PHILOSOPHY AND THE HUMAN SCIENCES

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BARNES & NOBLE BOOKS
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he offered philosophy should give rise to the very symptoms it was supposed to cure.

Recommended Reading


Like many other general labels, the title Ordinary Language Philosopher is often more of a hindrance than a help in identifying and characterising those to whom it is applied. In the first place, it seems to imply that what differentiates such philosophers from their contemporaries is that they are concerned with a whole new branch of philosophy, namely the philosophy of ordinary language, or that they conduct their philosophy solely in terms supplied by ordinary language, or both. This is misleading because, as we shall see, Ordinary Language Philosophy is concerned with standard and classical problems. The deliberate avoidance of formal notation is no more than a preference for certain gains which are, it is thought, made thereby. Second, the use of the general label suggests a commonality of line, a uniformity of theory and problems, which would be quite wrong. And yet the term does have some advantage. One thing that does link Ordinary Language Philosophers is an attitude towards philosophy itself, and particularly the goals it should aim for. They are extremely sceptical of all attempts to build large scale speculative systems based upon the universalising of categorial distinctions. They offer none themselves and are prone to think that philosophers would be more at home with the concrete and particular than they are with the general and abstract. The painstaking nature of their investigations and the patient accumulation of findings is in direct contrast to many other tendencies in recent philosophical history. The unity discerned in Ordinary Philosophy is mainly due to the fact that the two pre-eminent figures, Ryle and Austin, were contemporaries at Oxford. It is further encouraged by the preference which both shared for writing essays rather than books. Ryle produced only one book length work and several collections of papers. Austin published only a handful of lectures and papers. The limited output and the deliberate refraining from advocating general theories allows for the blurring of differences.

In spite of the size of the philosophical output, for a time in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Ryle and Austin wielded considerable influence in a number of Philosophy Departments both in Britain and in North America. Two reasons may be offered for this. To begin with, in their piecemeal, meticulous investigations Ryle and Austin
seemed to have roughed out a novel approach to philosophy which
looked as if it might eliminate many of the conventional problems, or
at least render them more tractable. Second, and perhaps equally as
important, was the effect of their personal styles. Austin in particu-
lar had a quite unique personal authority among his students. Both wrote
their philosophy with a flair, wit and lightness of touch that is virtually
unrivalled. They were serious philosophers but neither could ever be
accused of being unnecessarily po-faced and solemn.

The verve of the writing combined with the inclination to propound
only the most minimal claims for philosophy has given rise to the
impression that Austin and Ryle are "philosophers' philosophers", and
so they have been somewhat neglected in other quarters. They do not
seem to be concerned with the important questions of the age or with
the timeless dilemmas of human existence. This has certainly been
the view within the human sciences, where only a few small groups
have paid any attention at all to their work. This is a pity. We ought
not to mistake reticence for irrelevance. As we shall see, Ryle's notion
of "category mistakes" and their logical consequences could well have
very important applications in psychology, sociology and elsewhere,
while Austin's search for precision and clarity with regard to
supposed distinctions such as part/whole, free/determined, general/
particular might have cut short much needless theoretical dispute in
all the social sciences. A more positive reason for taking an interest in
Ordinary Language Philosophy is that it is primarily concerned with
the topic of the human sciences, human action and its correct
characterisation. What is it that makes something an action and not
merely a piece of behaviour? What sorts of action are there? How are
they defined and organised? If we were to take such an interest, it
might occur to us that many of the models of human action that are
advocated within the human sciences are wholly inadequate, having
neither the flexibility nor the subtlety to fulfil the general applications
claimed for them. As we have already hinted, in its own idiosyncratic
way, Ordinary Language Philosophy might very well shake our
confidence in the broad and apparently firm philosophical distinc-
tions which are thought to be central to our endeavours; those
between appearance and reality, subjectivity and objectivity, free will
and determinism, and so on. It would not be all that unfair to say that it
is Ryle and Austin's conclusion that much of the discussion of these
distinctions and the questions to which they relate has been ham-
fisted in the extreme. Since the human sciences are so dependent upon
them, clarification and definition of what is at stake could only be

beneficial. It might, for example, encourage us to avoid many of the
pitfalls that we stumble into and help us to unravel the knots that we
tie ourselves in when we try to escape.

We said at the beginning that Ordinary Language Philosophy is not
a set of theories, nor even a uniform method, but an attitude. It is often
thought that Ryle and Austin wished to defend the infallibility of
commonsense and replace genuine philosophical definitions and
concepts with those commonly used by the man in the street. Nothing
could be wider of the mark. The interest in the stock or common use of
concepts as they are to be seen in the things we might ordinarily say,
arose out of a preoccupation which has been central to philosophy of
every kind, namely the relationships that might be said to hold
between our concepts and the world. Does the logical structure of our
concepts match that of the world? Some philosophers felt that clear
progress toward deciding this might be obtained if philosophical
reflections were couched in a formal language, the logic of which
operated according to pre-defined principles. The model often
promoted was the branch of mathematical logic known as set theory.
It was argued that the gains made if this were to be done would far
outweigh any drawbacks formalism might have. For a start, defini-
tional clarity would encourage the tracing out of all implications
and presuppositions thereby going a long way towards preventing
arguments slipping into paradox or contradiction. The demonstration
of the power of formality was to be seen in the way that fresh light was
thrown on classical problems. A second gain that was to be made was
the proceduralising of philosophising itself. The central philosophical
task became the translation of the problem into the appropriate
notation. This had one important effect. It soon became clear that
translation was not simply the application of a lexicon term by term.
The sense of the expression as well as the reference of the terms had to
be conveyed. Such sense was determined by looking to the context of
use. The difference between sense and reference, that was outlined in
the Introduction to this section, and the determination of meaning by
looking to context became the cornerstones of nearly all later
discussions. As we will see, in part, Ordinary Language Philosophy is
distinguished by its particular interpretation of what 'looking to the
context' might mean.

The major thrust of an important part of philosophy, then, has been
towards formality and the introduction of mathematical logic. Not
everyone followed this line. Some felt that the drawbacks acknow-
ledged by those advocating formalism were far more substantial than
often allowed. The requirements of translation into the relatively narrow confines of symbolic logic often stretched and distorted concepts in ways that went unnoticed. This could result in confusion, if not outright absurdity. For example, as Austin once pointed out, Frege's definition of a name should tell us why the name 'Julius Caesar' is not a number. But why should philosophy concern itself with silly questions? Such sentiments go back in British philosophy as far as Hume, at least, if not further. But probably the most well known of the more recent advocates of the importance of keeping one's philosophical feet on the ground is G.E. Moore. Lying behind this disquiet is the conviction that philosophy is not the name of a body of knowledge over which one gains technical mastery, but an activity. Philosophy's technical vocabulary is not applied to empirical statements in the way that science's is. Terms like cognition, perception, existential quantifier, material implication are elucidated by reference to other non-technical terms drawn from everyday life. We talk about what we know, feel, require, think, take to be implied or presupposed, and so on. In philosophy one does not gain knowledge of some set of special things or philosophical objects existing in the world but of how we use our concepts to deal with the world. Since philosophy makes use of ordinary concepts in this way, some philosophers felt that rather than seeking formality and translation, we ought to give attention to those terms and their relationships in their natural settings. We ought to try to get to know what we are ordinarily doing when we use them. Looking at how such ordinary terms are used would, it was felt, reveal their underlying or informal logic. This knowledge would enable us to see how and when formal and informal logic meshed. The way to reveal this informal logic was through the examination of cases. There was another reason for turning to ordinary concepts and language. The proceduralising of philosophical questions began to look as if it would reduce, perhaps even eliminate, the purely philosophical issues involved in favour of the logical. We might become more concerned with why and how failures in the standard techniques occurred than with the philosophical points to be made.

