

The ontological commitments of common sense psychology 1The Mind as a substanceIntroduction

In the previous two sections we have been concerned with what may appropriately be described as the cosmology of the psychological language of common sense, i.e. with its use in everyday life for the purposes of explaining and predicting the behaviour of other human beings. We now turn to the problem of the ontology or ontological commitments of the psychological language of common sense, i.e. to the problem of the kinds of things to which we are referring when we employ these concepts in talking about ourselves and others and to whose existence or occurrence we are thereby committed. To some extent we have already discussed some of these ontological issues in examining ontological commitments of concepts like 'knowing', 'believing', 'wanting' and 'intending' which, as we have seen, are the central concepts employed in common sense mentalist explanations of behaviour. What we now have to do is to examine the ontological commitments of the psychological or mental concepts of ordinary language as a whole, including those such as 'sensation', 'experience', 'attending', 'observing', 'perceiving', 'understanding', 'imaging', 'dreaming', 'thinking', 'concluding', 'remembering' and 'deciding', which are implicated in the explanations we give of the acquisition of knowledge, beliefs, desires and intentions and thus only indirectly with the determination of how the individual behaves. We shall also have occasion to mention the status of another important group of mental concepts which are more directly implicated in determining how the individual behaves, but which do not involve the element of rational choice and decision which is characteristic of mentalist explanations proper, namely the group of concepts which come under the heading of 'affect', 'feeling' or 'emotion'. These however, we shall consider in greater detail in Section 7.

In examining the ontological commitments of the mental concepts of ordinary language there are three fundamental issues which we shall have to decide. Firstly are we committed when we use these concepts to a belief in the existence of an independently existing entity or substance in Aristotle's sense to which an individual's mental properties belong which is distinct and separable from the independently existing entity or substance constituted by the human body or corpse? Secondly, if we decide as I shall argue we should, that there is only one independently existing entity or substance, the human organism or person which has both 'mental' and 'physical' characteristics, are we committed, in ascribing mental properties to the person, to a belief in the existence or occurrence of states, processes or events which are covert or private in the sense of being unobservable as far as an external observer is concerned and observable, in so far as they are observable at all, only by their owner, or is there as the logical behaviourist holds, strictly nothing to which we refer which is not overt in the sense of being available to public inspection, at least in principle? Thirdly, and here we come on to the topics to be discussed in Section 6, if and in so far as we do refer to states and occurrences which are covert or private in this sense, how do we explain the existence or occurrence of such covert states, processes and events and, in particular, what sort of case can be made out for the hypothesis that what we have to deal with here are in fact states, processes and events which exist or take place within the central nervous system?

Mental Substance - arguments for and against

It will already be apparent from what has been said in previous lectures that I do not personally subscribe to the Cartesian view that the mental concepts of ordinary language imply the existence of a mind or soul in the sense of a separate substance capable of existing apart from the body. That is not to say that the supposition that there is such an independently existing entity cannot be formulated in ordinary language. Such a view has been preached from the pulpit and has been understood without much difficulty, by the man-in-the-pew for several millennia if not from time immemorial. It may be argued that the notion becomes very much less coherent when we try to state the view at all precisely, particularly in relation to the phenomenon of death as understood in contemporary medical science. But it is not part of my thesis that the doctrine of the mind or soul as a separate substance is logically incoherent, though I suspect that it may

well prove to be so. My contention is simply that the mental concepts of ordinary language, do not require an interpretation in terms of the two substance doctrine and that therefore, there is not necessarily incompatibility between such concepts and scientific accounts of the human organism such as we find in psychology and neurophysiology which dispense with the two substance doctrine.

The arguments for and against the view that ordinary language commits us to a two substance view of the mind-body relation will be discussed under four headings:

- (a) arguments from the use of the substantive 'mind' in ordinary language idioms;
- (b) arguments from the use of the first person pronoun - 'I', 'me', 'myself', 'my' etc.
- (c) arguments based on the Aristotelian doctrine of substance;
- (d) arguments relating to the criteria of personal identity.

