IX*—ON KNOWING ONE'S OWN MIND

By Jean Austin

I fear that if it is ever allowed that a phrase is to be equated with a cry of despair, that is the equation I should make in the choice of my title. One's own mind may not be a very interesting subject, but, at least in its colloquial use, not knowing one's own mind is a serious impediment to rational behaviour, and though it would be almost a frivolous parody to take this colloquialism as a basis of enquiry into the more technical implications of the phrase, the two seem, perhaps contingently, not entirely separate. I shall therefore first attempt to give a brief account of what I take to be implied in crediting anyone with knowing his own mind. Whether or not a connexion could be justly argued to exist between this, and the more technical, *knowledge*, of one's own mind, most of what I have to say will be devoted to an attempt to sort out some of the difficulties that do seem to lie in assessing the truth or falsity in self-ascription, of what could, very generally, be classed as psychological predicates. An embroilment with such predicates seems to involve a more ambitious attack on general psycho-philosophical terms, of which I choose as I hope a fair bag—intention, decision, desire, motive, belief, attitude, and goal—for more specific clarification. By this circuitous and perhaps foolhardy route I hope to arrive not at the solution of any difficulties, but, perhaps, at a rather negative indication of what seems to be basic incoherence embedded in any view of ourselves.

I

To say of anyone that he, just generally, or without qualification, 'knows his own mind' is itself to ascribe a character-trait: to say of anyone, as we perhaps more frequently do, that on a specific issue he 'knows his own mind', is to imply rather more than an ascription of behaviour. A specific *issue* seems to be the

most natural concomitant of knowing one's own mind. Facts are facts, and questions simply of fact, though they may demand one's opinion, demand an opinion based, straightforwardly, on evidence, with little room for the intervention of one's own mind. Issues may, or may not, involve one personally, but in so far as anything is seen as an issue, it is seen as requiring action ('action' in the sense that can include 'refraining to act') on someone's part. Knowing one's own mind on a specific issue seems to rule out, not so much the possibility of (ever) *changing* one's mind, on that issue, but rather either, not (ever) having made up one's own mind, or being patently without the need to do so. Making up one's mind involves deciding, not only *what* to do, or what ought to be done, but basing this decision on a decision *that* the situation is of the sort appropriate to such action. Consistency and coherence of attitude might well be the mark of knowing one's own mind; such consistency and coherence could, in their turn, be explained, at least partially, in terms of consistency and coherence of judgment, and, perhaps, partially, more negatively, in terms of immunity to persuasion by others. We are certainly unlikely to credit anyone with 'knowing his own mind', on any issue, upon which he appears to be continually seeking advice or guidance from others; and, again, though change of mind would not be ruled out, change of mind as the result of mere influence, certainly would. Anyone who knows his own mind must, if he changes it, be in a position to offer what would pass as a good reason for such a change; must know *why* he changes it. The elements involved, then, in saying of anyone that he knows his own mind on a specific issue, seem to resolve into an ascription of 'attitude', together with implications of 'decision', perhaps entailing 'intention', and, perhaps, also entailing 'conviction'. If the issue is one in which he is personally involved, his 'goal', too, may be implicated, suggesting a possible further reference to his 'desire'. He is in a position to answer both the question, *what* ought to be done, or what ought he to do, and *why* it ought to be done, or he ought to do it; and this 'why' may itself be used to ask questions of different kinds. In so far as we credit anyone with knowing his own mind in this context, even though, of course, we may think him totally misguided, we leave no room for questioning, or therefore mentioning, his 'ulterior' motives, and, hardly, for

questioning, or therefore mentioning, his 'mistaken' beliefs as such.