The turn towards the consideration of ordinary concepts as they are on view in the things we say marks a distinct departure from what was becoming the dominant strain in philosophy. Its guiding rationale can be summarised like this. Central to all philosophy is the aim of defining what sorts of things there are in the world and how they are to be described and related. What can be said to be true, good, real, solid, imaginary? In answering these questions, philosophy has tended to want to demarcate the qualities which characterise Truth, Goodness, Reality and Imagination etc. It is these qualities which inhere in good deeds, true statements, real objects and imaginary fears. Philosophers like Ryle and Austin wish to break with this approach. All talk of examining essential qualities seems to end up as talk about what we might say in certain circumstances. That is to say, the search for essences ends as talk about particular cases. This being so, they thought, we might as well suspend the assumption that there are essential distinctions which inhere in nature independently of our concepts and direct our attention to those which are institutionalised in our language and the concepts it expresses. The examination of these distinctions will reveal their informal logic and the rules (their logical grammar) by which they are used.

Such examination can only take place on a case by case basis. Each has to be examined on its own because we have suspended the assumption that some essential quality or qualities can define them. Both Ryle and Austin accept that philosophy should aim for generality; it is how that is to be arrived at that is at issue. If one adopts the attitude that generalisation must follow from the consideration and comparison of cases, then with Ryle and Austin, one is likely to find that most philosophical theories fail. In fact, they cannot even meet the simplest of tests, namely the translation back into the ordinary terms from which the formalised, logical formulae were derived! Why does the existence of external objects cause such perplexity? What is so odd about a stick appearing to bend in water? Who would deny that they can tell when a person is angry or excited? What is so difficult about an object having two names? The consequence of pointing out that these and many other hallowed examples and difficulties might be predicated upon the distorted, perhaps even inept, use of ordinary concepts is a sort of stealthy desecration. Problems tend to be eliminated rather than accumulated. This too probably contributed to the popularity of Ryle and Austin. They seemed to be saying that, when viewed with an unprejudiced eye, many philosophical questions and puzzles seem not so much venerable as myth-eaten.

Gilbert Ryle

'Ask not what the conclusions are'. Ryle advises writers of
philosophical texts and summaries, 'but look for what the big worry was'. Summaries of conclusions do not convey the point of philosophy or philosophising. They eliminate the essential feature, the formulation, consideration and appraisal of arguments. The discoveries that genuine philosophers make — and Ryle was not averse to speaking of philosophical discoveries — are not sets of conclusions reached, points of termination, but the routes by which they are attained. What we have here is a distinctive version of the view of philosophy that we outlined just now. Unlike the sciences, philosophy does not provide new information about the world. There are no philosophical objects to scrutinise. To think that there are, that if science is the study of the physical world and its objects, then philosophy is the study of the mental world and its objects — that is ideas — has been a recurrent mistake.

Philosophical problems are problems of a special sort; they are not problems of an ordinary sort about special entities. (*Collected Papers*, p. vii)

What is special about philosophy’s problems is that they are concerned with processes of reasoning, not the objects that we reason about. This might seem a bit strained, but what Ryle is getting at here is the way that philosophical problems are never solved but rather restated in a different form. This restating involves trying to get clear what was muddled, and untangling what was knotty and confused. It is the finding of a novel way to bring clarity to some question that constitutes a philosophical discovery. The best discoveries show how whole heaps of confusion, whole thickets of thorny questions can be straightened out and cleared. Seen in this way, it should be fairly clear that Ryle is far from advocating a single ‘proper’ method for philosophy. A new approach, like his own, he thought, might make some things go smoothly now whereas before they were stuck. But this being the case, they will only get stuck somewhere else. Disputation, perplexity and uncertainty are the core of philosophy. In this sense, Ryle is of a very different temper to Austin. As we will see, Austin felt that in his own preferred corner of philosophy at least he was laying down the possibility of real and permanent progress by bringing order and system. At some time in the future, the possibility was that whole classes of philosophical questions would be taken over by sciences of one kind or another. Ryle, on the other hand, doubted that anything could or should remain settled for long. He certainly did not think that matters were ever finally resolved.

So, what is Ryle's big worry? Luckily enough, Ryle himself has given us some indication. While not particularly attracted to nor adept at the notational complexities of modern symbolic logic, Ryle was convinced that the developments made by logicians in the past hundred years or so would, or ought to have, a significant impact upon philosophy, even in those areas where it might seem that logical issues were remote such as the philosophy of mind. The gains that were to be made, however, would not be without hiccoughs and difficulties. He saw his own role as one of facilitating the 'transactions' between logic and philosophy, a sort of broker whose task it was to indicate what was on offer and of interest, just what kind of repackaging of issues would be necessary and what the costs might be. Part of this role was the obligation to point up just what the transactions told us about the similarities and differences between logic and philosophy. At heart, the big worry was that philosophy might be swamped by logic. We suggested at the beginning of this chapter that he and Austin were part of a reaction against the overformalising of philosophical questions. The primary reason for this was not a rejection of formality itself, but the feeling that the search for formal expression in logical form often meant that the informal logic of concepts and the part it plays in philosophy was downgraded and ignored. Philosophy, as opposed to logic, ought to be preoccupied with the informal logic of our concepts. Where the downgrading occurred, Ryle felt, there appeared to be a real danger that philosophers might end up talking one or other species of nonsense. Exposing just when and how this might come about was to be Ryle's life's work.

To gain a preliminary view of the way that Ryle saw this issue, we will go fairly slowly through one of his earlier and justly celebrated papers, *Systematically Misleading Expressions*. Having grasped the general approach we will then turn to two clusters of problems to which Ryle returned again and again, the apparent irreconcilability between some ways of thinking, especially science and commonsense, and the peculiarity of some of the philosophical foundations of psychology.

Philosophers are not much interested in particular facts such as 'the speed of light in a vacuum is 186,281.7 miles/sec' or in particular meanings like one of the meanings of 'geometer' is 'a species of caterpillar'. They carry out what are sometimes called 'second order' investigations. They want to know what it is about statements like those given that makes them factual or meaningful. What is the relationship between a state of affairs and the factual proposition
which describes it, or between a word and its meaning? In undertaking such investigations philosophers have to abstract and generalise. They do so by looking to the formal properties of the statements they collect together. The difficulties begin when they look only for formal features and hence fail to pay attention to the informal logic of the concepts — such as 'meaningful' and 'factual' — which they invoke. This can happen when the formal syntactical similarities of statements and expressions are taken as a firm guide for their logical character. When this happens, formal logic and informal logic get out of tune. It could happen, for example, if all factual statements are taken to have the same logical character and be about the same sorts of objects. This might lead us to think that because 'the speed of light is 186,281.7 miles/sec is a fact' has the same syntactic structure as 'the magpie is a bird' then 'facts' and 'birds' are the same sorts of things, namely describable objects in the world. Ryle's suggestion in Systematically Misleading Expressions is that just this sort of blunder has occurred time and time again in philosophy and has given rise to quite a few pseudo-philosophical problems.

