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THOUGHT AND ACTION

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis is concerned with the relation between thought and action. Philosophical accounts of this relation are inevitably based on assumptions about the nature of language. The first purpose of this inquiry is to assess the validity of these assumptions and the cogency of the theories they support. In order to accomplish this it will be necessary, in the first chapter, to discuss a number of general difficulties in the philosophy of language. The chapters that follow attempt to show how a particular way of meeting these difficulties has a significant bearing on how the relation between thought and action is to be understood. "Human thought", as Geach reminds us, "is both theoretical and practical: we are concerned both with the way things are and with what we ourselves have to do."⁽¹⁾ Our ultimate purpose is to show that the two aspects of thought Geach refers to are related and to indicate how this relationship is possible.

Thinking is an intellectual activity and the word "thought" is sometimes used to refer to intellectual activities in general. What divides theories of thought is not disagreement over its intellectual character but rival conceptions of the intellect. Accounts of thought in modern and, in some respects, ancient philosophy complement two contrasting conceptions of mind. For convenience, the terms "internalist" and "externalist" may be used to suggest how these conceptions differ. The internalist conception is an essential feature of the philosophies developed by Descartes and Locke, and the

1 P T Geach, "Reason and Argument", p 3.

externalist view is exemplified in the work of such different twentieth century philosophers as Wittgenstein and Ryle. In the internalist tradition the mental or intellectual character of thought is elucidated by reference to the idea of privacy, and in the work of Descartes and Locke the privacy of thought is connected with the assumption that the contents of minds are ideas. Locke defined ideas as what the mind is "applied about whilst thinking",⁽¹⁾ by which he meant that ideas are the instruments, materials or vehicles of thought. On this account thoughts are mental acts involving ideas in various ways.

Although Locke's account of thought and language and the relation between thought and action is defective there are a number of assumptions in his philosophy which, if interpreted correctly, suggest how our discussion ought to proceed. In order to bring out the difficulties in Locke's account, and to justify the interpretation we believe it requires, his work will be discussed in considerable detail. Locke has been chosen as a representative of internalism in preference to Descartes because a consideration of the latter's excessively generous interpretation of thought to cover all forms of consciousness falls outside the scope of our inquiry. It is now common to describe thought more specifically, mainly by reference to the notions of reflection, deliberation and rationality. We shall follow this practice, although it is worth mentioning that there are philosophers who still

1 John Locke, "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding", 2.1.1.

regard "thought" as a general term covering a wide range of mental states and processes.⁽¹⁾

Philosophers representing an externalist position reject the assumption that thought is a private or inner process together with the metaphysical distinction between mind and body it neatly fits. They claim instead that thought is to be elucidated in terms of overt behaviour; the criteria according to which we ascribe thought to people are certain features of the actions we observe them performing and it is a confusion to regard the actions as the outward products or manifestations of private mental processes. The following remarks, taken from Ryle's attack on the "intellectualist legend", are particularly representative of the externalist standpoint:

"What distinguishes sensible from silly operations is not their parentage but their procedure, and this holds no less for intellectual than for practical performances. 'Intelligent' cannot be defined in terms of 'intellectual' or 'knowing how' in terms of 'knowing that'; 'thinking what I am doing' does not connote 'both thinking what to do and doing it'. When I do something intelligently, ie thinking what I am doing, I am doing one thing and not two. My performance has a special procedure or manner, not special antecedents."⁽²⁾

Wittgenstein may also be understood as belonging to the externalist tradition, although his criticisms of internalist assumptions are strikingly different from Ryle's. Unlike Ryle, Wittgenstein is concerned to remove obstructions that stand in the way of understanding the concepts of thought and mental activity rather than to present an alternative to Cartesianism.

1 ie Donald Davidson, "Thought and Talk" in "Mind and Language", ed. S Guttenplan, p 8

2 Gilbert Ryle, "The Concept of Mind", p 32

Nevertheless, Wittgenstein's clarification of the grammar of "think", for example, involves rejecting the assumption that thinking is to be understood, literally, as a private, incorporeal process which "lends life and sense to speaking, and which it would be possible to detach from speaking."⁽¹⁾ This suggests that it is misleading to regard thought as an essentially inner process which determines outward behaviour. Wittgenstein does not deny that it makes sense to speak of mental processes or inner phenomena, but he does criticise the view that privacy is the defining property of the mental and insists that "An inner process stands in need of outward criteria."⁽²⁾

The internalist and externalist conceptions of mind and thought are connected in complex ways with opposing accounts of the relation between thought and language. Some philosophers have distinguished between thought and language, describing them as different forms of human activity. Others have rejected this distinction and have followed Plato in defining thought in terms of language. Such philosophers are likely to describe thought as an activity of operating with signs and to maintain that the criteria according to which thought is identified and distinguished from other forms of activity are the distinctive ways in which words and symbols are used. Given that speech is an important part of people's outward behaviour it is tempting to associate the identification of thought in terms of language with the externalist conception of thought. It is

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Philosophical Investigations": Pt 1, 339

2 Ibid, Pt 1, 580

equally tempting to associate the distinction between thought and language with internalism, representatives of which generally describe language as the means by which thought is expressed and communicated. These temptations must be resisted. Plato identified thought in terms of language but he also defined thinking as a mental activity, "a discourse the mind carries on with itself",⁽¹⁾ and a study of individual philosophers reveals that it is impossible to describe the relations between these four theories in a systematic way. It is true that Locke and Descartes distinguish between thought and language and assert that language is dependent on thought. But the nature of the dependence must be considered carefully. Descartes wrote:

"I cannot express anything in words, provided that I understand what I say, without its thereby being certain that there is within me the idea of that which is signified by the words in question."⁽²⁾

and Locke defended a similar position. According to Locke man, by nature, had the ability to utter words or "articulate sounds" but this capacity had no significance until he was able "to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions, and to make them stand as marks for the ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another."⁽³⁾ These remarks indicate why both philosophers distinguish between thought and language; the meaningful use of words is

1 Plato, "Thaetetus", 189E; translated by F M Cornford

2 "The Works of Descartes", translated by E Haldane and G R T Ross; Vol 2, p 56

3 John Locke, Ibid, 3.1.2

dependent upon the ideas they signify and ideas are essentially private. Locke's remarks also suggest that he saw an important connection between the fact that ideas are the contents of minds and the capacity to think and to have thoughts. It is difficult to give a clear account of how Descartes understood this connection: he sometimes refers to ideas as mental operations⁽¹⁾ and sometimes as the objects of mental acts.⁽²⁾ But in Locke the connection is reasonably clear and worthy of serious attention. Ideas are the objects a man is applied about whilst thinking, but they are also the constituents of mental propositions and, as such, the instruments or materials of knowledge.⁽³⁾ It will be argued that among the different ways Locke uses the term "idea", the sense in which he defines an idea as a sign is particularly important. There is evidence to support the claim that Locke regarded ideas as the constituents of a system of signs in which thoughts are formed, a language of thought. This means that Locke, although an internalist, characterises thought in terms of a language. Locke's theory and the interest it retains will be discussed in detail in chapters two and three and his account of the relation between thought and action will be considered at the beginning of chapter four.

It is equally erroneous to assume that philosophers who characterise thought in terms of the language used in communication belong exclusively to the externalist tradition.

A J Ayer and H H Price, for example, define thought as the use

1 Descartes, Ibid. Vol 2, p 105

2 Descartes, Ibid. Vol 1, p 138

3 Locke, Ibid. 4.21.4

of signs or symbols and recognise that it is sometimes a private mental activity. Ayer once argued that "in the cases where a thought is articulated, setting aside the question whether there are any others, the thinking is not a process distinct from its articulation": thinking is, "at least in certain cases, a matter of simply talking to oneself",⁽¹⁾ and Ayer has no objection to saying that talking to oneself is, in some sense, a mental process. This conception enables Ayer to explain the relation between thought and reality with ease: to think of an object is to use a symbol which designates it, the objects of thought are what symbols mean.⁽²⁾ More recently, Ayer has connected this theory with the externalist conception of thought. He reaffirms the view that there is no clear-cut distinction between thought and its expression, but concedes that "there is a difference between talking intelligently, thoughtfully if you will, and merely babbling, just as there is a difference between writing intelligently and merely scribbling." His account of the difference appeals to a central principle of externalism: "the difference is to be found in the arrangement of the signs themselves, the manner in which they are produced, the general attitude of the speaker, rather than in the presence of any factor 'behind' the signs for which the word 'thought' might be a name."⁽³⁾ This principle holds for private as well as public thought. Now it seems as if this account of the relation between thought and language is a promising way of undermining the opposition

1 A J Ayer, "Thinking and Meaning", p 8

2 Ayer, Ibid, p 11

3 A J Ayer, "What is Communication", in "Metaphysics and Common Sense"; p 29

between internalism and externalism. But the plausability of such a theory rests on the account of the nature and status of language to which it is linked, and the important question is whether the identification of thought in terms of language follows from an understanding of the nature of language.

H H Price, while admitting that people think both silently and aloud, draws a sharp distinction between the use of symbols in thinking and their use in communication. According to Price the use of symbols in thinking is primary and their use in communication derivative: "It is only because symbols are already used for thinking with that they can also be used for communication, for giving and receiving information."⁽¹⁾ This view is of interest because, like Ayer's, it indicates the way in which philosophers have interested themselves in the nature of thought from the standpoint of epistemology. The identification of thought in terms of language enables philosophers to account for what might be called the cognitive or epistemological aspect of thought by explaining the relation between language and the world. As Price puts it: "From the point of view of the theory of cognition in general, and the theory of conceptual cognition in particular, the most important fact about symbols is that each of us uses them for himself in his own thinking: and this fact is most obvious when he uses them privately."⁽²⁾ Gilbert Harman has also developed an account of the nature of thought primarily from the standpoint of epistemology and his theory is, in some respects, similar to

1 H H Price, "Thinking and Experience", p 60

2 Price, Ibid. p 242

that of Price. According to Harman "to acquire a language is to acquire a new system of representation to think in."⁽¹⁾

The capacity to think presupposes the acquisition of language, but once a person has the capacity to think the "outer" language of communication becomes dependent on the "inner" language of thought:

"Outer language is used to express beliefs and other mental states. To specify the meaning of a sentence used in communication is partly to specify the belief or other mental state expressed; and the representational character of the state is determined by its functional role." (2)

Thoughts, beliefs and other mental states are described as instances or tokens of sentences that have functional roles in a person's inner language of thought. Thoughts and mental states are inner sentences that represent features of the world but which are not themselves used to express or communicate.

Price and Harman, then, insist on the primacy of symbolic representation in thought over the use of signs and symbols in communication, and both are primarily interested in thought from the standpoint of epistemology. Harman is also interested in the relation between thought and action and the connection between his account of thought and his characterisation of human beings as "nondeterministic automata" will require some comment. Wilfrid Sellars, on the other hand, is more explicitly interested in the nature of thought in the context of the philosophy of action. Sellars retains the traditional assumption that thoughts are inner episodes and argues that overt behaviour, including the use of words, is the culmination of a process

1 Gilbert Harman, "Thought": p 92

2 Harman, Ibid. p 60

of a process that begins with inner speech. Thoughts are inner verbal episodes causally related to the performance of bodily actions. This theory will be described and criticised in chapter four.

What has been said so far might lead one to suppose that the important task is to settle the issue of whether thought is to be understood as a distinctive use of language and then to consider whether we are to attach any significance to the fact that this activity is sometimes carried on privately or mentally. This has not been the intention. The important issue is not whether thought is an aspect of the capacity to participate in language but the very nature and significance of this participation, the status of language in human life. Chapter one is a discussion of a number of considerations which must be taken into account if this issue is to receive adequate treatment. These considerations will be developed further in the two chapters on Locke and at later stages in the inquiry. Sellars' theory of thoughts as inner linguistic episodes will be discussed in chapter four. Sellars claims that his theory is a response to Ryle's and it will be important to consider the version of externalism developed in "The Concept of Mind". In chapter five it will be argued that Ryle does not present an acceptable alternative to the doctrine he attacked. This is primarily because he fails to take account of the distinctive status of language and does not consider why a discussion of this matter is important in elucidating the relation between thought and action. This is connected with the fact that Ryle refuses to distinguish sharply between intellectual and non-intellectual operations. According to Ryle we are to understand intelligent performances as the actualisations of

dispositions. This view turns out to be compatible with the argument that human actions can issue from motives (or reasons) and be prompted by causes, this being an argument that follows from the intimate connection between dispositional and causal explanations. Although Ryle's alternative to Cartesianism rests heavily on such notions as behaviour, action, performance and procedure, his theory does not provide clear answers to the questions of what it is to perform actions and how actions have identity. These questions will be taken up in chapter six. The point of doing so will be to consider whether it is possible to give an account of human action which is compatible with the claim that deliberation is a central feature of agency. Chapter seven returns to the question whether thought is to be identified in terms of language and Harman's theory of thought, which is related to the characterisation of human beings as nondeterministic automata, is criticised and rejected. In the final chapter it will be argued that the issue of how the epistemological aspect of thought is related to deliberation involves the concepts of reason and decision. It is concluded that an adequate account of the relation between thought and action stands opposed to a causal theory of human action, our aim having been to reveal some of the considerations that win support for such an account.

What follows is not intended to be an exhaustive inquiry in either epistemology or the philosophy of action. Given that its purpose is to show how considerations in the philosophy of language help to elucidate the relation between thought and action, it is a limited attempt to clarify certain features of human agency.

Chapter 1

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

The most fundamental task in the philosophy of language is to give an account of the relation between language and the world. This task, which is essentially concerned with the concepts of meaning, truth, sense and reference, is complicated by the fact that although it is correct to speak of a relation between words and the world, it is also correct to refer to language as something which is itself part of the world. The different ways in which philosophers have understood language as a feature of the world are closely related to the ways in which they have explained the relation between words, on the one hand, and objects, properties, actions and events, on the other. Such explanations are an important source of interest in this inquiry because they purport to elucidate the connection between the possession of language and the possibility of achieving knowledge and understanding.

According to some philosophers the meanings of words and the senses of expressions are, in one way or another, dependent upon the world. Others have maintained the opposite, that language is in no sense dependent upon the world. Rather, it is language which confers intelligibility on the things we perceive or experience, a view which Stuart Hampshire seems to endorse when he states that "A Language must provide a means of differentiating, of dividing, reality into the pieces and segments

which are to be constant subjects of reference."⁽¹⁾ The strangest version of this thesis leads to the sceptical view that human beings can never go beyond or free themselves from language in order to apprehend what the world is really like, a conclusion that might be drawn from the assumption that "When we use a language in our own thoughts and in communication with others, we are so far accepting that particular division of reality into segments which the vocabulary and grammar of that particular language impose."⁽²⁾

The first account that has been sketched is sometimes developed by combining a causal explanation of meaning with a correspondence theory of truth. Russell once argued:

"A form of words is a social phenomenon, therefore the fundamental form of truth must be social. A form of words is true when it has a certain relation to a certain fact. What relation to what fact? I think the fundamental relation is this: a form of words is true if a person who knows the language is led to that form of words when he finds himself in an environment which contains features that are the meanings of those words, and these features produce reactions in him sufficiently strong for him to use words which mean them." ⁽³⁾

This theory, which Russell confessed to be "too crude to be quite true", is founded on the principle that "The environment causes words, and words directly caused by the environment (if they are statements) are true." Indeed, "What is called 'verification' in science", Russell argues, "consists in putting oneself in a situation where words previously used for other reasons result directly from the environment."⁽⁴⁾ It is

1 Stuart Hampshire, "Thought and Action", p 11

2 Stuart Hampshire, *Ibid*, p 12

3 Bertrand Russell, "An Outline of Philosophy", p 273

4 Bertrand Russell, *Ibid*, p 273

important to notice that Russell develops this theory to meet the sceptical claim that since the intelligibility of phenomena is entirely dependent upon language we can never go beyond language to discover what the world is really like: the sceptic asks "How can we get outside words to the facts which make them true or false?" and denies that we ever can. Yet it is hard to see how Russell's theory meets this challenge. He maintains that statements are formed by putting words together "according to a known syntax" and that the relation between a statement and a fact "results logically from the meanings of the separate words and the laws of syntax."⁽¹⁾ It is necessary to explain how the argument that words are combined in accordance with laws of syntax known to the speaker is compatible with the claim that his use of words is caused by features of the environment in which he is placed. Russell's theory does not provide this explanation and can give no account of how the words that are caused to occur on a given occasion should also accord with laws of syntax and express statements. But Russell's theory does not meet the sceptic's challenge primarily because it fails to explain how statements can be verified. If statements directly caused by the environment are true it is difficult to account for the possibility of false statements and to see how the practice of verification can ever have a point. What results from the practice of verification, as Russell describes it, is not knowledge of the truth or falsity of a statement but another occurrence of the statement.

The interesting feature of this theory is the close connection it assumes to obtain between the causal function of meanings and the physical nature of signs, the sense in which

1 Russell, Ibid, p 273

language is a part of the world. Russell writes:

"A spoken sentence consists of a temporal series of events; a written sentence is a spatial series of bits of matter. Thus, it is not surprising that language can represent the course of events in the physical world, preserving its structure in a more manageable form, and it can do this because it consists of physical events." (1)

The physical character of signs is a condition of the causal action of meanings, and Russell is arguing that language represents the world precisely because it is itself a spatial and temporal phenomenon. This argument leads naturally to the principle that what human beings say is determined by the world by virtue of the fact that language and the world have a common structure. What Russell's theory fails to explain is how the language people speak happens to possess this structure.

The second account that has been mentioned is based on the argument that our apprehending an intelligible reality is dependent upon the language we speak and is less easily characterised. We are likely to find a philosopher who has adopted this view emphasising the primacy of rules and the wholly conventional nature of language. Some remarks by J A Fodor, expounding what he takes to be central assumptions in Wittgenstein's "Blue Book", illustrates this emphasis:

"In the first place, there must be conventions which fix the combinatorial properties of words, ie which determine the sentential positions a word can occupy. Secondly, there must be conventions which determine meaning relations between words or expressions, eg which determine which sentences of the language are true (or false) by virtue of the meanings of their component terms. Finally, there must be conventions which fix relations between words and non-linguistic entities, objects, events, situations, etc...." (2)

1 Russell, Ibid, p 276

2 J A Fodor, "Meaning, Convention and The Blue Book", in "The Business of Reason", ed J J McIntosh and S Coval: pp 76-77

This view is very similar to that expressed by A J Ayer in "Language, Truth and Logic". According to Ayer analytic statements, true by virtue of the meanings of their constituent terms, record our determination to use words in certain regular ways: they indicate the conventions governing the uses of words, particularly their application to the world.⁽¹⁾ Analytic propositions cannot be confuted by experience and, consistent with the thoroughgoing conventionalism he is expounding, Ayer insists that "It is perfectly conceivable that we should have employed different linguistic conventions from those we actually do employ."⁽²⁾ He does not make clear whether the possibility of different linguistic conventions implies that the reality we apprehend would be significantly different if other linguistic conventions had been adopted. If it is argued that there is an intimate connection between the identity we ascribe to an object and the use of the word which refers to it, then it must be assumed that the identity of the object depends, albeit indirectly, upon the conventions governing the use of the word. If this is not assumed then the conventionalist thesis is empty. The possibility of apprehending the world quite independently of language, and of fixing the meanings of words on the basis of what we apprehend, does not allow one to say that our linguistic conventions might have been different, except in the trivial sense that what we mean by one word might have been what we mean by another, a form of conventionalism which is perfectly compatible with the argument that changing a name does not alter the identity of the object it refers to. The possibility of

1 A J Ayer, "Language, Truth and Logic", p 79

2 A J Ayer, Ibid, p 84

apprehending the identity of phenomena without being influenced or prejudiced by linguistic usages constitutes a threat to non-trivial conventionalism, for it implies that the meanings of words are not arbitrary. Meaning is only arbitrary in the absence of criteria on which speakers can agree, and a reality that can be apprehended quite independently of the use of words would provide the necessary criteria and thus serve as the measure by which the intelligibility of language could be judged.⁽¹⁾ The non-trivial form of conventionalism under discussion must maintain that the identity of phenomena is dependent upon the linguistic conventions that have been adopted and that the analytic propositions recording these conventions are devoid of factual content.⁽²⁾ By drawing attention to linguistic usages such propositions serve as rules guiding the uses to which words may be put, primarily their application to non-linguistic phenomena. The meanings of many words, names, predicates, descriptions of events and actions, may still be seen to depend on the relations between those words and what they mean or signify, only here the relations are a matter of what is conventionally stipulated and not, as with Russell, a matter of physical causality.

It is not hard to see, then, how this general account may lead one to assume that it is language which confers intelligibility on the world, and to agree with Hampshire that we cannot

1 Cf. Berkeley: "so long as I confine my thoughts to my own ideas divested of words, I do not see how I can be easily mistaken. The objects I consider I clearly and adequately know." "The Principles of Human Knowledge": Introduction, 22.

2 One assumes that the emptiness of analytical propositions derives from the fact that they were initially formulated to introduce terms into the language. This suggests that they are to be distinguished from expressions stating or elucidating linguistic conventions, for such statements are not empty.

suppose "that there must be some identifiable ground in reality, independent of the conditions of reference to reality, for the manner in which we differentiate elements in reality."⁽¹⁾

Before indicating some of the specific defects in these theories it may be suggested that they are both unsatisfactory attempts to meet the problem that arises from the distinction between language as a perceptible phenomenon, as something which belongs to the world, and language understood as a condition of apprehending an intelligible reality, the sense in which language, being related to the world, is something which makes knowledge and understanding possible. The status of language as a perceptible phenomenon is expressed in the following remarks:

"Language is not something set over against the whole world, like the Divine Mind; languages are part of the world, linguistic facts and structures are facts and structures in the world." (2)

"Linguistic events, whether they are mental or noises, are events among events. Linguistic things, such as marks on paper, are things among things. Talking about either, one talks about language as part of the world." (3)

"Language is, of course, a part of the world: a natural process amongst natural processes." (4)

The sense in which philosophers have regarded the possession of language as a condition of knowledge and understanding is suggested by the following statements:

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- 1 Hampshire, *Ibid*, p 13
 - 2 P T Geach, "Names and Identity", in "Mind and Language", ed. S Guttenplan, p 142
 - 3 Gustav Bergmann, "Intentionality": in "Intentionality, Mind and Language", ed. A Marras, p 294
 - 4 A C Danto, "Analytical Philosophy of Knowledge", pp 231-232

"We do not learn first what to talk about and then what to say about it." (1)

...."we cannot conceive our world in detail prior to having some language or other."
 "we develop our conception of the world in the very process of mastering a language that allows us to talk about it." (2)

"Our idea of what belongs to the realm of reality is given for us in the language we speak. The concepts we have settle for us the form of the experience we have of the world." (3)

These remarks indicate an important distinction which has not always been clearly understood. The distinction is puzzling because it is not clear which aspect of language should be given prominence in developing an account of the possibility of expression and communication. Sensing that there is some form of opposition between them a philosopher is likely to appeal to one aspect rather than the other in his discussions. Thus, Russell's account may be interpreted as an attempt to explain the "conditional status" of language exclusively in terms of what he takes to be its material nature. This does not explain how certain temporal events and spatial bits of matter happen to represent features of the world or how these constitute a language. The other position, the conventionalist, disregards the sense in which the material character of language is important and consequently presents a confused account of language as a condition of intelligibility. It is certainly confusing to describe language in the same terms as we describe non-linguistic phenomena, to say, for example, that a spoken sentence is an

1 W V O Quine, "Word and Object", p 16

2 Bruce Aune, "Knowledge, Mind and Nature", p 195

3 Peter Winch, "The Idea of a Social Science", p 15

event having the same status as any non-linguistic event. This does not mean, however, that the intelligibility of the phenomena we apprehend is contingently dependent upon the linguistic conventions we have adopted. A strictly conventionalist theory fails to make clear how different linguistic conventions carry with them different conceptions of reality and it is hard to see how it could.

The theories that have been mentioned are both misleading because they are born of misunderstanding the distinction we are considering. The opposition between the "phenomenal" and "conditional" aspects of language is only apparent. There is indeed a distinction here but it is important to understand that both sides of the distinction belong to what is meant by "language", to the grammar of this concept. A language is something which exhibits this distinction and unless this was so it would not be possible to describe what is said in a language as something which stands in a significant relation to reality. The fact that signs have a material character is important, but not as a condition of words and phrases standing in causal relationships to non-linguistic phenomena. There is a very obvious sense in which language must be perceptible and public: it is not by virtue of their physical nature that words are related to the world, but their physical nature is a necessary condition of the shared linguistic practices by which the conditional status of language is maintained. For instance, the referring role of a term, contrary to what a number of contemporary philosophers have suggested, is not maintained by a causal chain between an initial act of attaching the term to an

object and its subsequent application to objects of that kind. The argument is that the term, once it has been attached to an object, is passed on from person to person in a chain, the fixed reference of the term being preserved at each link. As Putnam says, "the reference is fixed by the fact that the individual is causally linked to other individuals who were in a position to pick out the bearer of the name, or of some names from which the name descended."⁽¹⁾ What maintains the reference of the term, however, is not the causal relations said to obtain between uses of the term but that these uses are correct, this being a matter of agreement rather than causality. Putnam comes close to perceiving this when he acknowledges that what is important is not that the use of proper names is causal but that their use is collective. Once this is perceived, however, it becomes confusing to speak of causal links between particular uses of a referring term by individual speakers. The agreement characterising the correct uses of words would not be possible unless speaking a language was a public or "collective" activity.⁽²⁾

The importance of the distinction between the two aspects of language cannot be fully understood unless it is discussed in terms of particular considerations. These have to do with meaning and truth. One such consideration is the logical requirement that a statement has a sense which is independent of its actual truth or falsity. We cannot explain how a statement has sense in the way that we explain how it is true or false, a point that is clearly expressed by Winch in discussing Wittgenstein's "Tractatus":

1 Hilary Putnam, "Mind, Language and Reality", Vol. 2, p 203

2 The collective use of terms, as we understand it, is a matter of people participating in shared linguistic practices. Accordingly, the correct use of words is a matter of following rules rather than of causality. Appealing to causality does not explain either how a term is given meaning by being attached to an object or how a term continues to be used to refer to objects of the same kind.

"There is a puzzle about the relation which holds between a proposition and a fact in virtue of which we say that a proposition 'states' a fact. What makes this perplexing is that a proposition does not have to be true in order to be meaningful. A proposition must already stand in a relation to reality if it means something (ie if it really is a proposition at all); to understand the proposition is to know what fact it states to obtain - and the question whether that fact really does obtain is a further one. Because a proposition may be false, its meaningfulness cannot consist in any relation in which it stands to an actually obtaining fact (at least not the fact that it states to obtain - for perhaps there is no such fact." (1)

What gives the distinction between how a statement has sense and the question whether it is true or false the character of a logical requirement is that verification presupposes that the statement that is to be verified has sense: a meaningless sentence does not say anything and does not admit of verification.

Another equally important consideration is the way the general distinction between the two aspects of language is involved in the possibility of a word or sign having meaning. In order for a sound or a mark to have the identity of a word there must be a distinction between its material appearance, how it sounds or what it looks like, and what is essential to its having meaning, to its being a word. This may be expressed very generally by saying that a word has a syntax. What this means is that there is a difference between using the word correctly and incorrectly and that it can be given correct use in expressions belonging in a language. It is misleading, as Wittgenstein reminds us, ⁽²⁾ to think of a sentence as a "mechanism" in which a word has a particular function, as if the sentence was somehow

1 Peter Winch, "Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein", p 3

2 Wittgenstein, Ibid, Pt 1:559

given prior to the use of the word. Nevertheless, the function or role of the word comes out in operating with it in the formation of sentences, for it is in contexts of expression that the correct uses of words are primarily exhibited. The syntax of words is not a matter of their physical appearance but of their correct employment.

These considerations, both of which can be understood as logical requirements for the conditional status of language, are closely connected. If we could not speak of the difference between using words correctly rather than incorrectly then neither could we speak of a sentence as something which has sense or says something independently of its standing in a relation to an actually obtaining state of affairs. These considerations have been introduced because the errors and misconceptions in both the causal and conventionalist theories make it difficult if not impossible for these requirements to be met.