(a) The substantive 'mind' in ordinary language idiom

One line of argument for the view that we are committed by our ordinary mental concepts to a belief in the existence of a distinct mental substance which has never formally presented, so far as I am aware, is the argument that the use of the noun or substantive 'mind' as it occurs in the idioms of ordinary language presupposes a substantive or independently existing entity to which this word refers when used in this way. The reason why this case has never been formally presented is partly, that those philosophers like Ryle (7) who have approached the problem from the standpoint of ordinary language have usually been unsympathetic to the two substance view, but also I suspect, because for every idiom in ordinary language which appears to commit us to the belief in a separate mental substance, there are other idioms such as those which assign mental states and processes to some part of the body such as the head, the brain, the heart or the bowels which can equally well be used to show that common sense psychology is committed to a single substance or physical organism view. In fact an examination of both these types of idiom shows fairly conclusively that none of them, as they occur in common parlance, are intended to be taken very literally. In the case of idioms which employ the substantive 'mind' it is not difficult to show not only that such idioms are metaphorical in the sense that many of the propositions which would be entailed by statements containing [the] noun 'mind', if it did refer to a substance, are not in fact entailed by such statements (e.g. to say 'A sees x in his mind's eye' does not entail 'A has his mind's eye open') but also that such idioms are invariably 'pleonastic' or redundant in the sense that the expression containing the noun 'mind' can either be omitted or replaced by some other expression which does not contain it without loss or change of meaning. Thus:

'A saw in his mind's eye'	can be replaced by	'A imagined seeing x'
'A bore p in mind'	can be replaced by	'A remembered' or 'reminded himself that p'
'A had it in mind to $\Phi$ '	can be replaced by	'A intended to $\Phi$ '
'A & B were of one mind'	can be replaced by	'A and B were agreed'
'A's mind wandered'	can be replaced by	'A's attention wandered'
'A is out of his mind'	can be replaced by	'A is mad/very distressed'
'A has a fine mind'	can be replaced by	'A is very intelligent'
'I don't understand how A's mind works'	can be replaced by	'I don't understand why A thinks and acts as he does' (6)

(b) The reference of the first person pronoun - the Kantian argument

A more formidable argument for the view that ordinary language is committed to the existence of a distinct mental substance is provided by considerations concerning the meaning of the first person pronoun, particularly when a comparison is drawn between the function of the nominative form 'I' when combined with the accusative reflexive form 'myself' as the subject and object terms with respect to the same main verb. This is the basis of Kant's doctrine of the soul as the Pure or Transcendental Ego which he discusses in the Paralogisms of Pure Reason (4). Kant states his view of the nature of the Pure or Transcendental 'I' as follows: "the 'I' that thinks can be regarded always as subject and as something that does not belong to thought as a mere predicate." What he seems to mean by this is that the 'I' that thinks is something numerically different from anything it may be said to think about, including both 'myself' in the sense of my body and 'myself' in the sense of my empirical self, the particular thoughts and experiences

which 'I, qua transcendental ego, happen to have. Kant seems to believe that our ordinary ways of talking and thinking imply the existence of an entity referred to by the 'I' in sentences beginning 'I think' which is a different thing both to that referred to by the word 'myself' in the sentence 'I am thinking about myself' and to the entity referred to by the word 'I' in the sentence 'I am digging', since in the latter case I can be conscious of or think about the self that does the digging, and in both cases that which is or can be an object of thought or consciousness cannot be the same thing that/which thinks about or is conscious of it.

The assumption underlying this argument is that because the word 'I' in sentences beginning 'I think' is the subject term of the sentence whereas the word 'myself' in 'I am thinking about myself' is a term of the object position, these two first person pronouns must refer to different entities. The logical consequence of making this assumption is the generation of a multiplicity of different selves or ego's such as we find in Freud's theory which both in its earlier (3a) and later form (3b) bears the marks of Kant's influence in this respect, if in no other. Taken to its logical conclusion we should have to say that in a case where I am conscious of myself watching myself shaving myself, we should need to distinguish no less than four different ego's or selves, from the pure ego that is conscious, the empirical self that is watching, the self qua agent that is doing the shaving and the self qua body that is being shaved. A much simpler and more reasonable assumption is that reflexive pronouns are genuinely reflexive and refer back to exactly the same entity as that referred to by the subject term whether it be in the first, second or third person. Thus in my example the 'I' that is conscious in the same spatio-temporally extended physical substance as the 'myself' that is watching, the 'myself' that is shaving and the 'myself' that is being shaved and, in the case where I am the person who utters this sentence, the same spatio-temporally extended physical substance as is known to others as Ullin Place.