Take the sentence 'Seb Coe is Olympic 1500-metre champion'. This records a fact about an individual, Seb Coe. We might be inclined to say that there must be some sort of relationship between that individual and the sentence which underpins its factual and meaningful character. We might then go on to say that all factual and meaningful statements stand in the same relationship to the objects or states of affairs they describe. However, were we to do this, we would soon run into trouble. What would we want to say about the sentence 'the Centaur does not exist'? This is true, meaningful and records, we might say, a fact. But 'the Centaur does not exist' cannot be about the Centaur in the same way that 'Seb Coe is Olympic 1500-metre champion' is about Seb Coe, or can it? The Centaur does not exist and Coe does. If we say that being Olympic champion is a feature or quality of Coe and not existing is a quality of the Centaur and the two sentences describe the possession of these qualities factually, then we have a contradiction. How can 'not existing' be a quality of something which does not exist? How can anything which does not exist have any qualities? To get round this, philosophers have resorted to saying that there are two sorts of objects in the world: bicycles, trees, people and other objects, and non-substituting objects like Centaurs, unicorns, square circles. The phrase 'the Centaur' refers to a non-substituting object in exactly the same way that 'Seb Coe' refers to Seb Coe. As we saw in the Introduction, even while they were propounding and defending this solution, many philosophers were unhappy with it. With the development of symbolic logic at the end of the nineteenth century, it looked as if a way might have been found to eliminate the need for non-existing substantives. The logical analysis of the sentences in which such terms occurred would reveal the ontology to be unnecessary. This logical analysis consisted in the translation of such sentences into others which would then display their logical form. Thus we might 'unpack' 'Seb Coe is Olympic 1500-metre champion' into 'There is someone who is both Seb Coe and Olympic 1500-metre champion'. 'The Centaur does not exist' becomes 'there is nothing that is both half-man and half-horse and which exists'. The importance of this is that the unpacked sentence now does not imply anything about any thing which does or might exist.

The root of the difficulty we faced was the way that 'the Centaur does not exist' seemed to commit us to the existence of certain sorts of things because it looked to be about those things. It has, says Ryle, a 'quasi-ontological' character. It is not the negative which is causing the problem but the fact that we are dealing with an existential proposition. All existential propositions look as if they have the same sort of logical character and appear to commit us to accepting that they describe the existence of things. But they do not; they are systematically misleading. This does not mean that they do not function perfectly well in the situations where they are ordinarily used. It is only when they are transported into philosophy and logic that things go awry.

Why? Take the sentence 'this pen is red'. This commits us to accepting that this pen is an object in the world because if it is true it says something about this pen, namely that it is red. And if it is false it also says something about this pen, namely that it is not red. Now look at the case of 'Seb Coe exists'. This is an implication of the truth of the sentence 'Seb Coe is Olympic 1500-metre champion'. In Ryle's view, it would be misleading to think that this was about Seb Coe in the same way, that is, that it records a fact which might be true or false and which is parallel to 'this pen is red'. But this cannot be so for while everything looks fine if we accept that 'Seb Coe exists' is true, what about if it is false? If it is false then there is nothing for the sentence to be about. We have the difficulty with non-existent substantives and the proposed solution of logical analysis only because we have been misled by the syntactic similarities of existential propositions to others. But existence is not like redness or solidity. It is not a quality which something can possess. The consequence of accepting Ryle's
line of thinking is an increasing scepticism towards those branches of philosophy such as hermeneutics and phenomenology that have set themselves the task of elaborating and defending metaphysical schemes containing terms such as Being, Reality, Objectivity and examining the status of different orders of Being, Reality and Objectivity. Given Ryle's point of view, they are churning out systematically misleading expressions in the guise of philosophy. Any investigative discipline based upon them is similarly systematically misleading or misled.

Having dismissed the necessity for attempting to rid philosophy of non-existing subsistents and having hinted that the study of Being, Reality, Number and so on may be manufacturing metaphysical monstrosities, Ryle turns his attention towards the idea of universals. When someone says 'honesty is the best policy', this appears to be the same sort of expression as 'John is the best swimmer'. The appearance of similarity has led some philosophers to talk of there being two sorts of things in the world; universals such as beauty, truth, honesty and the like, and particulars such as this beautiful picture, this true statement and this honest person. But this is to be misled. The character of the muddle we are in can be glimpsed if we ask what it is that 'honesty' is supposed to be referring to in the sentence 'honesty is the best policy'. Is honesty the name of something separate from the things that a person does like paying for goods bought, returning items borrowed and so on? Honesty is not a separate line of action to be adopted alongside returning tools and paying bus fares. It is a characterisation of those lines of action. Thus if we unpack 'honesty is the best policy', honesty is not the name of something. Ryle feels that the implication of this is that any debate about the supposed existence of universals and exactly what sort of existence they might have is pointless. Justice, progress, equality, freedom are not the names of a certain sort of object, the characteristics of which are on display in their particular manifestations. These particulars do not have essential characteristics, features of the universal which they share, and to search for them is misconceived.

The third sort of misleading expression which Ryle attacks is that which he calls 'quasi-referential'. The problems which they have created are very much more familiar. For example, a great deal of philosophical energy has been expended on the sentence 'the present king of France is bald'. This is perfectly intelligible; the phrase 'the present king of France' has sense but no reference. How can this be? 'The present king of France is bald' looks rather like 'Paris is the capital of France', where 'Paris' is the name of the capital of France. But if that is the case, whom is 'the present king of France' naming? To whom does it refer? Before we rush to logic to seek an analysis, Ryle advises us to consider sentences of this sort, 'Neil Kinnock is not Prime Minister' and '17859 is not the largest integer'. These appear to be syntactically similar but they are not logically the same. The sentence 'the Prime Minister is not Neil Kinnock' is true; 'the largest integer is not 17859' is neither true nor false. There is nothing which could be the largest integer and so the term 'the largest integer' is not a name nor a description. It does not refer at all. Ryle asserts that we have to keep in mind in our philosophical discussions just when 'the . . .' expressions refer and when they do not. Many terms of location like 'the top of the tree', 'the centre of the storm' do not refer to particular things or items but to relative positions; they are attributional. Some of the difficulties raised in the philosophy of mathematics and science, for instance, might be less daunting if terms like path, space, region, value, magnitude, time and so on were treated as relative rather than referential.

What Ryle is insisting we accept is that not every sentence which appears to describe or refer actually does do so. If we don't see this, we can be lured into asking all sorts of misconceived questions. If someone were to say 'the idea occurred to me in the bath' or 'the thought flashed through my mind', we might want to reflect philosophically on what sorts of things ideas were, whereabouts in us they could occur and how long this occurrence might last. We might ask what sorts of things thoughts and minds are so that one can pass through the other. Is the relation like a current in a circuit? Similarly, to take Frege's famous case, if we fail to see just how misleading 'the meaning of "Hesperus" is identical with the meaning of "Phosphoros"' is, we will fret for a long time over what sorts of things meanings could be and how they might relate to the terms just given.