(a) Both theories embody what might be called a relational theory of meaning. The result of this is that the notion of a rule becomes confused with that of a relation. That is to say, meaning is discussed in terms of relations rather than rules or criteria. Both theories are mistaken, not only in defining the meaning of a word as the object which it names or signifies, but also, and perhaps more significantly, in locating what is essential to a word having meaning in a relation obtaining between the word and a certain thing. In Russell's theory the relation is causal, in the conventionalist theory it is established by a convention. Both theories intimate that the use of a word is dependent upon the relation by which it has meaning and in this way a relation replaces or, more accurately, is

given the status of a rule. Yet a relation cannot be a measure of the correct use of a word. Quite unlike the application of a term a relation cannot be either correct or incorrect - either a relation obtains or there is no relation. The fact that a word has been used incorrectly does not allow us to say that the word has not been used. Because a word is meaningful in being used correctly and consistently it follows that its correct or meaningful use does not depend upon its relation to an object. Yet many philosophers insist that learning the meaning of certain words is a matter of a person learning to associate the words with certain features of his environment. In describing a primitive way of learning a word, Quine states:

..... "we teach the infant a word by reinforcing his random babbling on some appropriate occasion. His chance utterance bears a chance resemblance to a word appropriate to the occasion, and we reward him. The occasion must be some object or some stimulus source that we as well as the child are in a position to notice. Furthermore, we must be in a position to observe that the child is in a position to notice it. Only thus would there be any purpose in our rewarding his chance utterance. In so doing we encourage the child to repeat the word on future similar occasions." (1)

However, the ability to associate a word with an object and to pronounce the word in its presence gives no indication that a child has mastered the correct use and thereby the meaning of the word, even in a primitive way. To learn to use a colour word, for instance, is not simply to perceive that the word is associated with a certain colour; it is to learn to use the word when it is appropriate or when it has a point. It is important to understand that learning to apply words to objects, properties and events is learning to speak a language and that this is essentially a matter of learning to combine words to form

1 W V O Quine, "Mind and Verbal Dispositions" in "Mind and Language", ed. S Guttenplan, pp 83-84

significant expressions. A relation only obtains between a word and an object when the word is used correctly and it is misleading and mystifying to speak of the relation persisting in some way when the word is not being used. What persists is not the relation but the shared practice of using the word consistently. A relation cannot in itself disclose how a word is to be used, "the overall role of the word in language",⁽¹⁾ and neither, for that matter, can a rule. It is not possible to understand the rule distinguishing between the correct and incorrect uses of a word prior to learning to use the word; to master the correct use of the word is to learn the rule.

The second criticism that can be made of these theories follows directly from what has been said.

(b) Both theories fail to give a satisfactory account of what it is to use words. To say something is to perform an action of a distinctive kind and it is a confusion to define an utterance simply as an event among events. According to Russell's theory meanings cause the occurrence of series of words, events rather than acts of speech. He speaks of sentences representing the world and preserving its structure but does not consider the notion that representing something is a human action rather than an event caused by features of a person's environment. As we have argued, there is an important connection between the fact that the meaningfulness of a word does not consist in its being related to an object and the requirement that a sentence has sense independent of its actual truth or falsity. This is closely related to the notion that to utter a sentence is to perform an action. Russell fails to take

1 The expression is Wittgenstein's: Ibid, Pt 1.30.

account of the conceptual distinction between the occurrence of words and their meaningful use and the consequences are impossible to accept. A sentence is an arrangement of signs which says something and it is an error to describe this arrangement as a contingent occurrence.

Now it might be thought that this error is precisely what the conventionalist theory manages to avoid; correctness of use and intelligibility of expression are ensured by the body of rules or conventions by which a language has unity. This is not the case. Accordance with rules might be described as a necessary condition of sense, but this must be considered in connection with the fact that sentences are normally uttered in circumstances where they have a point, where their utterance is not gratuitous or arbitrary. The connection between the sense of sentences and the circumstances in which they are uttered can only be explained by appealing to the notion that a significant expression is the performance of an action, one which cannot be determined by the rules embodied in the language to which the expression belongs. It certainly cannot be determined by the three forms of convention described by Fodor. The conventions governing the combinatorial properties of words do not disclose which words should be combined and when. It is also clear that the conventions determining which expressions in the language are analytically true or false do not determine the truth or falsity of empirical statements nor the occasions when it is appropriate to utter them. And in emphasising the status of conventions which establish relations between words and non-linguistic phenomena the conventionalist is mistakenly interpreting the relation between a word and an object as a condition of its correct employment.

(c) The two criticisms that have been advanced help to explain the third defect that both theories have in common, this being the erroneous assumption that a person's use of words on any given occasion is guided or determined by factors that are, in one way or another, independent of the language he speaks. According to Russell an expression is the effect of features of the environment; a series of sounds or marks represent a state of affairs because it is caused to do so, which means that the notion of using words or of forming a sentence that says something plays no role in Russell's account. The conventionalist theory, on the other hand, ascribed to a body of rules or conventions something of the role which "meanings" or "features of the environment" play in the causal theory. Conventions are not causes but they are, nevertheless, made sufficiently independent of actual linguistic practice that they may be said to determine a person's use of words. Since there are conventions fixing the combinatorial properties of words, which sentences are analytic, and the relations between words and non-linguistic phenomena, it may be assumed that the conventions guide a person in what to say, in putting words together coherently and, furthermore, in recognising incoherence when it occurs. If a language is constituted by these three forms of convention then it must be assumed that the conventions play a significant role in a person's acquisition of the language and in his subsequent ability to speak it.

The reasoning behind regarding a body of rules as a guiding authority is fallacious.⁽¹⁾ In the first place it is impossible

1 Cf Norman Malcolm, "The Myth of Cognitive Processes and Structures", in "Thought and Knowledge", p 167

to understand the expression of a rule prior to understanding the distinction marked by its application. A person cannot decide whether a sentence he is to utter is intelligible by consulting the rules or conventions with which it accords: if the sentence accords to the rules it cannot be other than intelligible and if he does not understand the expression then he will not know which rules to apply to it. A person who can speak a language is never in a position in which he has to make such a decision. In the second place, it is false to say that the sentences a person utters, in a discussion, for instance, are derived from or guided by rules. If one understands that an action has been performed correctly then one understands that it accords with a rule. This is because the concept of correctness involves that of following a rule. This does not mean that the action is actually guided or prompted by the rule to which it accords. A rule is something that can be formulated and expressed, yet the ability to formulate a rule is not a condition of being able to follow it. If a person is able to use a word correctly then it can be said that he knows the rule governing its use; it cannot be denied that he is able to follow it.

These considerations indicate that the causal and conventionalist theories share a number of serious misconceptions about the nature of language. Both draw attention to the distinction between the material nature of language and its status as a condition of intelligibility yet fail to show its importance. It is largely because of this that these theories are unable to provide a satisfactory account of the relation between a person's ability to apprehend reality and his ability to participate in language. The defects inherent in both theories must be avoided if the character of this relation is to be adequately described.

It has been argued that the importance of the material nature of language lies in its being necessary to the agreement characterising the correct uses of words and not in its being a condition of the causal action of meanings. This implies that what we have described as the conditional status of language is maintained by shared linguistic practices, by the correct and consistent use of words in expression and communication. It is an error, therefore, to assume that a language could possess one of these aspects but not the other. As we shall see, this is an assumption which a number of philosophers, including Locke, have been prepared to make.

Understanding the importance of these aspects of language is closely connected with the possibility of giving an acceptable account of the relation between words and the world. This relation only obtains because words are used correctly in discourse. It is not the case that the meanings of words are secured by a method of attaching them to objects, properties and events which people can apprehend and identify prior to learning to use the words that refer to them. The temptation to argue that words do have meaning in being related to objects is likely to derive from misunderstanding the way words are taught and, in particular, the role of ostensive definitions. H H Price, for example, argues correctly that if a person is to talk sense, to himself as well as to others, his words must retain a constancy of meaning.⁽¹⁾ What ensures constancy of meaning, for Price, is the relation that has been established between the word and what it signifies. This is unsatisfactory, for we are now faced with

1 H H Price, "Thinking and Experience", p 232

the problem of explaining how the relation between the word and an object is itself maintained. The only acceptable answer is that the constancy of the relation depends on the word retaining correctness of use from speaker to speaker. A child may be able to associate a word with an object, he may, for instance, pronounce the word whenever he sees it. Leaving aside the question of the identity of what he perceives, it could not be said that he is using the word correctly or meaningfully or even that he is using it at all. Yet this is how Price understands the role of ostensive definitions:

"The final stage of the ostensive process is the establishment of ostensive rules. Such a rule if it were put into words would be of the form 'If an object or situation of sort A is experienced, the word W is to be applied to it'. Henceforward our use of the word W for thinking with, both in the presence of A-like objects and in their absence, is governed by this rule, though the rule is neither consciously adopted, nor formulated, nor consciously obeyed." (1)

Price fails to appreciate that an ostensive definition cannot play a normative role unless it can be seen that only in using a sign correctly that a relation can obtain between that sign and an object. By learning to use the sign correctly this is precisely what a person does see. Instruction by means of ostensive definition is not a matter of teaching a child to utter a word whenever he experiences an object of a particular kind. That would, in any case, presuppose that he could recognise that the objects are the same. Indicating an object is a part of teaching a child "the overall role of the word in language" and if he simply proceeds to utter the word whenever a particular

1 Price, Ibid, p 224

object comes into view he has not yet understood the point of the definition. To teach the child the meaning of the word is also to teach him the identity of the object; the identity of the object is only apprehended when the correct use of the word has been mastered, when he can apply the word, not only to the particular object indicated, but to other objects of that kind in the course of his speaking the language. Price rightly speaks of a relation between the capacity to use signs and the capacity to recognise objects. He is in error in suggesting that these capacities are independently acquired and that a person only later comes to associate them.⁽¹⁾ These capacities are not contingently related and merely seeing an object is not the same as recognising what it is.⁽²⁾ The identity of an object is fixed by the use of its name in expressions; its identity becomes known as the use of the word is successfully acquired. It must not be thought, however, that the position being defended is the same as the conventionalist standpoint already criticised. Adopting different terms is a matter of changing language,⁽³⁾ not the identities of the things we perceive. What is important is not the words we apply, that is, how they look and sound, but how they are used, the fact that human beings use words at all. It is in this sense that knowing the identity of an object is internally related to knowing the meaning of the word that is applied to it. Because of this we find, not surprisingly, that a person's ability to use a word correctly is bound up with his knowing the criteria by which an object is recognised

1 Price, *Ibid*, pp 232-233

2 This is suggested by Wittgenstein, *Ibid*, Pt 1, 380

3 It is in fact a matter of changing the perceptible form of language.

and identified. These criteria are often taught in the process of teaching the use of the word. It must not be thought, however, that a name or predicate somehow determines the "nature" of an object or property. Names and predicates are used in talking about objects, and while being able to use terms like "snow" and "gold" is essential to recognising and identifying the phenomena they refer to, it is a mistake to think that what makes these things what they are is somehow dependent upon language. The "natures" of snow and gold are discovered by empirical investigation not by reflecting on words. It must not be forgotten that there is an important difference between knowing that what one perceives is snow and knowing what snow actually is. One can know the former without knowing the latter. Language makes it possible for us to talk about the world, to have something to say; we learn to recognise and identify things in learning to talk about them. What we do say, however, is only made possible by the language we speak, not determined by it. What we say on a particular occasion depends on how we understand things to be, although that understanding would not be possible if we did not possess language. This is importantly connected with the fact that speaking is an activity and it will be more appropriate to consider this after the nature of action has been discussed.

An investigation of the relation between language and the capacity to think and to have thoughts must take the considerations that have been discussed in this chapter into account. They are particularly relevant to understanding the way a number of philosophers have analysed the epistemological aspect

of thought, its relation to reality, in terms of language.
Locke's account of this matter is of particular interest.

Chapter 2

LOCKE: IDEAS AND THE LANGUAGE OF THOUGHT

Locke's account of the nature of thought is a response to the philosophical question of how knowledge and understanding are possible. His account of the nature of language, on the other hand, is a response to the question of how knowledge and understanding can be communicated and shared among human beings. These accounts are based on two assumptions, first, that spoken and written language is primarily a vehicle for communicating thoughts, and second, that its status as such is dependent upon thought as a means of comprehending reality. The difference between thought and communication is for Locke a difference between two forms of language. These languages are different in kind because they serve essentially different purposes. This chapter and the one that follows discuss this conception of the relation between thought and language. Before embarking on a detailed examination of Locke's view of ideas as signs constituting a language of thought it is necessary to say something about how Locke's doctrine of ideas is to be understood.

Locke's interest in the notion of thought is primarily epistemological; he is interested in the conditions that must be met if knowledge of an external world is to be possible and in the limits on the extent of that knowledge. Although the theory of ideas has justly been regarded as a contribution to these problems the nature of the contribution has not always been clearly understood. The most serious misunderstanding of

Locké's theory has rested on the interpretation of the term "idea" which most readily suggests that Locke was expounding a representative theory of perception and little else. This theory is indeed suggested by the definition of ideas as the immediate objects of perception. What Locke meant by this, however, cannot be appreciated unless one carefully considers what he took ideas to be, and a number of commentators have pointed out that Locke was prone to use the word "idea" in different and sometimes conflicting senses. Thus, Reginald Jackson believes that "if the Essay is to be interpreted at all, it is necessary to search, among the conflicting usages of any term, for one which may be most conveniently selected as the normal usage, and by reference to which other usages may be classified as departures."⁽¹⁾ This is not a satisfactory approach to the different senses in which Locke uses the term "idea". A careful study of the Essay reveals that there is one sense of "idea" to which Locke attaches the greatest importance, this being the definition of ideas as signs. It is inaccurate to take this to be the normal sense of the term and to describe the other senses as deviations: some of the other ways in which Locke defines "idea" are compatible with and derive their sense from this most important and pervasive use of the term. If we under-estimate Locke's interest in the question of how signs have meaning this is liable to escape our attention.

In his essay on Locke⁽²⁾ Gilbert Ryle considers five different senses in which Locke uses the word "idea" and yet

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- 1 Reginald Jackson, "Locke's Distinction Between Primary and Secondary Qualities", in "Locke and Berkeley", ed by C B Martin and D M Armstrong: p 53.
 - 2 Gilbert Ryle, "John Locke on the Human Understanding" in "Locke and Berkeley" ed by C B Martin and D M Armstrong.

fails to distinguish clearly the definition of ideas as signs. He also neglects the manner in which Locke sought to explain how words have meaning in terms of the doctrine of ideas. Locke certainly does talk of ideas as entities which occur and exist in a person's mind and as immediate objects of perception. He also refers to them as if they were sense-data or sensible qualities and as mental images, pictures, copies or representations of things which, as he puts it, are not immediately present to the mind. And sometimes he uses "idea" in ways suggesting that ideas are concepts, conceptions or notions. That Locke was unclear about some of the ways in which he uses this term cannot be denied. He is particularly unclear when he speaks of ideas, in one sense, as signs by which we comprehend and distinguish things, and, in another sense, as being in things themselves.⁽¹⁾ Nevertheless, it can be made clear that in Locke's doctrine of ideas different senses of "idea" are related in important ways. While it is not our intention to do so comprehensively in this thesis, it can be argued that the several senses of "idea" do not indicate that Locke was led into philosophical confusion by terminological inconsistency alone.⁽²⁾ In using the term in different ways he was attempting, although unsuccessfully, to provide an account of the nature of thought and its relation, on the one hand, to an independent reality and, on the other, to the language of human communication. This may be put in another way by saying that Locke was attempting to account for the relation between the epistemological function of thought and the status of language as a vehicle of communication. Because his theory

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.8.8.

2 We do not wish to exonerate Locke completely from the charge of inconsistency. It is particularly difficult to reconcile the definition of ideas as sense-data with the view that they are both concepts and signs. The inconsistency partly derives from Locke's failure to distinguish clearly between thought and perception.

represents a possible solution to the problem of whether knowledge and understanding are possible, and because many of the assumptions it involves continue to attract philosophers, it merits serious attention.

In the course of his discussion Locke exhibits the philosophical tendency to account for the nature of thought in terms of a theory of how signs have meaning and it is important to be clear at the outset that Locke discusses the notion of meaning in connection with two languages rather than one. The difficulties in Locke's philosophy may be elucidated by first considering how ideas are meaningful in relation to the world, the nature of ideas as signs. This is because within Locke's philosophy the meaning of words depends upon the epistemological status of ideas.

Locke describes thinking as one of the "great and principal actions of the mind".⁽¹⁾ What the mind is "applied about whilst thinking"⁽²⁾ are ideas, and ideas, whether derived from experience of external things or from "perception of the operations of our own mind within us, as it is employed about the ideas it has got",⁽³⁾ are both the materials of thinking and immediate objects of perception. What Locke means by talking of ideas in this way is that a language, a structure or system of signs, is a condition of apprehending an intelligible reality.⁽⁴⁾ This is a central theme in Locke's appeal to the doctrine of ideas and it may be argued that he describes ideas as immediate objects of perception, not because the mind cannot attend to or perceive

1 Locke, Ibid, 2.6.2

2 Locke, Ibid, 2.1.1.

3 Locke, Ibid, 2.1.4.

4 Knowledge and reasoning, Locke argues, require precise determinate ideas (3.10.22), and it is important to bear in mind that Locke regarded ideas as signs.

anything other than ideas, but because the intelligibility of ideas does not depend on the mediation or "intervention" of other ideas.

According to Locke human beings make use of two different kinds of sign. Ideas are used for understanding or comprehending things and words, although they can also be used in thought, are primarily used for communicating thought and knowledge to others. The following remarks indicate how Locke understood the difference between words and ideas:

..... "since the things the mind contemplates are none of them, besides itself, present to the understanding, it is necessary that something else, as a sign or representation of the thing it considers, should be present to it; and these are ideas. And because the scene of ideas that makes one man's thoughts cannot be laid open to the immediate view of another, nor laid up anywhere but in the memory, aⁿ no very sure repository; therefore to communicate our thoughts to one another, as well as to record them for our own use, signs of our ideas are also necessary; those which men have found most convenient, and therefore generally make use of, are articulate sounds." (1)

This indicates the sense in which Locke characterises thought and communication in terms of different languages.⁽²⁾ It also makes it clear that Locke did not regard the external world as being entirely inaccessible, for he speaks of "the things the mind contemplates" in contrast to the signs which represent them. The difficult notion that external things are not present to the understanding, which does seem to imply that the external world is not directly perceived, does not justify a common misreading of Locke's philosophy. Ryle exemplifies this misreading when he ascribes to Locke the view "that minds cannot immediately attend to or think about any other things save 'ideas'", that

1 Locke, *Ibid*, 4.21.4.

2 Locke's references to ideas as signs are numerous, ie 2.32.19, 3.3.11, 4.5.2, 4.21.4.

"whenever we think of or are awake to anything, it is to these supposed mind-dependent entities to which we are attending and never to any real existence outside of (which I suppose means independent of) our minds."⁽¹⁾ Ryle supports his interpretation by referring to Locke's definition of an idea as "whatsoever is the object of the understanding when a man thinks or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking". But this interpretation is only plausible if one ignores the status of ideas as signs. When Locke is talking about ideas as objects of the understanding he is referring to the perception of signs of a distinctive kind, and the remark that the mind is employed about ideas in thinking refers to the concept of a mental act as one of using ideas. It must also be remembered that ideas are objects of the understanding in the form of mental propositions, and it is naive to ascribe to Locke the view that such propositions cannot be verified by comparing them with reality. The fact that Locke quite explicitly regarded ideas as signs, describing them as "the materials of thinking" and the instruments of knowledge, would have made it extremely difficult for him to maintain with consistency the principle that ideas are the things we know and understand rather than the means by which we acquire knowledge and understanding of other things. Indeed, it seems to have occurred to him that this position would have been untenable. He states that "if our knowledge of our ideas terminate in them and reach no further where there is something further intended, our most serious thoughts will be of little more use than the reveries of a crazy brain, and the truths built thereon of no more weight than the discourses of

1 Ryle, Ibid. p 20

a man who sees things clearly in a dream and with great assurance utters them."⁽¹⁾ And he goes on to remark that "Our knowledge is real only so far as there is conformity between our ideas the the reality of things."⁽²⁾

Now if it is assumed that Locke attempted to combine the theory that the external world is inaccessible with the view that an idea is a concept, and Locke does refer to our ideas of things, then his position appears similar to the one held by G E Moore in his early writings. In "The Nature of Judgement"⁽³⁾ Moore held that one cannot draw a significant distinction between a proposition and an independent reality. He argued that since to know is to be aware of a proposition, and that since a proposition asserts a relation between concepts, then it is impossible to know anything other than concepts: concepts are "the only objects of knowledge".⁽⁴⁾ There are of course differences, the most important being the fact that Locke explains propositions as being composed of signs, and while he might have been wrong to identify concepts with ideas as perceptible signs, he believed it essential that we should be able to compare propositions with things as they really are. Given that the general function of ideas is that of representation then there must be things which they represent, and a mental proposition is true when its constituent ideas agree with their archetypes in nature.

The most important confusion in Locke's philosophy lies not in his theory of perception, although it is essentially

1 Locke, Ibid. 4.4.2

2 Locke, Ibid. 4.4.3

3 Mind, 1899

4 Moore, Ibid, p 180

connected with his view of the nature of perception, but in his account of how ideas function as signs, how they have meaning and how they serve as the meanings of words. The issue Locke was attempting to meet by developing his theory of ideas is comparable to the problem Russell attempted to solve with his causal theory of meaning, the problem of explaining how we can "get outside" signs to the facts which make propositions true or false. Locke's solution is far more complex than Russell's. In dividing thought from language Locke was attempting to develop a theory of meaning sufficient to explain how a language of thought could mediate between an independent reality and the words we use to talk about it. His theory of meaning is firmly relational but only in a limited sense causal. Locke is far more aware of the relation between a sign being meaningful and the fact that it is used and, for the most part, he does not fall into the error of explaining the use of a sign as the effect of a cause.

Locke's account of words and the function of speech to communicate thought will be discussed in the next chapter. All that needs to be said here is that Locke regarded the communication of thoughts as the essential function of spoken and written language because of the distinctive nature of ideas and of mental activity in general. Ideas are essentially private and language is necessary to express and communicate the ideas and thoughts which have meaning and sense independent of their being signified and expressed verbally. It is important for Locke to give some account of how this is possible because the language of thought, as it may be called, has a dual function. Locke expresses this most clearly when he is discussing abstract ideas:

..... "this abstract idea, being something in the mind between the thing that exists and the name that is given to it, it is in our ideas that both the rightness of our knowledge, and the propriety and intelligibility of our speaking consists. And hence it is that men are so forward to suppose that the abstract ideas they have in their minds are such as agree to the things existing without them, to which they are referred; and are the same also to which the names they give them do by the use and propriety of that language belong. For without this double conformity of their ideas, they find they should both think amiss of things in themselves, and talk of them unintelligibly to others."(1)

This passage is of the greatest importance in understanding Locke's theory of knowledge and his philosophy of language. The ideas a person has in his mind, and which he refers to external things, constitute a system or structure of signs which mediates between a person's use of words and what they are about. Locke was aware of the fact that in communicating with others our talk does not exclusively consist of reporting and describing our mental states and activities. A large part of our use of words consists of talk about external things and it is in connection with this that Locke believed the "double conformity" of ideas to be most important. Ideas determine the sense of our expressions because the language of thought that they constitute also serves as a condition of the intelligibility of the things we talk about. Yet the view that a language is a condition of a person being able to apprehend the identities of objects, qualities and events does not in itself afford any indication of how a system of signs happens to possess this property; it amounts to little more than the assumption that a distinction between signs and what they are about can be drawn.

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 2.32.8

That Locke believed there to be this distinction is shown by his use of such terms as "conformity", "representation" and "comprehension" to describe the relation between ideas and objects. The fact that he did not consider the language of expression and communication to be a condition of a person apprehending an intelligible reality, however, undermines the very distinction he wishes to maintain. This is connected with the fact that as signs ideas are perceptible entities. In this sense they belong to the world and their status as such is not altered by the fact that they are private or mental. Ideas are at once signs and objects of perception and what some commentators have interpreted as Locke's representative theory of perception is, in reality, his recognition of the truth that signs are essentially perceptible. The problem of understanding the distinction between language as a perceptible phenomenon and its conditional status confronts Locke's philosophy at the level of ideas, the language of thought, rather than that of words. Ideas are perceptible entities which are known and understood. Yet they are also related to and "comprehend" the objects, qualities and events of an independent reality. We now need to consider whether the doctrine of ideas is based on an account of meaning and truth which is compatible with the significance of this distinction. The main issue is whether Locke was justified in accounting for the relation between thought and reality by appealing to the notion of a language of thought.

The influence of Descartes' philosophy of mind is mainly responsible for Locke's characterisation of mental acts as essentially private. Descartes' work also influenced Locke's

use of the term "idea". As we have noted, Descartes held that a person can only express something he understands if there is within him the idea of what is signified by the words he uses. Locke, however, found it necessary to place the notion of idea in the context of an empiricist epistemology, his task being to retain the principle that ideas are private while accounting for their origin in sense-experience. The result of this is that while Descartes mainly emphasises the role of ideas in reasoning, Locke mainly emphasises their role in significant perception. The chief reason why Locke ascribed a conditional status to the language of ideas rather than that of words was his recognition of the difference between merely experiencing an object, for instance, and perceiving it as an object of a particular kind. Apprehending the identity of an object presupposes having the idea of it and an idea Locke assumed to be a mental entity. It was a natural step for him to argue that thinking about things involves using the ideas by virtue of which the objects of a person's thoughts are intelligible and thus to assert that ideas are signs of a peculiarly mental kind.

The direction of Locke's discussion might also have been influenced by certain observations that can be made of the use of words. Human beings often misunderstand each other and often utter sounds that lack meaning. Language admits of contradictions and nonsensical constructions and the same thing can often be said in different words and in different languages. These observations might have suggested to Locke that spoken and written language is an unreliable instrument of thought and knowledge, that if knowledge is possible at all then it must

consist in a relation between a mind and the objects it contemplates. Realising that mere experience is not sufficient to yield knowledge,⁽¹⁾ Locke postulated the existence of a language of ideas serving, first, as a condition of the intelligibility of the things we experience and, second, as a secure foundation, admitting as little ambiguity, unclarity and uncertainty as possible, for the "propriety and intelligibleness of our speaking". Locke was right in his first assumption, for it is correct, to ascribe this status to a language. But his second assumption, which concerns the questions of the meaning and sense of words and expressions, is seriously confused: the sense of what is said in one language does not depend on what is formulated in another. Locke's mistake was to assume that it was necessary, that it even made sense, to speak of a language the status of which is exclusively conditional, the signs of which are never used in expression and communication. Ideas are the constituent signs of a wholly private language. Locke's assuming the existence of such a language is closely connected with his failure to see that a language can only serve as a condition of its speakers apprehending the identities of things if that language, as a perceptible phenomenon, is used in discourse with others. The source of this failure may be shown by considering Locke's account of the meanings of ideas. What this theory was may be gathered from his descriptions of the nature and function of ideas. Ideas are entities which exist in and are perceived by the mind. Many ideas are formed by mental

1 Locke's commitment to the conditional status of the inner language of thought is clearly suggested by, for example, his reference to ideas as "the instruments of knowledge" (4.21.4), his discussion of mental propositions (4.5 1-6), and his stipulation that knowledge and reasoning require precise, determinate ideas (3.10.22).

activity and the mind applies ideas to features of the external world in the sense that the mind, which is both the location and the agency of thought, cannot apprehend things immediately but only by the application or "intervention" of the ideas it has of them."⁽¹⁾ Ideas as signs, on the other hand, are apprehended immediately. If apprehending the identity of an idea depended on the "intervention" of another idea then the notion of apprehending the identity of an idea would contain an infinite regress. Ideas are intrinsically intelligible and this is a feature of their conditional status. It is the notion of "intervention" that characterises the language of ideas as a condition of recognition and identification, of understanding what and how things are. In connection with this there are two considerations to which Locke attaches some importance. The first is that ideas are related to objects and qualities. The other is that people use ideas, particularly in the formation of other ideas and in the construction of mental propositions. We must now consider how Locke described the relation between these principles.

Locke maintained that all ideas originate, directly or indirectly, from experience, from our perception of external objects and of the "internal operations of our minds".⁽²⁾ The existence of simple ideas, the materials of all our knowledge and which are "taken in by sensation", is caused by powers in external objects. Ideas of primary qualities resemble their causes, "their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves",⁽³⁾ while ideas of secondary qualities, being merely

1 Locke, Ibid. 4.4.3

2 Locke, Ibid. 2.1.2

3 Locke, Ibid. 2.18.15

the effects of powers in objects, do not necessarily resemble their causes. The latter are, nevertheless, signs elicited in a person's experience. They are "real" rather than "fantastical" ideas because although they do not necessarily resemble their causes they are constantly produced by them,⁽¹⁾ and Locke takes this to be a sufficient condition of their being meaningful signs. The interesting notion here is that of conformity which Locke associates with the use of ideas to refer to external things. Fantastical ideas, for instance, are representations that "have no foundation in nature, nor have any conformity to that reality of being to which they are tacitly referred as archetypes".⁽²⁾ In contrast, real ideas conform to the things to which they are, with justification, referred. Complex ideas of substances are "such combinations of simple ideas as are taken to represent distinct particular things subsisting by themselves",⁽³⁾ and all our simple ideas agree to the reality of things. These ideas, as signs or representations of "whatever the mind considers or thinks about",⁽⁴⁾ enable us to "distinguish the qualities which are really in things themselves".⁽⁵⁾

This battery of descriptions and definitions shows how Locke intended ideas to be understood quite literally as signs. They are not to be regarded merely as objects of perception and contemplation. Ideas, like words, are signs that people use:

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- 1 Locke, Ibid. 2.30.2
 - 2 Locke, Ibid. 2.30.1
 - 3 Locke, Ibid. 2.12.6
 - 4 Locke, Ibid. 4.21.4
 - 5 Locke, Ibid. 2.30.2

"The mind having got an idea which it thinks it may have use of either in contemplation or discourse, the first thing it does is to abstract it, and then get a name to it; and so lay it up in its storehouse, the memory, as containing the essence of a sort of thing, of which that name is always to be the mark." (1)

To judge, discriminate or contemplate is to use or apply ideas which are signs "designed to be the marks whereby we are to know and distinguish things we have to do with", and he goes on to remark:

.... "our ideas do as well serve us to that purpose, and are as real distinguishing characters, whether they be only constant effects, or else exact resemblances of something in things themselves, the reality lying in that steady correspondence they have with the distinct constitution of real being. But whether they answer to those constitutions, as to causes or patterns it matters not; it suffices that they are constantly produced by them. And thus our simple ideas are all real and true, because they answer and agree to those powers in things which produce them in our minds, that being all that is requisite to make them real, and not fictitious at pleasure." (2)

Here Locke is specifying the conditions governing the status of ideas as meaningful signs. If these conditions are met then ideas may serve as the materials of knowledge, the constituent signs of a language of thought.