So much, briefly, for what it is to know one's own mind on a specific issue. In ascribing what does indeed seem to be the *character-trait* of knowing one's own mind in *general*, one seems to be ascribing not merely a tendency to know one's own mind on specific issues, though this might well be implied in such an ascription. If anyone knows his own mind on some specific issue in which he is personally involved he knows what at least he *wants* to be the outcome: what could be referred to, as, perhaps, his 'goal'. If anyone is credited with knowing his own mind in a more general way it is likely that his specific goals will appear to be *systematised*—to be coherent and consistent with each other. It is, of course, possible for anyone to know what he wants on many separate specific issues, without one's being willing to credit him with knowing, *in general*, what he is up to. When an ascription of knowing one's own mind *in general* is in place it implies, not only that his 'intentions', 'decisions', 'desires' are consistent within a specific and limited context, but, also, that they can be identified as consistently linked throughout the relevant range of various contexts in which they may arise. That seems to add another dimension: this consistency and coherence seems to be different in kind rather than in degree. Here, *making up* one's mind, though it has a part, has a rather different part: one is inclined to say that there will be less to make up. A predetermined framework will change the nature of the decision, as one of the elements to be taken into account is that *this* goal must be seen as consistent with *other* goals. As a basic criterion of the appropriateness of an action to *this* situation, will be that of its relevance to *other*, actual and potential, situations, decision here is a question of identifying *this* situation, as related to *that*, in terms of reference to such 'further' goals. What, therefore, is not seen as in this way consistent, though on other criteria it might have appeared appropriate, will be discarded; the overriding implication is that of consistency between goals, and the consistent pursuit of these goals. This leads to another aspect in which seeing one's goals as related and interdependent, seems to differentiate knowing one's own mind as a general ascription, from knowing one's own mind on a specific issue: here, this implied ordering does

suggest a possible reference to 'motive' and 'belief'. Anyone of whom the general ascription is made, is liable to be seen as being in a position to answer the question 'why?' not only in terms of decision, intention, desire in *this* (specific) context, but also, at least possibly, to explain how *this* goal is related to others and, therefore, to give *his* reasons for *making this* his goal. Here the giving of *such* reasons *would* suggest both 'motive', in the implication of a further goal, and, possibly, idiosyncratic 'belief' concerning the factual relation of the relevant goals. Anyone we credit with knowing his own mind may well be enviable: he may well get what he wants, not only precisely because he seems to know what he 'really' wants, but also because, to the extent that he is *seen* to *know what he wants*, he must also be seen to *get his way*. That such a general ascription, then, is rare, is scarcely surprising, for the good reason that it is not very often seen to be altogether in place.

II

Even, then, in its idiomatic use, the phrase 'knowing one's own mind' does seem to imply some ascription of 'intention', 'decision', 'desire', 'motive', 'belief' and 'attitude'. In its more general sense there are more options open. If one knows one's own mind, one presumably knows what one wants and what one thinks. How far these, in such a context, can indeed be separately identified, is one of the questions I should like to raise. 'Thinking' and at least 'willing' are traditional 'Cartesian' concepts, and in a 'Cartesian' context of a (perhaps solipsistic) conscious ego, this conscious ego illuminates, in its transparency, the introspective answers to such questions as 'what do I think?' or 'what do I want?'. At the other extreme, in what I shall call the more recent 'Freudian' context, these answers are lost in the opacity of a thing-like self, the conscious ego functioning only as a blind to any impartial introspection; any objectivity necessarily dissolves into the subjectivity of the introspector. Somewhere between the two lies what we would normally refer to as self-knowledge: a capacity, on the one hand, to predict one's actions and, therefore, presumably one's 'intentions' and, perhaps, 'decisions', and one's 'desires'; and, on the other, not

again totally divorced, to ascribe to oneself correctly the relevant abilities and character-traits. It is not perhaps contingent that the traditional problem of inaccessible 'other minds' generated by the implicitly solipsistic Cartesian dualism should be to some extent paralleled by the problem of the inaccessible 'unconscious self' generated by the dualism of Freudian theory. Though I hope later to return briefly to this I want, here, only to remark that this seems to be relevant to what seems to me to be the important asymmetry that appears between self-ascription and other-ascription of character-traits. It is one that shows itself in, for instance, the difference between asking of someone else if, for example, he is 'really' generous and asking of oneself whether one is 'really' generous. The conceptual tie between character-trait and appropriate behaviour scarcely needs stressing, but perhaps one should consider this briefly before returning in more detail to specific character-traits.