Two features of Ryle's philosophy ought to be apparent by now. First, there is the firm conviction that the examination of the grammar of concepts is a genuine and pressing philosophical task. It is a concern with informal logic and should be carried out in as perspicacious a manner as possible. Second, many of the internal squabbles and confusions in philosophy owe their origins to failures to see how misleading the most ordinary of expressions can be if they are translated into philosophical discourse without reflection. They are not designed for that use and unless exercised with care will play havoc with our arguments. These two join in the work of unravelling
some of the knots and tangles that philosophers have tied themselves into. We will look at just two of those with which Ryle occupied himself: what he called *dilemmas* and the logical grammar of the concept of mind.

A dilemma in philosophy appears when we find ourselves drawn in conflicting directions by rival ways of thinking and talking, neither of which is decisively and obviously superior. The opposing arguments look as if they should refute one another, and yet neither does. We are stuck and do not know which way to go. Here are a few of the sorts of dilemmas Ryle has in mind:

1. You are seated at a desk reading. All around you are familiar objects. Out of the window you can see other equally familiar objects. They have a solidity, a reality, which is wholly indubitable. From your shelves you take a text in physics. Pretty soon you learn that physics has shown that ordinary solid objects are no more than whirling conglomerates of elementary particles held together by various electromagnetic forces. They only appear to be solid; really they are otherwise. You put your apparently solid coffee cup down on an apparently solid table. Your apparently solid jaw drops. Here we are pulled two ways at once. If a cup or a table are not solid, we do not know what is. And yet we do not want to deny the progress and achievements of physics. What do we say?

2. Your eldest child is growing apace. He can now wear your shoes and clothes and pretty soon will be as tall as you. But, before he can be as tall as you, he will have to grow half the difference in your heights. He will then have to grow half the remainder and half the remainder of that and so on. It seems that there will always be an amount, no matter how infinitesimal, still left to be grown. He gets closer and closer to your height but never quite catches you up. Although you might find this quite cheering, it looks odd. We know children outgrow their parents and yet the logic of the measurement system seems to imply that they don’t or can’t.

3. Here is a third. We all decide to meet for a drink next Friday. We discuss arrangements between ourselves and agree that Friday is the best time. We have made a choice. Now, if we do meet on Friday then it is true on Saturday morning that we met on the day before. Since truth cannot be time dependent, it must also have been true last Christmas that we would meet next Friday. And if that is the case, then it was true in 100 B.C. that we will meet for a drink next Friday. Faced with this, we might want to say that it is already fixed in advance that we will meet next Friday, for we were not alive in 100 B.C. to affect the decision. We have no choice in the matter. What appear to be free actions are in fact determined. And yet we want to say that we did make a choice; nothing was fixed until we made the arrangements.

Ryle argues that what is going on here is the muddling up of "technical” and "untechnical” concepts because of the failure to pay sufficient attention to the role of informal logic. If we think about the cases put to us, we should soon see that what appear to be competitive ways of thinking are, in actual fact, only alternate ones. They are, or could be, quietly coexisting and the image of rivalry is a misconstrual. As we shall see, such a line will have considerable implications for the supposed boundary disputes and arguments over which explanations are "more basic" in the human sciences.

Let us see how Ryle might untangle the meeting for a drink example. We can then look more briefly at the other two. What seems to be being said is that if it was true in 100 BC that we will meet for a drink next Friday, then this is exactly the same as the truth of the statement that we met on Friday uttered on Saturday morning. There is, to use the terms, no distinction between anterior and posterior truths. But ‘we will meet next Friday’ is not a statement about a state of affairs that exists; it is not a proposition which can be true or false. It is a prediction. Predictions cannot be true or false; they can be well or ill founded, correct or incorrect. The truth or falsity of a proposition about an event is a verdict that can be arrived at only after the event. It is not a quality which can be displayed in advance. Our meeting next Friday makes the proposition true. The truth of the proposition does not make us meet next Friday. The connection between events and propositions cannot be causal, with propositions causing events; but neither is it logical. The truth of the proposition does not entail that we meet. Truths are the consequences of other truths. The truth of the proposition on Saturday morning entails the proposition that ‘if in 100 B.C. some one had said “if they meet on Friday ... then it will be true on Saturday morning that they met”’ will be true. The statement ‘they will meet’ would have been neither true nor false. It is only because the connection between propositions is seen as a causal one that the correctness of the prediction somehow determines the events it predicts. Causal connections hold between objects and events, not propositions. We will only succumb to what Ryle calls the fatalistic argument if we do not see that the ordinary words ‘can’, ‘must’, ‘cause’, ‘effect’ have uses in ordinary life which ramify and soon get
out of control if we are not careful when we use them in philosophy.

The two other dilemmas can be reduced in much the same way. Consider the case of the growing child. As we outlined it, the problem in hand seems rather like that faced by a mother who has to divide a cake equally among her children. She could use a rule which says 'give each child the same sized portion'. Or, she could use a rule which allots to each a slice commensurate with their position in the age ranking. On this rule, perhaps, the oldest child would get half of the cake, the next oldest would receive half of what was left and so on. There would always be a portion of the cake, albeit not very much, left to divide among the remaining children. Clearly, we treated the growing child in terms of a rule such as the latter. But what has an infinite character here is neither the cake nor the difference in the heights but the number of times we can apply the division rule. We can keep dividing ad infinitum because the number series is infinite. There is no largest integer and hence there is no smallest fraction. The physical process of growing cannot be subjected to recursive division. We only have the dilemma when we take that principle out of its natural setting in arithmetic and try to apply it where it does not fit, namely to physical processes like growth.

The example of physics ought now to present very few problems. It looks like we have a flat contradiction between commonsense and physics. But Ryle asks us to remember that we have little or no bother in accepting that the sciences have specialised equipment and vocabulary; we do not normally use potentiometers, electron microscopes and cyclotrons. We do not normally talk of volts, quarks and creep fracture. What we have also to remember is that science also uses perfectly ordinary words in specialised ways, and this is what is happening when the physicist and we seem to be at odds over chairs, tables and cups. Think of the statement of income and expenditure that an accountant might give for a small business. We might find items like salaries with figures allocated, but no indication of what the people did to earn their salary; we might see miscellaneous travel, but have no idea from where to where the journeys were taken nor with what purpose. What does the allocation of the sum for the purchase of the microcomputer tell us about the reports written by using the word-processing package it runs? These matters would be irrelevant to the accountant. They look for a match between real expenditure and items claimed; assets and those owned. The owner and employees of the business have entirely different interests. These would be expressed in the descriptions or theories they would offer. There is no overarching, single, ultimate interest that we could take in the firm, no unique description that could be given. In the same way, the struggle between commonsense and science, or between religion and science, or between psychology and many of the human sciences is really only a sham. They offer the descriptions they do based upon the interests which they have; we can only make the conflict between them appear to stick if we set those interests up as conflicting. But they do not have to be. We should be very careful in ensuring that two different technical disciplines really are describing things in the same way before we advertise their rivalry. This is a very important point to grasp because we may easily be led into thinking that because, say, sociology is about people and so is psychology, if their accounts differ either they must be reconciled or one must be right and the other wrong. If sociology and psychology are not describing people in the same sort of way, how can they be rivals?