(c) Aristotle's doctrine of substance and the Cartesian argument

The best known of all the arguments for the view that the mind is a separate substance from the body is that presented by Descartes (2). The argument is based directly on the theory of substance developed by Aristotle (1). As we saw in Lecture 3, according to Aristotle, a substance is something like a man, an animal, a plant, a hammer, a motorcar or a stone which has the characteristic of existing independently in the sense that to assert its existence does not entail the existence of anything else; whereas to assert the existence of a property like redness or roundness always entails the existence of some substance or part of a substance that has the property in question, which is red or is round. Now as Descartes realised, this kind of independent existence which constitutes the defining characteristic of a substance is a matter of logical rather than causal independence. For if a substance has to be causally independent of everything else in the universe we should have to conclude, as Spinoza (9) concluded, that there is only one substance in the universe, namely God. The claim with respect to substances like men, animals, plants, hammers, motorcars and stones is not that they can as a matter of fact exist independently of anything else, but that to assert their existence does not logically entail the existence of anything else. It does not even entail the existence of any of their specific properties since any of these can change without the substance itself ceasing to exist. There are of course, some properties which a substance cannot lose without losing its identity as a thing of a certain kind. For example a lump of twisted and compressed metal that was once a motor car is no longer in any intelligible sense a motor car. But the substance in question still continues to exist so long as it preserves its spatio-temporal integrity and continuity.

Now Descartes argues (2) that I can perfectly well suppose that everything I seem to see, hear, taste, smell and feel - including my own body - is a dream or illusion and hence does not exist; whereas I cannot without self contradiction suppose that 'I' that is supposing or thinking this is likewise an illusion and does not exist. From this it follows that it is logically possible that the soul or mind which Descartes defines as the res cogitans or 'I' that thinks, should exist without the body existing; and that by Aristotle's criterion, makes it both a substance in its own right and a distinct and separate substance from the body. Furthermore, as he goes on to argue later in the Meditations, it is a substance which differs from the other corporeal substances which we recognise in that unlike them it is not extended and located in space in the way other substances are, since it is not divisible in the way that corporeal substances are divisible. For as he says, "although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, yet when a foot or an arm or any other part of the body is cut off I am not aware that any subtraction has been made from the mind".

This argument, so it seems to me, is entirely conclusive and cannot be rebutted, so long as we accept the validity of the egocentric introspective standpoint which Descartes adopts. But when in the light of Wittgenstein's (11) private language argument you begin to question the validity of this ego-centric and introspective standpoint a very different picture emerges. For if, as Wittgenstein's argument implies, any language which is going to be intelligible as a vehicle of inter-personal communication must be firmly anchored to features of the inter-subjective reality within which different human beings are communicating with one another, it follows that a proposition can only be a genuine logical possibility in so far as it can be intelligibly stated in inter-subjective terms. Now while it may appear logically possible from an egocentric introspective point of view that an individual's thought processes should occur without there being any kind of spatio-temporally located and extended body to which they are attached or to which they belong, it is extremely difficult to see what sense if any, can be attached to such a supposition in inter-subjective terms. From an intersubjective point of view the occurrence of thoughts requires a spatio-temporally locatable substance or person whose thoughts they are, in exactly the same way that the existence of redness and roundness requires some substance or part of a substance that is red or round. Thinking in other words is a predicate or property that applies to substances. It is not a substance in its own right. Descartes of course, recognises this; which is why he identifies the mental or spiritual substance as the 'I' that does the thinking, rather than as the thinking itself. But as we have seen in examining Kant's argument the first person pronoun as ordinarily understood refers not to some mysterious entity within the person but to the person as a whole, the spatio-temporally extended and located substance which utters the sentence in question. The sentence 'I am thinking' uttered by Descartes expresses the same proposition as the sentence 'Descartes is thinking' uttered on the same occasion by a passer-by who observed him through the window.

