and science is, as I will argue below, of central importance to Ryle and a primary reason for rejecting a behaviorist interpretation of *The Concept of Mind*. Part of Ryle's "overriding worry" is that the term "analysis" had systematically misled many of his colleagues to overlook the difference between philosophic and scientific endeavors. In "The Theory of Meaning" Ryle worries that the term "analysis" suggests that "philosophical problems are like the chemist's or the detective's problems" in that one could "work on problem A this morning, file the answer, and go on to problem B this afternoon." This suggestion, he says,

does violence to the vital fact that philosophical problems interlock in all sorts of ways. It would be patently absurd to tell someone to finish the problem of the nature of truth this morning, file the answer and go on to solve the problem of the relations between naming and saying, holding over until tomorrow problems about the concepts of existence and non-existence. . . . [P]hilosophers liken their task to that of the cartographer . . . not to that of the chemist or the detective.³³

If we keep these metaphilosophical views of Ryle in mind, we get a clearer picture of Ryle's central antagonist in *The Concept of Mind*. Throughout *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle characterizes "the Cartesian myth" he rejects as a theory which creates "mysteries" that imply that the philosopher has to be a "detective" or "sleuth" (CM 90, 91, 103, 151, 170, 174, 184). Philosophical theories should not, he argues, give rise to "Sherlock Holmes questions" (CM 232).

Ryle's antagonist in *The Concept of Mind* is not merely—perhaps, not even—Descartes. Although several reviewers of Ryle's book have taken him to task for misinterpreting Descartes, the absence of textual citations to Descartes in *The Concept of Mind* would suggest that Ryle was—as the phrases "the Cartesian myth" and "the para-mechanical legend" would also indicate—more interested in the mythological or legendary Descartes, than in Descartes himself. Nor is Ryle's antagonist in *The Concept of Mind* merely Cartesian dualism. Indeed, it would be puzzling, as Russell notes, if Ryle were to devote an entire book to refuting a view which had been "rejected by Malebranche, Leibniz, Berkeley, Hegel and William James" before him, a view which no "philosopher of repute" any longer accepted.³⁴

What Ryle's critics have failed to recognize, in interpreting *The Concept of Mind* as a behaviorist tract against dualism, is that "the Cartesian myth" Ryle seeks to "explode" in that work encompasses a vast array of traditional and contemporary philosophical positions, which are united only in their metaphilosophical outlook. Ryle's arguments and polemics in *The Concept of Mind*

³³ Ryle, "The Theory of Meaning," in C. A. Mace, ed., *British Philosophy in Mid-Century* (Allen and Unwin, 1957), reprinted in CP 2: 372.

³⁴ Russell, "What is Mind?" 5.

are aimed at philosophers—including his former self³⁵—who have mistaken a philosophical enterprise for a scientific one and, thus, have confused problems of justification with problems of causal etiology. The result of this metaphilosophical confusion, according to Ryle, is a proliferation of “mystery-mongering” theories. Throughout *The Concept of Mind* (CM 103, 133, 152–53, 185, 225, 229, 239, 264–65, 285, 289, 291, 303–304, 306, 310, 315, 317–18) and elsewhere in Ryle’s writings (OT 83–84), Ryle’s polemics are often directed against epistemological theories which explain *how* people know (learn, remember, etc.) things by means of theories which render the fact *that* they know those things a complete mystery to others. He says:

the great epistemologists, Locke, Hume and Kant, . . . thought that they were discussing parts of the occult life story of persons acquiring knowledge. They were discussing the credentials of sorts of theories, but they were doing this in para-physiological allegories. . . . One of the strongest forces making for belief in the doctrine that a mind is a private stage is the ingrained habit of assuming that there must exist the “cognitive acts” and “cognitive processes” which these names [of traditional epistemology] have been perverted to signify. (CM 318)

While Ryle’s critique is most explicitly aimed at “Cartesian” “double-life theory” and its views of “privileged access” and “self-luminating consciousness,” it needs to be understood as a critique of the recommended ontologies of *both* rationalist and empiricist epistemologies.

The ontologies Ryle criticizes in *The Concept of Mind* include those recommended by materialists, in addition to those recommended by dualists and idealists, which poses a serious difficulty for behaviorist interpretations of that work. The interpretation of Ryle as someone who seeks to eliminate minds in favor of behavior construes Ryle’s diatribe against “the Cartesian myth” as mere antimentalism. But Ryle explicitly disavows antimentalism. In characterizing his project, he says: “I am not . . . denying that there occur mental processes. Doing long division is a mental process and so is making a joke” (CM 22). Armstrong recognizes this difficulty, which is the primary reason he interprets Ryle as a reductive, rather than an eliminative behaviorist. Accord-

³⁵ I thank J. O. Urmson for conveying to me that, in conversation, Ryle had frequently claimed that his “main target was his former self” and that his work was primarily aimed at “ridding his own mind of conceptual error.” Ryle also reveals this motivation in the Introduction to *The Concept of Mind*, stating that “the assumptions against which I exhibit the most heat are assumptions of which I myself have been a victim. Primarily I am trying to get some disorders out of my own system” (CM 10–11). If one compares Ryle’s earliest works to *The Concept of Mind* and later works, one can trace a gradual shift in Ryle’s metaphilosophical views. In “Systematically Misleading Expressions,” for example, Ryle seems to regard philosophical analysis as a project of uncovering and displaying the logical form of “facts,” a view which he abandoned by the time of writing the *The Concept of Mind*, and which he explicitly rejects in his essays collected in *On Thinking*.

ing to Armstrong, “the only reason” Ryle denied behaviorism was that he took this to be “the doctrine that there are no such things as minds.” Thus, since he “did not want to deny the existence of minds, but simply wanted to give an account of the mind in terms of behavior,” he denied that he was a behaviorist.⁵⁶ The problem for the reductive account of Ryle, however, is that Ryle disavows it too.