The use of psychology as an example was calculated. In the human sciences there has been a long-running and bruising dispute over the role that psychology ought to play. Is it the foundational discipline? Or is it merely one of a number of approaches? Some of the disquiet that is felt about psychology stems from the sorts of directions that accommodation with psychology would require us to follow. Several philosophical theories have been devoted to just this, but none have been particularly successful. In Ryle's The Concept of Mind we find an examination of some of the contributory reasons for this state of affairs. There, he shows how his own distinctive philosophy bears upon those covered in Part One. Ever since the Enlightenment, and perhaps even earlier, philosophical psychology has been preoccupied with the relationships between mind and body, the mental and the physical. That these terms designated a distinction between two orders of things was taken as foundational. In characteristic style, Ryle takes exception to the use of the distinction. It is based upon a mistake, and the predication of both the philosophy of mind and psychology upon it is nothing less than a monumental blunder. The distinction embodies what he calls with deliberate abuse, the Cartesian myth. His aim is to demythologise the concept of mind.

What are the tenets of the Cartesian myth? We all know that the world is made up of physical objects and processes. Bicycles are ridden, trees lose their leaves, window-sills rot. We explain these processes by causally relating certain processes with their effects. We know, or can find out, the nature of the forces enabling the bicycle to
roll along, the combinations of light, soil chemistry and temperature which produces leaf fall and so on. In addition to these processes and objects, we also know that other things go on which may or may not be correlated with physical manifestations. A special category of these involve ourselves. We can show anger, or bottle it up and act as if nothing is the matter. We can count the days of the week in our heads or on our fingers. Ever since Descartes, some philosophers have wanted to treat these activities as parallel to the physical processes of bicycle riding, leaf-fall and window-sill rot. They are causal, but the causes are to be found in another dimension, as the science fiction writers might say. We are not simply physical objects; we are physical objects plus something else. We are objects with minds and what characterises our actions of holding our anger and our tongues is the involvement of our intellects or wills.

Now, after Newton’s revolution in physics, it was thought, erroneously as it happens, that it would eventually be possible to explain all events in the physical universe via a mechanical model — the clockwork interaction of objects exerting forces upon one another. If this was the case, there seemed no reason why the same approach should not be applied to non-physical events such as those which involve our minds. A ‘para-mechanical’ model could be used with ‘mental events’ as well. It was thought that psychology would provide the descriptions and causal explanations of these events and particularly would demonstrate the causal interactions between mental processes and physical ones, between minds and bodies. Mental events are special because their operations are not directly open to public scrutiny. We cannot directly examine a person’s thoughts, desires, wishes and feelings. They are hidden from view in the mind. The body/mind distinction segregates two different sorts of entities which interact. The physical body is a machine which is motivated (the term is deliberate) by the mind. It is our minds which cause us to make the sounds we do or control our temper. The external signs of shouting and waving and the physical correlates and effects of the mental activities of being angry or counting.

One implication of the privacy of mental phenomena is the presumption that we and we alone have privileged and direct access to them. Only I know my true thought, hatreds and wishes. The mind is defined as an inscrutable presence, the ghost, in the machine that is our bodies. Alongside any physical action of ours is the mental action which impels it. Before we wave, we must wish to wave; before we count, we know the arithmetical sequence.

For Ryle, the whole of this conventional psychology rests on one gigantic mistake, and its effects have percolated through all of the human sciences. The mistake is the pushing together of two different categories of things and processes, their concatenation in philosophical propositions and arguments. The result is a logical howler, a category mistake. The notion of a category mistake is the technical wedge which Ryle pushes into the mind/body distinction. By hammering away at it with different mental concepts — knowledge, volition, sensation, imagination, intelligence — eventually the distinction fractures. This does not mean that Ryle reduces the mental to the physical, that he insists we cannot talk of our having a mental life and only of our behaviour and brain processes. Rather it is the way that the two are set up as contrast classes which is at issue. Treating them in this way is what constitutes a category mistake.

So, what is a category mistake? Here is a Rylean type of example. Some friends come to stay. You show them around your new house. At the end of the tour, one of your visitors turns to you and says ‘We have seen where you sleep, where the baby sleeps and where the older children sleep, but tell me where does the family sleep?’ To ask this question is to mistake the family for something over and above the parents and the children, an additional entity that is just like them. It is a category mistake, for a family just is the parents and their children.

The category mistake on which philosophical talk of minds and bodies rests is, at root, a tendency to employ an episodic characterisation of our mental lives. Such mental acts are treated as events occurring in the mind. It is only because this characterisation is taken for granted that we worry where and when they occur and how long they last. We talk of mental events as if they were essentially no different to physical ones. We say the meal took an hour to cook, the children played football in the garden, the telegram arrived at 5 pm. To extend this episodic treatment to mental events leads to absurdity. Do we say someone understood the calculus between 9 and 9.30, that he knew the date of his wedding anniversary in the garden but not in the kitchen? You can have a bruise on the shin, but where do you have an idea? In the head? This surely is only a metaphor because what the neurologist can point to are brain states and neuron firings, not the ideas you have. In contrast to the episodic view, Ryle suggests that we use mental verbs to describe dispositions, tendencies to act in certain ways, not to describe events that are going on somewhere. If one is reading attentively or counting accurately, one is not performing a physical act of moving the eyes over the words and a mental act of
paying attention; one is not pointing and being aware of what one is doing. No self-monitoring needs to be taking place at all.

Some dispositional verbs are polymorphous, as Ryle calls them, and others are not. That is to say, some are amenable to precise descriptions of the activity they describe, others are not. You might say that a bricklayer does some fairly specific things, like laying bricks; but what specific things does teaching involve? Teaching, unlike bricklaying, is a polymorphous concept. Teachers do lots of different things and not all teachers need do the same things. Thinking, planning, solving, understanding are all polymorphous in that doing them does not involve some precise and fixed action of the mind. We can do them out loud, silently, on paper, in conversation, some spontaneously and some thoughtfully. In addition, some of these mental verbs are not process verbs at all but mark achievements. They are like defeating and finishing, not like fishing and writing. We cannot ask how long someone was finishing (except in an extended and peculiar sense), so we do not ask how long they were understanding, grasping or solving a problem.

With the notion of the episodic description of mental events as a category mistake, Ryle cuts a great swathe through the philosophy of mind. If we look at the concept of knowledge, for instance, straightway we see that we use the verb ‘to know’ not just about propositional knowledge (knowledge that such and such is the case) but also dispositional (knowledge how to do such and such). To treat both of these as associated with the same mental activity requires us to reduce the one to the other. This is what the philosophy of mind has been tempted to try to do. It suggests that knowing how to play chess, the favourite example, we know the rules of chess (that pawns capture diagonally, that rooks move in straight lines) and the criteria when to apply these rules (which pieces are pawns and rooks). The problem with this assimilation is that it is regressive. To know how to apply the rules of chess won’t we need to know rules and criteria about rules, and hence rules and criteria about the rules of rules? In any case, knowing how to swim, play the piano or make shadow figures on the wall doesn’t seem to require us to be able to list sets of propositions about these things. We can do all of these things with little or no knowledge of a theoretical sort. We might want to say that such propositional knowledge is to be found at a deeper level, although that geological image is a little mystifying. Linguists have struggled for years to assimilate the knowledge of how to speak grammatically to knowledge of propositions concerning the grammar which underlies how we speak. They have not met much success and at least one group of them have written the whole issue off by defining grammar as innate.