But if it makes no sense from an intersubjective point of view to suppose that Descartes was thinking, although no such spatio-temporally located and extended human organism ever existed, then the supposition 'I am thinking, although my body does not exist' entertained by Descartes is not a genuine logical possibility, and this argument for the independent existence of the soul or mind as a substance distinct from the body breaks down. And if the mind is not a substance, as the failure of this argument would suggest that it is not, then the fact that it is not divisible in the way that corporeal substances are divisible would tend to show, not as Descartes thought, that it is a substance which differs from other substances in not being spatially extended, but simply that the mental properties of corporeal substances such as human beings are not themselves substances unlike, for example, the parts of a motor car or parts of the body like the brain which clearly are substances in their own right and are divisible in exactly the same way that the substance of which they form part are divisible. For another view of this matter see Strawson (10) pp. 115-6.

(d) Personal Identity - the Lockean argument

The fourth and final argument for the view of the mind as an independently existing substance which we need to consider differs from the other three in that it does not attempt to show as the others do, that we are inescapably committed to such a view by the conceptual framework which we employ in thinking and talking about it. What the argument from Personal Identity as presented by Locke tries to do is to draw our attention to the kind of empirical evidence which, if we were confronted with it, would compel us to postulate the existence of some such independently existing substance. Locke's argument runs as follows: "Had I the same consciousness that I saw the ark and Noah's flood as that I saw an overflowing of the Thames last winter, or as that I write now, I could no more doubt that I that write this now, that saw the Thames overflowed last winter and that viewed the flood at the general deluge, was the same self place that self in what substance you please". What Locke is saying in this somewhat turgid passage is that if I remembered an incident at which, qua human being or 'man', to use Locke's term, I was not in fact present and could not have been present because it happened long before I was born, and remembered it in the way that I remember incidents in the past at which I have been present and of which I have been conscious at the time, rather than in the way in which I remember things I have been told or have read about in books, I would be forced to conclude that I had in fact been present at and conscious of the incident in question, though as the same spiritual substance or self inhabiting some other material substance or body which was present at the time.

Now as Shoemaker has pointed out (8), there are a number of considerations which raise serious

doubts as to the intelligibility and coherence of the supposition that Locke makes here. In the first place it may well be true as a matter of psychological fact that people who have experiences, such as the one described by Locke or, of the kind known to psychologists as déjà vu experiences, find it impossible to avoid drawing the kind of conclusion that Locke suggests they would be compelled to draw. But it is one thing to say that such a conclusion is psychologically inescapable and quite another that it is the only logically possible interpretation of the facts as stated. Part of the difficulty here arises from the logical complexity of the notion of 'remembering an incident at which one was present and of which one was conscious at the time' in contrast to 'remembering what one has been told about it.' We can probably agree that to remember an incident entails; if it does not entirely consist in, remembering certain propositions relating to the incident. Now to say that someone A remembers that p where p is a proposition entails 'A knows that p' and, as we have seen, 'A knows that p' entails (1) 'A believes that p' (2) p is true and (3) 'A has good grounds for his belief that p.' Furthermore the force of saying 'A remembers that p' rather than saying 'A knows that p' in such a case is to draw attention to the nature of A's grounds for believing and asserting p, namely the fact that he was present, was conscious of what was going on and formed the judgement that p at the time.