In both the opening and closing chapters of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle is clear about his view that all three of the ontological positions outlined in section 2 above are mistaken in the same principled way. At the outset of the book, Ryle claims that “if [his] argument is successful, . . . the hallowed contrast between Mind and Matter will be dissipated, but dissipated not by either of the equally hallowed absorptions of Mind by Matter or of Matter by Mind, but in a quite different way” (CM 22). And again, in summarizing his position, he claims that “if [his] arguments have any force, then these concepts [the cardinal mental concepts] have been misallocated in the same general way, though in opposing particular ways, by both mechanists and para-mechanists, by Hobbes and by Descartes” (CM 329).

As these remarks suggest, Ryle thinks that problems in the philosophy of mind are to be rectified by clarifying the contours of our concept of mind, rather than by investigating the contours of our minds. Ryle’s thesis in *The Concept of Mind*, as the title should immediately indicate, is a conceptual, rather than an ontological, thesis. More precisely, since concepts are not to be construed as “special entities,” the thesis of *The Concept of Mind* is a thesis about our mental-conduct language. This fact is captured by interpretations of Ryle as a logical behaviorist.

4. RYLE AS A LOGICAL BEHAVIORIST

According to Steven Stich, *The Concept of Mind* is to be interpreted as “the magnum opus of philosophical behaviorism,” a version of behaviorism which is to be distinguished from psychological behaviorism.⁵⁷ Philosophical behaviorism, as Stich describes it, was “inspired by the verificationist theory of meaning,” which held that “all meaningful empirical terms must be definable in terms of *observables*,” and thus sought to define “mental” locutions in terms of observable behavior. This project was quite different from the project of behaviorist psychologists who sought an explanatory paradigm which related environmental stimuli to an organism’s observed behavior. Behavioral psychologists denied the existence—or at least the explanatory relevance—of inner mental states, but didn’t need to have a professional opinion concerning

⁵⁶ Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of Mind*, 55.

⁵⁷ Steven Stich, *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science*, 3–4, 247 n. 4.

the meaning of our talk about such mental states. Philosophical behaviorists, like Stich's Ryle, on the other hand, were more concerned with the meaning of our mental-conduct attributions, than they were with defending or rejecting ontological paradigms.

The view that Stich attributes to Ryle is more commonly known as "logical behaviorism," the thesis, as described by Hilary Putnam, that "all talk about mental events is translatable into talk about actual or potential overt behavior."³⁸ A variety of commentators attribute some version of this thesis to Ryle: Peter Geach claims that Ryle is attempting to "reduce" reports of mental acts to statements about overt behavior;³⁹ A. J. Ayer suspects that Ryle is attempting to "reformulate" talk about mental states and processes in a way that eliminates any reference to an inner life;⁴⁰ Stuart Hampshire accuses Ryle of attempting to "identify" the meaning of mental-conduct statements with their method of verification; and Arthur Pap portrays Ryle as trying to "define" mental acts in terms of publicly observable actions.⁴¹ On this interpretation, as Pap explains, "Ryle's basic thesis is that the theory of *mental acts* like believing, knowing, aspiring, results from the failure to see that sentences containing such psychological verbs are statements about (behavioral) dispositions. . . . Ryle is saying . . . that statements which the dualists interpret as referring to 'ghostly' mental acts *are really about* behavioral events or behavioral dispositions."⁴²

The distinction between ontological (or psychological) and logical (or philosophical) behaviorism is a distinction that seems well-matched to Ryle's distinction between science and philosophy, which lends the latter interpretation of *The Concept of Mind* initial plausibility. At the very least, the interpretation of Ryle as a logical or philosophical behaviorist seems more plausible than interpretations of Ryle which align him with reductionists or eliminativists like Watson and Skinner. As early as 1932, Ryle expressed agreement "with Husserl's official view" that "the business of philosophy is not to give new information about the world, but to analyse the most general forms of what experience finds to be exemplified in the world."⁴³ This idea is reiterated in Ryle's 1937 paper, "Taking Sides in Philosophy," where Ryle claims "there is no philosophical information": "Philosophers do not make known matters of fact which were unknown before. The sense in which they throw light is that

³⁸ Hilary Putnam, "Brains and Behavior," in Ned Block, ed., *Readings in Philosophy of Psychology* 1: 25.

³⁹ Peter Geach, *Mental Acts*, section 3.

⁴⁰ A. J. Ayer, "An Honest Ghost?" in R 54–55 and *passim*.

⁴¹ Arthur Pap, "Semantic Analysis and Psycho-Physical Dualism," 211.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 209–10.

⁴³ Ryle, "Symposium: Phenomenology," *Aristotelian Society*, supplementary vol. 11 (1932): 72.

they make clear what was unclear before, or make obvious things which were previously in a muddle."⁴⁴

Philosophy, unlike science, is fundamentally concerned with questions of meaning, according to Ryle:

Meanings (to use a trouble-making plural noun) are what Moore's analyses have been analyses of; meanings are what Russell's logical atoms were atoms of; meanings, in one sense, but not in another, were what Russell's 'incomplete symbols' were bereft of; meanings are what logical considerations prohibit to the antinomy-generating forms of words on which Frege and Russell tried to found arithmetic; meanings are what the members of the Vienna Circle proffered a general litmus-paper for; meanings are what the *Tractatus*, with certain qualifications, denies to the would-be propositions both of Formal Logic and of philosophy; and yet meanings are just what, in different ways, philosophy and logic are *ex officio* about. (R 8)

And, in fact, Ryle characterizes his philosophical work, retrospectively, as work on the notion of meaning, although he does so with some recalcitrance: "My interest was in the theory of Meanings—horrid substantive!—and quite soon, I am glad to say, in the theory of its senior partner, Nonsense" (R 7).