A generous man is a man whose actions are generous, a compassionate man, a man who acts compassionately, and a callous man, a man whose actions are callous. Here the predicates seem to be ascribable indifferently to the man, or to his behaviour or actions: we can perhaps understand the ascription of the predicates to one, only in terms of its ascription to the others. A generous man may, of course, 'uncharacteristically' fail to act generously or a callous man may 'uncharacteristically' act compassionately, but this allowance of 'uncharacteristic' behaviour shows the strength, rather than the weakness, of the conceptual tie. On the other hand such character-traits are traditionally equated with 'dispositions'. In so far as 'disposition' is taken to *mean* 'character-trait' this is quite innocuous; but it is hard to avoid what seem to be the *causal* implications of the term 'disposition'. The temptation is to equate a 'disposition' to act in a specific way with a dispositional property of a physical *thing*. Both may *appear* to be significantly reducible to hypotheticals, with, in each case, the presupposition of a Humean-regularity link between the antecedent and the consequent. In the case of a dispositional property of a physical thing, the conditions that, taken together, make up the antecedent, are taken to be clearly and fairly rigidly established. Hypotheticals here may have a genuinely illuminating character. Elsewhere they seem rather to be masqueraders. Any

attempt to specify conditions that constitute the antecedent of,
for instance, the consequent 'he will act callously', seems,
almost inevitably, to contain a reference back, in one form or
another, to callousness itself. To be callous is not merely, but it
is perhaps at least, to be indifferent to the sufferings of others.
Only, therefore, in certain situations, themselves to be defined
in terms of the possibility of indifference to the sufferings of
others, can the question arise. Again these 'conditions' might be
'specified' in terms of 'intention', 'decision', 'desire', 'motive',
'belief', 'attitude', or 'goal'; but such specification would entail
a further reference to the sort of 'intentions', 'decisions' *etc.*
that would be ascribed to a callous person. And so though such
a reduction *may* be a harmless tautology, more dangerously it
may yield the implication that callous behaviour is the quasi-
causal product of such factors as situation, intention *etc.* In fact
the term 'disposition' is not so much *neutral* between persons and
things, but, rather, has the function of a *double-agent*.

A comparable double-agent in this area is the term 'be-
haviour'. Of course we can and do legitimately speak of *observing*
the '*behaviour*' of a metal, or a chemical compound, under specific
conditions, but the behaviour here in question will consist of
reactions, such as expansion, contraction, change of colour or
shape and so on. Again we *can*, but less frequently do, speak of
observing bodily behaviour, where such behaviour is describable in
terms of physical movements of reflexes. Such uses, however,
seem to blur, again, the essential distinction between our view
of things and of persons. For the sort of *behaviour* we *observe* in
persons is precisely not the sort of behaviour that it is logically
possible to ascribe to physical things or bodies. Behaviour of the
sort we typically observe is, itself, generous behaviour, or
honest behaviour, or callous behaviour. And that is to come
back to the point that such predicates as 'honest', or 'generous',
or 'callous', carry exactly the same force, whether they are
ascribed to persons, to actions or to behaviour. If I am right
on this then 'intentions', 'decisions', 'desires', 'beliefs', 'motives',
'attitudes', and 'goals' may well come into the explanation of
much action, or behaviour, but where they cannot come in, for
there is no room for them, is to function as an explanatory link
between the ascription to persons of such predicative terms as
'honesty', 'callousness', 'generosity', *etc.*, and the ascription of

these to action or behaviour: for to ascribe such predicates entails the ascription of the relevant 'explanatory' intention *etc*. In claiming that the link is *conceptual*, one has denied room for any *causal* link.

In making this claim, I think I am only asserting what can scarcely be denied, that, since we learn the meaning of predicates ascribing character-traits through learning to identify actions, or behaviour, of others, or of ourselves, as, say, 'generous', 'honest', 'callous' or 'cruel', and at the same time, to identify others, at least, as *being* 'kind' or 'cruel' in so far as they *act* 'kindly' or 'cruelly', that it is no more impossible to *observe* kindness or cruelty than it is to observe, say, *expertise* of any kind. We observe experts at their work, whether such work entails sorting out the niceties of the law, or cooking. We may not understand *how* in some sense they do it, or can do it, but that does not make *what they are doing*, or what they are up to, in doing what they are doing, unobservable. But the proof of the pudding is in the eating, and skills and expertise, since they imply relevant success, supply in this way their own standards of assessment, and along with this, some basis for categorization. It is often not even clear what we are doing in assessing or describing a character: 'success' does not, in the *same* way, enter the picture, and any tidy categorization of the relevant predicates seems ruled out by their nature. It seems rather to be this lack of tidiness, than any 'unobservable' element that accounts for the elusiveness of such terms as 'motive'—as being a 'reason or a cause', and perhaps of 'intentions', 'desires' or 'decisions'. However much we may remind ourselves that there is, embedded in the philosophical use of such terms, outdated psycho-philosophical theory such as Hume's or Kant's, there is always a temptation, in order to tidy things up, to allot them a quasi-independent existence, and in analysing psychological predicates, to try to make them fit in as *items in their own right*.