Two consequences follow from this for the case we are considering. Firstly, if someone claims to remember an incident which he has not been told and has not read about, he is claiming (a) that what he says happened actually did happen on the occasion in question and (b) that his ability to make this correct assertion is a direct consequence of his having been present at and conscious of the incident at the time. However (and this is the second consequence) such a claim is not the kind of claim which we are compelled to accept on the say-so of the individual who is making the claim. If we conclude on the other grounds either that one or more of the propositions he claims to remember are false or that he was not in fact present and conscious of the incident at the time or that although he was present and conscious his ability to report correctly results not so much from what he himself observed at the time as from what he was told afterwards by others, the claim which he makes to remember the incident will fail to gain acceptance by others however strong the individual's own convictions in the matter may be. As every lawyer and every psychologist knows only too well, first hand reports of incidents, even where there is no doubt that the witness was present at the time and observed the incident in question, are notoriously unreliable and can often be shown to be grossly distorted despite the witness's firm conviction that he observed what he claimed to have observed. In the light of these considerations it is difficult to see why the conviction that one has actually been present at and witnessed the incident which one claims to remember should be any more reliable than one's equally sincere and confident convictions about what actually happened.

It follows from this that in a case such as the example which Locke gives, where there is very strong prima facie evidence against the individual's having actually been present at and having observed Noah's Flood, it is much easier to believe that the conviction that he was present, which is implied by his claim to remember it, is delusory, than to suppose with Locke that the same consciousness which now belongs to him was previously attached to some other body which was in fact present at the time. No doubt one can envisage circumstances in which some such prima facie improbable hypothesis as this, would be required in order to account for the facts observed. For example suppose that someone reports an incident or series of incidents which could only have been observed by one particular individual, say Napoleon, at the time when they occurred; and let us further suppose that we have a means of checking these reports from documentary records and diaries left by Napoleon, which have never been published and which we can be quite sure could never have been seen by the individual who is claiming to remember these incidents in Napoleon's life; and let us further suppose that the incidents as reported, turn out both to agree with the evidence of the diaries, but also to add further details which are not only quite consistent with everything in them; but also provide a wholly convincing and yet previously unsuspected explanation of facts which have puzzled historians for generations. In such circumstances I suggest we should have no option but to postulate some kind of direct causal connection between Napoleon's witnessing of these events at the time and our friend's subsequent ability to report them correctly and in great detail a hundred and sixty years later.

But even this would not be sufficient evidence on which to establish the claim which Locke is making that our friend's consciousness is the same consciousness as the one which once inhabited Napoleon's body. For there are other kinds of causal connection which, though equally fantastic, could be postulated to account for the causal connection between Napoleon's witnessing of the events and our friend's

ability to report them. He might be supposed to have a faculty for clairvoyance which enabled him to perceive past states of Napoleon's mind without his consciousness being the same consciousness as that which once belonged to Napoleon. Alternatively his powers of clairvoyance might enable him to read the diaries of Napoleon which are available only to scholars by extra-sensory perception; or again he may be in telepathic communication with those few scholars who have actually read the diaries. All these hypotheses would account equally well for the supposed facts and it is extremely difficult to see what evidence we could possibly have which would enable us to decide between these alternatives. Moreover, even supposing we could decide between them and that the evidence came out overwhelmingly in favour of the transmigration of Napoleon's consciousness hypothesis, it would still be open to a materialist like myself to argue that since consciousness in the relevant sense is either a process or system of states and not a substance, there must be some hitherto unknown material substance in which this process or system of states takes place or to which it belongs which has a continuous history through space and time between the time when it formed part of Napoleon and the time when it became part of our friend.

### Conclusion

I conclude therefore, that no adequate case has been made out either for the view that the mental concepts of ordinary language commit us to a belief in an independently existing mental substance or for the view that the possible existence of such a mental substance is a hypothesis which we might conceivably need in the future in order to account for empirical phenomena whose occurrence has not in any case been firmly established. In the light of these considerations and in the absence of any other arguments for such a view we may safely conclude following Strawson (10) that what I have called in Lecture 8 the 'basic form' of all mental concepts is a predicative expression qualifying a subject term which in all cases refers to a particular spatio-temporally extended and located substance, a person, a human being or a living organism, whichever term you prefer, to which, as its spatio-temporal extension and location implies, what Strawson calls M- or Material (i.e. non-mental) predicates apply, just as much as do the P- or Person (i.e. mental) predicates. We can therefore proceed to our next problem which is to decide whether and to what extent these states, processes and events which constitute properties of this single material substance, the person or human being, must be conceived as involving covert or private states and occurrences existing or taking place within the person of which only he is conscious or aware.

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