Nonetheless, while the interpretation of Ryle as a logical behaviorist correctly captures Ryle's interest in developing a theory of meaning, the specific theory of meaning attributed to Ryle by this interpretation is mistaken. The truth contained in the logical behaviorist interpretation of Ryle is that Ryle is not taking a stance regarding the status of minds, but is instead taking a stance regarding the status of sentences about minds. The error contained in this interpretation of Ryle is that Ryle's stance toward sentences about minds is one which explicitly differentiates them from, rather than likening them to, sentences about bodily behavior.

5. PROBLEMS WITH THE LOGICAL BEHAVIORIST ACCOUNT

The claim that Ryle is seeking to reduce statements about minds to, or identify statements about minds with, statements about publicly observable behavior seems to be in direct conflict with certain central passages in *The Concept of Mind*. In the opening chapter of his book, Ryle lodges the following complaint about "the Cartesian myth":

[T]he dogma of the Ghost in the Machine . . . maintains that there exist both bodies and minds; that there occur physical processes and mental processes; that there are mechanical causes of corporeal movements and mental causes of corporeal movements. . . . [T]hese and other analogous conjunctions are absurd. . . . [T]he phrase 'there occur mental processes' does not mean the same sort of thing as 'there occur physical processes', and therefore . . . it makes no sense to conjoin or disjoin the two. . . . [T]he 'reduction' of the material world to mental states and processes, as well

⁴⁴ Ryle, "Taking Sides in Philosophy," in CP 2: 166.

as the reduction of the mental states and processes to physical states and processes, presuppose the legitimacy of the disjunction 'Either there exist minds or their exist bodies (but not both)'. (CM 22)

Claims regarding the existence of bodies and the causes of physical movements and processes are true or false, depending upon whether the entities and occurrences they refer to are as they describe them. But this is, according to Ryle, an incorrect model of interpretation for claims about minds and reasons for acting, because statements about (linguistically) minds are not about (referentially) minds.⁴⁵

Throughout *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle urges that, when we use mental-conduct terms to talk about a person's mind, we should not be misled into thinking that these terms denote, name, refer to, or stand for⁴⁶ states (CM 99, 119), episodes (CM 109, 116, 117, 209, 242, 293, 318), happenings or events (CM 113, 161, 178, 229, 285, 295), acts (CM 118, 135, 151, 153, 223, 225, 245, 263, 272, 285, 291, 293, 294, 301, 304, 318), incidents (CM 125), occurrences (CM 19, 133, 176, 228, 229, 242, 245, 263, 294, 319), processes (CM 19, 44, 135, 229, 293, 294, 303, 318), performances (CM 151), operations (CM 47, 151, 227, 228, 257, 285, 303, 311, 314) or things (CM 209, 295). The term 'mind' does not signify a person, place, or thing and thus does not signify an animal, vegetable, mineral, or ghost. Thus:

The statement 'the mind is its own place', as theorists might construe it, is not true, for the mind is not even a metaphorical 'place'. On the contrary, the chessboard, the platform, the scholar's desk, the judge's bench, the lorry-driver's seat, the studio and the football field are among its places. These are where people work and play stupidly or intelligently. 'Mind' is not the *name* of another person, working or frolicking behind an impenetrable screen; it is not the *name* of another place where work is done or games are played; and it is not the *name* of another tool with which work is done, or another appliance with which games are played. (CM 51, emphasis mine)

These and other passages in *The Concept of Mind* and elsewhere undermine the interpretation of Ryle as a logical behaviorist seeking to translate state-

⁴⁵ This is the terminology Ryle employs in a short *Analysis* paper which argues against "a presumption, often unwarranted, that if S is 'about (l)' Q, then S is 'about (r)' Q." This simple mistake of equivocation, he notes, is the source of "many mistakes in logic and metaphysics" ("About," *Analysis* 1 [1933], in CP 2: 82-84).

⁴⁶ CM 25, 51, 88, 91, 109, 117, 119, 120, 176, 187, 190, 193, 199, 203, 209, 253, 285, 303. Ryle alternates between these locutions in *The Concept of Mind*, but most often denies that mental-conduct terms denote. By the time of his article, "The Theory of Meaning" (1957) in CP 2: 350-72, he explicitly criticizes what he terms "the doctrine of denotation" (370). Here, too, however, he sometimes uses the other locutions: "the notion of *having meaning* is . . . different from the notion of *standing for*" (354); "expressions are matters not of *naming* things, but of *saying* things" (362). I suspect Ryle considers these terms interchangeable, but I have spoken of "denotation," following his most common usage.

ments which are ostensibly about (referentially) minds into statements which are really about (referentially) observable behaviors. In particular, they undermine Hampshire's contention that Ryle holds a "literalist" or "naive correspondence theory of language."⁴⁷ Under the subheading "What do our principal mental concepts stand for?" Hampshire provides the standard criticism of Ryle's (alleged) logical behaviorism, namely, that its program of translation is not and cannot be successfully carried out. According to Hampshire's Ryle:

[P]utative statements, whether biographical or autobiographical, about immaterial and imperceptible occurrences must in each representative case be exhibited as disguised hypothetical statements about perceptible behavior. The argument . . . , therefore, at first looks like one further application of the old high empiricist Hume-and-Russell method of 'analysis', the logical construction method, whereby impalpable and oppressive substances, the Mind no less than the State, are shown to be logically reducible to less pretentious material. But such a simple design is never in fact executed, Professor Ryle himself indicating (e.g. p. 117), not only where in particular such reductions or rules of translation cannot be provided (e.g. for statements about emotional agitations, hankerings, pangs and thrills, silent calculations and imaginings), but also hinting in various places that to look for translations of categorical statements about mental states and activities into hypothetical statements about perceptible behavior is, as a matter of logic, a pure mistake.⁴⁸