This untidiness can be shown in various ways. The phrase 'out of', fits some relevant predicates but not others, nor is it *only* such predicates that it fits. 'Revenge' is said itself to be a 'motive'. 'He did it *out of* revenge' answers the question 'Why did he do it?' 'He did it out of curiosity' is equally an answer, but 'revenge' is very unlike 'curiosity' in its implications. The

implications of 'revenge' seem more like those of 'duty' or 'obligation', in that it seems to contain a reference to some (perhaps outdated) established, vendetta-like, *procedure*, while 'curiosity' has nothing to do with established procedures. 'Curiosity' is a character-trait while though 'vengeful' may be, 'revenge' itself, of course, cannot. 'Curiosity' again and 'spite', are analogous in some ways, but not in others. The same is true of 'spite' and 'honesty', and again of 'honesty' and 'generosity', and of 'generosity' and 'justice'. Another point is the differing degrees of precision, with which it is proper to use such terms, or, one might say, the clarity of reference they carry. An argument as to whether someone is 'really shrewd', is unlikely to reveal much difference in applicability criteria of 'shrewd', while an argument as to whether someone is 'really vain', or 'really courageous', may very well do so. In the last case, if 'courage' is even, as it traditionally has been, classified as a virtue, that will bring in some other element of assessment, in limiting '*real* courage' to actions to which approval is accorded. If we differ as to whether someone is '*really* shrewd' that difference is likely to resolve into differing opinions of the achievements of the *subject* in question: how far and in what way he brought off what he *intended* to bring off. Differing as to whether an action was 'really courageous' might well be a difference as to whether it was 'really *courageous*': that is, fairly explicitly, a difference as to the correctness or incorrectness of the *ascription as such*. Again, and perhaps more frequently, and certainly more confusingly, there might be *no* clarity as to what, precisely, was in doubt. Maybe he was 'really foolhardy' or 'really taking an unwarranted risk'; or maybe he wasn't 'really aware of the danger'; or maybe he 'didn't really consider the danger as unpalatable'; maybe, again, though he was aware of the danger and did find it 'unpalatable' his 'interest' was only in the gain that would accrue to himself; or maybe his action was one simply to be deplored on other grounds. Such a list, boring though it may be, would not exhaust the possible doubts or queries that could arise over the correctness, or incorrectness, of any ascription of courage. And comparable, but significantly differing, lists could be produced for any other predicate of this kind. I can only hope that from all this at least one thing may have emerged. There is a necessary untidiness about character

predicates, and a necessary lack of precision in the use of these predicates.

The situations in which we learn the use of predicates ascribing character-traits are, themselves, of course, not clearly identifiable, and in learning the correct ascription of these predicates, we also, to some extent, learn the hazards involved in such ascription. It is not, usually, that we are subject to general Cartesian doubt as to whether, because of total simulation, we can ascribe a predicate *at all*—the possibility of *acting*, though it may arise, is not usually in question. The portrayal of a character on the stage or on the screen *means* his portrayal as generous, honest, inquisitive and so on: such a portrayal *is* a portrayal of generosity, honesty, curiosity, or ambition. What we learn, as privileged spectators, through a series of episodes, of a character, allows us to diagnose with varying degrees of crudity or subtlety his character-traits. In a situation which 'fits', in a relevantly straightforward way, what we have already learned to expect, if author and actor are successful, *we* successfully diagnose the behaviour *as fitting* the situation, and being generous, ambitious or what not. All that is *on* the stage or screen. But stage and screen are ultimately parasitic on our experience and expectations in real life. In real life we lack the 'privilege' of being shown, and *may* be *victims* of total simulation, but in so far as we are such victims, the question of correct or incorrect ascription, whether he was 'really' generous or ambitious can hardly arise—we simply (though as we may find out later wrongly) *take* him to be so. We are more likely to be *puzzled* where some features do fit, and some do not, the diagnosis or ascription we are, within the limits of our knowledge, inclined to make.