It is of interest to note at this juncture that some commentators who have wished to exonerate Locke from the charge that he held a crude representative theory of perception, based on the assumption that ideas are mental entities, have not properly considered the fact that Locke regarded ideas as signs. A D Wozzley, for example, attributes to Locke the view that ideas represent reality in that there can be "a correspondence between

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.32.7

2 Locke, Ibid. 2.30.2

what we think about the world and the way the world is, and that the improvement of knowledge is the increase of this correspondence; and they also represent reality in the sense that we can think about things in their absence."⁽¹⁾ He goes on to argue that it is only plausible to interpret the notion that ideas resemble the qualities they stand for according to the "picture-original model, if one has already taken an idea to be a special kind of mental thing", and dismisses the descriptions suggesting that ideas are mental entities as unimportant; "A general idea ... is not, as on the image theory, an item of psychological furniture, but an ability to discriminate and classify and to use words accordingly."⁽²⁾ However, Woozley's sympathetic reading is only plausible if one ignores the fact that Locke intended his readers to understand ideas as mental signs. The mental activities of discriminating and classifying consist in the application of ideas, which are signs used "for the understanding of things", and signs are of necessity perceptible. Woozley is mistaken in stating that "Forming ideas is identical with understanding words",⁽³⁾ for Locke draws a clear distinction between words and ideas, the importance of the distinction resting on the assumption that the epistemological status of ideas determines the meanings of words. Locke's argument that the existence of ideas is a condition of the intelligibility of external phenomena can be stated in the following way: an idea (strictly speaking, the use that can be made of it) is a necessary and sufficient condition of apprehending the identity of an object or quality, for since the things the mind contemplates are not "present to the

1 A D Woozley; introduction to his abridged edition of Locke's "Essay", p 33.

2 Woozley, *Ibid.* p 44.

3 Locke, *Ibid.* 4.21.4

understanding" it is necessary for it to have signs of those things, and these signs are ideas.⁽¹⁾ Woozley is correct to deny that Locke held the theory that external phenomena are inaccessible and unknowable and that all we perceive are ideas. What Locke does maintain is that unless a person had ideas external things would not be present to the understanding in intelligible form; a person experiences things but the intelligibility of the things he experiences depends upon the "intervention" or application of ideas. Because of this it is misleading to regard the perceptible nature of ideas as being unimportant and to state that an examination of Locke's text cannot support this claim. Locke regards the perception of ideas as being so important that "without it there could be no knowledge, no reasoning, no imagination, no distinct thoughts at all",⁽²⁾ the reason being that if ideas are signs then they must be entities that can be perceived and used. Woozley's criticism of the view commonly attributed to Locke, that ideas are proxies for inaccessible external things is appropriate and he is right to point out that, for Locke, words derive their meaning from ideas. What he fails to see is the connection in Locke's discussion between the activities of discrimination and classification and the status of ideas as signs. Locke explains the possibility of identifying, classifying and discriminating between things in terms of the ideas we have of them. If this is a plausible interpretation of Locke's arguments then it may be suggested that what many have understood as a causal, representative theory of perception is, in essence, a relational theory

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 4.21.4

2 Locke, *Ibid.* 4.21.4

of how ideas have meaning. His account of the relation between words and the world depends on whether this theory can withstand critical analysis.

If it is accepted that the substance of Locke's appeal to ideas is to characterise an inner language of thought then his philosophical motives may be more clearly understood. A language of thought becomes necessary because a theory of knowledge must involve an account of how propositions are possible, and propositions, although Locke did not see this clearly, consist of signs used in such a way that they say something. A proposition is not a subsisting entity but an act of using signs, and although Locke is partially aware of this his account of the matter is unsatisfactory. What Locke tried to show was how a language served as the instrument of knowledge and as a foundation for the use of words, and it is in connection with this that he attached so much importance to simple ideas. Simple ideas are the effects of powers in objects and not the products of mental activity. Locke assumed that because of this it was impossible for them to be imagined distortions of their causes; if they were inadequate in this sense there would be no way of establishing whether their uses are significant, and whether the structure of ideas the mind develops out of them is an illusion. Thus the mind passively receives simple ideas so that its activities may rest on a secure foundation.

So far Locke has not offered anything that could be considered a theory of how such ideas have meaning. Having argued that they are a condition of the identities of things he is now faced with the problem of explaining how these perceptible entities themselves have individual identities. In declaring

that all simple ideas are real and agree to the powers that cause them Locke has merely argued that the question whether they actually represent their causes can never arise. However, this is not to close the gap between simple ideas and their archetypes to the degree that they cannot be compared with or referred to their objects. It is important to realise that Locke is talking about the origin of simple ideas and that the question of how they are used has yet to be answered. Locke, unlike Russell, appeals to the notion of causality in explaining how these signs originate, not how they are used. This does not mean that Locke regarded their meaning as being quite unconnected with their origin. Clearly the fundamental considerations of "steady correspondence" and "constant production" are to be explained as matters of causal dependence. And in giving this explanation Locke was attempting to account for the possibility of identifying and distinguishing objects and qualities by the application of ideas; the fact that their existence is caused ensures that these ideas are adequate representations of their objects. Locke is not arguing that the applications of simple ideas to things and their use in forming complex ideas are directly caused by their archetypes. Nevertheless, he insists that the constant production of simple ideas is a necessary and sufficient condition of their being meaningful. The meaning of simple ideas, the uses that may be made of them, is given with their existence. What is given, however, are the relations between these signs and their objects and these natural relations reveal what these ideas mean, prior to the uses to which they may be put. Locke makes the point like this:

"It is the first act of the mind, when it has any ideas or sentiments at all, to perceive its ideas; and so far as it perceives them, to know each what it is, and thereby also to perceive their difference, and that one is not the other. This is so absolutely necessary that without it there could be no knowledge, no reasoning, no imagination, no distinct thoughts at all. By this the mind clearly and infallibly perceives each idea to agree with itself, and to be what it is, and all distinct ideas to disagree, ie that one not to be the other; and this it does without pains, labour or deduction, but at first view, by its natural power of perception and deduction." (1)

Because he conceives ideas to be essentially private Locke is forced to argue that their identities or, what comes to the same thing, their meanings are immediately apprehended. It is impossible for him to appeal to the idea that signs have commonly accepted uses that people acquire through being taught. This is the result of his failing to consider two of the conditions governing the status of various forms of perceptible phenomena as signs. The first is that a sign is something that is used. The second is that a sign belongs to a system or structure within which it can be correctly (or incorrectly) combined with other signs. By considering some of the details of Locke's theory it can be shown that simple ideas, and, indeed, ideas in general, cannot serve the epistemological function he ascribes to them.

The essentially mental and private nature of ideas rules out the possibility of explaining their meaning in terms of the regularity, correctness and general agreement characterising their use. Locke believed that the constant production of a simple idea by the object it thereby represents is a sufficient condition of its being meaningful. This dispenses with the need to talk of a necessary relationship between the notion

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 4.1.4.

that a sign is used and the notion that a sign, when used meaningfully, is used correctly. Thus the relation of steady correspondence stands in the place which, in an adequate theory of meaning, would be occupied by the concept of a rule. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Locke unconcerned about the consideration that to refer to the correct use of a sign is to refer to its use within a language. The ideas within a person's mind, the structure of the understanding, do not form a system of signs given prior to the reception of simple ideas. The fact that this structure, and the knowledge and understanding it embodies, is developed from simple ideas involves the assumption that their identities are immediately apprehended. And because their meanings are given in isolation, independent of their application in combination with other signs, their nature as signs cannot be explained by reference to rules, criteria and principles. Locke did not see that a perceptible entity, a sound or a mark, cannot be a meaningful sign unless it can be used in combination with other signs. Once this is acknowledged, however, it can be argued that it is not possible to know the meaning of a word prior to knowing how to use it in, to use Frege's expression, the contexts of propositions. Knowing what simple ideas mean, supposing that there are such signs, could not depend on perception but on coming to understand the relations between them, relations which can only be grasped in learning their use. The reason why Locke assumes that the meanings of simple ideas is given in perception is clear enough.⁽¹⁾ The possibility of determining their adequacy by comparing them with their archetypes would undermine the role he intended them to perform. It could then be said that a person could apprehend

i Simple ideas, it must be remembered, are received and apprehended prior to abstraction. They are ideas on which abstraction is performed. See for instance, 2.11.14.

the identity of a quality or an object directly, without the "intervention" of an idea and that a language is not a condition of apprehending an intelligible reality. Locke is aware of the fact that a perceptible entity can only be a sign if certain conditions are satisfied but the conditions he stipulates, "constant production" and "steady correspondence", are contingent. He fails to see that a "sensible appearance" can only be a sign, and thus contribute to the conditional status of language, if it has uses in combination with other signs within a language and that the mere perception of a sign does not disclose the uses to which it may be put. He claims that once the identities of simple ideas have been apprehended they may be used to form complex ideas. Indeed, we may assume that once the mind has received a sufficient number of simple ideas the activities of repeating, comparing and uniting them to form complex ideas seems to follow quite naturally. But these activities are only possible if the meanings of simple ideas are already known. They are not activities a person masters in the process of learning to use simple ideas, and for this reason it may be said that for Locke the meanings of simple ideas is given prior to their use in a system of signs; simple ideas are the materials out of which the language is created. It is on the basis of simple ideas that the language of thought is connected with reality and they constitute the limits to what can be intelligibly thought or formulated in that language. In this connection Locke's view of simple ideas bears an interesting similarity to Russell's notion of an object-language consisting of object-words that have meaning in isolation.⁽¹⁾ There is also a similarity between

1 Bertrand Russell, "An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth", p 62.

Russell's theory of a hierarchy of languages and Locke's conception of the understanding as something which develops in three stages. After the reception of simple ideas the mind proceeds to form complex and general ideas. It is only after these have been formed that the mind possesses the resources necessary to form thoughts or mental propositions. Because he fails to explain how simple ideas have meaning it is impossible for him to sustain a coherent account of how ideas constitute a language of thought. This may be shown by considering complex ideas and mental propositions in turn.

(a) Complex ideas. To speak of the use of signs is to refer to the roles they occupy in various forms of expression. When Locke speaks of the use the mind makes of its ideas it must be assumed that he is primarily referring to the role of ideas in mental propositions. The use of simple ideas to form complex ideas, however, is quite distinct. Whereas the use of an idea in the context of a mental proposition is its application to a feature of the world, the use of a simple idea to form a complex idea does not depend on "what offers itself from without".⁽¹⁾ By repeating, combining and abstracting simple ideas "the mind has great power in varying and multiplying the objects of its thoughts, infinitely beyond what sensation or reflection furnished it with".⁽²⁾ This depends on the prior intelligibility of simple ideas, for the possibility of complex ideas is inherent in the simple ideas out of which they are formed. Locke's account of how complex ideas are formed is obscure. He intends the distinction between simple and complex ideas to mark a difference

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.12.2

2 Ibid.

between the origin and the nature of these forms of sign. Simple ideas have meaning in isolation and, as we have argued, cannot exhibit the "grammar" that is required for them to be combined with other signs. The important question is how a person in possession of a sufficient number of simple ideas knows which complex ideas he may form out of them: what are the criteria by which he selects the appropriate simple ideas? Locke appears to be answering this question when he states that "As simple ideas are observed to exist in several combinations united together, so the mind has a power to consider several of them united together as one idea, and not only as they are united in external objects, but as itself has joined them."⁽¹⁾ This suggests that the qualities that are perceived to belong to an object indicate that they may be combined to form a complex idea. This is not consistent with the principle that simple ideas are received as discrete entities and that it is individual qualities that are made intelligible or given identity by the ideas the mind is caused to have of them. Perceiving that a number of simple ideas⁽²⁾ are "united" in an object presupposes that the ideas they have individually caused have meaning and does not in itself show how these ideas may be used to form new ideas. For Locke's theory to be at all plausible it must explain how simple ideas have meaning quite independently of their role in forming complex ideas and this is something it cannot do. If in the inner language of thought simple ideas are signs that have meaning in isolation then criteria are required to govern

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.12.1

2 Strictly speaking, it is a number of particular qualities that are perceived to belong to an object.

their use in concept formation. There can be no such criteria. Complex ideas cannot themselves be the measure by which simple ideas can be selected and operated on to form those very ideas; apprehending the complex ideas would make those operations unnecessary. By a similar argument the feature of reality to which a complex idea applies cannot serve as the criterion, for the possibility of apprehending what this is, prior to having the complex idea, would make forming an idea of it unnecessary. The only alternative, and this seems to be Locke's view, is that forming complex ideas is a natural process; on receiving simple ideas the mind is somehow led to form complex ideas out of them. Yet this is at variance with Locke's initial description of a complex idea as something that is created by intentionally performing mental operations on the appropriate simple ideas. The procedures he describes are limited by the meanings of simple ideas, but this does not explain how it is possible to follow those procedures. The examples mentioned by Locke, those of beauty, gratitude, a man, an army, and the universe, do not help. It is not at all obvious which simple ideas ought to be combined to form ideas of any of these things. And if we select the most plausible example, for instance, that of forming the idea of sugar by combining the simple ideas of whiteness, hardness and sweetness, there is nothing in the nature of such ideas to indicate that they may be combined to form the complex idea, particularly if we bear in mind that these ideas are signs that have meaning in isolation. Locke is wrongly assuming that because the nature of sugar, for example, can be explained by referring to its texture, taste and colour then the idea of sugar was formed by combining the ideas of these properties.

The mistake is comparable to the assumption that because a sentence may be divided into the individual words composing it then the sense of the sentence, what it says, is somehow inherent in the meaning of each individual word. Knowing the meaning of a word does entail knowing how to use it in sentences, but it does not entail knowing which sentences these will be. Knowing the meaning of simple ideas might entail knowing that one can refer to them in explicating complex ideas but it does not entail knowing which complex ideas. Locke's thesis is obscured yet further by his stipulation that all ideas, as signs, are perceptible entities. Locke regards the complex ideas a person has formed as being adequate because they have been formed out of adequate simple ideas. A person is responsible for how those ideas appear in his mind, but how they do appear is something he does not discuss.

Locke's discussion of complex ideas is an attempt to give a coherent account of how concepts can be privately formed. The theory that each individual forms his own complex ideas must involve the assumption that this activity is based on data given in perception. Such data must be intelligible and it is to Locke's credit that he realised how this depended on the "intervention" of a language. The fact that he conceived this language to be essentially private, however, makes his position seriously confused. It is in the transition from his account of simple and complex ideas to his theory of mental propositions that his notion of an inner language of thought, the status of which is exclusively conditional, is finally undermined.

(b) Mental propositions. In defining knowledge as "nothing but the perception of the connexion and agreement, and

disagreement and repugnancy of any of our ideas."⁽¹⁾, Locke is arguing that knowledge consists in perceiving that propositions are true. Because he distinguishes between thought and the language used in communication he must, in turn, distinguish between mental and verbal propositions, the former consisting of ideas and the latter of words. Mental propositions are expressed by verbal propositions and are defined as "Nothing but a bare consideration of the ideas as they are in our minds, stripped of names".⁽²⁾ Because "most men, if not all, in their thinking and reasonings within themselves make use of words instead of ideas, at least when the subject of their meditation contains in it complex ideas."⁽³⁾, it is difficult to treat mental and verbal propositions separately. Even so, it is central to Locke's philosophy that ideas temporally precede words and are more fundamental epistemologically: the language of thought possesses a greater degree of certainty than that of communication.

The nature of mental propositions is elucidated by combining a relational theory of meaning with a correspondence theory of truth. The result of this is a failure to distinguish clearly between the conditions according to which an arrangement of signs has sense and the conditions according to which a proposition is true. The thesis that a mental proposition is true when it corresponds to a state of affairs must be distinguished from the thesis that such propositions are formed when "the ideas in our understandings are without the use of

1 Locke, Ibid. 4.1.2.

2 Locke, Ibid..4.5.3.

3 Locke, Ibid. 4.5.4.

words put together, or separated by the mind perceiving or judging of their agreement or disagreement."⁽¹⁾ The first is a claim about the conditions that are satisfied when a statement is true. The second is a claim about the conditions that are satisfied when a series of signs constitute a proposition. A mental proposition is true when its constituent ideas actually represent or refer to their objects on a given occasion, a point on which Locke remarks somewhat ambiguously when he states that "Truth lies in so joining or separating these representatives as the things they stand for do in themselves agree or disagree; and falsehood in the contrary",⁽²⁾ the argument being that a proposition is true when a state of affairs is as the proposition states it to be. A mental proposition has sense, on the other hand, when the ideas composing it "agree" with each other or are syntactically compatible. Locke is clearly in a position to argue that an arrangement of signs exhibits a sense or says something independently of whether it is actually true or false, to argue that what makes a series of signs a proposition or a thought is not what makes it true. He does not do so and his failure to distinguish clearly between the two senses in which he uses the term "agreement", in one sense, to refer to the syntactical correctness with which signs are used to form propositions and in another sense to define the truth of a proposition, represents a serious confusion over the nature and function of mental propositions.

Mental propositions, if it makes sense to assume their existence, can only be verified if they are significant

1 Locke, Ibid. 4.5.5.

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.32. 24

arrangements of signs. Similarly, verbal propositions can only express and communicate mental propositions if they meet the same condition. Once this is conceded, however, it becomes extremely difficult to provide an argument against the view that verbal propositions can stand in the same relation to reality as mental propositions. The absence of such an argument undermines the theory that verbal propositions are dependent upon the language of thought yet further. The theory is only cogent if Locke can show that ideas admit of uses which constitute significant expressions, and we have gone some way towards showing that this is something he cannot do. Furthermore, Locke is unable to show that ideas have identities by which they can serve as the meanings of words. While he does say that ideas are used his account of how these uses are possible rests on the mere assumption that the mind infallibly perceives each idea to be identical with itself and to differ from other ideas. Although it can be assumed that, for Locke, to perceive the identity of an idea is to perceive it as an idea of an object or property, the relation between an idea and its object cannot of itself disclose how and when the idea is to be used, nor its "agreement" or "disagreement" with other ideas. Locke thus fails to perceive that coming to participate in a language is a matter of learning to combine signs to form significant expressions on specific occasions. Locke says little or nothing about how a person learns to form mental propositions or the occasions when the formation of these propositions has a point. The ability to form propositions is related to understanding the point of doing so and Locke gives no indication of how a person can acquire this understanding. He frequently describes ideas as signs by which the mind comprehends reality and mental propositions as

the contents of sentences. But a person's understanding the point of expressing his ideas and thoughts depends on what might rather loosely be described as his position in relation to other human beings, a position which he occupies, in part, by virtue of the fact that he shares with them a common language. Since the point of uttering expressions is understood in the context of social relations then understanding the point of forming the mental content of these propositions must derive from the same context. Unless this was so a person's reason for expressing a proposition would be significantly different from the reason why he has that proposition to express in the first place. The mental proposition will have been formed quite independently of the social context in which its expression has a point. (1) Locke argues that ideas comprehend reality by representing their archetypes but does not explain how the relations between ideas and their objects determine the significance or expressiveness of mental propositions. If this deficiency is taken in conjunction with the principle that mental propositions are formed privately, independent of the contexts in which they are verbally expressed, the argument for assuming their existence is seriously weakened. Locke asserts that mental propositions are true when they agree with the way things are. This must be supported by an account of how ideas can be "put together or separated in the mind" so that the proposition so formed is "real and instructive". (2), for it is only those informative or instructive arrangements of signs that admit of verification. Locke fails to account for the fact that a proposition is a

1 The "point" of expressions is connected with the fact that they are uttered in particular circumstances, as part of our general behaviour. It is in particular circumstances that there is a point to stating a fact, seeking to convince someone, uttering a falsehood, and so on. cf Putnam, "Meaning and the Moral Sciences", pp 100-101.

2 Locke, Ibid. 4.5.6.

significant arrangement of signs, a distinctive form of action. A mere series of signs is not in itself informative or expressive and can give no indication of which verbal proposition that can be employed to express it. Locke does attempt to say something about how mental propositions are informative in his discussion of logical connectives but only succeeds in making the status of these propositions more obscure.

It must be remembered that Locke's epistemology is expressed in the principle that "our knowledge and reasoning about other things is only as they correspond with those of our particular ideas."⁽¹⁾ Although it is clear that Locke regards mental propositions as perceptible entities he does not state explicitly how they differ from sentences. They are similar in that both thoughts and sentences can be either affirmative or negative. They are different in that thoughts are formed by the mind in immediate relation to the external world. He seems to have assumed that the mind has a natural capacity to form these arrangements of signs. He also assumed that sentences derive their sense from the mental propositions they express, the argument being, not that one arrangement of signs can be formed to express the same sense as another but that the content communicated by a sentence is itself a prior arrangement of signs. A person only speaks rationally when he uses words for the ideas he has in his mind.⁽²⁾ Locke does not mean by this that a person applies a verbal proposition to its mental equivalent. But in order to show how a mental proposition

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 4.17.8

2 Locke, *Ibid.* 4.8.7.

provides the content of a sentence he must at least show that a mental and a verbal proposition can have the same sense. It is hard to see how this can be so. The function of a mental proposition is to represent⁽¹⁾ rather than to express, state, inform or communicate, and Locke understands that this function depends on their being either affirmative or negative. Yet he rather strangely defines affirmation and negation, not as intrinsic features of propositions but as mental acts. He suggests this in his remarks on logical connectives:

"Besides words which are names of ideas in our mind, there are a good many others that are made use of to signify the connexion that the mind gives to ideas or propositions, one with another. The mind, in communicating its thought to others, does not only need signs of the ideas it has then before it, but others also to show or intimate some particular action of its own at that time relating to those ideas. This it does in several ways, as is and is not are the general marks of the mind, affirming or denying. But besides affirmation or negation, without which there is in words no truth or falsehood, the mind in declaring its sentiments to others, connect not only the parts of propositions but whole sentences one to another, with their several relations and dependencies, to make a coherent discourse." (2)

This explanation of logical connectives is one of the most puzzling elements in Locke's account of thought. Logical connectives presumably signify mental acts of affirming or denying mental propositions. There are no mental signs to which logical connectives correspond and this entails that these mental acts perform the same role as logical connectives in spoken language. The difficulty lies in imagining how mental acts can

1 Locke does not speak of the use of ideas as a form of inner discourse.

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.7.1

have this function. The terms that operate as logical connectives are essential to the construction of informative sentences; there is a necessary relationship between the function of such terms and the senses expressed by the sentences in which they operate. To imagine a language devoid of logical connectives is to imagine a vocabulary which does not constitute a language, a totality of signs in which significant expressions cannot be formed. Locke's conception of an inner language of thought is confused because the absence of logical connectives makes it impossible to use the signs which constitute this language. Such a language cannot have the status of being a condition of apprehending reality because it is a language devoid of logic. Identifying, distinguishing and referring are matters of expression involving the correct application of signs. Signs refer to objects when they are used to do so, and they do so when they function correctly in the contexts of propositions. The point is simply that a significant arrangement of signs is in itself either affirmative or negative. Locke's theory is born of misunderstanding the idea that a proposition is a complete arrangement of signs, and his suggestion that a mental act can perform the function of a sign obscures the sense in which to use signs is to perform an action. It is interesting to observe that in many cases of action the instrument used in performing an act exists when it is not being used while the act cannot be performed without the instrument. It might be thought that there is a comparison to be made between, for instance, using a hammer to drive in a nail and using an idea in forming a mental proposition. The latter can remain as an object of mental contemplation after it has been formed, yet it cannot remain as a complete proposition without the act which

makes it either affirmative or negative, and this shows that a mental act cannot be a constituent of a proposition. There is a sense in which it is correct to say that propositions "remain" after they have been formed or expressed. They "exist" in written form, they can be contemplated or thought about and they can be remembered and discussed. This is because it is the combination of signs constituting a complete proposition that performs the "action" of saying something and Locke fails to perceive that a proposition only represents a state of affairs because it intrinsically performs the action of affirming or denying that the fact obtains.⁽¹⁾

In this chapter we have criticised Locke's attempt to characterise thought in terms of a language of ideas the status of which is exclusively conditional. Possessing this language is a condition of any human being apprehending an intelligible reality, for if by some chance a person lacked the capacity to have ideas he would not know the identities of the objects and properties he experienced. Sensory impressions must produce ideas in a person's mind "wherein consists actual perception"⁽²⁾, and Locke associates thought very closely with perception. The term "thinking", according to Locke, "signifies that sort of operation in the mind about its ideas wherein the mind is active, where it, with some degree of voluntary attention, considers anything",⁽³⁾ The fact that thought and perception are closely associated modes of attention supports the interpretation we

1 This notion will be pursued further later in our inquiry.

2 Locke, *Ibid.* 1.9.3.

3 Locke, *Ibid.* 1.9.3.

have been defending, that Locke understood the inner language of ideas as a condition of apprehending reality, for the person who receives impressions but not ideas is not, strictly speaking, able to perceive and consider anything. The exclusively conditional status of ideas, which Locke defines as their intervening or mediating function, is inextricably bound up with his account of communication. The next chapter describes and criticises this account and is intended to support the argument that a language can only have a conditional status if it is also a public language used in discourse with others.

Chapter 3

LOCKE: THE LANGUAGE OF COMMUNICATION

Locke defines words as vehicles of communication because of the privacy of mental activity and the distinctive nature of ideas. He states his position in the following remarks:

.... "because the scene of ideas that makes one man's thoughts cannot be laid open to the immediate view of another, nor laid up anywhere but in the memory, a no very sure repository; therefore to communicate our thoughts to one another, as well as record them for our own use, signs of our ideas are also necessary; those which men have found most convenient, and therefore generally make use of, are articulate sounds."⁽¹⁾

For Locke the question of how a language can serve as a means of communication is largely the question of what makes a sound "articulate" or meaningful. Language is not to be explained as the mere emission of sounds or the inscription of marks; the ability to pronounce words is not a sufficient indication that a person is, as Locke puts it, "capable of language".⁽²⁾ There is a logical difference between a series of meaningless sounds or marks and a significant arrangement of signs. By insisting that a word is an articulate sound Locke is making the point that language cannot be understood exclusively as a physical phenomenon. Although language is perceptible it is remarkably different from other things. Yolton, commenting on the fact that Locke is not interested in words as mere sounds, makes the point very well:

1 Locke, Ibid, 4.21.4

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.1.1

"The human use of words takes them as having sense, not as sounds or sights alone, though of course the physical fact of sounds and sights is necessary for linguistic use. In this sense, the sense of what a word is for a language-user, a word is not a physical sound or a physical label pinned on or pointing to objects: words are not just sounds or marks on paper, but meaningful sounds and marks." (1)

It is reasonable to assume that, for Locke, it is only by belonging in a language that a word can be termed "articulate" or meaningful and he rightly believed that this was connected with the fact that words are used. It is the relation of signification between words and ideas that makes the meaningful use of words possible, communication being a matter of a speaker using words as signs for the ideas in his mind:

"Besides articulate sounds it was further necessary that he should be able to use these sounds as signs of internal conceptions, and to make them stand as marks for ideas within his own mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the thoughts of men's minds be conveyed from one to another." (2)

Locke is concerned with the problem of clarifying how words are adequate vehicles of communication because words, unlike ideas, are conventional and this makes it necessary to show that the conventional nature of words does not undermine the possibility of communication. A person's ideas "are all within his own breast, invisible and hidden from others, nor can of themselves be made appear."⁽³⁾ and because words signify ideas it is important to show how individuals are able to use words for the same ideas. This is the major problem to which Locke's account of communication is directed.