Indeed, for these reasons, in addition to reasons already outlined above and Ryle's emphasis in *The Concept of Mind* on "mongrel-categorical" statements (CM 141 and *passim*), we should be suspicious of interpretations of Ryle as a would-be logical behaviorist. The core of Ryle's argument is, as Hampshire contends, that to talk of a person's mind is "to talk of the person's abilities, liabilities and inclinations to do and undergo certain sorts of things, and of the doing and undergoing of these things in the ordinary world" (CM 199). Yet, it is misleading to characterize Ryle as (unsuccessfully) attempting to *translate* "categorical statements about 'ghostly' (= invisible, intangible, inaudible) events, as hypothetical statements about events in the so-called 'ordinary' world, where 'ordinary' strangely means (literalism or correspondence theory again) whatever can be perceived by anyone (not 'Privileged Access') by the use of one or more of five senses."⁴⁹ Attempting to reinterpret ordinary language about minds and mental activities in a way that relieves it of ontological commitments foisted upon it by other philosophical interpretations needn't require translating ordinary language into the observational vocabulary of behavioral psychology. And rejecting the doctrine of Privileged Access does not entail replacing it with a doctrine of Public Access. If the mind is not a person, place, or thing, then questions concerning whether "it" is privately

⁴⁷ Hampshire, "Critical Notice," 241, 242.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 243–244.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 243.

or publicly accessible, located inside or outside the head, observable by the introspection of one or the sense perception of many, are moot.

Hampshire himself recognizes the absurdity of such questions in his criticism of *The Concept of Mind*. According to Hampshire, Ryle's "terminology of 'standing for', 'designating', and 'naming' leads him to write as if there were a real answer . . . to such questions as 'Does the verb 'mind' or 'try' designate a single distinct activity or a complex of activities?'—as though the world consisted of just so many distinguishable Activities (or Facts or States or Things) waiting to be counted and named."⁵⁰ But, according to Ryle, treating mental-conduct terms as if they were count-nouns is the primary mistake of most previous philosophers of mind. Indeed, it is the general tendency of philosophers to be "systematically misled" by terms which function grammatically as nouns into thinking that the sentences which contain them must be true or false in virtue of accurately or inaccurately depicting something (process, event, etc.) that *The Concept of Mind* is written to counteract.

In his "Discussion of Rudolf Carnap: 'Meaning and Necessity'," a paper published in the same year as *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle refers to the theory of meaning, adopted by many of Ryle's philosophical colleagues and attributed to Ryle himself by Hampshire, as "the 'Fido'-Fido theory of meaning": "Frege, like Russell, had inherited . . . the traditional belief that to ask What does the expression 'E' mean? is to ask To what does 'E' stand in the relation in which 'Fido' stands to Fido? The significance of any expression is the thing, process, person or entity of which the expression is the proper name."⁵¹

Against this "grotesque" theory, Ryle argues that there may not *be* any things to which many terms apply and even if there are, these things are not a part of what the expressions mean "any more than a nail is or is not part of how a hammer is used."⁵²

As the above passages make clear, Ryle is no disciple of Russell. Nor is he a disciple of Frege or Carnap. Although Ryle characterizes himself, in a later essay, as sincerely interested in "the same cardinal problems as those which exercised Frege and the young Russell, problems, namely, about the relations between naming and saying,"⁵³ Ryle objects to the solutions proposed to those problems by his colleagues. Frege and, following him, the early Russell saw

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ryle, "Discussion of Rudolf Carnap: 'Meaning and Necessity,'" *Philosophy* 24 (1949), reprinted in CP 1: 226.

⁵² Ibid. 228. Cf. "The Theory of Meaning," in CP 2: "The notion of denotation, so far from providing the final explanation of the notion of meaning, turns out itself to be just one special branch or twig on the tree of signification. Expressions do not mean because they denote things; some expressions denote things, in one or another of several manners, because they are significant" (365).

⁵³ Ryle, "Letters and Syllables in Plato," *Philosophical Review* 64 (1960), in CP 1: 71.

meaning as a function of words, rather than as a function of sentences and this led them, according to Ryle, to (mis)construe many words as names. Thus, Frege and Russell, and later Carnap as well, concluded that meaning was based on denotation. And this, in turn, gave rise to Duplicationist and Reductionist ontologies.⁵⁴ Some philosophers, like the early Russell, began assigning Platonic universals or essences to every word, in order to account for their meaningfulness. The assumption was that either philosophical talk (including talk about the mind) had to be inflatable to suprascientific talk, to talk about suprascientific entities, or it had to be abandoned. Others, like the logical positivists, denied that large areas of our discourse were meaningful. Their assumption was that either philosophical talk (including talk about the mind) had to be reducible to scientific talk, to talk about publicly observable entities, or it had to be abandoned.

According to Ryle, these dilemmas were false ones which resulted from applying an inappropriate theory of meaning to philosophical discourse. Philosophy wasn't science. Nor was it suprascience. But it wasn't meaningless either.⁵⁵ Philosophical statements are, for Ryle, meaningless—or, in his terms, “absurd”—only if they are misconstrued as informing us about the world, if their constituent terms are taken to denote some sort of entity or other.

For Ryle, philosophical statements, including statements about the mind, are neither true nor false in the ‘Fido’-Fido sense, because their reference is not a part of their meaning, which is identified, by Ryle, with their use. Their correctness or incorrectness is, instead, a function of their intelligibility or absurdity, which is discovered independently of, and prior to, ontological investigations. In other words, Ryle neither accepts, nor attempts to apply, but instead rejects the “naive correspondence theory of language” held by the logical behaviorists and attributed to him by Hampshire.