Full knowledge on our part might make it *patent* that his behaviour was courageous, or generous, or ambitious. Where there is doubt as to whether he is 'really' courageous or 'really' generous, where the 'fit' is, in one of the many possible ways in which it may be, incomplete, this may be attributed to lack of full knowledge on our part. It may, then, just be about *him in general*, that we are ignorant; or, in some circumstances at least, it is precisely *knowledge* of what we, by implication, credit *him* with, that we specifically lack. We may lack knowledge of the way in which he sees the specific situation (his 'beliefs') or of

what, within this situation he is specifically up to (his 'inten-
tions') or how he sees *this* situation as fitting others (his 'motives',
'desires' or 'goals'). In diagnosing his behaviour as just coura-
geous, or just generous we rule out questions, either on his part,
or our own, as to the appropriateness of the situation to courage
or generosity; and we rule out questions on our own part as to
what he is up to in doing what he is doing—there is no need,
and very little room, for an explanation of his behaviour in
terms of his 'intentions', 'decisions', 'desires', 'motives', 'beliefs'
or 'goals'. To state our puzzle as a puzzle about *his* intentions,
motives and so on is to imply *our own* ignorance of answers to
specific questions, answers which *he* possesses. Dangers seem to
lie in such a formulation. We are tempted to regard an appar-
atus of intentions, desires, motives and so on as having an
independent existence, an existence in its own right, independ-
ent of situations, in which it is tied specifically to questions
concerning specific behaviour, and specifically deviant be-
haviour. And this apparatus in its turn is regarded as an explana-
tory model, in terms of which *all* behaviour is to be explained
in a quasi-causal system.

Predicates ascribing character-traits appear themselves to be
symmetrical, as ascribed to others or to ourselves. Doubts we
may have as to whether we ourselves are 'really' courageous,
generous or ambitious, appear to have the same force as doubts
as to whether someone else is 'really' courageous, generous or
ambitious. The introduction of an explanatory, quasi-causal,
mental apparatus, at least blurs this symmetry. For where we
attribute our puzzle, as to whether *someone else* is 'really'
courageous, generous, or ambitious to our own ignorance as to
his 'beliefs' about the situation, or our ignorance as to his
'intentions', 'desires' or 'motives', we are, in so attributing
it, *eo ipso*, attributing to *him* knowledge of, precisely, that of
which we are, ourselves, ignorant. We *cannot, in the same way*
be ignorant of our own 'beliefs', 'intentions', 'desires' and
'motives'. At *that* level the question of our own ignorance cannot
arise. In more extreme cases we may doubt his sincerity or even
whether he is actively deceiving us. Such doubts on our part,
again, imply that we credit him with knowledge, and know-
ledge, here, that he is consciously dissimulating or concealing
from us. We may, again, notoriously, be beset by doubts as to

our *own* sincerity or, as notoriously, that we may be self-deceived. Here what we tend to question are precisely our *own* 'intentions', 'desires' 'motives' and 'beliefs'. The *kind* of question however that arises about *these* cannot be the *kind* of question that faces us, as to *anyone else's* 'intentions', 'desires', 'motives', and 'beliefs'. The shift from that of which the subject is, necessarily, fully conscious, to that of which he is, necessarily, unconscious, or not fully conscious, changes the essential implications of the relevant terms. It is this incoherence which seems to be a necessary feature of our thought about ourselves.

III

To look for a fuller explanation of behaviour in terms of 'intentions', 'decisions', 'desires', 'motives' and 'beliefs', which are taken to be *known to the agent*, could, consequently, be made explicit by him, and are therefore necessarily 'conscious', is to presuppose, in this context, a conceptual connexion between such terms and the behaviour they explicate. To set out to examine one's own 'intentions', 'decisions', 'desires', 'motives' and 'beliefs' is to assume that they are not immediately perspicuous to the subject, oneself, but to allot to them a quasi-causal, explanatory rôle in determining behaviour, one's conception of which, or the conceptual identification of which, would be liable to change as the result of such an examination. The traditional paradox, generated by 'Cartesian' dualism, that the 'contents' of a mind other than one's own are necessarily inaccessible, can be claimed to have been resolved by the recognition that identification of one's own mental states, entails the possibility of symmetrical identification of these states in others. The 'Freudian' paradox, that the conscious subject is precluded by his consciousness from the 'true' identification of his own mental states, *seems* to assume the same symmetry between self-ascription and other-ascription of the relevant predicates, but actually, in making the shift from the identification of states which are essentially conscious, to those which are not conscious, is rather to *deny* any *question* of symmetry or asymmetry between 'self-ascription' or 'other-ascription'. Predicates most clearly associated with persons are *de*-personalised, and treated, rather, as those which are used to describe the properties of

