

Themes in the Philosophy of Mind – 6

Hand-out

1 Wittgenstein, *Blue Book*, p. 47, sq.

At first sight it may appear (but why it should can only become clear later) that here we have two kinds of worlds, worlds built of different materials; a mental world and a physical world. The mental world in fact is liable to be imagined as gaseous, or rather, aethereal. But let me remind you here of the queer role which the gaseous and the aethereal play in philosophy,—when we perceive that a substantive is not used as what in general we should call the name of an object, and when therefore we can't help saying to ourselves that it is the name of an aethereal object. I mean, we already know the idea of 'aethereal objects' as a subterfuge, when we are embarrassed about the grammar of certain words, and when all we know is that they are not used as names for material objects. This is a hint as to how the problem of the two materials, *mind* and *matter*, is going to dissolve.

It seems to us sometimes as though the phenomena of personal experience were in a way phenomena in the upper strata of the atmosphere as opposed to the material phenomena which happen on the ground. There are views according to which these phenomena in the upper strata arise when the material phenomena reach a certain degree of complexity. E.g., that the mental phenomena, sense experience, volition, etc., emerge when a type of animal body of a certain complexity has been evolved. There seems to be some obvious truth in this, for the amoeba certainly doesn't speak or write or discuss, whereas we do. On the other hand the problem here arises which could be expressed by the question : "Is it possible for a machine to think?" (whether the action of this machine can be described and predicted by the laws of physics or, possibly, only by laws of a different kind applying to the behaviour of organisms). And the trouble which is expressed in this question is not really that we don't yet know a machine which could do the job. The question is not analogous to that which someone might have asked a hundred years ago : "Can a machine liquefy a gas?" The trouble is rather that the sentence, "A machine thinks (perceives, wishes)" : seems somehow nonsensical. It is as though we had asked "Has the number 3 a colour?" ("What colour could it be, as it obviously has none of the colours known to us?") For in one aspect of the matter, personal experience, far from being the *product* of physical, chemical, physiological processes, seems to be the very *basis* of all that we say with any sense about such processes. Looking at it in this way we are inclined to use our idea of a building-material in yet another misleading way, and to say that the whole world, mental and physical, is made of one material only.