6. RYLE'S NONBEHAVIORISTIC THEORY OF LANGUAGE

There are, roughly, three different theories of language that one could adopt in interpreting everyday claims about minds:

Nonreductive Realism (L): (1) The meaning of sentences about the mind is a function of the denotation of

⁵⁴ In Ryle's posthumously published essays collected in *On Thinking*, Ryle argues fervently against two camps of philosophers: “Duplicationists,” who propose “inflationary” ontologies and “Reductionists,” who propose “deflationary” ontologies. According to Ryle, disagreements between these two parties (“Tweedledum” and “Tweedledee,” 88) are pseudo-debates generated by a shared mistake about the nature of philosophy and of philosophical language.

⁵⁵ Ryle thus shared Wittgenstein's view that “the sciences aim at saying what is true about the world; philosophy aims at disclosing only the logic of what can be truly or falsely said about the world,” “Ludwig Wittgenstein,” *Analysis* 12 (1951), in CP 1: 252. Yet he disagreed with the conclusion of the *Tractatus* that, therefore, philosophers couldn't say significant things.

- their constituent mental-conduct terms,
and such sentences are to be judged as
true or false depending upon whether or
not those terms successfully denote; and
- (2) The object denoted by a mental-conduct
term is an immaterial entity.
- Reductive Realism (L): (1) The meaning of sentences about the mind is
a function of the denotation of their constitu-
ent mental-conduct terms, and such sen-
tences are to be judged as true or false de-
pending upon whether or not those terms
successfully denote; but
- (2) The object denoted by a mental-conduct
term is a material entity.
- Antirealism (L): (1) The meaning of sentences about the mind is *not* a
function of the denotation of their constituent
mental-conduct terms, and sentences about the
mind are not to be judged as true or false (if true
means, as above stipulated, true by virtue of denota-
tion) because their constituent terms are *not* meant
to denote; and thus
- (2) The question concerning whether mental-conduct
terms denote material or immaterial entities is a
pseudoquestion.

Ryle's negative thesis (his argument against the "Cartesian myth") is the thesis of linguistic Antirealism. It is important to note that there is no connection between the linguistic version of Antirealism sketched here and the ontological version of Antirealism sketched in section 2 above. Antirealism (O) does not entail Antirealism (L). Instead, it presupposes a variation of Reductive Realism (L). The eliminativist claims that sentences about minds are false (or, perhaps, meaningless) *because there are no such things as minds* or, in other words, because their constituent terms *fail to denote*. Nor does Antirealism (L) entail Antirealism (O). For the linguistic Antirealist, the success or failure of denotation is *irrelevant* to the semantic success or failure of a sentence about minds. According to this position—which could be characterized positively as a theory of meaning as use—we are justified in saying certain things about particular persons' minds (or, even less misleadingly, we are justified in saying certain things about those persons) under certain sorts of epistemic conditions, *independently of questions about denotation*. The linguistic formulation of Antirealism in this area of discourse simply claims that truth and falsity (on the 'Fido'-Fido model) are not applicable to sentences about minds. Anti-

realism (L) is simply a rejection of a theory of meaning based on reference. And, as such, Antirealism (L) is ontologically neutral: it neither affirms nor denies the existence of minds.

Nonetheless, the linguistic formulation above of the Realism/Antirealism debate in the philosophy of mind does share certain connections with the more common ontological formulation I gave earlier. The precise nature of these connections, however, differs depending on which side of the debate one takes. A brief examination of these connections illuminates the real disagreement between Ryle and his critics—a disagreement which has been obscured by his critics' (mis)interpretations of *The Concept of Mind*.

The linguistic Realist, by virtue of adhering to a denotational ('Fido'-Fido) notion of truth, places ontology prior to language. Thus, for the linguistic Realist: (i) Nonreductive Realism (L) presupposes Nonreductive Realism (O); and (ii) Reductive Realism (L) presupposes Reductive Realism (O). Because the linguistic Realist assumes that any claim (linguistically) about the mind, is about (referentially) the mind, he reasons that Descartes's claims about the mind are true only if ontological dualism is true; and the materialist's statements about the mind are true only if ontological monism is true. Ryle's critics have systematically assumed—either explicitly or implicitly—the truth of linguistic Realism. Indeed, this has been the guiding assumption behind their interpretations of Ryle, their criticisms of his position thus interpreted, and their proposed alternatives to Ryle.

By interpreting Ryle's attack on the "Cartesian myth" as an attack on ontological dualism, they have interpreted Ryle as essentially arguing that: (1) Nonreductive Realism (L) entails Nonreductive Realism (O). But (2) Nonreductive Realism (O) is false. Therefore (3) Nonreductive Realism (L) is false (1,2 modus tollens). Hence, (4) Reductive Realism (L) is true (3 double negation). And, since (5) Reductive Realism (L) entails Reductive Realism (O), (6) Reductive Realism (O) is true (4,5 modus ponens). Specifically, (4a) logical behaviorism is true (by the verificationist theory of meaning). And, since (5a) logical behaviorism entails ontological behaviorism, (6a) ontological behaviorism is true.