physical things. I have so far alluded, perhaps arbitrarily, and indiscriminately, to 'intentions', 'decisions', 'desires', 'motives', 'beliefs', 'attitudes' and 'goals', and in touching on character-traits, mentioned more frequently the first four or five of them than the last two. Obviously they do not all function in exactly the same way, and some in obviously different ways. 'Goal' and 'attitude' seem to have their origin in a different kind of dis-course from that in which the others most naturally occur. Each lacks what might be called the Cartesian implications which the others share, and each, in different ways, suggests a subject free from problems of possible egocentric asymmetry. 'Intention', 'decision' and 'desire' on the other hand, is each heavily suggestive of a context in which the ego-centric subject, Cartesian or not, must in some sense still be the authority. 'Belief' and 'motive' have each been subjected to constant, and sometimes conflicting, analyses. That each should have played a large part in Hume's Newtonian psychological apparatus is perhaps not contingent: each has slightly sinister implications of possible deviancy, which allows the play, relevantly different in each case, between a luminous, 'Cartesian', mental entity, and an opaque, 'Freudian', explanatory, hypothetical entity. There would be other possible groupings; I have chosen this because it provides a framework within which to examine a little more closely other relations and inter-relations between these terms. This framework in its turn points, I hope, to what I am arguing is the incoherence most fundamental in our use of such terms.

Both 'attitude' and 'goal' have acquired their philosophical implications only recently, since the infiltration into non-technical language of rudimentary 'Freudianism'. It is, perhaps, because of this, that their presuppositions seem, rather than being metaphysical, to be basically comparable, as I have already suggested, to those of predicates describing the physical properties of *things*. Each appears, in its natural context, not so much to attempt to accommodate, either as dominating, or conflicting, the rôle of rationality as the specific differentia of human beings, but rather to evade the acknowledgement of such a differentia. The model from which an attitude derives is that of a posture or a stance: we allow that bodies or statues take 'attitudes'. Each is a heavily physical metaphor. That

from which a goal derives is more complex but at least as heavily 'behaviouristic'. In some contexts 'attitudes' have been linked or even identified with 'feelings', but the sort of questions that have notoriously been raised about 'feelings'—to what extent, or on what grounds, or according to what criteria, we can identify feelings other than our own—are questions which could never have got off the ground in the case of 'attitudes'. There is a parallel in our discourse about 'goals'. It is such, on the one hand, that we allow that rats or flat-worms may have 'goals'. Here the test for such 'teleological' behaviour may be the observation of a *tendency*, given a certain antecedent, to produce a certain consequent: and in this case the relation between consequent and antecedent does *not*, as I have argued that in typically human behaviour it must, involve an inevitable reference back to what it claims to elucidate. A 'goal' here seems not so very different from a 'target' in cybernetics. 'Awareness' is *not* presupposed by the use of the term in such a context, a context which seems to be its most natural. On the other hand, when we use it, as it is perhaps significant that we do, now, frequently use it where 'aim' or even 'end', in which 'awareness' *is* presupposed, would have seemed in place, that is, in the context of *human* behaviour, it is these presuppositions that we *evade*. The use of such terms as 'attitude' or 'goal' in discourse about human situations, seems to betray a view of ourselves, which, while still being relevantly within that of traditionally self-aware egocentric individuals, is simultaneously *de*-personalized. To mix, if not metaphors, authors, it is as though the 'Cartesian' self is imprisoned for safety's sake within its own Humean self-lacking breast.

To turn to the other end of the spectrum I have suggested, to intention, decision and desire, is scarcely to extricate oneself from patent difficulties. Each has been the subject of discussion and controversy that is fortunately far beyond my scope. I want, here, only to touch upon what is relatively uncontroversial and at the same time, I hope, relevant to what, I am arguing, is a very general and inevitable incoherence that permeates our view-points. I have argued earlier that the ascription of psychological predicates either to oneself or to others entails an ascription of implicit 'intention', 'decision', and perhaps in its misleadingly wide philosophical sense, 'desire'. 'Intentionality'