1 John W Yolton, "Locke and the Compass of the Human Understanding", p 213

2 Locke, *Ibid.* 3.1.2.

3 Locke, *Ibid.* 3.2.1.

The fact that thought and knowledge involve the "intervention" of ideas implies that words do not refer directly to objects, qualities and events. Locke must, therefore, explain how the "propriety and intelligibility of our speaking" depends on ideas and he does this by appealing to the principle that in signifying ideas words and sentences represent a reality initially made intelligible by the intervention of the language of thought. The use of words is governed by the ideas and internal conceptions which are their "original significations".⁽¹⁾ This can be clarified by considering Locke's discussion of general terms.

An adequate medium of communication, according to Locke, requires that some sounds "can be made use of so as to comprehend several particular things: for the multiplication of words would have perplexed their use, had every particular thing need of a distinct name to be signified by."⁽²⁾ But it is in signifying a general idea that a general word can be used as the "mark of a multitude of particular existences". The use of a general term depends on the fact that they are made to signify general ideas and Locke's remarks bring out clearly the difference between words and ideas:

1 The word "original" is important because although a person can use a word meaningfully when its corresponding idea is not present in his mind, it is his understanding the prior relation between the word and an idea that enables him to use the word meaningfully.

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.1.3

"Words became general by being made the signs of general ideas; and ideas became general by separating from them the circumstances of time and place, and any other ideas that may determine them to this or that particular existence. By this way of abstraction they are made capable of representing more individuals than one; each of which, having in it a conformity to that abstract idea, is (as we call it) of that sort." (1)

The difference between words and ideas is also elucidated by Lock's use of the term "comprehension" to describe the function of ideas and the word "signification" to describe the function of words. Ideas "comprehend" particular things in the sense that it is only by having ideas that we know the identities of the things we perceive, and this helps to explain how Locke appealed to a language of ideas in accounting for the epistemological or cognitive aspect of thought. Words, on the other hand, do not comprehend but signify or stand for ideas and something must now be said about the importance Locke attached to the notion of signification.

Ian Hacking has argued⁽²⁾ that Locke did not have a theory of meaning, a theory of public discourse, although he did have a theory of ideas, a theory of mental discourse. The second assumption is largely correct, although to refer to the use of ideas as mental discourse is only appropriate in that it is the primary function of ideas to be the constituents of mental propositions: Locke nowhere speaks of people conversing with themselves by means of ideas. The first statement, however, is mistaken, for it ignores the argument that ideas, as the foundation of the "propriety and intelligibility of our speaking", determine the use of words. Hacking supports his thesis

1 Locke, Ibid 3.3.6

2 Ian Hacking, "Why Does Language Matter to Philosophy?", Ch 5

by referring to the distinction in Locke's work between the proper and immediate signification of a word and its "common acceptance". Locke did draw this distinction and it is quite apparent that the former is private and the latter public. But it is an error to claim that, on Locke's account, the signification of a word, its relation to an idea, and its public use in discourse are unconnected. That would mean that the way people use words had nothing to do with the fact that they stand for ideas and are given meaning by being attached to ideas. This is plainly not Locke's view. He insists that to use words without ideas, without knowing which ideas they stand for, is to use them without meaning: "it is a perverting the use of words, and brings unavoidable obscurity and confusion into their signification, whenever we make them stand for anything but those ideas we have in our own minds."⁽¹⁾ What must be remembered is that Locke used the term "signification" to describe the relations between words and things as well as the relations between words and ideas, only insisting that ideas are the proper, immediate and original significations of words. What Locke's theory comes to is this: men only use words correctly and meaningfully if they know which ideas they signify; once these are known they can use words to signify things other than ideas. This is why Locke suggests that men take it for granted that the words they use in discourse stand for the same ideas. He states that men, as well as supposing that their words stand for the reality of things,⁽²⁾

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 3.2.5.

2 Locke describes this as "secret reference".

.... "suppose their words to be the marks of the ideas in the minds also of other men, with whom they communicate; for else they should talk in vain and could not be understood, if the sounds they applied to one idea were such as by the hearer were applied to another, which is to speak two languages. But in this, men stand not usually to examine whether the idea they and those they discourse with have in their minds be the same, but think it enough that they use the word as they imagine in the common acceptance of that language, in which they suppose that the idea they make it a sign of is precisely the same to which the understanding men of that country apply that name." (1)

We have quoted Locke at length to show that "common acceptance" is simply a matter of men taking for granted that others use words as signs for the same ideas as they do. Hacking endeavours to show that "common acceptance" is not to be equated with "proper and immediate signification". This may well be the case. But to argue that the common acceptance of a word, the way it is used in a particular community, has nothing to do with its proper and immediate signification is quite another matter. It is the connection between the two that constitutes Locke's explanation of how words have meaning. Words have meaning because they signify particular ideas in the minds of individual speakers. Unless this was so the uses of words, if they had uses at all, would be entirely arbitrary.⁽²⁾ The relations between words and ideas ensure that when people use words they do so meaningfully and this suggests that Locke was aware of what must be a central consideration in any theory of meaning, namely that there must be criteria for distinguishing between correct and incorrect uses

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 3.2.4

2 Although Locke explicitly remarks on the arbitrary invention of words to signify ideas, he does not say that their uses are arbitrary.

of words. Locke takes it to be a necessary truth that a person can only use words meaningfully if he has ideas in his own mind, that a person cannot use words for ideas other than his own: "when he represents to himself other men's ideas by some of his own, if he consent to give them the same names that other men do, it is still to his own ideas: to ideas that he has, and not to ideas that he has not."⁽¹⁾ And he adds that "This is so necessary in the use of language that in this respect the knowing and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned, use the words they speak (with any meaning) all alike. They, in every man's mouth, stand for the ideas he has, and which he would express by them."⁽²⁾ The relations between words and ideas are psychological associations formed by each individual, and these are the criteria according to which they use words correctly:

.... "the signification and use of words depending on that connexion which the mind makes between its ideas and the sounds it uses as signs of them, it is necessary, in the application of names to things, that the mind should have distinct ideas of the things, and retain also the particular name that belongs to every one, with its peculiar appropriation to that idea." (2)

A person's use of words is guided by the "difference of the ideas" to which they have been attached and this means that the issue of how the meaningful use of words is possible is resolved in terms of the epistemological or cognitive function of ideas. Although it is a deeply deficient account it is, nevertheless, an account of how words have meaning and one that repays careful study.

1 Locke, Ibid. 3.2.2.

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.3.2.

Locke states that it is impossible for a person to give meaning to words by attaching them to anything other than his ideas. A person cannot apply words "as marks, immediately, to anything else but the ideas that he himself hath: for this would be to make them signs of his own conceptions and yet apply them to other ideas; which would be to make them signs and not signs of his ideas at the same time; and so in effect to have no signification at all."⁽¹⁾ To apply words "immediately" to anything other than the ideas a person has in his mind would be to go beyond the limit governing the meaningful use of words, and any such attempt must inevitably fail. What Locke is explaining by talking of the immediate application of words is how words are given meaning, this being a matter of attaching them to ideas. This does not commit Locke to the view that the common use of words is a matter of applying them to the ideas that are on those occasions in speakers' minds. His argument is that to use words which one has not made the signs of ideas in one's own mind is to use them without meaning. If communication, "the end of speech", is to be achieved then a person's use of words must not be guided by anything that he does not know "immediately".

Wittgenstein wrote:

' "How do I manage always to use a word correctly - ie significantly: do I keep on consulting a grammar? No: the fact that I mean something - the thing I mean prevents me from talking nonsense." - "I mean something by the words" here means: I know that I can apply them.' (2)

And Locke is arguing that what prevents a person from talking nonsense are the ideas in his mind, the things words mean, for

1 Locke, Ibid. 3.2.2.

2 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Zettel", 297

he can consult the relations he has established between words and ideas as he might consult a grammar.

It is by way of this account of the conditions of meaning that Locke arrives at the problem we need to consider, the problem of explaining how the conditional status of language, so essential to elucidating the nature of thought, is maintained by shared linguistic practices. The question of how words can have the same meanings for different people is central to this notion. How successfully, then, can Locke's theory of meaning answer this question?

According to Locke until a person has some ideas of his own "he cannot suppose them to correspond with the conceptions of other men; nor can he use any signs for them: for thus they would be the signs of he knows not what, which is in truth to be the signs of nothing." And when "he represents to himself other men's ideas by some of his own, if he consent to give them the same names that other men do, it is still to his own ideas: to ideas that he has, and not to ideas that he has not."⁽¹⁾ These remarks are inconclusive because they do not specify the grounds on which a person consents to give other people's ideas the same names as they do. Locke appears to concede that there can be no such grounds, for "every man has so inviolable a liberty to make words stand for whatever ideas he pleases that no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds that he has, when they use the same word that he does."⁽²⁾ Yet the assumption that men take for granted that the idea to which they attach a word "is precisely the same to which the under-

1 Locke, Ibid. 3.2.2.

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.2.8.

standing men of that country apply that name" does not accord with the view that each individual arbitrarily associates words with their ideas. Taken literally, this implies the impossibility of agreement or "common acceptation" in the use of words. The most Locke can say is that "common use, by a tacit consent, appropriates certain sounds to certain ideas in all languages, which so far limits the signification of that sound that, unless a man applies it to the same idea, he does not speak properly."⁽¹⁾ Locke can say what the criteria for speaking "properly" or intelligibly are but he cannot say how such criteria can be commonly known and applied, the "tacit consent" he refers to is contingent. Furthermore, the fact that it is impossible for the consent or agreement to have a common ground implies that the intelligibility of language may only be apparent, an implication which clearly derives from the stipulation that criteria of meaning are essentially private. Had Locke recognised that ideas must be expressed in language before people can discover whether they have the same ideas he might also have recognised the importance of his own statement that "men learn names and use them in talk with others".⁽²⁾ It is by participating in a common language that human beings come to have the same, and, for that matter, different, ideas, and there are parts of the "Essay" where Locke is almost prepared to concede that this is so. This seems to be the case when he remarks that "we often observe that, when anyone sees a new thing of a kind that he knows not, he presently asks what it is, meaning by that inquiry

1 Locke, Ibid. 3.2.8.

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.3.3.

nothing but the name, as if the name carried with it the knowledge of the species or the essence of it, whereof it is indeed used as the mark and is generally supposed annexed to it."⁽¹⁾ The point is, of course, that the name only carries with it the identity of the thing if it has been attached to an idea. Locke is unable to give any indication of how a person can discover whether his idea of an object is the same as that of another and, therefore, how he can know that what he means by a name is the same as what others mean by it. Yet people are able to establish whether they have the same ideas or concepts and this is intimately connected with their ability to establish whether they are using particular words correctly. It is only agreement over the correct use of words that can serve as a basis on which sameness or difference of ideas can be understood and it follows from this that agreement over the meanings of words is not something that can be derived from ideas or concepts. Seeking agreement in ideas takes place within discourse. If a person suspects that his child does not know the meaning of the word "red" he may, for instance, show him a red object and ask him to describe its colour. If he states that it is yellow his mistake may be corrected. He may then be able to form a mental representation of this particular colour. This does not mean that what he is able to visualise becomes his idea of red nor the meaning of the word he is being taught: it certainly does not become the criterion by which he is able to use it correctly. Because it can be visualised it is itself something to which the word can be applied. Mental representations can be erroneous and the erroneous nature of a representation is parasitic upon the

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 2.32.7

incorrect use of a word and the erroneous identification of a particular object or property. Forming an appropriate mental representation is indeed an ability that may be acquired in conjunction with learning the correct application of a term or description, but it is not an ability that can form the basis of learning the correct use of a term. This, it is being argued, is intimately related to learning to identify and recognise particular things. If the child now knows the meaning of the word he will be able to use it in connection with one colour rather than another, and in using the word correctly on a subsequent occasion it will not be necessary for him to mentally represent the colour in order to do so. His using the word correctly shows that he knows the identity of this particular property, that he has the idea or concept, and the rule governing the application of the word is not to be defined as an association between the word and the mental representation. According to Locke people assume that the words they use signify the same ideas. He does not see that it is only if ideas are expressed and communicated, only if people understand each other, that such an assumption can be made at all. This observation casts doubt on the stipulation that although people agree to associate words with the same ideas, if only tacitly, they always and necessarily use words to stand for their own ideas. If Locke had made agreement in the use of words a precondition of understanding correspondence or divergence between ideas the principle that words derive their meaning from ideas could not have been retained: it would no longer make sense to characterise ideas as private entities. Neither could he have retained the principle that a person can only make himself understood if the words he uses

"excite" in others those ideas which are for him what those words mean. A person can only succeed in communicating if his listeners had already given the words meaning by attaching them to the same ideas. The two doctrines of the privacy of ideas and the arbitrariness of the relations between words and ideas combine to make this possibility extremely remote. A person cannot know that his words are going to "excite" his ideas in the minds of others by relying on the constancy with which words are used. Constancy in the use of words, "commonly received sounds", may lead a person to assume, falsely, that "the speaker and hearer had necessarily the same ideas".⁽¹⁾ This form of deception occurs when speakers "never trouble themselves to explain their own or understand clearly others' meaning."⁽²⁾ This can be accomplished by means of definitions and a definition, according to Locke, is "nothing but making another understand by words what idea the term defined stands for."⁽³⁾ The inadequacy of Locke's theory of meaning again becomes obvious if one considers how a dispute over the signification of a word could have emerged in the first place. It could only have done so if people had recognised inconsistency or irregularity in its use. A definition, as Locke describes it, only succeeds if people agree on the meanings of the words used in it. But the dispute here is actually over the idea which is the meaning of a word used in the definition, an idea which is essentially private. The point is that a definition can only resolve a dispute over the signification of a word if one use of the word is taken as

1 Locke, Ibid. 3.10.22

2 Locke, Ibid. 3.10.22

3 Locke, Ibid. 3.3.10

correct and this runs counter to Locke's belief that "every man has so inviolable a liberty to make words stand for whatever ideas he pleases that no one hath the power to make others have the same ideas in their minds that he has, when they use the same words that he does."⁽¹⁾ If men exercised this liberty then the definitions Locke speaks of could never succeed.⁽²⁾ The point of giving a definition in explaining the meaning of a word is to establish constancy or regularity in its use and constancy in the use of words does not give rise to the form of deception Locke mentions. He is mistaking constancy in the relation a person has established between a word and an idea, a relation which, for all he knows, might not obtain in the mind of anyone else, for the constancy or regularity with which words are used by the speakers of a language. It is their using words in the same way which shows that people have the same ideas or concepts, and it is the agreement characterising the correct use of words that maintains the status of a language as a condition of apprehending the identities of things. We may take this argument further by considering Wittgenstein's appeal to the notion of a language-game.

Wittgenstein describes a language-game as "the whole, consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven."⁽³⁾ Words have meaning in the contexts of expressions and expressions are uttered in particular circumstances. The fact that the circumstances we are in has a bearing on what we say, that "Our talk", as Wittgenstein remarks elsewhere, "gets its meaning from the

1 Locke, *Ibid.* 3.2.8

2 One might wonder whether such definitions could ever be formulated.

3 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Philosophical Investigations": 7

rest of our proceedings",⁽¹⁾ is closely connected with the sense in which the conditional status of language is maintained by shared linguistic practices. It is not possible to imagine a people who spoke a language yet did not know the identities of objects, qualities, events, thoughts, mental states and attitudes. Such a language, if that is what it would be, could not be involved with other human activities and practices and without this involvement of language it is hard to imagine what activities and practices these people could engage in. Denying that a language has conditional status is confused because it invites one to contemplate a possible state of affairs in which there is at most a contingent relation between the speakers of a language knowing the identities of objects and the fact that those objects bear names or fall under descriptions. This picture is as confused as the idea of a language containing names which are not used to refer to things. It is inconceivable that a language could contain names that are not used in the contexts of expressions; it is only in having correct uses that names belong in a language and they are used to refer to or signify objects. Wittgenstein brings this out clearly in his remarks on what he calls "a complete primitive language".⁽²⁾ This language consists of names which a builder calls out as orders to which his assistant responds by bringing the appropriate object.

Now Wittgenstein's suggestion that this use of names might be the entire language these men speak or that it might be "the whole language of a tribe" has rightly been criticised. Rush Rhees writes:

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "On Certainty", 229

2 Wittgenstein, "Philosophical Investigations", 2

"The trouble is not to imagine a people with a language of such a limited vocabulary. The trouble is to imagine that they spoke the language only to give these special orders on this job and otherwise never spoke at all. I do not think it would be speaking a language."(1)

Rhees points out that what the builders utter are "signals which cannot be used in any other way", which is closely related to the point that Wittgenstein's description "does not show how speaking is related to the lives people lead". The words are simply a part of the building technique and if these people had only learned these shouts and reactions their "language" would not admit a distinction between sense and nonsense. Nevertheless, one of Wittgenstein's aims in introducing the idea of a language-game was to show the inadequacy of the theory that the meanings of words are fixed by an act of attaching them to objects. Thus "It disperses the fog to study the phenomena of language in primitive kinds of application in which one can command a clear view of the aim and functioning of the words."(2) This is what Wittgenstein does by describing the use of names in this extremely simple activity. We are not to imagine that these names signify objects independently of their "aim and functioning", which in this case consists of giving orders. Neither are we to imagine that these objects have identities for these men, that they know what they are, prior to learning to use their names; the use of a particular name as an order indicates which object is to be brought. This has an important bearing on Locke's claim that people can know what things are prior to learning the words that signify them, that it is the idea a person has of a thing which

1 Rush Rhees, "Discussions of Wittgenstein", pp 76-77

is the measure according to which he uses a word to signify it. What words signify, however, is shown by their use. Wittgenstein writes:

"Now what do the words of this language signify? - What is supposed to show what they signify if not the kind of use they have? And we have already described that. So we are asking for the expression 'This word signifies this' to be made part of the description. In other words the description ought to take the form: 'The word signifies'

Of course, one can reduce the description of the use of the word 'slab' to the statement that this word signifies this object. This will be done when, for example, it is merely a matter of removing the mistaken idea that the word 'slab' refers to the shape of the building-stone that we in fact call 'block' - but the kind of referring this is, that is to say the use of these for the rest, is already known." (1)

To call ~~but~~ the word "slab", for example, is to signify a certain kind of object and the word signifies the object in the linguistic act of giving an order. Signification is not a relation that obtains between a word and an object either prior to or independently of the way the word is used. A person who misapplies a name is not just mistaken about the use of this word. He is also mistaken about the identity of the object to which he applies it, and such a mistake is only possible, and can only be corrected, if he has already mastered the practice of applying names to objects. If the builder's assistant responds to "Slab!" by bringing a beam what shows that he has made an error is the fact that he already understands this use of names.

Although discussion of this simple practice is instructive Rhees is right to point out that if this is all the builders can

1 Wittgenstein, Ibid. 10

do with words it can hardly be said that they can speak a language. The point that their use of words does not admit of a distinction between sense and nonsense is important because Wittgenstein's description does not show that these men can use names in sentences. Names can be used by themselves, in just the way that Wittgenstein describes, but this use of names is dependent upon their already having use to refer to objects in the contexts of sentences.⁽¹⁾ Teaching a child the meaning of a word is part of the process of teaching him to form sentences, to combine words to say things. It was for this reason that we argued⁽²⁾ that the question of how words have meaning is intimately related to the question of how sentences can have sense independently of their actual truth or falsity. To learn the meaning of a word is to learn "the overall role of the word in language", its grammar, and this is to learn the contribution the word can make to the sense of sentences.⁽³⁾ Locke wrongly assumes that the associations a person has established between words and ideas are sufficient to enable him to use words in sentences. He does not explicitly consider how the associations actually determine the correct use of words in the expression of thoughts. As we have argued, the assumption that words are given meaning by being attached to private objects makes it impossible for Locke to explain how words are consistently and correctly used. He does not perceive that words only signify objects or secure their references when they are being used correctly, and the correct use of words is not something that is established by

1 Cf Hide Ishiguro, "Use and Reference of Names", in "Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein", ed. P Winch, p 25

2 Chapter 1, p 23

3 Cf Michael Dummett, "Frege", p 194

ostensive definitions. Wittgenstein's observations on this are important:

"One thinks that learning language consists in giving names to objects. Viz, to human beings, to shapes, to colours, to pains, to moods, to numbers, etc. To repeat - naming is something like attaching a label to a thing. One can say that this is preparatory to the use of a word. But what is it a preparation for?"

"'We name things and then we can talk about them; can refer to them in talk.' - As if what we did next were given with the mere act of naming." (1)

The explanation Wittgenstein is attacking fails to recognise that what we do with a name is given in the language we learn to speak. The act of giving a name to an object, itself a practice within language, may be described as a preparation for using the word, but will mean nothing unless the use of the word, its grammar, has been mastered. Unless a person comes to understand that the name he is being taught is to be used in expression the act of naming or ostensive definition is a pointless exercise. This is why Wittgenstein spoke of the initial teaching of words as training rather than explanation⁽²⁾ and of following a rule in using a word correctly as a shared practice.⁽³⁾ It is an error to speak of words having meaning and of being given meaning prior to their uses in combination with other words in expression and communication. Expression and communication are not made possible by relations of signification: signification is a function of expression. Even if we followed Locke in assuming that a person's ideas of things are perceptible mental entities we should have to

1 Wittgenstein, Ibid. 26-27

2 Wittgenstein, Ibid. 5-6

3 Wittgenstein, Ibid. 202

recognise that unless a person could correctly apply the names he has attached to them then it would not be possible for him to know what these entities are. Even if there are such entities the words which signify them must belong in a public language, a language which has a conditional status. This, of course, is to reverse the relation Locke assumes to obtain between the language of thought and the language of communication. Once it is shown that a language can only serve as a condition of apprehending the identities of things if it is a shared language used in communication it is no longer necessary to postulate the "existence" of a language of thought. To say that an object, a property or an event has identity is simply to say that a person knows what it is and can distinguish it from others. Knowledge of identity presupposes language because words are used in identifying things and distinguishing between them. The usual criteria by which we tell whether a person knows the identity of an object is his ability to say what it is, to respond to a request to point out the object, and so on. His knowledge (and ignorance) of identity is shown in his use of words and in his responses. What Locke failed to realise was that the concepts of identity, similarity and difference can only be explained in terms of the language of expression and communication and not in terms of a private language of thought.

Now it might seem that the view being defended is similar to the one sketched by Stuart Hampshire,⁽¹⁾ namely that "When we use a language in our own thought and in communication with others, we are so far accepting that particular division of

1 See Chapter 1, p 13

reality into segments which the vocabulary and grammar of that particular language impose." This is not in fact the case. The identities of things and the differences between them are not "imposed" on people by the language they have acquired. It is the people who speak a language who identify, compare and discriminate between objects. It is true that they do so in language but it is not the language which divides reality into segments, as if a language with a different vocabulary and grammar divided the same reality into different segments.⁽¹⁾ Furthermore, it would be wrong to suppose that a person acquires a command of linguistic practices in order to identify, compare and discriminate between objects. When a person learns to use words these practices are, among others, precisely what he masters; learning what things are is an essential part of what we mean by the idea of learning to speak. It does not follow that giving an object or property a different name would change its identity and neither would it alter our perception of the object. What must be emphasised is the close connection between the criteria by which an object is identified and the rule embodied in the correct use of its name. Unless the object had a name we could hardly imagine how these criteria could enter our language or even how there could be any such criteria. The criteria need not necessarily be precise; they can change and they can, in some degree, vary from speaker to speaker. There can be cases in which a person applies the right name to the right object in accordance with quite inappropriate criteria, when, for example, his beliefs about the object are entirely

1 I owe these points to some remarks by Peter Winch in his paper "Language, Belief and Relativism", in "Contemporary British Philosophy" (fourth series): pp 324-325

false. The fact that he does apply the name to the object is made possible by his having mastered the practice of applying names. What is important in connection with knowledge of identity is that objects have names at all, names which have use in the contexts of expressions. There would be no connection between the identities of objects and the fact that they bear names unless these names had correct, and thus public, uses in a language.

We have argued that knowing the identities of objects, qualities and events is intimately related to knowing how to apply their names and descriptions correctly, and that the correct uses of terms is something over which there is overwhelming agreement among the speakers of a language. We have also argued that to learn to use words correctly is essentially linked with learning to make statements and to distinguish between their truth and falsity. The connection between these two considerations leads to the view that the status of language as a condition of knowing what things are, and, indeed, how they are, is maintained by shared linguistic practices, that language can only have a conditional status if it is also used in communication.

In the previous chapter we attempted to show how Locke's explanation of the cognitive or epistemological aspect of thought in terms of the doctrine of ideas was mistaken. In this chapter we have criticised his account of communication. In view of the fact that Locke was mistaken in explaining the relation between thought and reality in terms of a private language of ideas one might now be tempted to assume that the difficulties in Locke's theory can be avoided by explaining this relation in terms of

the language in which thoughts are expressed and communicated. In the next chapter we consider a particular version of this theory and the account of agency to which it is tied.

Chapter 4

AGENCY AND INNER EPISODES

The internalist conception of thought embodies a certain picture of thinking as a human activity. Typical human activities such as gardening, carpentry, painting pictures and cookery involve the use of tools, instruments and materials and are carried on in appropriate places. This observation tempts one to describe thinking as an activity of operating with signs in the mind. As Wittgenstein puts it, "the existence of the words 'thinking' and 'thought' alongside of the words denoting (bodily) activities, such as writing, speaking, etc, makes us look for an activity, different from these but analogous to them, corresponding to the word 'thinking'."⁽¹⁾ Thus, for Locke the word "thinking" signifies the operation of the mind "about its ideas"⁽²⁾ and, for Wilfrid Sellars, "thinking at the distinctive human level is essentially verbal activity."⁽³⁾ Sellars belongs to the internalist tradition in that the verbal activity constituting thought is normally carried on internally or covertly. The relation between this picture of thinking as an activity and the notion of agency requires discussion.

It was suggested at the beginning of this inquiry that philosophers have interested themselves in the concept of

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "The Blue and Brown Books", p 7

2 Locke, Ibid. 2.9.1

3 Wilfrid Sellars, "Conceptual Change", in "Conceptual Change", ed G Pearce and P Maynard, p 82

thought in connection with two general problems, the possibility of apprehending an intelligible reality and the possibility of intelligent, rational and intentional behaviour. Although Locke is primarily concerned with the first problem he is also deeply interested in the second. The essence of Locke's purpose is to show that "Knowledge and reasoning require precise determinate ideas"⁽¹⁾, but he is aware of the important connection between, on the one hand, a person's knowledge and understanding, and, on the other, his intentional or purposive behaviour.

a) Locke's theory of agency. Locke explains the notion of agency in terms of the mind and its two principal activities or powers. He writes:

"The ideas we have belonging to and peculiar to spirit are thinking and will, or a power of putting body into motion by thought, and which is consequent to it, liberty. For, as body cannot but communicate its motion by impulse to another body, which it meets with at rest, so the mind can put bodies into motion, or forbear to do so, as it pleases. The ideas of existence, duration and mobility are common to them both."⁽²⁾

The important remarks here concern the mind's power of putting body into motion by thought, for Locke is suggesting that thought, as a power or capacity subject to the mind's direction, guides bodily action. The role of thought in determining action is developed further in Locke's discussion of volition:

"Volition, it is plain, is an act of the mind knowingly exerting that domain it takes itself to have over any part of the man, by employing it in, or withholding it from, any particular action. And is that faculty anything more in effect than a power, the power of the mind, to determine its thought to the producing, continuing, or stopping any action as far as it depends on us? For can it be denied that whatever agent has a power to think on its own actions, and to prefer their doing or omission either to other, has the faculty called will? Will, then, is nothing but such a power."⁽³⁾

1 Locke, Ibid 3.10.22.

2 Locke, Ibid.2.23.15

3 Locke, Ibid.2.21.18

An action is performed when the mind directs its thought to its production. The power of willing is intimately related to the power of the mind to "think on its own actions", to deliberate on their appropriateness. The power of the mind to direct its thought to producing an action is causal but it is a relation that obtains in the light of the mind's preference for the action, and this is a matter of deliberation involving desires, motives and reasons. One of Locke's aims in clarifying the relation between thought and action is to show that the performance of an action is not brought about by the performance of a prior action, that "the power to do one action is not operated on by the power of doing another action."⁽¹⁾ It is Locke's argument that the cause of an action is the agent and not, in itself, the thought which he directs towards its performance. The agent performs the action of thinking as well as causing the performance of a bodily action:

"I grant that this or that actual thought may be the occasion of volition, or exercising the power a man has to choose, or the actual choice of the mind, the cause of thinking on this or that thing, as the actual singing of such a tune may be the occasion of dancing such a dance, and the actual dancing of such a dance the occasion of singing such a tune. But in all these it is not one power that operates on another, but it is the mind that operates and exerts these powers; it is the man that does the action, it is the agent that has power, or is able to do. For powers are relations, not agents; and that which has the power or not the power to operate is that alone which is or is not free, and not the power itself. For freedom, or not freedom, can belong to nothing but what has or has not a power to act." (2)

Powers are capacities exercised by agents and it is possible for an agent to think or deliberate without actually performing

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.21.18

2 Locke, Ibid. 2.21.19

the action towards which the thought is directed. It is also possible for an agent to act without prior deliberation, and Locke wrongly describes such actions as involuntary in order to distinguish between acting with and without thought.⁽¹⁾ Nevertheless, thought is a decisive factor in the performance of actions for it is a person's thinking that makes the difference between his performing and not performing an action and between his preferring, and thus performing, one action rather than another. Locke maintains that everyone experiences himself as an agent who can by thought and will cause his own bodily actions, and this he describes as the power of "exciting" motion by thought.⁽²⁾ It is also interesting and relevant to our discussion that Locke speaks of the function of thought in connection with language as well as bodily action:

..... "if I can, by a thought directing the motion of my finger, make it move when it was at rest, or vice versa, it is evident that in respect of that I am free; and if I can, by a like thought of my mind, preferring one to the other, produce either words or silence, I am at liberty to speak or hold my peace; and as far as this power reaches, of acting or not acting, by the power of his own thought preferring either, so far is a man free."⁽³⁾

What we are interested in here is not Locke's description of the conditions under which a man acts freely but the role he ascribes to thought in the originating of action. There is a causal relation between an agent and his actions and the agent's thoughts form part of this relation. What causes my performance of an action, according to Locke, is "a thought of my mind", and this he takes to be a matter of incontrovertible fact.⁽⁴⁾ Agents will

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.21.5

2 Locke, Ibid. 2.32.28

3 Locke, Ibid. 2.21.21

4 Locke, Ibid. 4.10.19

actions by directing their thoughts to the production of actions, willing and thinking being essentially mental and internal. An agent's originating an action is in the nature of an order or command,⁽¹⁾ but without thought there can be no agency in the proper sense.⁽²⁾ What Locke means by saying that action presupposes thought is, of course, that action presupposes ideas. Men have ideas of actions which they retain and use as patterns of the behaviour they initiate. Furthermore, it is only because they have ideas that men can have reasons for their actions. Human beings act on reasons and actions guided by reasons or preferences, those caused by agents, are to be distinguished from bodily movements brought about by "impulse" both from within and from without. The view that it is only beings capable of thought, beings who have reasons or preferences, that can perform actions is brought out clearly in Locke's argument for denying agency to a tennis ball:

"If we inquire into the reason, we shall find it is because we conceive a tennis ball not to think, and consequently not to have any volition, or preference of motion to rest, or vice versa; and therefore has not liberty, is not a free agent; but all its both motion and rest come under our idea of necessary, and are so called." (3)

The remarks we have cited give a clear indication of how Locke understood the relation between thought and action. It is a modified version of this theory, based on the assumption that both verbal and non-verbal behaviour originate from inner or mental activity, that Wilfrid Sellars seeks to defend.