Of course, Ryle's argument—thus understood—is a notoriously bad argument. Ryle's detailed delineations of the logical geography of our mental-conduct concepts in *The Concept of Mind* will not establish premise 2 above (the falsity of ontological dualism) and, thus, they will not establish Ryle's (allegedly) desired conclusion. Moreover, in addition to failing to demonstrate the falsity of ontological dualism, Ryle fails to demonstrate that behaviorism, rather than some other version of materialistic monism, should be dualism's replacement. Several of Ryle's critics (e.g., Armstrong, Fodor, and Stich) have used the same form of argument as outlined above to establish alternative

versions of physicalism (e.g., Central State Identity Theory, the Representational Theory of Mind, and Eliminative Materialism respectively).⁵⁶

For the linguistic Antirealist, however, the problems with the schematic argument provided above go far beyond those registered by Ryle's critics. First, premise 4 must be abandoned. The falsity of Nonreductive Realism (L) will not establish the truth of any form of Reductive Realism (L), because these two positions are not, as the above argument suggests, mutually exclusive and exhaustive. Antirealism (L) provides a third option, namely, Ryle's own. Secondly, premisses 1 and 5 will also be flatly rejected. For the linguistic Antirealist, language is prior to ontology and, hence, the nature of the connections between linguistic and ontological Realism need to be understood quite differently than the schematic argument above suggests. Thus, Ryle argues that (i) Nonreductive Realism (O) presupposes Nonreductive Realism (L); and (ii) Reductive Realism (O) presupposes Reductive Realism (L). Ontological dualism is acceptable only if the dualist's statements about (linguistically) the mind are acceptable; and ontological monism is acceptable only if the materialist's statements about (linguistically) the mind are acceptable. But, of course, for the linguistic Antirealist, both the dualist's and the materialist's statements about (linguistically) the mind are unacceptable insofar as both parties interpret statements about (linguistically) the mind as about (referentially) the mind. To say, however, that such statements are unacceptable is not to say that they are false. The linguistic Antirealist will also reject premise 2 above insofar as it presupposes a denotational ('Fido'-Fido) theory of truth. This is why Ryle rejects the "Cartesian myth" as absurd, rather than attempting to show that it is false.

What both dualists and monists overlook, according to Ryle, is the simple fact that, in our nonphilosophical moods, we know how to operate with mental-conduct terms quite independently of any scientific or pseudoscientific theories about entities.⁵⁷ We have learned to use mental-conduct language to describe, predict, evaluate, and otherwise inform each other of the performances of others. But, it is only by understanding the meaning of these reports in terms of their use, rather than in terms of their reference, that it is possible to explain our ability to learn such language. If we were to apply a 'Fido'-Fido theory of meaning to psychological language, then, as Ryle argues in *The Concept of Mind*,

⁵⁶ Cf. Armstrong, *A Materialist Theory of Mind*; Fodor, *The Language of Thought and Representations*; Stich, *From Folk Psychology to Cognitive Science*.

⁵⁷ This message permeates almost all of Ryle's work, but see esp. CM, Chapter II, "Knowing How and Knowing That"; and D, Chapter V, "The World of Science and the Everyday World."

... the verbs, nouns and adjectives with which in ordinary life we describe the wits, characters and higher grade performances of the people with whom we have to do, are required to be construed as signifying special episodes in their secret histories, or else as signifying tendencies for such episodes to occur. When someone is described as knowing, believing or guessing something, as hoping, dreading, intending or shirking something, as designing this or being amused at that, these verbs [would be] supposed to denote the occurrence of specific modifications in his [to us] occult stream of consciousness. (CM 15)

This would entail the unhappy consequence that we could never be assured that our comments about the mental conduct of others "have any vestige of truth" (ibid.). Yet, this is absurd since,

... it was just because we do in fact all know how to make such comments, make them with general correctness and correct them when they turn out to be confused or mistaken, that philosophers found it necessary to construct their theories of the nature and place of minds. Finding mental-conduct concepts regularly and effectively used, they properly sought to fix their logical geography. But the logical geography officially recommended would entail that there could be no regular or effective use of these mental-conduct concepts in our descriptions of, and prescriptions for, other people's minds. (ibid.)

These and other passages in *The Concept of Mind* indicate that the core of Ryle's argument against the "Cartesian myth" is that by virtue of its presumption of linguistic Realism it renders mind-language unlearnable. On the 'Fido'-Fido theory of meaning, it would be impossible to show someone the connection between mind-language and the reality which it is purported to describe. Yet, our "regular and effective" use of such language is *presupposed* by the application of this (or any other) theory of meaning to it. Hence, learning the meaning of mental-conduct sentences must be possible and, contrary to the claims of linguistic Realism, it must consist simply in learning the appropriate and inappropriate conditions of their use.

7. ADVANTAGES OF A NONBEHAVIORISTIC INTERPRETATION OF RYLE

The (nonbehavioristic) interpretation of Ryle sketched above offers several advantages over traditional (behavioristic) interpretations of Ryle. In particular, it helps us to understand *The Concept of Mind* as a book with a meta-philosophical purpose, it enables us to make sense of Ryle's style of argument in that work, it explains Ryle's impatience with traditional epistemology, and it differentiates his position from positions he explicitly denounces. Moreover, it does all of these things without caricaturing Ryle as anyone's disciple.

Philosophy, according to Ryle, is a conceptual and not a factual enquiry and *The Concept of Mind* is intended to demonstrate this to us both explicitly and

implicitly, by both its claims and its performance. The explicit thesis of the book is that the “Cartesian myth”—a shorthand for a whole series of interconnected theses and their attendant difficulties in the philosophy of mind—arises from misapplying the theory of meaning appropriate to understanding scientific discourse (the ‘Fido’-Fido theory) to philosophical discussions. The Cartesian myth arises, in other words, from treating a philosophical problem—in this case the mind-body problem—as a matter for factual investigation. Thus it provides an example of how not to do philosophy. And Ryle’s own diagnosis of the mistake, by means of *reductio ad absurdum* arguments, and his dissolution of it, by means of bypassing enquiries concerning the alleged denotation of mental-conduct terms and replacing them with enquiries concerning the use of those terms, is meant to provide us with an example of how to *do* philosophy. Far from advocating behaviorism, *The Concept of Mind* is a case study in the great difference it makes to apply (consciously or unconsciously) one, rather than another, theory of meaning to philosophical statements.

