

Themes in the Philosophy of Mind – 2

Hand-out

The doctrine of the transparent mind is equally misconceived. There is much that can be said to be ‘in the mind’ of which we are not conscious. Subliminal perception is now widely recognized. In a post-Freudian era, we should not need to be reminded of the ubiquity of unconscious thoughts, beliefs, wishes, desires and emotions – although we should be warned against the Freudian misconception of the unconscious as a hidden domain, just like the conscious mind, only unconscious. It is mistaken to suppose that whenever we take ourselves to know, understand, want or believe something, we know indubitably that we do so. We commonly think that we know, understand or want things that we do not actually know (but only believe), do not really understand (but misunderstand), and do not really want at all. We commonly wonder whether we really believe something, and often deceive ourselves about what we really believe. Even in cases where doubt *is* patently excluded, as when one is in pain or as when one thinks that it is a beautiful day, it is far from obvious that one *knows* that one is in pain or *knows* that one is thinking that it is a beautiful day. For ignorance here is excluded – but not because the requirements of knowledge are satisfied. Doubt too is excluded – but not because the conditions of certainty have been met. Rather, both are precluded by *grammar*, by the meaning-constituting rules for the use of words. It makes no *sense* to doubt whether one is in pain or whether one is thinking such-and-such.

P. M. S. Hacker, *Human Nature : the Categorical Framework*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 245.

Introspection was explicitly compared to looking into a *camera obscura*. But this too is mistaken. There is no such thing as my seeing that I see something or perceiving that I hear, smell, taste or feel. I can no more *look into* my own mind than I can look into another’s, and we often have more insight into the mind of another than into our own. The perceptual metaphor bound up with ‘introspection’ is misleading, and is a poor model in terms of which to comprehend the logical character of consciousness of what passes in our mind. We confuse

the ability to *say* how things are with us with the ability to *see* how things are with us.

To be able to say how things are with one (subjectively speaking) is not to have *access* to anything, it is to be able to *give expression* to something. When one says that one has a headache, what one has is a pain, not access to a pain. It is true that others can ascribe psychological attributes to a person only on the basis of what he says and does, whereas the person himself can avow how things are with him without observing his own behaviour. Of course, one can report one's pains and confess one's thoughts – but that is not because one has observed something *in foro interno*. To say what one thinks is not to describe one's thoughts, and a description of one's pains does not rest on observation. We wrongly suppose that our sincere word has a privileged status because it rests on privileged *access*. Its authoritative status is not derived from its describing observations of a private peepshow. The subject's sincere word is an expression or manifestation of his thought or experience. Its special status is grammatical, not epistemic – the agent is not *an authority* on his pains and thoughts as he might be an authority on something which only he has seen and studied. Rather, his utterances are logical (non- inductive) *criteria* for how things are with him, and his sincerity, in cases where self-deception can be excluded, guarantees truth.

P. M. S. Hacker, *Human Nature : the Categorical Framework*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 246.

When two terms belong to the same category, it is proper to construct conjunctive propositions embodying them. Thus a purchaser may say that he bought a left-hand glove and a right-hand glove, but not that he bought a left-hand glove, a right-hand glove and a pair of gloves. 'She came home in a flood of tears and a sedan-chair' is a well-known joke based on the absurdity of conjoining terms of different types. It would have been equally ridiculous to construct the disjunction 'She came home either in a flood of tears or else in a sedan-chair.' Now the dogma of the Ghost in the Machine does just this. It 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. I shall argue that these and other analogous conjunctions are absurd; but, it must be noticed, the argument will not show that either of the illegitimately conjoined propositions is absurd in itself. I am not, for example, denying that there occur mental processes. Doing long division is a mental process and so is making a joke. But I am saying that the phrase 'there occur mental processes' does not mean the same sort of thing as 'there occur physical processes', and, therefore, that it makes no sense to conjoin or disjoin the two.

G. Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, Oxford, 1949, éd. Routledge, 2009, p. 11-12.