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.21.5

2 Locke, Ibid. 2.21.13

3 Locke, Ibid. 2.21.9

b) Sellars' Myth. Sellars' discussion of thoughts in his essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind"⁽¹⁾ is an attempt to reconcile the classical theory that thoughts are inner episodes, a theory which is found in a fully developed form in Locke's "Essay", "with the idea that the categories of intentionality are, at bottom, semantical categories pertaining to overt verbal performances."⁽²⁾ This attempt is of particular interest because it results in an account of thought and its relation to action, including linguistic action, which is in important respects similar to Locke's. Locke can of course be construed as a representative of the theory that the sense or meaningfulness of overt utterances derives from the thoughts they are said to express and one is not surprised to discover that what Sellars ultimately wishes to defend is a version of the theory that thoughts are inner linguistic episodes rather than acts performed in a language of ideas. This places Sellars in that wing of the internalist tradition which identifies thought in terms of the language of communication.

Before considering how Sellars carries out this task it is worth bearing in mind one of the main criticisms that has been brought to bear on the internalist account of thought and action. A proponent of externalism is likely to argue that if overt actions are caused by prior mental acts then those mental acts must in turn have been brought about by prior actions, and so on,⁽³⁾ Locke tries to avoid this regress by describing the agent

1 All references will be to this article published in Sellars' book "Science, Perception and Reality".

2 Sellars, p 180

3 The theory that volitions are mental acts causally related to overt performances has been decisively criticised by Ryle: "The Concept of Mind", pp 65-66

as the cause of actions rather than mental acts. Nevertheless, the relation between thought and action is a causal relation in that an agent excites bodily motion by directing his thoughts to the performance of particular actions. This suggests that once a judgement or preference has emerged from a person's deliberations the action cannot but follow, except by the intervention of another preference issuing from further deliberations. Now, according to Locke, minds or intellectual agents are "nothing else but modes of thinking and willing",⁽¹⁾ and the substances which exercise these capacities are unknown to us;⁽²⁾ we simply form the idea of mind from the ideas we have derived from mental operations. The regress can only be avoided, then, by declaring the ultimate cause of overt actions, and the mental actions which "excite" them, to be unknowable. Locke attempts to meet the problem of what determines the mind to the performance of a particular action by appealing to the influence of motives, which he defines as states of "uneasiness" or desire, and we must assume that these states, or rather our ideas of them, enter into our deliberations. Our deliberations result in judgements and these give rise to overt actions. Thoughts play a causal role in action in the sense that the mind's directing its thoughts to the production of action is a causal process. The mind or the agent is linked to overt actions by the exercise of mental powers, although the agent is responsible for these mental acts and the overt actions to which they are related. The price Locke has to pay for a causal explanation of the relation between thought and action is the unknowable and wholly mysterious nature of the

1 Locke, Ibid. 2.22.11

2 Locke, Ibid. 2.23.30

agent. One of our tasks now is to consider whether Sellars' account affords a clearer understanding of the notion of agency.

Sellars begins by asserting that the distinction between theoretical and observational discourse is "involved in the logic of concepts pertaining to inner episodes".⁽¹⁾ The "myth" in terms of which he develops his account is intended to show "how the idea that an intersubjective language must be Rylean rests on too simple a picture of the relation of intersubjective discourse to public objects."⁽²⁾ He pictures a people who have already mastered a "Rylean language", "a language of which the fundamental descriptive vocabulary speaks of public properties of public objects located in space and enduring through time."⁽³⁾ Although this is a language of considerable expressive power it does not explain how we are able to talk of inner episodes and immediate experiences. The question Sellars asks is how this language could have been supplemented so that people came to understand each other as beings who think, observe and have feelings and sensations. The first requirement is the resources necessary for people to characterise their utterances in "semantical terms", thus enabling them to say what their utterances mean and whether their statements are true or false.⁽⁴⁾ Given this addition, Sellars argues, "the language of our fictional ancestors has acquired a dimension which gives considerable

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- 1 Sellars, p 183. He qualifies this assertion by saying that he does not wish to maintain that these concepts actually are theoretical concepts.
 - 2 Sellars, p 179
 - 3 Sellars, p 178
 - 4 Sellars assumes that the so-called Rylean language could not admit of such talk. One doubts whether Ryle would have agreed with this.

more plausibility to the claim that they are in a position to talk about thoughts just as we are".⁽¹⁾ This is because intentionality, reference or aboutness is a characteristic of thoughts as well as verbal expressions. Needless to say, the next addition to the original Rylean language is theoretical discourse: the members of the mythical community develop "crude, sketchy and vague theories" to explain each other's behaviour. Yet the example by which Sellars explains the difference between observational and theoretical discourse is puzzling. He writes:

.... "while it would be a category mistake to suppose that the inflammability of a piece of wood is, so to speak, a hidden burning which becomes overt or manifest when the wood is placed on the fire, not all the unobservable episodes we suppose to go on in the world are the offspring of category mistakes. Clearly it is by no means an illegitimate use of 'in' - though it is a use which has its own logical grammar - to say, for example, that 'in' the air around us there are innumerable molecules which, in spite of the observable stodginess of the air, are participating in a veritable turmoil of episodes. Clearly the sense in which these episodes are 'in' the air is to be explained in terms of the sense in which air 'is' a population of molecules, and this, in turn, in terms of the logic of the relation between theoretical and observational discourse." (2)

But it is not clear that the distinction between observational and theoretical discourse allows one to maintain coherently that the molecules which constitute air are also located in the air, as if the air and the molecules are at once identical and related. If science is continuous with common sense, a thesis on which much of Sellars' discussion is based, then the logical difference between "is" and "in" rules against our saying that certain phenomena are located in the substance with which science proclaims them to be identical: if the word "in" has a peculiar

1 Sellars, p 180

2 Sellars, p 183

logical grammar in this context Sellars does not tell us what it is. Presumably the example is intended to draw attention to the idea that thoughts are in the mind in much the way that air consists of a "veritable turmoil of episodes". If this means that minds actually consist of inner episodes then it is confusing to speak of these episodes being located within minds. A particular object cannot be located in itself; we cannot, for instance, speak of the material out of which a jug was made being in the jug in the way we can literally speak of water being in the jug. If the mind is identical with its operations then it is misleading to speak literally of these operations or episodes being located within the mind. Sellars does not see that there is a difficulty over the logical grammar of "in" concerning his example and proceeds to characterise the original "Rylean language" in which these people described themselves and each other. This language is inadequate because it is "restricted to the nontheoretical vocabulary of a behaviouristic psychology."⁽¹⁾ and the task is to dispose of the incompatibility commonly said to hold between methodological behaviourism and commonsense mentalistic psychology.⁽²⁾ The foundation on which his approach rests is expressed in the statement that "The behaviouristic requirement that all concepts should be introduced in terms of a basic vocabulary pertaining to overt behaviour is compatible with the idea that some behaviouristic concepts are to be introduced as theoretical concepts".⁽³⁾ And so Sellars proceeds to

1 Sellars, p 186

2 Sellars does not discuss whether commonsense psychology, whatever it may be, is mentalistic. The original "Rylean language" is, after all, behaviouristic.

3 Sellars, p 185

narrate the central episode in his myth, an episode in which a fictitious genius called Jones endeavours to remedy the limitations of his Rylean language. The narrative runs like this:

"Suppose, now, that in the attempt to account for the fact that his fellow men behave intelligently not only when their conduct is threaded on a string of overt verbal episodes - that is to say, as we would put it, when they 'think out loud' - but also when no detectable verbal output is present, Jones develops a theory according to which overt utterances are but the culmination of a process which begins with certain inner episodes. And let us suppose that his model for these episodes which initiate the events which culminate in overt verbal behaviour is that of overt verbal behaviour itself. In other words, using the language of the model, the theory is to the effect that overt verbal behaviour is the culmination of a process which begins with 'inner speech'."

Sellars does not give a detailed explanation of how Jones arrived at this theory. If we take the narrative literally then it must have been very difficult. Jones would only have formulated the theory that overt human behaviour, both verbal and non-verbal, is the culmination of a process initiated by inner verbal episodes if he already possessed the concept of inner episodes in general and the concept of inner verbal episodes in particular. It is only possible to understand the notion of overt speech in contrast to the notion of inner or covert speech. Furthermore, Jones must have had reasons for taking overt verbal behaviour as his model for introducing inner episodes into his theorising and among these reasons there must have been some conception of the role inner episodes could play in relation to overt actions. It would be extremely odd if a person knew what inner episodes were and did not know what they did or what their effects were. These considerations suggest that Jones' grounds

for developing his theory presuppose that very theory. We notice that in Sellars' narrative the model on which Jones formulated his hypothesis about the occurrence and function of inner episodes was that of overt verbal behaviour, a language which did not at that time contain terms pertaining to the nature and function of thought. But he must have realised that the language he already speaks and understands is overt and, if this is so, he must have understood the meaning of the term "covert speech". If Jones was familiar with the phenomenon of silent speech then he must surely have known whether inner speech episodes initiate processes that culminate in overt linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour. This cannot have been a testable hypothesis; it could at most have been a description of something with which he was perfectly familiar. And yet Sellars wishes to call Jones' description a theory in a strong sense. We are to suppose that Jones has called these discursive entities thoughts and that they are, in true scientific fashion, unobserved, non-empirical, inner episodes: "in these respects they are no worse off than the particles and episodes of physical theory. For these episodes are 'in' language-using animals as molecular impacts are 'in' gases, not as 'ghosts' are in 'machines'."⁽¹⁾ They are posited to explain overt behaviour and Jones has good reason to suppose that they occur and perform their distinctive function because "Their 'purity' is not a metaphysical purity, but, so to speak, a methodological purity."⁽²⁾ It may turn out, however, that such methodological assumptions can hardly be distinguished from metaphysics. Unless it can be shown that the

1 Sellars, p 187

2 Sellars, p 187

occurrence of inner episodes is a necessary and sufficient condition of behaviour that exhibits the character of intelligence then such assumptions lack justification. Sellars has ruled out the possibility of verifying the occurrence of these episodes by any form of empirical investigation; they do not consist of verbal imagery and are "not introduced as immediate experiences."⁽¹⁾

This aspect of Sellars' discussion is extremely difficult to follow. The inner episodes are nothing more than silent utterances, instances of a person saying something to himself, and these are "episodes" with which the vast majority of us are perfectly familiar. And while it may be difficult to say in what sense these acts are experienced it remains true that in performing them a person says something and knows what he says. The truth of the matter is that silent acts of speech are both unlikely and unsuitable candidates for inclusion in the category of theoretical episodes. But neither are they adequate for the purpose of commonsense explanation, and this can be shown by considering the final stage of Sellars' discussion.

Sellars maintains that "once our fictitious ancestor, Jones, has developed the theory that overt verbal behaviour is the expression of thoughts, and taught his compatriots to make use of the theory in interpreting each other's behaviour, it is but a short step to the use of this language in self-description."⁽²⁾ What is of interest here is not merely the final point about the application of the theory in self-description: it is hard to see how a person could be in the position of failing to understand

1 Sellars, p 188

2 Sellars, pp 188-189

how he can utter perfectly intelligible expressions and, for that matter, how he can perform perfectly appropriate actions. A serious question can be raised about the assumption that Jones' theory turns out to be particularly successful in interpreting behaviour. This calls for some account of the criteria of success here and some description of the way the same behaviour⁽¹⁾ was interpreted prior to the development of Jones' theory. We must assume that this theory shows previous forms of interpretation to have been unsuccessful. However, this assumption implies that the people of the Rylean community managed to behave in various ways, in some instances intelligently and in others not, but did not properly understand the actions they performed and how and why they performed them. We take it that this is what Sellars has in mind when he supposes that the members of this community began to develop crude, sketchy and vague theories "to explain why things which are similar in their observable properties differ in their causal properties, and things which are similar in their causal properties differ in their observable properties."⁽²⁾ The "things" in question are, of course, human beings and what Jones wishes to explain is the "fact" that his compatriots manage to behave intelligently even though their behaviour is not "threaded on a string of overt verbal episodes".⁽³⁾ Jones already knows that intelligent behaviour is to be explained by reference to the overt verbal episodes that accompany it, perhaps he has noticed that, as

1 We can assume that Jones' theory does not change the way people behave.

2 Sellars, p 183

3 Sellars, p 186

Wittgenstein put it, "Someone who thinks as he works will intersperse his work with auxiliary activities."⁽¹⁾ Apparently this makes it easy for Jones to arrive at the "theory" that when his compatriots do not accompany their intelligent behaviour with overt speech they do so with covert speech. Jones, who can already distinguish between intelligent and unintelligent behaviour, assumes that an accompaniment of verbal episodes is significantly related to intelligent actions, so it seems a natural step to argue that if the accompaniment is not overt then it must be covert. It is Jones' belief that intelligent behaviour must be threaded on a string of verbal episodes, whether overt or covert, that is at the root of the difficulty. Because he understands the language of the community he must understand that the statements with which people accompany their behaviour are not made without reason,⁽²⁾ that it is in the nature of these statements to influence behaviour. Yet what is puzzling is that Jones at this point in his speculations, suggests an explanation of intelligent behaviour using as a model a form of behaviour, overt linguistic behaviour, which actually belongs to that class of behaviour he wishes to explain. Jones' original account only applied to non-linguistic actions because the accompanying speech episodes could not have been explained by reference to a further verbal accompaniment. It remains difficult to understand why Jones has to explain the possibility of verbal and non-verbal behaviour in a strictly theoretical sense. Jones' theory is derived from the confused belief that the relation

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Zettel", 106

2 We are given no examples of the verbal episodes on which intelligent behaviour is threaded.

between intelligent behaviour and the speech acts that accompany it is causal. When intelligent behaviour⁽¹⁾ occurs without its overt causes he is only moved to conclude that it occurs because of covert causes of a like kind because he already believes that a causal relation obtains between intelligent behaviour and a verbal accompaniment.

Sellars, like his mythical ancestor, does not make it entirely clear whether the theory covers all forms of overt intelligent behaviour. For the most part he speaks of overt discourse as the culmination of a process beginning with inner speech: what prompted Jones to formulate his theory was the fact that people behave intelligently "when no detectable verbal output is present".⁽²⁾ But when Jones does formulate his theory it is "to the effect that overt verbal behaviour is the culmination of a process which begins with 'inner speech'." How strange, then, that Jones' theory is intended to explain the form of behaviour by which he had previously explained overt non-verbal behaviour. Yet Jones' new theory is also intended to explain intelligent non-verbal behaviour: "the true cause of intelligent non-habitual behaviour is 'inner speech'."⁽³⁾ And the only example Sellars offers is of a non-linguistic action: "even when a hungry person overtly says 'Here is an edible object' and proceeds to eat it, the true-theoretical-cause of his eating, given his hunger, is not the overt utterance but the 'inner utterance of this sentence'."⁽⁴⁾ In the light of this example

1 Sellars does not explain what Jones understands as intelligence.

2 Sellars, p 186

3 Sellars, pp 186-187

4 Sellars, p 187

we must assume that the true theoretical cause of any overt action is the inner utterance of a sentence or sentences. Sellars does not give a detailed description of how Jones arrived at this principle and the difficulties it contains are evaded by giving these inner episodes theoretical status. The fact that Jones has abandoned the view that eating an apple is caused by the overt utterance of "Here is an edible object" does not make accepting the inner utterance of this sentence as the cause of the action any the easier. Even if the sentence is uttered silently in the course of deliberation, perhaps as a premiss in a practical argument, we could only maintain that the sentence caused the overt action if we were persuaded that sentences can perform this function; this assumption must be resisted. In any case, it is hardly plausible to claim that a person could not have performed an action unless he had preceded it with the inner utterance of an appropriate sentence. He might have reasoned that since he is hungry, and that since the apple before him is edible, then he will satisfy his hunger by eating it. It does not follow that the reasoning caused his action. To say that his reasoning caused the action implies that he would not have acted in this way unless he had reasoned, and this is false. It is equally false to say that if a person reasoned thus then the action must follow as its effect.

Sellars attempts to protect Jones' from such difficulties by suggesting that his theory "is perfectly compatible with the idea that the ability to have thoughts is acquired in the process of acquiring overt speech and that only after overt speech is well established, can 'inner speech' occur without its overt culmination."⁽¹⁾ This implies that before overt speech is well

1 Sellars, p 188

established inner speech cannot occur without its overt culmination. Perhaps what Sellars means is that only after overt speech is well established can inner speech occur at all. Be that as it may, he does not offer any explanation of how inner speech can eventually occur without its overt effects, of how the causal relation can cease to hold in particular circumstances. It appears, as a refinement of Jones' theory, that a person can silently utter the sentence by which he would normally initiate the performance of an action and yet decide not to perform the action. This implies that at an earlier stage a relation of strict causality did obtain between the inner utterance of, for example, "Here is an edible object" and the eating of apples. This is mistaken. It is quite bizarre to think of someone being taught to cause his eating of apples by the inner utterance of this sentence. It would not take long for him to discover that the action can be performed without being preceded by the sentence. It is not the case that a person, at any stage in his development, performs an act of speech and, as a result, finds himself performing an overt action. According to Sellars, however, if, after overt speech is well established, a person can perform a covert act of speech without its overt culmination it is still the case that when he does perform an action the true theoretical cause of his doing so is an inner act of speech. Although overt speech is biographically or temporally prior to thought, thought or inner speech is theoretically and thus causally prior to overt behaviour, a distinction which is similar to the one Descartes drew between the ordo cognoscendi, the order of discovery, and the ordo essendi, the order of being or reality. The fact that Sellars retains the notion that overt behaviour

has inner causes and that these causes are acts of using signs places him within the internalist tradition of conceiving the relation between thought and action. Where Locke, for example, defined thoughts as acts performed on ideas Sellars defines them as linguistic episodes. The theoretical status he ascribes to them does not remove the puzzling and paradoxical features of the theory. For example, the idea that an overt action is the culmination of a process initiated by an inner act of speech suggests that a person performs an inner act of speech but not its effect, the overt action. What is paradoxical is the possibility that this is how human beings might theoretically understand their actions. Although Sellars believes the contrary, this is plainly a theory without application. He believes that once Jones has taught his compatriots to apply the theory in interpreting each other's behaviour, the theory can be applied in self-description:

"Thus, when Tom, watching Dick, has behavioural evidence which warrants the use of the sentence (in the language of the theory) 'Dick is thinking "P"' (or 'Dick is thinking that P'), Dick, using the same behavioural evidence, can say, in the language of the theory, 'I am thinking "P"' (or 'I am thinking that P'). And it now turns out - need it have? - that Dick can be trained to give reasonably reliable self-descriptions, using the language of the theory, without having to observe his overt behaviour. Jones brings this about, roughly, by applauding utterances by Dick of 'I am thinking that P' when the behavioural evidence strongly supports the theoretical statement 'Dick is thinking that P'; and by frowning on utterances of 'I am thinking that P', when the evidence does not support this theoretical statement. Our ancestors begin to speak of the privileged access each of us has to his own thoughts. What began as a language with a purely theoretical use has gained a reporting role." (1)

There are a number of ideas in this account which require scrutiny.

1 Sellars, p 189

First, the idea of the behavioural evidence by which statements like "Dick is thinking P" and "I am thinking P" are verified. If thinking consists of covert acts of speech it is wrong to argue that the only evidence people have for believing that they perform these acts is their overt behaviour, behaviour which is in many instances the culmination of a process which begins with these covert acts. Sellars has already admitted that thoughts can occur without their overt culminations. How, in such cases, can a person know that he is thinking, and what he is thinking, when an important source of evidence is unavailable to him? The fact that Tom contradicts Dick's report when the behavioural evidence does not support it suggests that Dick does not know that he is thinking something. How a person can be trained to report his thoughts without having to observe his overt behaviour remains a mystery.

Second, the idea that Jones' theory acquires theoretical currency. Jones trains his compatriots to use sentences like "Dick is thinking that P" by applauding them when the behavioural evidence supports their judgements. The evidence reveals that Dick is thinking but also what he is thinking, and this, the example suggests, might take place before Dick has been trained to report his own thoughts, might take place before even Tom has been taught to do this. Although this is most implausible, it is not the main question. The main question is whether Jones' theory is a necessary addition to the Rylean language his compatriots already possess, indeed whether Jones' theory distorts the understanding his community has already achieved. Jones does not actually teach his compatriots to think and they are able to perform perfectly intelligible and intelligent actions before

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Jones confronts them with his theory. They now acquire a "theoretical" understanding of their behaviour, particularly their overt utterances. What casts doubt on the story is that the grounds on which the theory is accepted are those forms of behaviour these people can already accomplish. Sellars, rather cunningly, contrives his narrative by withholding from Jones' community the possession of the concept of thought, and this need not have been the case. It is perfectly possible to imagine Sellars' ancestors applying the concept of thought correctly prior to Jones' theory, this being implicit in the fact that Jones begins his theorising by perceiving a connection between what people say and how they act. Sellars, on the other hand, appears to assume that the meaning of the word "thought" is to be explained, perhaps exclusively, by reference to inner episodes, silent acts of speech. He fails to provide convincing arguments for accepting that this is so and it may well be the case that Jones was only puzzled in Sellars' narrative. As Norman Malcolm has pointed out, the fact that people sometimes say things silently to themselves or sometimes have "inward thoughts" is a truism rather than a matter for philosophical conjecture.⁽¹⁾ It is certainly not a scientific discovery.

Third, the idea that the theoretical language of inner episodes acquires a reporting role. Jones teaches his compatriots to report their thoughts without having to observe their overt behaviour. Sellars' description of how this is done makes this possibility wholly mysterious. If the acts that are reported are themselves unobservable, and that after all is what is meant by calling them theoretical, then a person has no evidence whatever on which to base his report. It is true that we have no evidence

1 Norman Malcolm, "Memory and Mind", p 247

for saying that we have said something to ourselves other than our having said it, and if this is Sellars' point it is hard to see why these "episodes" should be given theoretical status. It is also hard to see why we should accept the claim that although the concepts of thought and inner episodes have a reporting use in the absence of behavioural evidence one can still insist "that the fact that overt behaviour is evidence for these episodes is built into the very logic of these concepts, just as the fact that the observable behaviour of gases is evidence for molecular episodes is built into the very logic of molecule talk."⁽¹⁾

Jones and indeed the historian of his scientific achievement have not seen that the behaviour of human beings differs in kind from the behaviour of gases and that the chief point of difference is that human beings speak a language. The speaking of language has a special status within human behaviour the nature of which forbids any meaningful comparison with the observable behaviour of gases. If his compatriots took Jones seriously and accepted that the theoretical causes of their behaviour are the utterances of inner sentences, they would have quickly realised that there are a large number of actions which they know how to cause but not perform. There are a large number of actions which a person must learn how to perform, instruction and practice being necessary to achieve the skill exhibited in their execution. We learn to perform actions intelligently in the process of learning to perform them and our understanding of when the performance of particular actions is appropriate is inherent to our understanding the actions.

1 Sellars, p 189

Sellars pays insufficient attention to the question of what it is to perform an action, this attention being necessary to a consideration of the further question of what it is for an action to be performed in the light of thought or deliberation. Neither does he develop an adequate account of the status of language in relation to non-linguistic behaviour: Jones' theory applies indifferently to linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour and this is one of its most serious shortcomings. The theory also applies indifferently to thinking thoughts, "Dick is thinking that P", and to having thoughts, "Dick has the thought that P" or "Dick thinks P". There is an important difference between these and they are in part to be distinguished by the fact that "thinking that P" need not be explained in terms of language. What we have in mind has been clearly expressed by Norman Malcolm:

"On the basis circumstances and behaviour we say that a man 'thought that P', without implying that he thought of P or formulated P, or that P occurred to him or was in his thoughts." (1)

I can also say of my dog, when it behaves in a certain way, that it thinks it is going to be fed, but my dog does not possess a language and cannot formulate thoughts.⁽²⁾ The notions of "having the thought that P", "thinking P" or "formulating the thought that P", on the other hand, do need to be explained in terms of the possession of language, and this will be given further consideration.

The position we shall defend is that human action does not stand in a causal relation to thoughts and certainly not to thoughts conceived as inner verbal episodes. While the intelligibility of actions presupposes a language which contains descriptions

1 Norman Malcolm, "Thoughtless Brutes" in "Thought and Knowledge", pp 50-51

2 Davidson would deny that the dog thinks it is going to be fed. Thinking presupposes that a creature has the concept of thought and "only a creature that can interpret speech can have the concept of a thought". "Thought and Talk", p 22.

of the actions, sentences containing those descriptions are not causally related to the actions. As we have said, it might well be the case that a person can correctly apply the description of an action in a sentence and yet not be able to perform the action let alone perform it with intelligence in appropriate circumstances. An adequate account of human action shows that the performance of an action is erroneously described as the effect of a preceding cause, a claim which will be discussed in a later chapter.

The final issue to be considered here is the other aspect of the internalist framework retained by Sellars, namely that the true theoretical cause of an action is the covert rather than the overt utterance of the appropriate sentence. Is the difference between inner and overt discourse such that only inner utterances are the causes of actions? One cannot think of any considerations that would establish this to be the case, ultimately because it is an error to conceive the utterance of a sentence as a cause. Sellars is aware of the confusion in the conception of inner speech as "the wagging of a hidden tongue": inner speech, he states, is "real" speech, just as one's utterances in a conversation is "real" speech. But what, in that case, is the difference? The only argument that is given is that only inner, unobserved utterances can be described as theoretical episodes, and these are introduced on the model of overt verbal episodes. This entails that the overt utterance of a sentence would not secure the effect brought about by the covert utterance of the same sentence. We do not intend to argue that the overt utterance of a sentence could cause the performance of an action because we do not believe that actions are the products of

causal processes, either covert or overt. It is certainly possible for a person to habitually utter "Here is an edible object". just before eating an apple, but this possibility does not entail that he could not eat the apple unless he preceded it with the inner utterance of this or any other sentence. Even if a person is given to silently rehearsing what he is going to say, his silent rehearsal is not the cause of his public performance. Given that a person can only acquire the ability to speak silently "in the process of acquiring overt speech" it is clearly not the case that a person acquires the ability to speak silently in order to cause overt utterances. Furthermore, the fact that inner utterances are themselves human actions suggests that they must in turn be caused by the performance of prior acts of speech. Sellars attempts to avoid the regress this entails by suggesting that the concepts of behaviour theory may turn out to involve some identification with "concepts pertaining to the functioning of anatomical structures",⁽¹⁾ although it cannot be assumed that the theory he has developed is committed ab initio to this identification. The difference between Locke and Sellars on this matter is not great; the substances which exercise mental capacities may be knowable, not to us but to science. If this should turn out to be the case then a causal account of the relation between thought and action would acquire further support.