Hence, interpreting Ryle as a linguistic Antirealist explains Ryle’s predilection for *reductio ad absurdum* arguments in *The Concept of Mind*. Although Ryle maintains that philosophers do not uncover new information, he claims that they do discover something, namely, arguments, and thus make advances in their field (R 5). This is a view Ryle adhered to for some time preceding *The Concept of Mind*. In “Taking Sides in Philosophy,” Ryle characterizes the philosophical endeavor as follows:

Every rigorous philosophical argument is a discovery. And in a looser sense of the word ‘discovery’, even every plausible philosophical argument is a discovery. A valid philosophical argument is itself a revealing of something of the sort of which philosophy is the search. Every philosopher who produces one new philosophical argument has made a philosophical advance. But it is not just the *conclusion* of his argument which is his discovery; it is the total argument for the conclusion.⁵⁸

Philosophical arguments cannot, however, be either inductive or deductive arguments, according to Ryle. Inductive arguments are the sort of arguments proper to science, and deductive arguments are the sort of arguments proper to mathematics, but philosophy is to be distinguished from both science and math.

Inductive arguments are intended to establish particular matters of fact, but philosophy is not in the business of fact-finding. Conceptual enquiries can neither establish facts, nor can they utilize facts. Therefore:

Philosophical arguments are not inductions. Both the premisses and the conclusions of inductions can be doubted or denied without absurdity. Observed facts and plausible

⁵⁸ Ryle, “Taking Sides in Philosophy,” in CP 2: 165.

hypotheses have no more illustrative force in philosophy than is possessed by fictions or guesses. Nor have either facts nor fancies any evidential force in the resolution of philosophical problems. The evidential force of matters of fact is only to increase or decrease the probability of general or particular hypotheses and it is absurd to describe philosophical propositions as relatively probable or improbable.⁵⁹

Nor are philosophical arguments deductions. The soundness of a deductive argument rests on the truth of its premisses, but philosophers do not discover truths. Conceptual enquiries cannot establish empirical truths—once again that is the job of the scientist. Neither can they establish axiomatic truths—that is the job of the mathematician: “Demonstration *ordine geometrico* belongs to mathematics and not to philosophy. . . . Spinoza’s notion of philosophy as a sort of metaphysical geometry is a completely mistaken sort of a priorism.”⁶⁰ A philosopher’s work is, unlike the scientist’s, done a priori,⁶¹ but philosophical debate “does not take the shape of a chain of theorems,” nor do the arguments in such debate “admit of notational codification” (D 111, 112). Philosophy is the study of informal, not formal, logic and although the philosopher is a “client” of the formal logician, “the handling of philosophical problems . . . [cannot] be reduced to the derivation of the application of theorems about logical constants” (D 123, 124).

Hence, the form of argument particularly well suited to the philosophical endeavor is the *reductio ad absurdum*,⁶² an argument which is premiseless, and therefore, independent of both empirical and axiomatic truths. “*Reductio ad absurdum* arguments . . . apply to the employment and misemployment of expressions.”⁶³ They do not demonstrate the truth or falsity of statements, but only their legitimacy or absurdity. They establish conclusions about the use, rather than the denotation, of expressions. Thus, put in the context of his broader views on the nature of philosophy and of philosophical statements, Ryle’s predilection for the use of such arguments in *The Concept of Mind* is readily explicable.

⁵⁹ Ryle, “Philosophical Arguments,” in CP 2: 196. Cf. “Taking Sides in Philosophy,” CP 2: 162–63; and “Phenomenology,” in CP 1: 177, where he makes this claim about the methods of philosophy of psychology in particular.

⁶⁰ Ryle, “Phenomenology,” in CP 1: 170.

⁶¹ Ryle, “Academy and the Dialectic,” in CP 1: 109.

⁶² Ryle distinguishes between a strong *reductio ad absurdum* and a weak *reductio*. The latter demonstrates the truth of a statement by deducing from its contradictory consequences which conflict with other accepted statements and, thus, proves only either that the required statement is true if those others are or that both are false. The former proceeds by deducing from a statement or set of statements consequences which conflict with one another or the original statement. Thus, it demonstrates the illegitimacy or absurdity of a statement (as opposed to its truth or falsity) by showing it to have logically absurd corollaries. It is this stronger form of the *reductio ad absurdum* that Ryle thinks is well suited to philosophy. (CP 2: 204)

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 204.

Ryle's frequent appeals to the use of ordinary language are also readily explained on the present interpretation of *The Concept of Mind*. Closely related to the (negative) thesis of linguistic Antirealism is, as I've suggested above, a (positive) identification of meaning with use. The idea is to identify the meaning of mind-sentences with something which is, unlike verification-transcendent truth-conditions, public and knowable.

Ryle's identification of the meaning of philosophical terms—including mental-conduct terms—with their use, however, is not an identification of meaning with conventional usage.

Lots of philosophers, whose dominant good resolution is to discern logico-linguistic differences, talk without qualms as if 'use' and 'usage' were synonyms. This is just a howler. . . . A usage is a custom, practice, fashion or vogue. It can be local or wide-spread, obsolete or current, rural or urban, vulgar or academic. There cannot be a misusage any more than there can be a miscustom or a misvogue. The methods of discovering linguistic usages are the methods of philologists. By contrast, a way of operating with [something] . . . is a technique, knack or method. Learning is learning how to do the thing; it is not finding out sociological generalities. . . .⁶⁴

Philology is the empirical study of how people apply concepts or use language, while Philosophy is the (informal) logical study of how to determine the "cross-bearings" of the concepts which people apply. In the "Introduction" to *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle explains: "It is . . . one thing to know how to apply . . . concepts, quite another to know how to correlate them with one another and with concepts of other sorts. Many people can talk sense with concepts but cannot talk sense about them; they know by practice how to operate with concepts, anyhow inside familiar fields, but they cannot state the regulations governing their use" (CM 7).