The importance of the dispositional view is not that we stop employing mental predicates but that it stops us treating them as all of a piece. People do mental arithmetic; they also count and add up with pencil and paper, on an abacus or even with a computer. People can reason in silent contemplation but also in conversation with friends or by drawing pictures. The thinking of thoughts, the reasoning, does not have to be treated as an occult activity going on alongside or prior to speaking or drawing.

As with knowledge, so with another of the specifically mental concepts, volition. This is a technical term covering wishing, willing, wanting, trying, and was ‘invented’ to provide the causal connection between the mental and the physical. It is by exercising our will that we raise our hand in greeting, control our tembers or kick the cat. However, Ryle argues that the whole catalogue of volitional concepts rests upon a false dichotomising of the terms ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ when applied to actions. It is said that some actions such as blushing, sneezing or blinking are involuntary or automatic while the rest are voluntary. What characterises a voluntary action is the exercise of our will, which makes it both morally appraisable and the expression of our mental life. In Ryle’s view, this juxtaposing misses the whole character of our ordinary uses of voluntary and involuntary. I might try to poison next door’s dog by putting out slug pellets, but do I try to move the pen when I write? What has my will got to do with the latter automatic action? What of actions that are habitual or conventional? Do I wish to return a greeting when I respond to someone else’s ‘hello’? Or do I just do it? Ryle argues that the question of the voluntariness or otherwise of an action arises only when something fishy has occurred, where there has been a lapse or violation in expectations. Such cases cannot be generalised to all actions. The purpose of stretching the concepts was to create enough space for the exercise of free will and so fend off the threats of materialism and mechanism. But these two hobbilins need only be feared if we allow them the toe-hold upon the mental which they require, namely the contradistinction between the voluntary and the involuntary as part of the larger class of distinctions, namely those between mind and matter.

At first sight, it is easy to suppose, as many have done, that in dismantling the mind/body distinction Ryle has no alternative but to
adopt behaviourism of one sort or another. This is to jump to the conclusion that if Ryle is being polemical — and he is — against a theory of the mind, it must be because he is arguing, albeit if tacitly, for some other one. This is not the case. Ryle wants to put a stop to wholesale generalisations, fixed frameworks and stipulative definitions. His case is that the instance of the oppositions of mind and body, widely adopted in the philosophy of mind, shows that such generalisations do not stand up to sustained examination. Throughout the rest of his life, Ryle continued to worry away at what exactly there was to be said about thinking, speculating, learning, and what exactly le penseur was doing. He does not advocate behaviourism, or any other programme, because to his mind they are all equally defective, if in differing ways. The behaviourist, for example, will not allow a describable difference to be described between someone waiting for a bus and someone sheltering from the rain. They go through the same physical motions, namely standing immobile in the bus-shelter. But waiting and sheltering are not the same, and a ‘thick description’ of the activities would reveal it. The dissatisfaction with all settled schemas as they stand is reflected in Ryle’s view of the psychological sciences. What is generally called psychology is, for him, a peculiar and rather restricted research programme which, as we have already indicated, would have to be placed alongside linguistics, sociology, psychiatry and literary criticism. Abandoning the Cartesian myth will mean the abandonment ‘of the idea that there is a locked door and a still to be discovered key’ (The Concept of Mind, p. 302) which it is psychology’s task to find. Under the rubric of Cartesianism, psychologists have studied facial and other physical movements, verbal responses and manipulative skills in the belief that these were the outward sign of inward processes. In so doing they have restricted themselves to some not very interesting and rather uninformative data, often in the confused belief that they are thereby being more scientific. He does not want to stop those who are interested in these things from practising their arts, but to try to wean psychology from the conviction that this is all that it is allowed to study. The data normally used by policemen, stockbrokers, teachers, judges and social workers is all psychological, as is that of the historian who interprets the motives for signing a treaty or declaring a war and the architect who plans a building that is both pleasing to look at and work in.

If we give up the idea that psychology is about something that the other human studies are not about, and if give up, therewith, the idea that psychologists work on data from which the other studies are debarred, what is the differentia between psychology and these other studies? (The Concept of Mind, p. 304)

The answer, of course, is that there is none. But this should not bother us, for the doctrine that all of the physical world is explainable by theories in physics leaves no room for Mendel or Darwin to offer their distinctive theories, just as it leaves no room alongside psychology for economics, librarianship or marketing. The two-worlds dogma is also a two-sciences dogma, the single science of the physical and that of the mental. If we drop the distinction then there is no need to force psychological explanations into the strait-jacket of causalism, thereby rendering them not just implausible but absurd.

Although Ryle’s aim was to sensitise philosophers and others to the nuances of the informal logic of our ordinary concepts, his work has not proved all that easy to accommodate within the social sciences. In part this is because the major implication of what he has to say must be that many of the treasured distinctions, such as that between the mind and the body, are simply inadequate. This point has been repeatedly made by Jeff Coulter, among others, with regard to the aims and ambitions of cognitive science and psychoanalysis, but with little effect. Ryle’s influence has been rather more strongly felt in anthropology where it has been mediated through the writing of Clifford Geertz. Geertz has made particular use of the idea of ‘thick description’ in bringing out the important part which interpretive understanding must play in anthropological accounts. It is not enough to give a résumé of functions and causes; a detailed description of the ambitions, motivations, desires and so on of the participants is a sine qua non of any adequate understanding of a way of life. In some ways the social and cultural sciences have been able to insulate themselves from Ryle’s philosophy. Austin, on the other hand, was for a while extremely influential in a very delimited sphere.

J.L. Austin

Ryle gives considerable attention to the larger issues of method and the scope of philosophy as he sees it. He is at considerable pains to locate his interests and approach. Austin is not. He gives only a passing explanation of his objectives in two places. In A Plea for
Excuses he indicates something of how he goes about attacking a particular problem and in *Ifs and Cans* he connects what he has to say with other discussions of free will to be found in moral and ethical philosophy. The rest of the time the links remain allusive, hidden in puns, asides, jokes and revamped examples. He is well aware that, as a consequence, many will find his work trivial and irrelevant. But he is inclined to think that, as they do not share his attitudes and priorities, they would probably miss his point anyway. To take an example; many philosophers are interested in how to make moral judgements. To achieve this they look for criteria by which to distinguish the description of an activity from its appraisal. They need these so that their appraisals can be firmly based. In Austin's view, if after the examination of cases it turns out that the distinction between appraisal and description is by no means as clear-cut as might be thought, this has obvious implications for moral philosophy. The moral philosophers looking for firm guidelines on how to make the distinction, on the other hand, are apt to find him baffling. He says he is talking about their problems, about what is good and what is right but to them he doesn't seem to be doing so.