In this chapter we have criticised Sellars' attempt to retain certain essential features of the internalist conception

1 Sellars, p 185

of thought and its relation to action. Sellars appeals to these features of internalism to correct what he takes to be the inadequacy of Ryle's rejection of the explanatory role of inner episodes. We might now have reason to think that Ryle's work does after all provide an adequate account of thought and action. The next task is to consider whether this is so.

Chapter 5

RYLE: THE EXTERNALIST ALTERNATIVE (1)

One of the similarities between Sellars' theory and what Ryle describes as "the intellectualist legend" is that Sellars retains the view that human actions are the observable effects of inner episodes. The following description could, without drastic modification, be applied to Sellars' theory as well as to older forms of internalism:

"Minds, as the whole legend describes them, are what must exist if there is to be a causal explanation of the behaviour of human bodies; and minds, as the legend describes them, live on the floor of existence defined as being outside the causal system to which bodies belong." (2)

Of course, if it turns out that the concepts of behaviour theory do involve some identification with concepts pertaining to anatomical structures then minds can be brought within the causal system to which human bodies belong. The possibility of this identification raises important issues which fall outside the scope of this inquiry. What we are interested in is Ryle's attack on the philosophical appeal to mental episodes. He rejects a causal theory of thought and action because there are no mental, inner or occult episodes as defined by the champions

1 Towards the end of his philosophical career Ryle produced a number of papers on the nature of thinking. While these papers are of great interest the discussions they contain generally fall outside the scope of this inquiry and the conclusions Ryle draws are based on assumptions that pervade "The Concept of Mind". These papers have not been explicitly considered because what little Ryle has to say in them about the relation between thought and action had already been said in one way or another in "The Concept of Mind".

2 Gilbert Ryle, "The Concept of Mind", p 65. All references will be to the Penguin edition published in 1963.

of internalism. We do say things to ourselves but this ability does not have the significance Sellars ascribes to it. According to Ryle, positing the existence and function of mental episodes is born of misunderstanding the language in which people describe and explain each other's behaviour. The internalist's mistake is to think that because there is a causal relation between thought and action there must be mental episodes capable of playing the required causal role. Locke⁽¹⁾ and, in some respects, Sellars wrongly assume that "The difference between the human behaviours which we describe as intelligent and those which we describe as unintelligent must be a difference in their causation."⁽²⁾ Ryle, on the other hand, claims that since there are no inner or occult episodes in the internalist or intellectualist sense then it is misleading to speak of a relation between thought and action; it is talk of such a relation that prompts the appeal to occult episodes. A person's behaviour is not the evidence of his thinking; in an important sense, it is his thinking. We must now consider the account which for Sellars presents "too simple a picture of the relation between intersubjective discourse and public objects", and in doing so we must pay careful attention to how Ryle treats the notion that thought makes a difference to a person's behaviour.

(a) Ryle on the Intellectualist Legend. After establishing the origins of the "intellectualist legend"⁽³⁾ Ryle introduces the

1 See Locke, 2.21.21

2 Ryle, p 20

3 He also refers to this theory as "Descartes' Myth".

distinction between knowing how and knowing that. It is in connection with this distinction that Ryle takes up the question of how the relation between thought and action is to be understood. His purpose is "to show that when we describe people as exercising qualities of mind, we are not referring to occult episodes of which their overt acts and utterances are effects; we are referring to those overt acts and utterances themselves."⁽¹⁾

This is a clear statement of the externalist standpoint. The difference between describing an action as performed absent-mindedly or deliberately does not consist "in the absence or presence of an implicit reference to some shadow-action covertly prefacing the overt action. They consist, on the contrary, in the presence or absence of certain sorts of testable explanatory-cum-predicative assertions."⁽²⁾ When we describe an action as intentional, thoughtful or clever we are not referring to hidden episodes from which the action derived its character but to the actual character of the action. This implies that our criteria for the correct ascription of such predicates are observable features of human performances. What are Ryle's reasons for this view?

Ryle's objection to the doctrine of occult episodes is based on the language in terms of which human actions are described and understood. The intellectualist legend is founded on a misunderstanding of this language and Ryle wishes to show that at the heart of this misunderstanding lies the fact that

1 Ryle, p 26

2 Ryle, p 26

"both philosophers and laymen alike treat intellectual operations as the core of mental conduct; that is to say, they tend to define all other mental-conduct concepts in terms of concepts of cognition."⁽¹⁾ This is to suppose "that the primary exercise of minds consists in finding the answers to questions and that their other occupations are merely applications of considered truths or even regrettable distractions from their consideration".⁽²⁾

Accordingly, to speak of mental activity is primarily to refer to that class of operations which we call theorising, the goal of which is the establishment of propositional knowledge. This emphasis on the theoretical gave rise to the pernicious doctrine that human actions possessed the characteristics ascribed to them by such terms as "intelligent", "rational", "clever", and the like, by virtue of the propositional knowledge the agents of the actions had attained;

"Other human powers could be classed as mental only if they could be shown to be somehow piloted by the intellectual grasp of true propositions. To be rational was to be able to recognise truths and the connections between them. To act rationally was, therefore, to have one's non-theoretical propensities controlled by one's apprehension of truths about the conduct of life."⁽³⁾

This doctrine is misleading. There are many forms of action to which we correctly ascribe mental predicates even though they are not, in the intellectualist sense, mental operations nor the effects of such operations. Intelligent and thoughtful behaviour is not the outcome of theorising; theorising is itself a human activity which can be either intelligently or stupidly conducted,

1 Ryle, p 27

2 Ryle, p 27

3 Ryle, p 27

and Ryle recommends that we are to understand the apprehension of truths in terms of intelligence rather than intelligence in terms of the apprehension of truths. Ryle does not explicitly deny that there is an important relation between a person's knowledge and the actions he performs, although his discussion does suggest that his interest lies mainly in the latter rather than in the former. In ordinary life "we are much more concerned with people's competences than with their cognitive repertoires, with their operations than with the truths that they learn."⁽¹⁾ Now Ryle's overriding interest in the ability to perform actions and participate in activities over the "stocks of truths" that people acquire indicates one of the deficiencies in his account. Although he recognises that theorising is a human activity subject to the application of mental concepts, he does not fully recognise that the possibility and the significance of applying these concepts requires a special consideration of the status of language, a status which is in part made distinctive by its being at once a form of action and a condition of apprehending the identities of actions. Locke recognised the conditional status of language and rightly connected it with the epistemological or cognitive aspect of thought. He also perceived that there is an important connection between the cognitive aspect of thought and the human capacity to perform rational and intelligent actions. Ryle is correct to deny that the relation between thought and action is causal but wrong in underestimating the relation between a person's knowledge and his ability to perform rational and intelligent actions. We rightly speak of thought in connection with the achievement of knowledge and understanding and we rightly

1 Ryle, p 28

speak of a person's thought making a difference to how he acts. The problem is to understand the connection between them.

Ryle asks what is involved in describing people as knowing how to perform actions thoughtfully and intelligently. Part of what we mean is that when people perform these actions they do so correctly, efficiently or successfully and this means that their performances meet appropriate standards or criteria. Such actions are not performed mechanically or as a matter of routine:

"To be intelligent is not merely to satisfy criteria, but to apply them; to regulate one's actions and not merely to be well-regulated. A person's performance is described as careful or skilful, if in his operations he is ready to detect and correct lapses, to repeat and improve upon success, to profit from the examples of others and so forth. He applies criteria in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right." (1)

Champions of the intellectualist legend, however, insist that the agent must first go through the intellectual performance of avowing to himself certain propositions about the action in order to be able to perform it intelligently. This means that "To do something thinking what one is doing is, according to this legend, always to do two things: namely, to consider certain appropriate propositions, or prescriptions, and to put into practice what these propositions or prescriptions enjoin. It is to do a bit of theory and then to do a bit of practice."⁽²⁾ Ryle is not denying that prior deliberation can influence a person's behaviour. He is arguing that deliberation is not essentially or necessarily that from which actions derive their intelligent character. Ryle's main objection to the intellectualist position is this:

1 Ryle, p 29

2 Ryle, p 36

"The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle." (1)

If we are to explain an intelligent act as the consequent of a prior act of considering a relevant rule or maxim, we are faced with the question of how a person is able to consider the appropriate rule rather than all the others which are inappropriate or irrelevant. Taking the intellectualist's position seriously forces us to admit that the selection of the appropriate rule was itself the result of a prior process of reflection. It would seem that for a person's reflection to be intelligent "he must first reflect how best to reflect how to act", and Ryle concludes that "The endlessness of this implied regress shows that the application of the criteria of appropriateness does not entail the occurrence of a process of considering this criterion."⁽²⁾ We are, therefore, to reject the theory that "a performance of any sort inherits its title to intelligence from some anterior internal operation of planning what to do."⁽³⁾ Yet people do reason about their actions prior to performing them: we often say, for instance, that a person's actions were carefully and thoughtfully planned. Ryle's conclusion only follows from his criticisms of the caricature which he describes as the intellectualist legend. His objections are persuasive because the legend is presented in such a way that it neatly fits the criticism. Our interest at this point is whether Ryle can do

1 Ryle, p 31

2 Ryle, p 31

3 Ryle, p 32

philosophical justice to the notion that thought or deliberation can make a difference to action. His criticisms point inevitably to the externalist position and we must now consider what this position amounts to.

Ryle argues that since the intelligent character of an action is not derived from a prior process of considering or planning the intelligence we ascribe to an action lies in the action itself:

"What distinguishes sensible from silly operations is not their parentage but their procedure, and this holds no less for intellectual than for practical performances." (1)

Ryle admits that there may be no observable difference between an act that is tactful or witty and an act that is tactless or humourless, to be sure, one and the same remark can be appreciated as witty in one context and condemned as tactless in another. This does not entail that the difference is constituted by "the performance or non-performance of some extra secret acts".⁽²⁾ Furthermore, the uses of "mind" and "mental" in talking of what a person does "in his head" cannot be adduced to support the claims that the thinking of thoughts is the primary activity of minds and that the mind is the inner location of this activity. Conducting one's thoughts silently in auditory word-images is a technical trick which secures secrecy, but the difference between thought and action is not a difference between silent and audible speech. The fact that a person says things to himself does not entail that he is thinking and Ryle correctly points out that "The distinction between talking sense and babbling, or between thinking what one is saying and merely saying, cuts across the

1 Ryle, p 32

2 Ryle, p 33

distinction between talking aloud and talking to oneself. What makes a verbal operation an exercise of intellect is independent of what makes it public or private."⁽¹⁾ What Ryle is saying here is important, although whether he is able to account for the sense in which a "verbal operation" is an exercise of intellect is another question.

Ryle now turns to the task of showing that the ability to apply rules and criteria is exercised, not in the mind, but in the very conduct of the performances they apply to. He supports this position by arguing that we do not learn to participate in activities by learning the theories which govern them. We do not say, for example, that a person can play chess if all he can do is to recite the rules of chess. It can only be said that he can play the game if he can make the appropriate moves:

"His knowledge how is exercised primarily in the moves that he makes, or concedes, and in the moves that he avoids or vetoes. So long as he can observe the rules, we do not care if he cannot also formulate them. It is not what he does in his head or with his tongue, but what he does on the board that shows whether or not he knows the rules in the executive way of knowing how to apply them." (2)

What Ryle appears to be describing here is a fairly basic ability to play chess and we want to ask whether the description can account for the way the brilliant chess master is able to employ and bring off his ingenious strategies. We know that there is more to this than merely playing according to the rules, that it involves great imagination and deliberation of a complex and sophisticated kind. Certainly, the fruits of the chess master's deliberations are to be explained by reference to what he achieves or fails to

1 Ryle, p 35

2 Ryle, p 41

achieve on the chess board. But there is a strong temptation to say that the chess player's achievements are the fruits of his thought and that his thought, while not conducted independently of the game, is not conducted on the chess board. In connection with this example Ryle's statement that overt intelligent performances actually are the workings of minds⁽¹⁾ does not ring true. We draw attention to this point, not because Ryle could not explain it, but because he tends to minimise the role and the importance of deliberation.

Ryle now introduces the central principle in his alternative to the intellectualist legend, the idea that mental concepts are dispositional or semi-dispositional in character.

(b) Dispositions and Occurrences. To say that an object has a dispositional property is to say that in given conditions this disposition either will or is likely to be actualised. A statement ascribing a dispositional property to an object has much in common with a statement subsuming the object under a law.⁽²⁾ Whenever we ascribe a dispositional property to an object we are implicitly conveying a hypothetical proposition to the effect that the disposition in question is or is likely to be actualised. However, not all dispositions are of this simple kind. The "higher-grade" dispositions of human beings "are, in general, not single-track dispositions, but dispositions the exercises of which are indefinitely heterogeneous."⁽³⁾ Human beings actualise their dispositions in many different ways in different circumstances. The sentences in which we apply words like "intelligent",

1 Ryle, p 57

2 Ryle, p 43

3 Ryle, p 44

"thoughtful", "clever" and "shrewd" are not untestable categorical propositions about the occurrence of inner episodes but testable hypothetical or semi-hypothetical propositions about what a person will or is likely to do in specific situations. Philosophers have been prone to say, quite erroneously, that human dispositions have uniform exercises. Thus, the dispositional sense of "believe", for example, is explained as a "one-pattern intellectual process". They postulate "that, for example, a man who believes that the earth is round must from time to time be going through some unique process of cognizing, 'judging', or internally re-asserting, with a feeling of confidence, 'The earth is round'."⁽¹⁾ This is something of a caricature and a rather uncharitable one. It is true that we would not say that a person believed that the earth was round if all he could do was to utter this sentence parrot-fashion: having this belief, as Ryle points out, requires that he is able to infer, imagine, say and do a number of other things as well. But it is also true that he is able to say that the earth is round, which is an act of judgement. As Geach remarks, when a person puts a belief into words, "not parrotwise but with consideration", there occurs a mental act of judgement.⁽²⁾ Such acts are not the effects of antecedent mental episodes but they are, for all that, episodic. Although a person's belief does not consist exclusively in the ability to perform an act of judgement, it is one of the criteria for ascribing a belief to a person and it is an important one. In particular, the ability is a condition of a person "having" a thought in the sense that a thought "occurs" to him or that he

1 Ryle, p 44

2 Peter Geach, "Mental Acts", p 9

formulates or comes to a thought in the course of his reflections and deliberations. Although Ryle is right to insist that believing involves more than being able to utter a sentence expressing the belief he does not distinguish sharply between believing, for instance, and other exercises of intelligence. In judging whether a performance is intelligent we have to look beyond the performance itself and in doing so "We are considering his abilities and propensities of which this performance was an actualisation. Our inquiry is not into causes (and a fortiori not into occult causes), but into capacities, skills, habits, liabilities and bents".⁽¹⁾ In trying to determine whether a marksman's bull's eye is a case of skill or sheer luck we have to take account of his subsequent shots, his past record and his own comments on his performance. Our task is not to determine the occurrence or non-occurrence of "ghostly processes" but "the truth or falsehood of certain 'could' and 'would' propositions and certain other particular applications of them".⁽²⁾ Similar considerations are involved in describing a person as arguing intelligently. The person who argues intelligently "has to meet new objections, interpret new evidence and make connections between elements in the situation which had not previously been coordinated".⁽³⁾ That he is thinking what he is doing is shown by the fact that he is innovating, "on guard" against ambiguities, "on the look out" for opportunities to exploit them, "taking care" to avoid fallacious inferences, "alert" to possible objections, and "resolute" in moving the course of his argument to the required conclusion.

1 Ryle, p 45

2 Ryle, p 46

3 Ryle, p 47

Such terms are semi-dispositional and semi-episodic in that "They do not signify the concomitant occurrence of extra but internal operations, nor mere capacities and tendencies to perform further operations if the need for them should arise, but something between the two."⁽¹⁾ The careful driver, for example, is not continually planning to meet all the contingencies that might arise, and neither is he merely competent to meet them when they do. His readiness to deal with emergencies is shown in how he deals with them and also in the way he normally drives, when he is not confronted by emergencies. Similarly, the person who reasons intelligently follows the rules of logic, not in the sense that he considers their prescriptions before performing the operations they govern, but in the sense that the rules are embodied in what he does when he is taking care. The rules are not external to his operations and to reason correctly and intelligently is to perform one form of operation rather than two, "to perform one operation in a certain manner or with a certain style or procedure, and the description of this modus operandi has to be in terms of such semi-dispositional, semi-episodic epithets as 'alert', 'careful', 'critical', 'ingenious', 'logical', etc."⁽²⁾

Now the fact that what is true of arguing intelligently is also true of other intelligent operations suggests that, for Ryle, the differences between intellectual and what we would normally call non-intellectual operations are relatively unimportant.⁽³⁾ It is an important part of Ryle's case that activities like

1 Ryle, p 47

2 Ryle, p 48

3 He might well have described them as differences in degree rather than in kind.

driving, marksmanship, boxing, and the like, are, in a real sense, intellectual. All but the most unsophisticated knacks involve some intellectual capacity. The ability to act according to instructions presupposes that one has understood the instructions and this shows that "some propositional competence is a condition of acquiring any of these competences".⁽¹⁾ It does not show, of course, that overt intellectual actions need to be accompanied by the exercise of intelligent competences. Champions of the intellectualist legend commit the error of postulating internal shadow-performances as the real carriers of the intelligence which we ordinarily ascribe to overt acts and assume that this is a cogent explanation of what gives an overt action its intelligent character: "They have described the overt act as an effect of a mental happening, though they stop short, of course, before raising the next question - what makes the postulated mental happenings manifestations of intelligence and not mental deficiency."⁽²⁾

What Ryle erects on the ruins of the intellectualist legend is the doctrine we have loosely described as externalism. At the heart of this doctrine is the claim that in describing a person's mental activity "We are describing certain phases of his one career, namely we are describing the ways in which parts of his conduct are managed."⁽³⁾ The doctrine is explicitly one of accounting for the way a person's behaviour is to be explained and, therefore, one of elucidating the language in which mental predicates are applied:

1 Ryle, p 48

2 Ryle, p 49

3 Ryle, p 49

"The sense in which we 'explain' his actions is not that we infer to occult causes, but that we subsume under hypothetical and semi-hypothetical propositions. The explanation is not of the type 'the glass broke because a stone hit it', but more nearly of the different type 'the glass broke when the stone hit it because it was brittle'." (1)

The statements which describe and explain a person's actions refer to dispositions and are confirmed or disconfirmed by the behaviour which is the actualisation of the dispositions. We do not wish to argue that Ryle's account is deficient because statements like "He scored a bull's eye because he was skilful" and "He got his sums right because he was careful" are unavoidably causal. His arguments effectively undermine the view that thoughts are essentially inner episodes causally related to overt performances. Introducing "intellectual competences" as theoretical episodes cuts no ice because it is the causal role ascribed to such episodes that Ryle is attacking: the terminology in which they are introduced is of little consequence. Yet Ryle's positive account raises issues which it cannot adequately resolve. Some of these are issues which the internalist, causal theory claimed to have settled, and in the context of this inquiry the most significant of these is the possibility of accounting for the forms of behaviour some of which are correctly described as being influenced by thought. According to Ryle what we have described as the cognitive or epistemological aspect of thought consists of operations of more or less the same status as other operations which can exhibit qualities of intellect. Reasoning does not differ in kind from, say, driving a car in the sense that one can engage in both activities carefully, cleverly, mindfully, stupidly, and so on. This indicates that Ryle is reluctant to

1 Ryle, p 49

accord the possession of language special importance, and one suspects that the reluctance derives from his aversion to the "intellectualist" idea that one of the most important activities of mind is the thinking of thoughts, the exercise of propositional competence. Ryle's positive account presupposes an argument which it nowhere supports or justifies. The argument, sketched at the beginning of this chapter, is to the effect that if there are no essentially mental episodes of the sort postulated by the internalist then one cannot speak in any meaningful way of a relation between thought and action. The argument, more fully expressed, is this:

- (1) A relation between thought and action cannot be other than causal.
- (2) A causal relation between thought and action is a relation between inner episodes and overt effects.
- (3) There are no inner episodes of the required kind.
- (4) There is no relation between thought and action.

The main difference between Ryle's position and Jones' theory, as narrated by Sellars, is that Jones believes that there must be such episodes and this because he assumes that the relation between thought and action cannot be other than causal. One need not make any such assumption. In certain contexts we may speak of a relation between thought and action in the sense that referring to a person's deliberations as influencing and making a difference to his behaviour is a correct and intelligible way of speaking. This way of speaking does not entail that thought and action are causally related.

(c) The Limitations of Externalism. Ryle repeatedly affirms that a person's capacities, skills, habits, liabilities and bent are to be understood as the actualisations of dispositions. An

explanation of a thoughtful or considered performance is to the effect that the person has a certain disposition which the action and the manner of its performance actualises. Ryle is right to draw our attention to the fact that we talk of human actions in terms of dispositions. Whether the dispositional statements in which Ryle is interested explain human behaviour is another matter.

Defining an intelligent or stupid action as the actualisation of a disposition is misleading. A person may have a number of dispositions but we only know that he has because he is able to perform the actions which exhibit them. We do not, however, explain the possibility and purpose of these actions by ascribing to him the dispositions. To say that a person actualised a disposition is just to say in very artificial terms that he performed an action, and to ascribe a disposition is to say that a person performs certain actions in appropriate circumstances. Dispositional terms like "thoughtful" and "clever" describe the character of certain actions and knowing how to apply them entails knowing which features of the actions serve as criteria for their correct application. By specifying these features we may explain the use of such terms but we do not explain how he was able to perform the action or why he did so. One need hardly point out that these are questions of a different type, that the former is a philosophical question while the latter is not. But it is also true that a philosophical discussion of action must take account of the understanding people have of why actions are performed. In order to understand an action as thoughtful or clever a person must know which features of the action constitute its thoughtfulness or cleverness in relation to the circumstances in which it is

performed. In this connection Ryle is prone to exaggerate the importance of observable features of actions and the manner and style of their performance. The cleverness of a move in chess, for instance, is exhibited in the context of the game but not, strictly speaking, in an observable feature of the action. We explain its cleverness by reference to the current state of play: we may point out to a beginner the advantages this move promotes and indicate the disasters other moves would have brought about. In doing so we are presenting the considerations which informed the intelligent thinking the move exhibited. If the beginner wishes to know how the player was able to make this move he is likely to be satisfied when we tell him that it was the ultimate product of good instruction, considerable experience and concentrated thought. Nothing is added by saying that the player had acquired the disposition to make clever moves; given that he has acquired the disposition he must still be able to perform the actions by which we tell that he has this disposition. It would seem that we do not so much explain an action by reference to a disposition but that we explain a disposition by reference to certain actions. To say that a person did certain things because he has a disposition to do so is not an explanation, certainly not a complete one.

These considerations point to the fact that Ryle has overlooked something of importance about the character of dispositional statements. It is certainly true that the sentence "The glass broke when the stone hit it, because it was brittle" does help to explain why the glass broke by specifying something about the nature of glass. Its brittleness does not cause the glass to break; it is rather something by reference to which we explain

how a causal relation obtained in this particular instance. This does not preclude the further question of why glass is brittle, a question that is answered by specifying the properties by virtue of which glass is brittle. In doing this we are not, as Ryle would admit, specifying properties by virtue of which glass has the additional property of brittleness. The difficulty with a dispositional explanation of human action is that it prompts one to ask what the thoughtfulness or cleverness of an action consisted in. It is this question that has tempted philosophers to postulate the occurrence of inner episodes and Ryle rightly insists that this temptation must be resisted. Ryle comes close to accounting for how it is possible for a person to perform thoughtful and clever actions when he emphasises the importance of instruction and training in the development of intelligence. Intelligent capacities are built up by training and this "involves the stimulation by criticism and example of the pupil's own judgement. He learns to do things thinking what he is doing, so that every operation performed is itself a new lesson to him how to perform better."⁽¹⁾ A person's performances improve by his learning to exercise care, vigilance, attention, and the like. Yet these are dispositional terms which describe the features of actions by which we recognise that a person is "thinking what he is doing". A description of the way intelligent capacities are developed does not in itself tell us how a person is able to act subsequently. Just as the ascription of a disposition does not fully explain how it is possible to perform the actions which are its actualisations, so a description of the origin and development of dispositions leaves open the question

1 Ryle, p 42

of how it is possible for a person to respond intelligently to training. A person is himself engaged in the business of building up intelligent capacities: they are not built up for him.

The notion that training involves the stimulation of the pupil's own judgement, however, suggests how a fuller account of intelligent action may be developed. It indicates that the possibility of intelligent action involves the capacity for making judgements more fundamentally than Ryle cares to admit, and the capacity for making judgements is one of the most important ideas by which we explain the nature of thought. This implies that the exercise of intellectual capacities has a distinctive status in relation to the forms of intelligent behaviour to which Ryle is inclined to assimilate it. The nature of the intellectual, however, can only be explained in terms of the possession of language. Ryle admits, perhaps with some reluctance, that the learning of all but the most unsophisticated knacks requires some intellectual capacity or propositional competence. But the role of the intellectual in relation to the intelligent goes much deeper than Ryle concedes. He mistakenly assumes that because the theory that intelligent operations derive their intelligent character from antecedent intellectual operations is a confusion,⁽¹⁾ then intellectual operations have more or less the same status as intelligent, non-intellectual operations such as gardening, marksmanship or cooking. Intellectual operations like reasoning and calculating are species of the intelligent: "theorizing is one practice among others and is itself intelligently or stupidly conducted."⁽²⁾ But to define the intellectual in terms of the

1 He is, of course, correct to deny that an exercise of intellect is essentially inner or private.

2 Ryle, p 27

intelligent is to dissolve the relation between thought and action and to obscure the connection between the cognitive aspect of thought and deliberation. It is because Ryle cannot conceive the relation between thought and action to be other than as the intellectualist legend proclaims that the notion of a disposition plays such a pivotal role in his alternative account. If our criticisms of this role are sound then the dispositions in which Ryle is primarily interested stand as much in need of explanation as the actions which exhibit them. If it is granted that a person can only actualise a disposition by performing an action, and that a disposition is nothing over and above the capacity to actualise it, then it follows either that we can only explain the possession of a disposition by explaining its actualisations or that we can only explain the actualisations by explaining the possession of the disposition; and these come to the same thing. Dispositional statements do not in themselves explain but indicate and circumscribe the kind of explanation one may look for. "Glass is brittle" only partially explains why glass tends to break when struck. A fuller explanation consists of specifying the properties by virtue of which glass is brittle, and this will be a matter of scientific investigation.⁽¹⁾ Similarly, we only partially explain a thoughtful performance by saying, and by confirming, that it was the exercise of a disposition. A fuller explanation will consist of an account of how a person was able to perform the action in question and why he did so. If we think of dispositional statements about human behaviour as explanations, akin to dispositional statements about physical substances, the result is

1 Cf. D M Armstrong, "A Materialist Theory of the Mind", p 86

unavoidably circular: the properties by virtue of which human beings have the specified dispositions are the actions in which the dispositions are actualised. As we shall see presently, Ryle's account does go beyond the dispositional in an attempt to explain how people exercise their capacities and competences on specific occasions. A discussion of this will show that the notion of a disposition has a place in Ryle's philosophy of mind which is similar to the place occupied by inner episodes in the internalist theory. A disposition is not a cause but, like an inner episode, it is made a base on which an explanation can rest.

Our second criticism of Ryle's positive philosophy stems directly from his misplaced faith in the explanatory force of dispositional statements. Ryle devotes little attention to the nature of human action, particularly to the question of how a sequence of bodily movements has the character of an action. This is a question that must be considered before progress can be made with the further question of what gives the action the character of intelligence. The question is also important because of the fact that what the internalist claimed was that a series of bodily movements constituted an action by being the effects of an antecedent mental occurrence. Ryle rejects this assumption but does not specifically consider the question of how a sequence of bodily movements constitute an action. Dispositional terms characterise actions but they do not enable us to explain what makes them actions in the first place. In this connection there are two questions that cannot be avoided. These are (a), the possibility of developing a coherent account of how sequences of bodily movements constitute actions, and (b), the possibility of accounting for how a person can know that an action has a parti-

cular identity and therefore can intend to perform it.

Ryle does recognise that the intellectualist legend defined overt actions as bodily movements, as caused effects rather than actions in the strictest sense: according to the legend "the workings of the body are motions of matter in space".⁽¹⁾ He also recognises that there is an important difference between actions and events, between something a person does and something that happens to him: "Being carried out to sea, or being called up, is something that happens to a person, not which he does.", and "Even frowning is something that a person does. It is not done to him."⁽²⁾ Unfortunately, Ryle obscures the significance of these considerations, partly by concentrating his attack almost exclusively against the myth of inner episodes, and partly by his attempt to give an account of why dispositions are actualised on particular occasions, something which is clearly illustrated by his discussion of motives.