In denouncing "the Cartesian myth," Ryle is criticizing a certain philosophical theory about the regulations governing the use of mental-conduct concepts. He is not criticizing the ordinary person's linguistic practice, but is, rather, criticizing certain prevalent views of the practice. The burden of Ryle's argument in *The Concept of Mind* is to show that there is something incoherent about the way we view our practice, that our explanation of that practice ought to be changed. An apt method of argument here is a particular type of *reductio ad absurdum*, namely, one which shows the absurdity of a prevalent theory of mental-conduct concepts by showing its incompatibility with "what we already know in our bones" (ibid.; cf. D 62, CP 1: 114, 154, OT 121), namely, how to apply those concepts. Ryle wants to show us that we are operating, in the

⁶⁴ Ryle, "Ordinary Language," *Philosophical Review* 62 (1953), in CP 2: 308. Cf. "Use, Usage and Meaning," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, supplementary volume 35 (1961), in CP 2: 407-14.

philosophy of mind, with a wrongheaded theory of meaning. And one of the ways to convince us of this is to show us that the consequences of that theory of meaning are things that “no one ever does or would say” (CM 161). We are talking nonsense *about* mental-conduct concepts, if our philosophical theory of those concepts undermines our ability to talk sense *with* them.

Interpreting Ryle as I have suggested also explains Ryle's impatience with epistemologists and their “mystery-mongering theories” (CM 151). According to the linguistic Antirealist, questions pertaining to the truth of, and justification for, statements about (linguistically) the mind do not reduce to questions pertaining to the truth of, and justification for, statements about (referentially) the mind. Put another way, questions of epistemological warrant are logically prior to, and independent of, questions of ontological reference. Thus, it is no surprise that Ryle often locates the source of “the Cartesian myth” in para-mechanical theories of knowledge and the cure for it in abandoning such theories of knowledge. Para-mechanical theories of knowledge are epistemological theories which presuppose the existence of “cognitive acts,” and they are bound to misfire if no such acts exist. Moreover, even if such acts did exist, they would make a poor foundation for epistemological theory, since “none of the things which we could witness John Doe doing were the required acts of having ideas, abstracting, making judgements or passing from premisses to conclusions, [and therefore] it seemed necessary to locate these acts on the boards of a stage to which only he had access” (CM 318).

In short, traditional epistemology postulated a theory of the mind which rendered our knowledge of the mind impossible. It led us to deny knowing things that we knew perfectly well how to do, namely, to distinguish between accurate and inaccurate assertions about another's mental conduct. On my interpretation of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle's solution to the proliferation of theories of knowledge which implied that such knowledge was impossible is simply to abandon the notion—shared by both rationalists and empiricists—that the existence of mental acts or processes was relevant to determining either the meaning or the accuracy of sentences which ascribed mental-conduct to others.

Most crucially, however, interpreting Ryle as an advocate of a nondenotational theory of meaning clearly distinguishes his position in *The Concept of Mind* from dualism, idealism, and materialism (including behaviorism) by characterizing it as antithetical to a principle that all three of those positions hold in common. The common mistake of dualism, idealism, and materialism is that they all adhere to a ‘Fido’-Fido theory of meaning which requires ontologizing by (wrongly) presuming that philosophical sentences about the mind express existential propositions. Taking either side of the ontological Realism/Antirealism debate over the status of minds requires the assumption

that a "Fido'-Fido theory of meaning is applicable to mind-talk, and it is this assumption that Ryle emphatically rejects.

8. CONCLUSIONS

In the preceding pages, I have attempted to argue for a nonbehaviorist interpretation of *The Concept of Mind* which renders it internally coherent, while also placing it within the larger corpus of Rylean works and the larger intellectual issues of Ryle's time. Although many reviewers of *The Concept of Mind* have suggested that, despite his disavowals, Ryle only substitutes a specific form of monism for Descartes's dualism,⁶⁵ Ryle neither explicitly nor implicitly accepts this, or any other, ontological conclusion. Ryle is emphatically not a psychological behaviorist. Nor is Ryle a logical behaviorist. He is a philosopher—a philosopher, moreover, whose views are not so easily dismissed as the proliferation of *reductio ad Rylean* arguments in recent and contemporary philosophy of mind would suggest.

If he is reinterpreted as I have suggested here, then the position Ryle develops in *The Concept of Mind*, unlike behaviorism, presents a serious and virtually unexamined challenge to the prevalent assumption of materialistic monism in contemporary philosophy of mind. In *The Concept of Mind* and elsewhere, Ryle claims that materialism only modifies "the Cartesian myth" and that a more radical solution is needed. Ontological dualism is not a factual mistake to be corrected by monism, elevenism, or any other such "ism." According to Ryle, "it makes no sense to speak as if there could be two or eleven worlds. Nothing but confusion is achieved by labeling worlds after particular avocations. Even the solemn phrase 'the physical world' is . . . philosophically pointless" (CM 199). Dualism is not a mistake which is the result of either poor science or poor math. It is not the result of either misobservation or miscalculation. It is, rather, what Ryle terms a "category-mistake," the result of poor philosophy. And it is typical of poor philosophy to mistake itself for science, to confuse its discourse about discourse about the world (metaphysics) with discourse about the world (physics).

If Ryle is right about this—something it would take more work than I have done here to demonstrate—then "naturalized epistemology," "philosophical psychology," and "cognitive science" may be unable to deliver the philosophical riches they currently promise. Indeed, despite the wealth of empirical hypotheses to be found in these research areas, they may be as fundamentally philosophically poverty-stricken as dualism.

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⁶⁵ Hampshire, for example, claims that *The Concept of Mind* can be characterized by the slogan "not Two Worlds, but One World"; "Critical Notice," 238.