Part of this, of course, has to do with the self-effacing style that Austin adopts. But also, it is a result of the approach. If philosophy wishes to sharpen up our perception of the complexities of human action, then one way of doing this would be to sharpen up our understanding of the ways in which we talk about such action. If we prise words off the world we will get a better view of both them and the world. Or at least that is Austin's view. The philosopher can do this either by falling back on his own individual resources and ingenuity — the examples he can dream up and the distinctions he can invent — or he can use those already available to him and enshrined in common, ordinary discourse. The latter have a distinct advantage over the former in that they have stood the test of time. They have proved their usefulness. There is a need for care though. Not every question shows itself immediately amenable to this kind of handling, nor are significant results obtained every time. But enough progress has been made, in Austin's opinion, to warrant holding a modicum of hope for the settling of issues in some parts of philosophy. But there are also snags and obstacles, not however of the kind usually thought of. First, it is not being suggested, for example, that symmetry with ordinary usage is the criterion for the acceptability of philosophical distinctions. Rather, where such symmetry is absent, we should be offered clear and defensible reasons for it. Ordinary language has the first word not the last. This is an attitude which many of Austin's colleagues have remarked was present even before his philosophy took the distinctive turn that it eventually did. Second, although usage does differ, such differences are by no means as deep-seated or prevalent as might be at first imagined. Often they reflect real differences in cases or, what is much the same, perceptions and definitions, and not a matching of concepts.

Austin's favourite philosopher was Aristotle. Both share the same tendency towards dealing with questions by classification and taxonomies. Austin would begin by drawing up a list of the terms and concepts closely associated with the issue at stake. If we are interested in perception, then the list might include see, hear, feel, sense, watch, tune in, notice and so on. Then, as many synonyms as possible are collected by reference to dictionaries, thesauruses, disciplines with a technical interest in the topic (psychology, in this case perhaps) and anywhere else that we might think relevant. Austin's own favourite was Case Law. Once the collection has been compiled, it is arranged into types, classes and taxonomies.

With these sources, and with the aid of imagination, it will go hard if we cannot arrive at the meanings of large numbers of expressions and at the understanding and classification of large numbers of 'actions'. Then we shall comprehend clearly much that was, before, only made use of ad hoc. Definition, I would add explanatory definition, should stand high among our aims; it is not enough to show how clever we are to show how obscure everything is. Clarity too, I know, has been said to be not enough: but perhaps it will be time to go into that when we are within measurable distance of achieving clarity on some matter. *(Philosophical Papers*, p. 189)

Using this method, Austin sought to bring clarity to a range of philosophical problems. To look at them all would require so much truncation and summarising that we would do Austin a grave disservice. The insight and power of his work lie in the particularities. Perhaps as much as any other philosopher, and more than most, Austin has to be read in the original. What we will do is to set out Austin's reflections on two themes that have bedevilled the human sciences, namely, the old and trusted opposition between free will and determination (one of the paradoxes we discussed with regard to Ryle) and the identification of types of action.
One approach to the mare's nest of problems in moral philosophy has been to separate those actions where the individual is deemed to be free from constraint and those where he is not. The former are to be treated as morally different from the latter. For example, we may abdicate responsibility by saying that we were acting under orders or under threat. In *A Plea for Excuses* Austin looks at the fundamental distinction between freedom and constraint. In philosophical discussions the question of freedom has tended to be raised somewhat negatively. In his opinion, philosophers have tended to define freedom as 'not unfreedom'. In general, claims about the limitations put on freedom of action arise in the consideration of non-normal cases, when someone would have normally acted otherwise but for the constraining conditions, whatever they were. It is clear, then, that one place where the issue of moral evaluation is visible in ordinary life is when the question of responsibility for an action arises, and hence when attempts are made to slough off, avoid, deny and duck such responsibility by making the action excusable. It is Austin's conclusion that more progress in moral philosophy might have been made if less attention had been paid to the range and types of constraint under which actions are performed, and more to the allocation of responsibility.

The method is as follows. First, excuses are segregated from justifications. Both are offered when someone is accused of something untoward. Justifications claim that the circumstances made it permissible: excuses insist that more should be taken into account. The two are of course interrelated and overlapping.

You dropped the tea tray: Certainly, but an emotional storm was about to break out: or, Yes, but there was a wasp. In each case, the defence, very soundly, insists on a fuller description of the event in its context; but the first is a justification, the second an excuse.

(*Philosophical Papers*, p. 176)

In turn, each of these classes is separated from others such as palliation, provocation and extenuation. This is done by examining the fine detail of occasions when each might be offered and found acceptable. If we were to work our way through such cases, Austin thinks that we would have to accept several conclusions, all of which hinge on the breakdown of what seem to be simple, obvious and unimpeachable distinctions. We would find that some straightforward negations such as voluntary and involuntary do not seem to be used oppositionally. I might not want to describe my flicking a switch to turn on the radio as an involuntary action, but it would only be under certain special circumstances that I would want to call it voluntary either. Again, not all modifications of actions are equally applicable in all circumstances. I can unwittingly indicate that I know more than I let on about a crime, but can I unwittingly confess to it? If we do look at how different concepts act in association or are kept apart, how modifications are made and descriptions phrased, we will soon be convinced that simple, generalised distinctions are by no means as useful for describing actions as we might have thought. We will have got to the inner workings of the machinery of action. We will also have become sensitive to the 'trailing clouds of etymology' which, as we have already seen with Ryle, philosophers are prone to overlook. For example, the original use of cause and effect has spilled over into philosophy giving rise to the arguments over free will and determinism. Once we are aware of this, we can discount it.

The consideration of excuses also indicates just how ordinary usage is limited and undergoing change, as well as what philosophy can offer by way of help. Austin offers two examples of the extension of technical distinctions in the human sciences to ordinary life: compulsive behaviour and displacement behaviour. Both have been noted and described by psychiatrists and psychologists. Here is an intriguing question for ethics. Does defining some behaviour as compulsive or displacing take it outside the scope of moral evaluation? If so, can any action be so defined, or only limited classes? Under what circumstances might an action be so described? Can you be a compulsive divorcée as well as a compulsive gambler? Can you displace affection as well as aggression?

*Three Ways of Spilling Ink* takes up the question of responsibility by looking at the logical grammar of volitional concepts such as intentional, purposeful and deliberate. These terms are central because, on the conventional view, it is the application of them to certain actions that makes them morally appraisable. Austin, as usual, launches a two-pronged attack. He assembles and examines an array of cases wherein the different terms apply, and where alternatives would be inappropriate. We might ask our daughter's beau what his intentions are, but hardly what his purposes are, and we know what his desires are! He can have honourable intentions; what would honourable purposes be? We might say that George killed the golden goose intentionally, thereby indicating that he meant to do it. If we say he killed it deliberately, we meant with and after deliberation.
In doing the deed George might achieve his purpose; he could not achieve his intention. The taxonomy is built up by surveying and marking what we would say about the actions of intending, deliberating and purposing, the modifications that can be effected on them and relationships they stand in. What is the significance of the fact that we do something on purpose but with intent? These observations lead Austin to suggest that ascribing an intention is a way of structuring a set of activities so that we can see that 'all along they intended to ...', while purposes are aims that can be achieved. But none of the terms govern the meanings of their 'negatives'. 'Voluntary' and 'intentional' do not 'wear the trousers' for involuntary and unintentional. Anyway, what exactly are the negatives of deliberate and purposeful? The gradation of descriptions of actions and their appraisal cannot be reduced to the stark contrast between 'free will' and 'determination'. Things are never that simple.