Motive words are not the names of feelings or of tendencies to have feelings and to explain an action as done from a certain motive is not to describe it as the effect of an occult cause "but to subsume it under a propensity or behaviour trend".⁽³⁾ There are, Ryle argues, at least two different senses in which an event can be said to have been explained. There are, correspondingly, two different senses in which one asks "why" a particular event occurred and, thus, two different senses in which we state that an event occurred "because" such and such was the case. The first sense is causal: we ask what caused the glass to break

1 Ryle, p 62

2 Ryle, p 72

3 Ryle, p 106

and receive the reply that it broke because the stone hit it. The clause "because the stone hit it" reports the event which stood to the breaking of the glass as cause to effect. The second sense is dispositional: we ask why the glass broke when the stone hit it and receive the reply that the glass broke because it was brittle. This is not to give a causal explanation:

.... "'brittle' is a dispositional adjective; that is to say, to describe the glass as brittle is to assert a general hypothetical proposition about the glass. So when we say that the glass broke when struck because it was brittle, the 'because' clause does not report a happening or a cause; it states a law-like proposition. People commonly say of explanations of this second kind that they give the 'reason' for the glass breaking when struck." (1)

The law-like proposition states, roughly, that if the glass is struck then it would fly into fragments rather than dissolve, stretch or evaporate. The fact that the glass broke when struck by the stone "is explained in this sense of 'explain', when the first happening, namely the impact of the stone, satisfies the protasis of the general hypothetical proposition, and when the second happening, the fragmentation of the glass satisfies its apodasis". (2) Ryle maintains that our explanations of actions done from motives, like the actions which are exercises of intelligent capacities, are of this form; they refer to dispositions rather than causes. The discovery of motives "is or is like an inductive process, which results in the establishment of law-like propositions and the applications of them as the 'reasons' for particular actions". (3)

1 Ryle, p 86

2 Ryle, Ibid

3 Ryle, p 87

It is at this point that Ryle introduces an important qualification into his case for dispositional explanation. There is an intimate relation between causal and dispositional explanations in that the latter only explain particular events if they include explanations of the former kind. Just as knowing that glass is brittle does not enable us to explain why a piece of glass shattered on a given occasion, so knowing that a person is disposed to do certain things does not enable us to explain why he performed an action at a particular time. Ryle meets the point like this:

"As the impact of the stone at 10 pm caused the glass to break, so some antecedent of an action causes or occasions the agent to perform it when and where he does so. For example, a man passes his neighbour the salt from politeness; but his politeness is merely his inclination to pass the salt when it is wanted, as well as to perform a thousand other courtesies of the same general kind. So besides the question 'for what reason did he pass the salt'? there is the quite different question 'what made him pass the salt at that moment to that neighbour'? The question is probably answered by 'he heard his neighbour ask for it', or 'he noticed his neighbour's eye wandering over the table', or something of that sort.

We are perfectly familiar with the sorts of happenings which induce or occasion people to do things. If we were not, we could not get them to do what we wished, and the ordinary dealings between people could not exist." (1)

There is an important distinction, therefore, between reasons, which are dispositions, and causes, which are features of a person's environment. Ryle goes on to say that there are two reasons for mentioning these considerations.⁽²⁾ The first is to show that there is no conflict between an action's having a

1 Ryle, p 109

2 Ryle refers to them as "important trivialities".

cause and a motive: the fact that an action has a cause is "already prescribed for in the protasis of the hypothetical proposition which states the motive".⁽¹⁾ The second is "to show that, so far from our wanting to hear of occult or ghostly causes of actions, we already know just what sorts of familiar and usually public happenings are the things which get people to act in particular ways at particular times".⁽²⁾ Ryle is quite prepared to talk of actions being caused, occasioned or induced. He is only opposed to the theory that human actions have inner causes, and this is because motives or reasons, along with thoughts, volitions and intentions, are not inner episodes; they are not candidates of the right logical type. To give a satisfactory explanation of an action what we need to do is to supplement a dispositional statement by referring to an antecedent event which caused the action. A full explanation of an action takes the form: "He passed the salt when his neighbour asked for it because he is polite." But Ryle's argument is deceptive in suggesting that dispositional explanations have primacy over causal explanations. The opposite is the case. Reference to a disposition, in certain contexts, supplements a causal explanation by specifying the nature of the object by virtue of which an antecedent event brought about a change in its state. We have argued that dispositional statements are not explanatory in the fullest sense, that they specify the ways in which one may seek an account of how a particular cause brought about its effect. It is natural to want to know how an event caused a

1 Ryle, p 110

2 Ryle, Ibid

disposition to be actualised, and this is to seek a fuller explanation. In the case of the brittleness of glass a scientist can surely provide us with the required explanation by referring to the "veritable turmoil of episodes" which constitute glass. In point of fact, we do not have to be scientists to know that there is something about the constitution of glass by virtue of which it is brittle and can thus be caused to break rather easily. In the case of human beings, however, it is a confusion to speak of their actions being caused unless talk of a relation between causes and actions can be justified. Ryle does not show that such talk is justified and misdescribes features of a person's environment, features which certainly have a bearing on the intelligibility and character of his actions, as the causes of his performances. It is of the greatest significance that a person conceives a particular action to be polite rather than impolite, tactless or boorish because he knows or understands that in these circumstances the action is likely to be taken as such. The argument that something which a person knows or understands to have a bearing on the character of his action, like a request or an empty glass, should also be the cause of his action is unacceptable. It can be argued instead that it is correct to say, in relation to this and more complex examples, that a person can act in the light of his knowledge and understanding but is not caused to do so. It does not matter how strongly a person may feel inclined to perform an action, it does not matter how clearly and certainly he understands that what he ought to do will be taken to have a certain character; he must still perform the action. In describing the context in relation to which an action is understood to be considered, intelligent, clever,

tactful, polite, stupid, or whatever, we are referring to things that the agent himself may understand as having a relevant bearing on his action or on his decision whether to perform it. If we say that these things act as causes of action then we undermine the sense in which they ought to be described as factors which the agent can understand and take into account in his deliberations. It is in the nature of causes that they can bring about their effects independently of an agent's understanding. In some circumstances a person may have no knowledge of what causes his limbs to move, and in these circumstances it is perfectly correct to say that he is not moving his limbs.⁽¹⁾

Ryle's treatment of the question of what makes a sequence of bodily movements an action is cursory. The question "How does my mind get my hand to make the required movements?" is, as Ryle points out,⁽²⁾ misconceived. But the distinction between saying "He did it" and "He did or underwent something else which caused it", where "it" refers to bodily movements, does not elucidate the nature of action but itself stands in need of elucidation. Once it is granted that an agent can understand and take account of the factors that might have a bearing on his actions then it is no longer correct to describe these factors as causes of actions in any meaningful sense.

It is now important to consider whether human action is such that it can be influenced by deliberation.

1 An interesting feature of this example is that even though the bodily movements may seem to be actions to a spectator, the person whose limbs are being caused to move can know that he is not performing actions, and would know that he was not even if he knew what was causing his bodily movements. It is an error to say that the distinction between an action and mere bodily movements can be elucidated in terms of knowledge and ignorance of the causes of bodily movements.

2 Ryle, p 79

Chapter 6

ACTIONS AND BODILY MOVEMENTS

Two negative conclusions can be drawn from the discussion of Sellars and Ryle. The first is that it is an error to define the relation between thought and action as a causal relation between inner episodes and overt behaviour.⁽¹⁾ The second is that it is misleading to argue that because the relation between thought and action is not a causal relation then there is no relation as such between them. Arguing that this is so leads to the doctrine of externalism and one of the most serious failings of this doctrine is that by undermining the distinction between thought and action it fails to provide an adequate account of human behaviour. Ryle's procedure is based on the assumption that there is no categorical difference between intellectual operations, such as deliberating, reasoning and calculating, and non-intellectual operations. This leads him to replace causal explanations referring to inner episodes with explanations referring to dispositions. Two things follow from this procedure. First, it becomes difficult to make sense of the claim that there are occasions on which a person's deliberation makes a difference to his conduct. Second, the notion of a dispositional explanation commits us to the view that actions, at least those which Ryle defines as the actualisations of dispositions, have causes. Unless reference can be made to such causes then dispositional statements do not explain why actions are performed on particular occasions. It is at this stage that trying to defend either

1 In defining thoughts as inner episodes Sellars is subscribing to the thesis that the relation between thought and action is one of event causality.

internalism or externalism is shown to be philosophically unfruitful: the two conceptions are as much the source of our difficulties as the means to their solution.

The internalist wrongly interprets the relation between thought and action as a causal relation between essentially private activity and overt behaviour. Nevertheless, Locke was right in drawing attention to the need to understand intellectual activities, those by which the concept of thought is elucidated, in terms of language: not only do these activities presuppose the possession of language, they also exemplify it. Locke also recognised the important relation between the cognitive aspect of thought and deliberation, thought directed towards the performance of actions, clearly perceiving that there is an intimate connection between knowing how things are (and how things can be) and the possibility of doing one thing rather than another.

The externalist, on the other hand, while recognising the error in speaking of a causal relation between essentially private thought and overt behaviour, either underestimates or dismisses⁽¹⁾ the sense in which we speak of thought influencing action. According to Ryle, to say that a person deliberates is to say that he reasons about his future behaviour intelligently or stupidly, carefully or carelessly, and so on, but the operations which constitute his deliberation do not differ in kind from the operations he deliberates about; both are to be understood as the exercise of intelligent capacities.

1 B F Skinner, for instance, denies that there is a relation between thought and action. According to Skinner, thought "is not some mysterious process responsible for behaviour but the very behaviour itself" B F Skinner, "Verbal Behaviour", p 449.

The position we wish to defend maintains that there is a difference between thought and action and that the difference involves a distinction between intellectual activities, which presuppose the possession of language, and bodily actions. Unless this distinction is retained and made clear it will not be possible to give sense to the most common and important ways of understanding and explaining human behaviour. In the first and second parts of this chapter we consider the nature of human action. In the third part we draw on one of Locke's most important observations in considering the question of how a human action has identity.

(a) Actions and Events. A philosopher who assumes that human actions are to be explained by reference to ~~causes~~ cannot maintain that there is a strong or significant difference between the concept of an action and the concept of an event. He may argue, for instance, that the difference is one of degree rather than kind and maintain that what differentiates actions from other events is that they are intentionally performed by human agents. According to Donald Davidson, "an event is an action if and only if it can be described in a way that makes it intentional".⁽¹⁾ On the other hand, a philosopher who rejects the assumption that human actions are the effects of antecedent causes will maintain that there is a categorical difference between the concept of an action and that of an event. Actions differ from events in that only actions are performed, usually deliberately or intentionally. An action, as Ryle recognises, is not something that happens to a person but something that he does. As such, an action is a

1 Donald Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy", in "Philosophy of Psychology", ed S C Brown; p 41.

change that would not otherwise have happened. This argument suggests that there is a further distinction to be drawn between the concept of performance and that of occurrence. The notion of performance seems to stand to that of action as the notion of occurrence stands to that of event, indeed it is by appealing to these terms that the difference between the things people do and the things that merely happen is commonly explained. To ask why an event occurred, according to this view, is different from asking why an action was performed, a point that can be expressed by saying that an event is explained by referring to a cause and an action by referring to a reason or a motive, where this is not to be understood as a cause but as something in the light of which a person acted. To construe a reason as a cause is to undermine the distinction between actions and events and to deny that a significant distinction can be drawn between performances and mere occurrences. A philosopher who rejects a causal theory of action will argue that unless these distinctions are observed then our understanding of human behaviour will be seriously distorted. Observing these distinctions enables us to maintain, with von Wright, that "To act is to interfere with the course of the world thereby making true something which would not otherwise (ie had it not been for this interference) come to be true of the world at that stage of its history."⁽¹⁾

This stand against a causal theory of human action can be given some support by clarifying the distinctions that have been mentioned. In doing this careful attention must be paid to the much-discussed question of the status of bodily movements in

1 G H von Wright, "Causality and Determinism", p 39, von Wright's view is strikingly different from Spinoza's, namely that human actions accord with the necessity of nature: "Ethics", Bk 5, prop 10, scholium.

relation to actions. This question may be put more precisely by asking how a sequence of bodily movements constitute an action. A possible answer to this question may be derived from a consideration of certain aspects of the not entirely unblemished account of action offered by von Wright.

(b) von Wright's Theory of Action von Wright distinguishes between doing things and bringing things about. By doing things or performing actions we bring about other things. The distinction is closely connected with the principle that to every action there corresponds a change or event,⁽¹⁾ a principle that is clearly explained in the following remarks:

.... "by opening a window we let fresh air into the room (bring about ventilation), or lower the temperature, or bring it about that a person in the room feels uncomfortable, starts to sneeze, and eventually catches cold. What we thus bring about are the effects of our action. That which we do is the cause of those effects. The cause I shall call the result, and the effects the consequences of our action. Between the cause and the effects there is a condition-ship relation of some sort."⁽²⁾

The distinction between an action and its consequences is clear enough. The definition of "that which we do" as "the result of our action", on the other hand, is obscure and derives from an argument which von Wright had expressed in his book "Norm and Action":

"The bodily movements which are a prerequisite of most human acts may be regarded as activity in which the agent has to engage in order to perform those acts. The changes and states which we call the results of action may be viewed as consequences of such prerequisite activities."⁽³⁾

1 G H von Wright, "Norm and Action", p 39

2 G H von Wright, "Explanation and Understanding", p 66

3 G H von Wright, "Norm and Action", p 41

In a later work, "Explanation and Understanding", the distinction between an action and the result it brings about leads von Wright to account for the uncaused nature of human actions by appealing to the idea of a basic action, one that is not brought about by doing something else. The necessity of introducing this idea derives from his conception of a non-basic action as a succession of related movements. The movements have the unity of an action in that each movement is sufficient for the bringing about of the movement succeeding it. The sequence of movements initiated by a basic action culminate in the result of the action, what von Wright describes as the thing that is done. The following remarks show the form von Wright's analysis takes:

"Assume we brought about the ventilation of the room by opening the window, ie by doing something. Did we not also 'bring about' the opening of the window? If we say that we brought about the opening of the window, this would normally indicate that we achieved this by doing something else, such as pressing a button and releasing a spring. But if we had to explain to somebody else how we opened the window, and said that we did this by first seizing the handle, then turning it clockwise, and finally pushing against the frame, then it would also be correct to say that we brought about the opening of the window by successively doing these things. The pushing was, under the circumstances, a sufficient condition of the window opening, but the turning of the handle was a necessary condition of creating the circumstances which made pushing sufficient to achieve the opening." (1)

This form of analysis makes it necessary to invoke the idea of a basic action. In turning a handle a person turns his hand. But if he was asked how he turned his hand it would not be correct to say that he did this by contracting and relaxing a particular group of muscles; unless he happened to have a knowledge

1 "Explanation and Understanding", p 66

of anatomy he would not know what these muscles are, nor how to contract them, except, that is, by turning his hand.⁽¹⁾ This makes the performance of basic actions something of a mystery and the mystery, once created, is difficult to dispel.

The initial difficulty von Wright's analysis creates, one to which we shall presently return, is that it makes the relation between an action and the movements into which it can be analysed difficult to understand. The relations between the movements that fall within an action are defined in the same way as the relations between an action and what it brings about. Each particular movement is a condition of bringing about the movement that succeeds it and from the succession of movements the result of the action materialises. Now the movements into which a complex action can be analysed can all be described as basic actions. None of them on their own are sufficient to open the window and in order to do so a person must perform all of them in a particular order. This calls to mind the argument that bodily movements constitute the activity in which a person has to engage in order to perform an action. von Wright describes the relations between the movements in an action as those of conditionship, but he also refers to them as "causal ties"⁽²⁾ and states that "certain movements of my body are causal antecedents of the result of the act of window-opening".⁽³⁾ It is unclear whether the causal antecedents von Wright is referring to are the muscular contractions and expansions that occur when a person moves his limbs or the actual movements of the limbs. If the relations between the bodily movements in an action are causal then an action, although not itself an event, is composed of events. The difficulty with

1 Ibid, p 67

2 Ibid, p 89

3 Ibid, p 88

this is that each particular movement falls under the intention to open the window and opening the window appears not to be an action in itself but the result of causal antecedents, the prior movements.

The second difficulty in von Wright's analysis is that it obscures the relation between action and "the world" with the course of which action interferes. von Wright himself draws attention to this difficulty in a later work when he declares that the line of division between agency and the world is difficult to draw.⁽¹⁾ It is, of course, possible to analyse an action in the way von Wright describes, and one might well do so in teaching the procedure or technique of opening a window. But the view that we are to account for the action of opening a window by describing it as the culmination of a series of related movements is hard to accept. Our reluctance derives from the sharp distinction von Wright wishes to draw between the movements in the action and something that materialises from them, the result of the action. It is equally plausible to argue that although the state of affairs of the window being open is brought about by the action, the opening of the window or the window opening cannot be sharply distinguished from the action. In these circumstances the opening of the window is the action and it is natural to describe it as such. Given that what is being described is an action then the statement "He opened the window and the window opened" is an extremely unnatural way of speaking, suggesting that in these circumstances we are witnessing both an action and an event. The action is certainly not antecedent to the event, for if that was the case we could say "He opened the window and then the window opened". What is being described, however, is an

1 "Causality and Determinism", pp 57-58

action and it is at the very least artificial to say that by performing such an action a person brings about a corresponding change or event. If what is being described is an action then there is no reason why the action must be sharply distinguished from the change.

The argument that an action results in a change betrays a certain misunderstanding of how human action "fits into" the world. An action does not interfere with the course of nature from a position outside the "chain of events". It may be more accurate to say that it does so from within the chain. It is perfectly clear that by opening the window one brings about ventilation and, given that certain conditions obtain, his act was the cause of the room being ventilated. It is also true that "ventilating the room" can be the description of an action rather than the consequences of an action. Someone may ask me to ventilate the room and in this context my opening the window is my ventilating the room. Here I am not doing two things, opening the window and ventilating the room, although it is quite correct to describe the former as the procedure I follow. Similarly, when my action is described as opening a window I am to be understood as performing this one action even though the particular motions of seizing, turning and pushing are all involved in it. In any case it is only possible to analyse the action into a succession of movements or basic actions if it is already understood that this action is one of opening a window. Given that what is done cannot be sharply distinguished from the action, the action cannot be sharply distinguished from its result. This is more or less implied by von Wright's stipulation that the connection between an action and its result is intrinsic or logical rather than causal:

"If the result does not materialise,⁽¹⁾ the action simply has not been performed. The result is an essential part of the action. It is a bad mistake to think of the act(ion) itself as the cause of its result." (2)

But once it is granted that the result is an essential part of the action it becomes confusing to draw a distinction between them, for it suggests that opening the window is an action and the window opening its result. This is a convenient point at which to return to the question of how the relation between an action and the bodily movements into which it can be analysed is to be understood.

The distinction between an action and its result is only plausible if the result is defined as the state of affairs that obtains after the action has been performed rather than as a change to which the action is said to correspond. von Wright, however, believes it to be immaterial whether the result is identified with a change or an end-state, and he persistently refers to the result of an action as "the thing done", as a change that materialises. If this is taken in conjunction with the fact that von Wright defines the performance of an action as "the putting into motion of a system",⁽³⁾ it would seem that, on this analysis, an action is a sequence of events initiated by a basic action, a view which seems to be inconsistent with the stipulation that an action is not the cause of its result. The inconsistency emerges from the admission that the distinction between an action and its consequences is relative:

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- 1 One may ask how "the result materialised" differs from "the result was brought about".
 - 2 "Explanation and Understanding", pp 67-68
 - 3 "Explanation and Understanding", p 68

"When I say that I ventilate the room by opening the window, the result of action here is that the window opens (is open). When I say that I open the window by turning the handle, etc., the change in position of the handle, etc. is the result, the change in position of the window the consequence." (1)

Such chains necessarily terminate in basic actions, which are not performed by doing something else. According to this analysis a chain of movements terminates in a window opening, which is the effect brought about by the prior phase or movement. Conceiving an action as a chain or a system issuing from a basic action implies that the successive "phases" of the action, including the intended result, are brought about by the phases prior to them. Yet what we are considering is an action and it is extremely odd to conceive an action as being actually composed of events. If it is correct to say that the change in the position of the window is the effect of the change in the position of the handle, which is in turn the consequence of the result of the prior action of my turning my hand (the hand being turned), then there seems little reason why we should not say that an action is a chain of events initiated by a basic action. The only alternative is to say that the phases of an action consist of basic actions, and this would mean abandoning the idea of an action as putting a system into motion. But even if this position is adopted it would still be possible to argue that the series of basic actions culminate in a result, that of the window opening. The oddity of von Wright's account disappears once it is seen that there are no actions, strictly speaking, which are brought about by doing other things, although this should not be taken to mean

1 Ibid

that there are only basic actions.⁽¹⁾ When an action is performed the action is the "system" in the sense that a performance follows a certain procedure. A sequence of movements, as von Wright would surely agree, does not follow a basic act of its own accord. Because each "phase" of an action like opening a window can be performed independently it is a mistake to suppose that in the context of this complex action they are merely brought about by the results of the phases prior to them. The difficulties in this account derive from the stipulation that changes correspond to actions. An action, in the strictest sense, is a change, it being wrong to say that the action is one thing and that the change is another. von Wright himself indicates an oddity in his analysis when he asks whether actions can be "done". He concedes that there is a slight oddity in giving an affirmative answer "because saying that an action is done suggests that an action is the result of an action".⁽²⁾ He does not give a good reason for denying that this can be the case.

We may begin to overcome the difficulties in von Wright's account by considering the connection between how an action has identity and what we mean by the notion of performance. The simplest answer to the first question is to say that an action has identity in falling under a description, the same description as that which figures in the statement of one's intention to perform the action.⁽³⁾ Now the description "opening a window" is correctly applied to an action irrespective of how it is performed.

1 cf Donald Davidson, "Agency" in "Agent, Action and Reason", ed R Binkley, R Bronaugh and A Marras: p 23

2 "Explanation and Understanding", p 69

3 G E M Auscombe's observations on this matter are important: "Intention", pp 37-38

A window may be opened in a variety of ways, in the way elaborately described by von Wright, by raising the frame with a crowbar or, perhaps, by pressing a button which activates an electronic device. The fact that it is natural and correct to apply the term "opening a window" to all three cases shows that a description identifies an action even though it does not specify precisely how it was performed. In each of these cases it is unnecessary to distinguish between the performance of the action and a person's bodily movements. Nothing of importance hangs on the fact that in the last example a person only presses a button: because what we are describing is an action it counts as opening a window. It is perfectly correct to say that a person can open a window with his hands, by using a crowbar or by activating an electronic mechanism, for what we are describing are the movements and instruments involved in the different performances of an action. The difficulties in von Wright's account are avoided once it is seen that it is unnecessary to distinguish between the performance of an action and the bodily movements it involves. The bodily movements are what we identify as the performance of the action, and it is a confusion to regard the movements as activity in which a person must engage in order to perform an action. If this is true then it no longer makes sense to speak of "the thing done" as a change corresponding to the action. The fact that an action is identical with a change is implicit in many of the descriptions by which we identify and discriminate between actions. The sentences "He opened the window", "He played the stroke", and "He mounted the horse" report the performance of actions, not changes that materialise from their performance. The argument that it is unnecessary to

distinguish between the performance of an action and an observable sequence of bodily movements implies that swinging one's leg in a certain way is kicking a ball, that the movements of my hand while holding a pen is signing a cheque and that my shouldering a gun and pulling a trigger is shooting at a crow. The equipment or instruments that may be involved are, like bodily movements, in the action: they are not things on which actions operate but things with which actions are performed.

The notion that an action has identity in falling under a description must not be underestimated, for it is essentially connected with the possibility of a person knowing what he is doing. A person knows the identity of an action, not because he can perform it (he may not be able to), but because he can apply the description under which it falls, because the description belongs in the language he speaks. Of course, a person may perform an action without knowing what it is, and there may be some actions which do not have descriptions. But in both cases a person cannot say what he is doing, what he has done or what he intends to do. There is also the vexing question of how "the same act" can fall under different descriptions. For example, the act of turning on the light can in certain circumstances be the act of alerting a burglar. The only point we are making here is that in these circumstances a person can later say that he did not know that he was alerting the burglar and that his being able to apply these descriptions is a condition of his coming to understand that he did not know that he was doing more than he thought.⁽¹⁾

1 It may be suggested that just as different sequences of bodily movements can fall under the same description, so the same sequence of bodily movements can fall under different descriptions. If it is true that a description does not apply uniquely to a sequence of bodily movements, it may also be true that the same bodily movements can constitute different actions.

What has been said runs counter to the view that human actions are events. The fact that an action can cause certain effects does not imply that an action is itself caused, and when an action does bring about an effect that effect cannot be an action in the strictest sense. von Wright recognises the distinction between actions and events but defines an action as something which involves the occurrence of events, not in the sense that when a person moves his hand muscles expand and contract, but in the sense that the movements in a performance are causally related. This is to misunderstand the notion of performance and this is apparent in von Wright's discussion of the "inner" and "outer" aspects of an action. The "inner" aspect of an action is the intention or will "behind" its outer manifestations and the "outer" aspect of an action can be divided into immediate and remote aspects:

"The immediate outer aspect is muscular activity - eg a turning of the hand or raising of an arm. The remote outer aspect is some event for which the muscular activity (1) is causally responsible - eg the turning of a handle or the opening of a window, or better: the fact that a certain handle turns or window opens." (2)

This bears out the point that on von Wright's analysis an action is a sequence of events initiated by a basic action. We can only repeat that a person does not turn his hand in order to turn a handle: his movements, under this description, is his performing this act. von Wright correctly states that the act of opening a window is a performance, but he is wrong to say that the result of the performance is an event. Substituting "The window opened

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- 1 von Wright cannot mean by this the muscular activity that occurs when I move my hand. He has already stated that the muscular activity does not cause the movement of the hand.
 - 2 "Explanation and Understanding", pp 86-87.

because he opened it" for "He opened the window" is misleading in suggesting that the performance of an action brings about a corresponding event. One must not be distracted from the fact that what is being described is an intentional action. To perform this act intentionally the agent must understand that the phases of his action will follow in a certain order, and this he understands because he can make them do so. Referring to the "phases" of an action is not to speak of events or causal antecedents but of the coordinated movements which an agent understands as a performance.

There is, therefore, some difference between the view we are advocating and that developed by von Wright. On our view a person's bodily movements are not the causal antecedents of the result of an action and there are no causal ties linking its various phases. The mystery of how a person is able to perform an action is partly created by the argument that an action is a system of movements initiated by a basic action. We have tried to show that this conception of action is misleading and our criticisms of Sellars and Ryle suggest that the mystery is not to be dispelled by appealing to inner linguistic episodes or features of a person's environment that cause his actions. If it can be shown that a person can know what he is doing and can intend and execute one act rather than another it may be possible to show that the mystery need not arise. Before concluding this part of our discussion something more must be said about the claim that a person knows the identity of an action because he is able to apply the description under which it falls.