may well be what *par excellence* differentiates the actions of persons from the causal sequences we observe in observing the physical properties of things. The characterization of a person and that person's actions are typically conceptually inter-dependent. The characterization of the agent's intentions, or of an intention which standardly issues in an action, is necessarily subject to the same conceptual dependence. An action is an identifiable human action in so far as it is identified either by the agent, or by others, as falling under some specific description '*x*'. When alternative action and therefore a 'decision' is in question, unless he is frustrated or changes his mind, the agent's decision to *x* rather than to *y* will issue in his action *x*; and his reasons for his decision will be, precisely, his reasons for *x*-ing. A necessary condition for this is that he should be capable of seeing what he is contemplating doing, or *conceiving* what he is contemplating doing as '*x*-ing', and, if he decides to do it, and if he is not frustrated and doesn't 'change his mind', seeing or conceiving, what he is doing *as x*-ing. Where no alternative action is apparently in question, the way he sees his future action, his conceptualization of it as '*x*', will be the characteri-zation of his intention, *i.e., to x*. That an action is seen by an agent to be describable in some specific way can never guaran-tee that the action performed by him will *in fact* be what he sees it to be: the way in which he sees it may *explain* what he does, just *because* what he sees himself as doing is not successfully done. If there were no possibility of slip between cup and lip, and no possibility of mistaking a cup or discarding it at the last moment, there might well be no room for any 'intention'. But unless, in general, the way an agent saw or conceived his own action, present or future, coincided with its being seen by himself and others to be realised, the term would have no significance. In this context 'intention', and in relevant respects 'decision', is conceptually parasitic on 'action': the agent's intention is to be identified only by reference to his conception of the successful action. Here the relation between 'intention' and 'action' could scarcely be more different from that between 'cause' and 'effect', where one event is 'explained' in terms of another, through systematic regularity: it is the recognised absence of any such regularity that allows an 'explanatory' force to the term 'intention'. In a 'Freudian' context that allows

for 'unconscious', and therefore unconceptualized 'intention', the picture is different. The story is told of the author, hearing one day of his sister's dislike of a hitherto prized inkstand, on the following day 'accidentally' knocking it on to the floor, thereby both breaking the inkstand and spilling the ink it contained, but spilling it in such a way that none of the precious papers which, we are told would 'naturally' have been in its path, were harmed. The complexity of the action was such that the implication is that while it was totally 'unconscious' it could not have been performed without *care* on the agent's part. Here it seems that a 'response' is explained in terms of a 'stimulus': that is to say a *causal* relation is presupposed. The apparent justi-fication for the use of the term 'intention' is that the action is of such a kind that its very *success* would, normally, have been 'explained' in terms of the way in which the agent saw himself as doing what he did. 'Cartesian' lucidity seems inevitably to be presupposed in the opacity which is claimed to obscure it. In the case of 'desire' it is perhaps enough to point out that the possibility of the extension of the implications of the term from those of 'appetite' to the much wider implications of 'want' reveals the same sort of move. The model behind an appetite is basically that of a response to a stimulus, and in this way again *causal*. But there are many uses of 'want' in which the subject can be said to want, what he does want, only in so far as he *sees* it as what he wants. The distinction between what a subject 'really' desires, and what he 'merely' *thinks* he desires may well be seen as a question of detecting his '*goals*'. As I have already suggested, this, in itself, is to bring to the surface the same stress and incoherence involved in treating ourselves as subjects, that 'see' ourselves as objects, in some sense incapable of such 'seeing'.

What I hope emerges from all this is the rather obvious point that against a general background of varying standards of success, it is among essential human privileges to err, to be fallible, to be mistaken and to fail. This may perhaps be made more explicit by considering the last two terms that I have placed in the middle of my spectrum: 'belief' and 'motive'. Here no reference to 'Freudianism' is necessary: the story is much more ancient. 'Certainty' has always in the context of essentially fallible beings seemed elusive. Whatever analysis is