In How to Do Things with Words the range of Austin's virtuosity is on show and the innovations for which he is most well known are made. In what follows we will endeavour to give the essentials of the argument while knowing full well that we will do him less than justice.

Let us consider, once again, the notorious sentence 'the present king of France is bald'. When examining this and the other familiar examples 'here is a hand', 'Scott is the author of Waverley', philosophers have primarily been occupied with the logical character of propositions. They have worried about what makes them true or false, meaningful or meaningless. Do we have to posit non-existent subsistents? Are descriptions names? Does saying 'here is a hand' imply that I know here is a hand, and does that presuppose that I believe I have a hand? If so, is 'I have a hand, and I believe it' a tautology? These and other considerations focus on what might be called the logic of statements and disregard the logic of the actions performed in making the statements. Conventional philosophical logic has broadened the notion of context to the whole sentence or expression, but has not included the action the expression accomplishes. Like Ryle, Austin suggests that focusing on the propositional character of expressions alone can be misleading or limiting, for not everything that looks like a statement actually is a statement, and not all propositions are cast in propositional form. The saying of 'I name this ship Britannia' is naming the ship, not a proposition or description of the action. 'I promise to pay the bearer on demand' is an act of promising, not a description of an intention or a proposition about some future action. Rather than having truth conditions, entailments and presuppositions, such performative utterances are only successful when the required felicity conditions are fulfilled. These conditions govern the informal, conventional logic of performance of the actions. How to Do Things with Words is given over to sketching out this logic.

Austin begins by making and considering the distinction between the acts of promising, swearing, betting and the performative of stating something. These latter are constative actions. Many of the philosophical difficulties brought out by the examination of constatives such as those of entailment, implication and presupposition, only arise because the contextual conditions normally considered with regard to activities are ignored or processed out. Mood, tone of voice, occasion are context dependent and so not formalisable. And yet these are precisely the resources that we use to grasp the meaning of utterances, including constative ones in ordinary life. We can usually tell when 'the plates are hot' is a warning or a description etc. In Austin's eyes, logic is cutting itself off from the means of solving its own self-imposed problems. As ever, he finds this to be both significant and not very widely recognised.

However, the distinction between performative and constative is not really a useful one. It breaks down too easily. So Austin goes off on another tack. He identifies three differing aspects of utterances, what he calls the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. This marks his real technical innovation and is used as follows.

1. The locutionary aspect is the use of words simply to convey certain meanings: 'the plates are hot' simply as a description of the plates.

2. The illocutionary force is the conventional action accomplished in saying 'the plates are hot' as a description or a warning.

3. The perlocutionary aspect is the effect or consequence so achieved. In warning you, I prevent you from burning yourself.

The difference between these three marks the difference between what is done and what is said. Once that is on the philosophical agenda, the next obvious task is the elaboration of more and more other performatives and the delineation of their felicity conditions.

Austin makes no bones about the preliminary nature of the list of performatives given and the need to refine and amend them. Many subsequent discussions have tried to update or wreck one or some of
them. Two things do become quite clear. First, the scheme allows Austin 'to play Old Harry' with a number of hallowed philosophical distinctions, in particular what he calls the true/false and fact/value fetishes. If one can promise 'falsely', does that mean one can promise 'truly'? Are these the same as saying that a promise is true or false, correct or incorrect? What of fact and value? Is a finding always the report of a fact? Or can it sometimes be an appraisal? What about denial, refutation and speculation? Once doubts have been raised and the complexities appreciated then it will be apparent that the analysis of performative utterances — speech acts as they became known — might show how the beginnings of a science of human action could be laid down as well as indicating how to get a grip on some slippery philosophical issues.

As it turned out, Austin's influence was largely limited to speech act theory. Within philosophy this soon dropped out of vogue. Consideration of the minutiae of cases and the provision of taxonomies of concepts are still to be found, as in the work of A.R. White, but the real impact was felt elsewhere. This was in the application of John Searle's extension of speech act theory to problems in linguistics. Consideration of performativistic characteristics was suggested as a way of dealing with semantic ambiguity, as when 'who's there?' might be analysed as a question or a challenge. Linguists sought to elaborate performative rules of implication to show how a sentence like 'what I say now is false', while meaningful, is a paradox. The irony is that the machinery brought in to make possible this type of analysis is that provided by modern symbolic logic. Socio-linguistics — and in particular Conversation Analysis — has been influenced by the phenomenon of performative utterances and the structural connections between sequences of such actions rather than by the philosophy. Discourse analysts have found similar uses for the term by looking for the rules by which meanings are located and determined within the conversation as a whole, and by its social context.

In an entirely different part of the sociological universe, Habermas has been developing a theory of communicative competence which as we have seen in Chapter 3 is an attempt to provide a hermeneutic philosophy of social life. Speech acts have been identified as the elementary unit of linguistic communication. The conditions surrounding 'the ideal speech act' of communicative action and of theoretical discourse differ. They require different competences. In the communicative action of ordinary life there are background determinations of comprehensibility, truthfulness, veracity, etc. which are taken for granted. In theoretical discourse, it is the argumentation itself which convinces. Where such ideal conditions do not obtain, we have the entry of human interests and the possibility of ideology. The discussion of Habermas in Chapter 3 shows how this is all connected to his critical theory of social life.

Austin's influence has been primarily in linguistics, and even there it is on the wane. But at least it was in an area to which he himself felt attracted. He did make a direct contribution to developments in socio-linguistics and semantics. Ryle can draw little if any such comfort. In spite of the energetic promotion of his views by Coulter and others, his views on the logical problems in the philosophy of mind, thought and language seem not to have percolated through to psychology and those others who take a professional interest in such matters. More importantly, the indisputable character of the foundational categorical distinctions remains intact, and indeed revered in the human sciences. It would be a rethinking of these that Austin and Ryle would probably prefer to have as their legacy.

Recommended Reading

extension of speech act theory is John Searle's *Speech Acts* (Cambridge University Press, 1969). Stanley Cavell's *Must We Mean What We Say* (Scribner, 1969) is also worth consulting. An exemplary contemporary example of work carried out in the Austinian style is A.R. White 'Shooting, Killing and Fatally Wounding', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1979-80). The application of Ryle's philosophy to the human sciences has largely been through attacks on cognitive science by Jeff Coulter such as his *The Social Construction of Mind* (Macmillan, 1979) and *Rethinking Cognitive Theory* (Macmillan, 1983), and Clifford Geertz's use of the notion of 'thick description' in the paper of that name in his *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Hutchinson, 1975). Austin's work received wide attention in linguistics. A summary of the use to which it was put can be seen in J. Lyons, *Language, Meaning and Context* (Fontana, 1981). Another more technical account is in S. Levinson, *Pragmatics* (Cambridge University Press, 1983). Applications to the areas of socio-linguistics are W. Labov and D. Fanshell *Therapeutic Discourse* (Academic Press, 1977) and Roy Turner's 'Words Utterances and Activities' in his *Ethnomethodology* (Penguin, 1974).