given of 'knowledge', 'belief' has had its function to cover the
admission of possible error: and the range and variety of
possible error is as wide as that of human thought and activity.
It is significant that in distinguishing 'logical' relations as the
object of 'knowledge' from 'causal' relations, Hume gave what
in many respects can be taken as a 'dispositional' account of
'belief'. Beliefs explained, and were essentially explained in
terms of, behaviour and action. But where all standardly goes
well, as, for instance, it standardly does in Moore's original list
of things he 'knows', there does not standardly seem to be room
for either knowledge or belief. It is only when non-standardly
something goes wrong that 'belief' has a natural place. The
possibility of 'false' or 'mistaken' belief in such a context
generates as a contrary 'true' belief' It does not follow from the
fact, that because, in going about our affairs, some mistakes we
make are attributable to our believing that something is the
case which is not actually so, that when we do not make
mistakes, that is because we have 'true' beliefs. A 'dispositional'
account of belief is implicitly, if not explicitly, to allot to
'beliefs' the rôle of unconceptualized causes of action. Where
doubts, well-founded or not so well-founded, are in place,
'belief' again has an appropriate and basic function, but here,
in contrast, such belief must be perspicuous and lucid. If an
agent has failed in some way we may explain this mistake in
terms of a mistaken belief. In the case of someone other than
oneself, *we* know that what he 'took' to be the case, was not so in
fact. Whether or not *he* had doubts, and so whether or not his
'belief' was, or was not, conscious is irrelevant, and so can safely
be left 'open'. It can scarcely, in our own case, be 'open' in this
way. To act on the ground that we believe something to be the
case, entails that one is conscious of the 'belief' upon which one
acts. But in many of our actions much is unquestioned. We may
make mistakes, but, all being reasonably well we do not attempt to
systematize or query our beliefs in general. If all is *not* reasonably
well, there may appear to be a lack of fit between the way we
have been going on, and the way things are: we may see our-
selves as victims of 'irrational' hopes and fears. We may, as a
result of this, look for a *causal* explanation of our failure, in the
examination of our general 'beliefs', including, relevantly, our
'beliefs' about ourselves: and to do this is to examine, in terms

of cause and effect, a structure of 'beliefs' of which it is pre-
supposed that we are not, and cannot be, conscious—parallel,
once more, to the examination of the physical properties of a
thing. The reference of the term 'motive' is hardly clearer. In its
broad use, rather like the broad use of the term 'desire', it can
seem to be in order to ask of any agent 'what is his motive in
doing what he is doing?'. At one level the implications of such
a use seem to be, in a primitive way, those of a mechanism:
each action has its 'motive' causally attached. But though such
implications must be present, even in such a context they are
not the *sole* implications of the term. Possible 'motives' are as
various as possible actions, and though the link between motive
and action is unlike that between intention and action in not
being straightforwardly conceptual, there is a suggestion that
this link is *both* causally *and* conceptually explanatory. The
isolation of terms as themselves identifying 'motives' suggests
that in some situations *standard* motives are to be found. But the
theory that *every* action has a standard motive itself presupposes
a mechanistic theory of human action. In its narrower sense the
term seems most at home where there is something puzzling or
fishy about the situation, conspicuously, perhaps, in the case of
an apparently uncharacteristic action, where the conceptual tie
between action and agent is threatened. It is not *always* in order,
once the action has been specified, to ask any further question
about what, in doing it, the agent is doing; and when such a
question *is* in order, it is far from necessary that this should refer
to his *motive*. Querying an agent's 'motive' implies that our
knowledge of what this is would allow a fuller, or perhaps a
revised, specification of his action. To credit him explicitly with
an 'ulterior' motive is to credit him explicitly with a perspicuous
motive of which he must necessarily be conscious. But once
again the suspicion that one may oneself have an 'ulterior'
motive presupposes that there is no perspicuity—an *unconscious*
'motive' must be in question. 'Motive' and 'belief' each seems
to have a built-in incoherence in that each suggests a subject's
need to explicate in terms proper to lucidity what is at the same
time necessarily denied lucidity.

IV

In arguing that our picture of ourselves must in some respects be inevitably incoherent, I am not arguing that this incoherence is in any way inappropriate. Inductive knowledge of the physical properties of things has always seemed comparatively safe ground; the reference of terms in the context of such discourse is, in its turn, comparatively clear and consistent. It is tempting to look for this same safety and consistency in our discourse about ourselves. Discourse about persons including ourselves commits us to symmetry in the implications of the terms appropriate to such discourse; but this symmetry itself presupposes basic asymmetry between the lucid egocentric subject and any other subject. The incoherence implied in any attempt to reduce knowing one's own mind to knowledge of the physical properties of a thing, seems only to reflect the incoherence of beings, who, essentially self-aware, see themselves as at the same time moved by forces of which they cannot be aware, but to which they ascribe the essential characteristics of awareness.