(c) Language and the Identity of Actions. The argument that the intelligibility of human behaviour presupposes a language is

found in Locke. Our ideas of actions are mixed modes. These ideas are formed by the active power of the mind and seem to have "their original, and constant existence more in the thoughts of men than in the reality of things".⁽¹⁾ Mixed modes are among the ideas the mind employs as "patterns" and it is by having these ideas that a person comprehends or knows the identities of particular actions. Such ideas are given unity and duration by being annexed to names, indeed they are usually acquired through the explication of the terms that signify them.⁽²⁾ Men form such ideas for the purpose of talking about action and action, Locke reminds us, is "the great business of mankind".⁽³⁾ Locke is drawing our attention to the important fact that people know the identities of the actions they and others perform: unless people have ideas or concepts of actions then they cannot know what they are doing and cannot intend to do one thing rather than another. Yolton expresses Locke's argument correctly when he states:

"What Locke is stressing by calling actions mixed modes (more properly, our ideas of actions are mixed modes) is that for anything to count as an action we must have a description, a name, for that action."⁽⁴⁾

The ideas men have of actions depend on the fact that those actions are commonly performed in their society:

...."where there was no such custom, there was no notion of any such actions, no use of such combinations of ideas as were united and, as it were, tied together by those terms: and therefore in other countries there were no names for them."⁽⁵⁾

1 Locke, 2.22.2.

2 Locke, 2.22.3, 2.22.4.

3 Locke, 2.22.10

4 John Yolton, "Locke and the Compass of Human Understanding":p 138.

5 Locke, 2.22.6

These remarks indicate that Locke was aware of the distinctive character of such ideas. It has already been noted that such ideas have their "original and constant existence more in the thoughts of men than in the reality of things" and this is closely related to the notion that there is no natural connection between a mixed mode and the action it comprehends:

.... "the pulling of the trigger of the gun with which the murder is committed and is all the action that is perhaps visible, has no natural connection with those ideas that make up the complex one named murder." (1)

This is because in determining the identity of an action we take into account the intention of the agent, the circumstances in which it was performed and the customs of the society the agent belongs to. As Locke recognises, the identity of an action is often a matter of disagreement and the same sequence of bodily movements can fall under different descriptions. Nevertheless, it remains true that such ideas are required if men are to find actions intelligible, for it is the use men make of such ideas and their names that is important. Mixed modes represent actions rather than objects and qualities and, as we have seen, Locke believed that actions presuppose thought. Ideas of mixed modes belong to the language of thought and thereby enter into the thought people direct towards their performance of actions. Because actions are performed a person can form ideas to which he can make his actions conform. This means that ideas of actions have a distinctive character:

"Because the names of mixed modes for the most part want standards in nature whereby men may rectify and adjust their significations; therefore they are very various and doubtful. They are assemblages of ideas put together at the pleasure of the mind, pursuing its own ends of discourse and suited to its own notions, whereby it designs not to copy anything really existing, but to denominate and rank things as they come to agree with those archetypes or forms it has made." (2)

1 Locke, 3.9.7.

2 Locke, 3.9.7.

Although these remarks are somewhat obscure they do indicate that men can use these ideas, not only as signs for comprehending and judging the actions they perform, but also in the thought they direct towards their performance. Men retain ideas of actions and use them as patterns in deliberating how they ought to behave, for "since the will supposes knowledge to guide its choice, all that we can do is to hold our wills undetermined, till we have examined the good and evil of what we desire."⁽¹⁾

Locke's remarks point to the argument that both thinking about actions and acting intentionally in the light of thought presuppose that actions have identities, and, for Locke, this is essentially connected with the fact that the inner language in which ideas of mixed modes belong has a conditional status. Although Locke's account points in the right direction - we normally say that some actions are performed on the basis of beliefs, decisions and reasons - it is defective in assuming the existence of an inner language of thought and that the relation between thought and action is causal. What follows deliberation, according to Locke, "follows in a chain of consequences, linked to one another, all depending on the last determination of the judgement, which is in our power".⁽²⁾

In this chapter we have attempted to say something about the nature of human action, our purpose having been to prepare the ground for showing that it is possible to speak of a person's thought as influencing and making a difference to his behaviour. In the previous two chapters we criticised Sellars for developing

1 Locke, 2.21.52

2 Locke, Ibid

a causal account of thought and action and Ryle, first, for refusing to distinguish clearly between the intellectual and the intelligent and, second, for invoking causality in connection with a dispositional account of human behaviour. Although Ryle is correct to say that what makes a "verbal operation" an exercise of intellect is independent of what makes it public or private,⁽¹⁾ he does not show clearly what makes a verbal operation an exercise of intellect. We have argued that thought exhibits two aspects which can be labelled the cognitive and the deliberative, and that these are essentially connected. Both must be discussed in terms of the conditional status of language and it is the fact that this is maintained by shared linguistic practices that renders the question whether thought is to be characterised as essentially inner activity philosophically inappropriate. Nevertheless, there are philosophers who have attempted to retain the notion of an inner language of thought and who have connected it explicitly with the cognitive aspect of thought and the nature of human behaviour. Gilbert Harman presents an account of thought in terms of an inner language and relates this account to a conception of human beings as "nondeterministic automata". The next chapter assesses the cogency of Harman's position.

1 "The Concept of Mind", p 35

Chapter 7

MENTAL STATES AND THE INNER LANGUAGE OF THOUGHT

Harman maintains that to acquire a language is to acquire a system of representation to think in. Although the capacity to think and to have thoughts is acquired in learning a language a person's use of words in communicating with others is dependent on thought. Harman explains this dependence by drawing a distinction between the inner language of thought and the outer language of communication and a corresponding distinction between inner and outer sentences. Inner sentences are a person's thoughts and mental states and outer sentences are the means by which these are expressed. We may begin our discussion of this theory with the notion of an inner sentence.

(a) Thoughts and Mental States A person's thoughts and mental states are assumed to be tokens or instances of sentences in an inner language of thought. These states or sentences have "representational characteristics" which depend on their logical structure. Harman writes:

.... "I suggest that mental states be taken to be structures of elements that are isomorphic to structures that are sentences under analysis, where the representational properties of the mental states correspond to those of the sentences under analysis."⁽¹⁾

Communication is successful when a person perceives a sentence as having a certain analysis which is also the analysis of the thought the sentence expresses. This is not simply to argue that to know what a person thinks is to understand what he says:

1 Gilbert Harman, "Thought", p 89

Harman is arguing that "the speaker's thought was a token of the sentence"⁽¹⁾ the hearer perceives as having a certain analysis. Thoughts and mental states are sentences structurally isomorphic to the sentences people utter. This view is reminiscent of Locke's and Harman's emphasis on representation, particularly in connection with inner sentences, suggest that he is particularly interested in the cognitive aspect of thought, its relation to reality. The following remarks suggest that this is so:

"The representational character of a sentence, be it a sentence of the language used in communication or a sentence of the inner language of thought - ie a mental state - depends on its truth-conditional structure. What the sentence or state is about, what it represents, depends on what is designated by arguments in that structure. What the sentence or state represents something as depends on the predicates applied to the relevant arguments. The theory of truth thus shows how the representational character of a sentence or state is a function of the way it is constructed."⁽²⁾

To think something or to be in a certain mental state is to be in a relation to a sentence of the inner language of thought. The names of mental states are formed by combining the name of the state, "belief", for instance, with a sentence such as "Snow is white", and mental states have structures that resemble the structures of their corresponding outer sentences.⁽³⁾

Now the view that a person's mental state of believing that snow is white has a similar structure or analysis to the sentence "Snow is white" is only plausible if mental states can be identified as sentences. The sentence "Snow is white" has a logical or grammatical structure but it is not at all clear that the

1 Harman, p 90

2 Harman, p 82

3 Harman, p 55

mental state of believing that snow is white, whatever that may be, has a similar structure or even a structure at all. A person's belief is what he believes, and what he believes is not a sentence but what a sentence says or expresses. It is not simply that mental states such as believing and hoping are not sentences, they are not entities in any sense. Beliefs, for instance, are not entities in precisely the sense in which what sentences say or express are not entities, and it is primarily this consideration which makes it misleading to speak of the structures of mental states and thoughts defined as tokens or instances of sentences. It is the sentences that express thoughts and mental states that exhibit logical and grammatical structure and this is because, unlike mental states, they are combinations of signs. It is true that such sentences express mental states because they have structure, but it is false to say that those states themselves have a similar structure. There is an important sense in which there are no such things as mental states to exhibit logical or grammatical structures.

What we are saying already casts doubt on the notion of an inner language of thought. For Harman, on the other hand, the assumption that there is such a language is essential to his account of mental activity. The inner language of thought is a functional system or conceptual scheme embodying a person's knowledge and understanding, a structure of sentences that represent the world. The syntactic structure of an outer sentence is the way it is constructed out of names, predicates, logical connectives, variables and quantifiers. An infinite number of possible sentences can be constructed out of a finite number of signs. Similarly:

"The structure of a mental state represents the way it can be constructed from mental names, mental predicates, mental connectives, mental variables, mental quantifiers, and so forth. For example, the belief that P and Q can be constructed from the belief that P and the belief that Q by an operation of conjunction; and analogously for other complex states. Finite resources give rise to a potential infinity of mental states." (1)

These remarks indicate just how literally the notion of an inner language of thought is to be taken. But as we have said the assumption is only plausible if it is possible to define thoughts and mental states as sentences. Our objection to the theory is partly based on the fact that the existence of such a language cannot be verified and partly on the emphasis Harman places on the notion of representation, the notion which he takes to define the cognitive aspect of thought. Harman misuses the notion of representation when he says that our beliefs, fears, hopes and desires concerning a certain person, for instance, represent him in different ways:

"The belief that Benacerraf is wise, the hope that he is wise, the fear that he is wise, and the desire that he be wise are all about Benacerraf and all represent him as wise. The difference between these mental states is a matter of the difference in the attitude they represent towards Benacerraf's being wise. They are true, or come true, if Benacerraf turns out to be wise." (2)

The error here lies in arguing that mental states have characteristics by virtue of which they represent their object in one way rather than another. A person might fear that Jones will turn out to be a wise man but this attitude, however it is conceived, does not represent anything even though it has an object. The sentence "Harman fears that Jones is wise" reports what

1 Harman, p 56

2 Harman, p 57

Harman fears: it specifies the object of Harman's fear but it does not represent his attitude or its object. What a person fears is what is said by a sentence like "Jones is wise" and the sentence can only be said to "represent" in that it says something about Jones. It is not the case that what the sentence says or expresses, that is, what the person fears, represents anything. The notion of representation here can only be explained in terms of what the sentence says and such an explanation is unnecessary; if it is appropriate to speak of a sentence representing something it only does so by saying something about it. Furthermore, it is not clear that we can speak of a mental state like fear being either true or false. We can seek to establish whether "Harman fears that Jones is wise" is true, but this is different from trying to establish that Harman's fear is true if it transpires that Jones is wise. We can have this fear irrespective of whether Jones actually is wise and if he does turn out to be wise we should say that his fear was justified. This is different from saying that his fear was true, although it is important to note that describing the fear as justified depends on establishing the truth of a sentence like "Jones is wise". The intelligibility of hopes and fears presuppose a language. That does not mean that hopes and fears actually are sentences. To fear something can be described as being in a relationship to what a sentence says but it is not to be in a relationship to a sentence.

(b) The Language of Thought Harman believes it necessary to assume the existence of a language of thought because he believes that what a person knows and understands must have been achieved and established before it can be expressed in speech. Knowledge

and understanding involve a language and the purpose of this language is not to communicate but to represent reality. The following remarks give a clear indication of Harman's position:

"Let us speak as if there were a 'language of thought' and that mental states essentially involve 'sentences' of this language. Then, to believe that Benacerraf is wise is to be in a relationship to a sentence of the language of thought, and to desire that Benacerraf be wise is to be in a different relationship to the same sentence. Representational characteristics of mental states derive from representational characteristics of sentences of the language of thought. For example to come to believe that Benacerraf is wise is to form an instance of the appropriate sentence and store it among our set of beliefs. To come to want Benacerraf to be wise is to form another instance of the same sentence and to store it among our ends; and similarly for other mental states. We can envision a psychological model in which belief sentences are actually stored in one place and desired sentences are stored in another; but we do not have to assume that beliefs and desires have distinct locations in the human brain, so long as there is some difference between an instance of a sentence of the language of thought stored as a belief and an instance of the same sentence stored as an end." (1)

The only difference, of course, is that what the sentence says is believed in one instance and desired in another. It is misleading to say that a sentence is "stored" in one instance as a belief and in another as a desire. If it is true that beliefs and desires are not sentences and that to believe or desire is not to stand in a relation to sentences, then to come to believe or desire something is not equivalent to forming a sentence. I can utter a sentence and yet not believe what it says. I might hear on the radio that Nixon has resigned. I do not consciously memorise this or "store" it among my beliefs. I later say in a conversation. "I believe that Nixon has resigned". Does this

1 Harman, p 57

mean that I did not believe that Nixon had resigned until I uttered this sentence? Clearly not. The fact that I understand what I hear and my ability to express this belief are important, for they make it possible for me to have this belief. But the notion of "storage" is inappropriate when applied both to sentences and what they express. Sentences are not stored but uttered and Harman's failure to recognise the importance of this is intimately related to the misleading conception of language in terms of which his theory is developed.

Harman believes that the suggestion that there is a language of thought is easy to verify.⁽¹⁾ He does not explain how this is so: "We can simply take mental states to be instances or 'tokens' of appropriate sentences". Few would regard this as an acceptable form of verification. Again, Harman does not fully explain what it means to say that the representational characteristics of mental states depend on their structure. Does this explain how sentences have sense? We have argued persistently that sentences have sense or say what they do because they are combinations of correctly used signs: sentences can only be described as the means by which things are said in that the sentences themselves are significant arrangements of signs. If this is what Harman means by saying that representational characteristics depend on structure then we cannot disagree. This does not give grounds for assuming that there is a language of thought for which the same general principle holds. Given that Harman does not show how the existence of a language of thought can be empirically verified, we must consider whether there are any other reasons for accepting his hypothesis.

1 Harman, p 58

According to Harman there are important differences between the language of thought and the language of communication. We can say of an outer sentence that it refers to something, means something and that it may or may not be understood. A belief, on the other hand, is about an object and represents it in a particular way. It does not in any ordinary sense refer to an object, mean something about it and it is not understood or misunderstood by anyone: "Reference, meaning, and understanding, as we ordinarily understand these things, have to do with the use of language in communication and not with its use in thought."⁽¹⁾ One might agree with this were it not being claimed that beliefs and other mental states are sentences. If mental states are sentences and are composed of signs then it is plausible to argue that some terms in these sentences refer to objects. Harman himself states that what a mental state is about depends on what is designated by the terms in that structure.⁽²⁾ If mental states are composed of signs then it is difficult to understand why Harman denies that they have meaning and that they can be understood or misunderstood. To discover Harman's reason for confining the notions of reference, meaning and understanding to the use of language in communication we must examine his conception of the language of thought as a functional system.

Harman argues that the representational character of a mental state derives from its potential role in the inner language or functional system, the structure of sentences which constitutes a person's knowledge and understanding. There is here an interesting comparison between Harman and Locke. Both define

1 Harman, p 59

2 Harman, p 82

the notion of thought in terms of an inner language and both are primarily interested in the cognitive aspect of thought. Both are led to a conception of language the status of which is exclusively conditional, a use of language which is defined by reference to the notion of representation.⁽¹⁾ Harman indicates the difference of status between inner and outer sentences when he states that "only sentences of the inner language of thought have roles in a functional system, whereas only sentences of the outer language used in communication have meaning, in any ordinary sense of 'meaning'."⁽²⁾ Yet Harman's grounds for drawing this distinction are far from clear. He argues throughout that thoughts and mental states are tokens of "sentences under analysis", and these sentences, one must presume, belong to the language of communication. Furthermore, inner sentences are structurally isomorphic with the outer sentences that express them. These considerations make it difficult to understand why only inner sentences have roles in a functional system. Both kinds of sentence have truth-functional structure and it is plainly unsatisfactory to say that the difference between these sentences is the fact that only inner sentences have roles in a functional system. Harman maintains that only inner sentences are used to represent reality and only outer sentences are used to express thoughts and mental states, but he fails to show why this must be so. One can perhaps make some sense of the notion of "potential role" provided it is understood in terms of the

1 It is interesting to compare the theories of Locke and Harman with that of D M Armstrong: "A Materialist Theory of the Mind", p 341

2 Harman, p 60

conditional status of language. The possibility of having and formulating particular thoughts falls within the limits of the language one speaks: a person comes to a certain thought because it is clearly true that a person's thinking what a sentence says presupposes his possession of the language in which that sentence can be formed. However, this argument requires qualification. The fact that when a person entertains a particular thought he entertains what is said by a sentence does not mean that his entertaining the thought actually consists of uttering the appropriate sentence. Neither does it mean that the thought actually is the sentence. As Norman Malcolm correctly states:

"We need to avoid identifying thoughts with their linguistic expression. At the same time we should reject the suggestion that it is possible that language-less creatures should have thoughts."⁽¹⁾

The possession of language is a condition of having thoughts in the sense that it is a condition of knowing and being able to formulate what one thinks. A person can exhibit a thought in his behaviour and we can refer to this thought in describing his actions. We can, for instance, say of a person rummaging in a drawer: "He thinks his pen is there". This need not mean that he uttered a sentence expressing this thought either before or during his search. His possession of language is a condition of his being able to explain his actions by saying "I thought my pen was in the drawer". What he thought, however, is not the sentence nor any other form of entity. Now if the person had deliberated about where he ought to look for his pen it is quite

1 Norman Malcolm, "Thoughtless Brutes", in "Thought and Knowledge", p 55. Malcolm also rejects the identification of thoughts with behavioural propensities, physiological events, bodily sensations and mental images.

likely that he would have uttered "I think my pen is in the drawer", together with other relevant sentences. Whether he utters these sentences silently or aloud is quite unimportant. The point of these utterances lies not in their actually being thoughts, but in the fact that what they say form the contents of a person's thinking. Language does not make thought possible because it provides a medium for thought but because it is a condition of intelligibility. Harman's position is quite different. He maintains that language embodies thought in that it provides a person with "a system of representation to think in".⁽¹⁾ A person thinks something when he is in a relation to a sentence of the inner language, a relation specified by the concept of thought. Thus to think that Nixon will retire is to be in the specified relation to the sentence "Nixon will retire". This is an inadequate account of what it is to think something. As we have said, thoughts are not non-linguistic entities, but neither are they sentences. It is as difficult to say what it is to think something as it is to say what thoughts actually are. Talking about the thoughts people actually have, on the other hand, is comparatively straightforward. The sentence "I think that the Prime Minister will resign" expresses what a person thinks in that the Prime Minister is the object of his thought and the sentence expresses what he thinks about this object. We can say that what a person thinks is what is said by a sentence, but trying to specify the actual character or constitution of thoughts is unnecessary if not misguided.

Harman's theory, like Locke's, is particularly vulnerable in its account of the relation between the language of thought and

1 Harman, p 92

the language of communication. He writes:

.... "What a sentence used in communication means depends in part on the role of a corresponding sentence in the language of thought. Outer language is used to express beliefs and other mental states. To specify the meaning of a sentence used in communication is partly to specify the belief or other mental state expressed. The representational character of that state is determined by its functional role. Since the state expressed is an instance of a sentence of the inner language of thought, the meaning of an outer sentence is at least partly a matter of the role in thought of the inner sentence it expresses."⁽¹⁾

By postulating an inner language of thought Harman attempts to explain how a person achieves knowledge and understanding before they are expressed and communicated. By the same procedure he attempts to account for the sense in which a person continues to think something even though he does not continuously utter the sentence which, for Harman, is the thought.⁽²⁾ Yet Harman is mistaken in assuming that the sense or "representational character" of a thought depends on its "functional role" in a language. One can ask what makes it possible for a sentence to have a functional role, and the answer seems to be that it depends on the sense or "representational character" of the sentence in question. Representational character and functional role are not independent and it cannot be said that the former depends on the latter. As Winch remarks in a discussion of Wittgenstein's "Tractatus": "unless propositions had logical relations with each other they would not state facts (ie would not be propositions) and unless they stated facts, they would not have logical relations with other propositions."⁽³⁾ A sentence stands in

1 Harman, p 60

2 Hence the appeal to the notion of "storage".

3 Peter Winch, "Studies in the Philosophy of Wittgenstein", p 4

logical relations to other sentences, not simply because it has a logical structure or form but because it is a combination of correctly used signs, a combination of signs exhibiting that structure. The correct use of signs in a language, however, involves the following of rules and this, as a matter of participating in shared practices, is a fundamental characteristic of the use of words in communication. If this is the case, and we submit that it is, then there is an important sense in which the inner language, the use of signs to represent reality, is dependent on the use of signs in communication. Once this is granted there seems to be no reason for assuming that what a sentence uttered in communication means depends, even in part, on the role in thought of the inner sentence it expresses. The rules according to which signs are correctly used in sentences are common to both languages but have their original application in the use of words in communication. It is difficult to see how these rules, originally embodied in the public use of words, can have the same application within a language the sentences of which only have the function of representing reality. It can now be argued that if the language of thought, as defined by Harman, is, in the strictest sense, a language then it must be a system of signs in which things are said and whatever can be said can also be communicated. If this undermines the argument that the meaning of outer sentences depends on the functional role of inner sentences then it also defeats the point of distinguishing between a language of thought and a language of communication.

Harman's characterisation of human beings as nondeterministic automata is closely connected with his conception of language. A person's thoughts and mental states are instantiations of

"sentences of his language under analysis", and what his language is "depends heavily on the sentences he believes".⁽¹⁾ It is not surprising that Harman argues in this way since a person's beliefs are sentences of his inner language. Neither is it a surprise to discover that there is, for Harman, little difference between "change of language" and "change of view".⁽²⁾ If a belief is an inner sentence then a change of belief amounts to discarding a sentence from this language and replacing it with another. Despite Harman's emphasis on the cognitive aspect of thought his conception of language is very different from the one taken as the starting point of our discussions. If the notion of language as a functional system or conceptual scheme is taken in conjunction with the argument that a person's language depends heavily on his beliefs, then it can be clearly seen that Harman regards language more as a body of information, a repository of beliefs and attitudes, rather than as a form of activity. This implies that a sentence of the inner language is to be understood as something that is believed or disbelieved, in the peculiar sense the sentence is a belief, rather than as an action. If the idea that to utter a sentence is to perform an action can be adequately clarified then it can be argued that coming to believe something is not identical with forming a sentence and giving it a place among our store of beliefs. To utter sentences is to perform the actions by which one participates in the activity of speaking, and language, as a social phenomenon, is not as such a body of information but a condition of acquiring and expressing information. Given that knowing the identities of things is

1 Harman, p 106

2 Harman, Ibid

essentially connected with knowing the meanings of the terms referring to them, then it is correct to say that the possession of a language is a condition of having beliefs but not that it actually consists of beliefs. Learning a language consists of learning to combine words correctly and to distinguish between truth and falsity but not of actually forming beliefs: one cannot form beliefs until one has mastered the ability to combine words to express beliefs. If thoughts and beliefs actually are sentences, and language consists of a system of beliefs, then it is not possible to speak of a person's language being dependent upon his beliefs. There is no sense in which a person can acquire the beliefs on which his language depends prior to learning the language. What a person will say on given occasions will, among other things, depend on what he believes. It must be recognised, however, that he only has beliefs because he can speak a language. Harman ignores this ordinary sense in which what a person says depends on what he believes because he identifies beliefs with sentences constituting an inner language of thought. Language is a condition of having something to say but does not determine what one says.

These considerations point to the fact that Harman's theory does not provide a satisfactory account of the conditional status of language and its relation to the cognitive aspect of thought. It is the significance of this notion which ought to make one wary of defining thoughts and mental states as sentences, of conceiving a language exclusively as a system of representation and of distinguishing between a language of thought and a language of communication. A language has conditional status because that same language is also used in communication, and in this sense language is to be understood as a form of activity in which

people participate by performing actions of a distinctive and uniquely important kind. Some sentences do express thoughts, but what this involves is not to be explained as a matter of an outer sentence conveying the representational character of another sentence: the thought that a person expresses when he utters a particular sentence is what the sentence expresses. It is in this sense that having thoughts is dependent upon the possession of language and it is a serious error to identify thoughts with sentences. It is true that Harman does not say that all thoughts are instances of sentences under analysis, but his discussion concentrates heavily on this identification and suggests that the thoughts that are to be understood in this way are the most important. A person's language of thought constitutes his representation of the world and it is by reference to this language that his behaviour is to be explained. A person's behaviour is, for Harman, that of a nondeterministic automaton.

(c) Nondeterministic Automata In describing the nature of psychological theory Harman introduces the notion of a psychological model. He suggests that it is fruitful to interpret a psychological theory, presumably a theory of the nature of mind, as a psychological model, one in which "input can represent the effect of perception and output can represent intentional action."⁽¹⁾ The purpose of a psychological model is to serve as a device for duplicating the relevant behaviour of a person, and if the device is adequately described it should be realisable as a robot or, as Harman prefers, an automaton. A sufficiently detailed psychological model may be identified with a person's psychology and anything that instantiates the "associated automaton" has

1 Harman, p 44

that particular psychology: a person is said to instantiate the automaton that "serves as a model of his individual psychology".⁽¹⁾ These assumptions lead Harman to argue that a person is to be conceived as an automaton, from which it follows that an individual person's psychology, his functional system or conceptual scheme, is to be understood as a programme. Thus to understand mental states and processes is to see what function they can have in a person's programme.⁽²⁾ Harman means us to take this conception of a human being very seriously:

"A person's beliefs form his representation of the world, his desires represent his ends, goals, plans and intentions. Perception yields new information about the world; natural needs for food, water, sleep, etc, put constraints on goals and intentions. Theoretical reasoning is a process that functions to improve his representation of the way things are. Practical reasoning is a way of modifying plans and intentions, in the light of the way things are represented to be, so as to increase the chances of success at reaching goals and ends. Pain functions to indicate danger or damage to parts of a person's body so as to get him out of a harmful situation or to care for the injury or to avoid such situations in the future. Certain emotions, such as fear, serve to concentrate his attention in a particular situation or some threat in the environment and enable him to avoid distractions."⁽³⁾

Harman suggests that these considerations indicate how the identity and character of mental states are to be understood in terms of their functional roles, and his remarks fill out, on his own admission, rather crudely, the sense in which a human being can be characterised as an automaton.

The reason why Harman insists that mental states are tokens of sentences is now apparent. It is because reasoning, as a mental process, is of fundamental importance in yielding new

1 Harman, p 45

2 Harman, p 53

3 Harman, pp 45-46

information about the world and in forming appropriate plans and intentions in the light of how the world is understood. It would now seem that Harman is making the very point to which we have attached such importance, namely that there is an essential connection between the cognitive aspect of thought and the thought a person directs towards the performance of actions. Given that his account of thoughts and mental states is **inadequate**, his assumptions concerning the relation between the cognitive aspect of thought and the nature of deliberation must also be called into question. His recommendation that we conceive a person as an automaton indicates why this is so and we wish to argue that a satisfactory account of the cognitive aspect of thought, developed in terms of the conditional status of language, is only compatible with a non-causal account of human action.

What Harman means by the notion of a nondeterministic automaton is that explanations of beliefs and actions referring to reasons are not deterministic explanations. An explanation that refers to reasons, "describes the sequence of considerations that led to belief in a conclusion without supposing that the sequence was determined".⁽¹⁾ Explaining why someone believes something, for instance, is like explaining why a nondeterministic automaton is in a certain state: various alternatives are taken to be possible and it is not assumed that the process of reasoning leading to the conclusion was determined in advance. Harman states that this position does not commit him either way to the notion of an underlying determinism and in spite of the fact that explanation by reasons, presumably with regard to why

1 Harman, p 52

beliefs are held and why actions are performed, is not "causal or deterministic" Harman casually leaves open the question of whether reasons are causes.⁽¹⁾ It is surprising that this question is not answered, for it leaves one puzzled about why Harman wishes to say that reasons may be causes even though explanation in terms of reasons is not "causal or deterministic explanation". The account of the relation between thought and action our inquiry is intended to support renders the question of an underlying determinism irrelevant and firmly rejects the assumption that reasons function as causes.

According to Harman mental states have roles or functions in a person's "programme" or individual psychology. The functional system which is a person's mind or psychology consists of states that are linguistic in character, and we have already remarked on the fact that this system will include thoughts and beliefs on which a person acts. Harman is certainly correct to point out that there is an important connection between a person's knowledge and understanding and the way he behaves. Even so, it is still possible to ask whether it is appropriate to explain this relation by describing human beings as nondeterministic automata. Defining a person as an automaton, even though one that is nondeterministic, puts the notion of explanation by reasons under considerable strain. We describe something, a clock, for instance, as an automaton because it is understood as a deterministic mechanism or system. If the clock is in good repair then it will operate in a certain way; the mechanical components will function in the way they have been designed to

1 Harman, *Ibid*

function. On the other hand, it is commonly said of human beings that they are not automata because although they behave in certain ways they might behave differently. This is perhaps Harman's point in calling human beings nondeterministic. Yet it is this very point which makes one reluctant to characterise persons as automata. The idea of an automaton is inextricably linked with that of mechanism, and Harman's explanation of the relations between perception, thought and behaviour⁽¹⁾ suggests that this link applies in the case of human beings. There are, however, a number of considerations that challenge this suggestion. Unlike clocks and metronomes human beings sometimes reason validly and sometimes make mistakes, and the validity of their reasoning and the errors they make are, more often than not, reflected in their actions. The errors to which human beings are prone are not like mechanical defects and the roles played by mental states in contexts of human thought and action are not to be compared with the functions of the various components in an automaton. Harman is of course thinking of a more sophisticated form of automaton like a computer, but this comparison is equally misleading. The programme by virtue of which a computer operates is not to be compared with the thoughts and reasons in the light of which a person decides and acts. Quite the contrary, a computer does not act in any way that is comparable to the behaviour of a human being and does not take part in a life in which reasons play a part. A computer is not responsible either for its programme or for the deliverances that issue from it; a computer can only operate in the way it has been designed and

1 Harman, p 45

programmed to operate.⁽¹⁾ A computer may point out lies because it has been programmed to do so, but for all that the computer does not lie, nor does it tell the truth. We do not say that a computer lies or tells the truth because it makes no sense to say that its testimony is its own: the "output" of a computer depends on how it was made and for what purpose. The notion of a human being saying something that is its own is essentially related to the fact that unlike a computer a human being can have reasons for what he does and does not do; he can formulate reasons, take account of them, ignore them and offer them in explaining and justifying his actions. A computer is described as an automaton because its operations are mechanical and, in that sense, entirely determined. Trying to explain why a person has made a particular decision is quite unlike trying to explain how a computer has delivered a certain forecast, for instance. In trying to understand what led a person to make a decision one may consider what influenced him. The notion of influence that is used in describing the workings of a machine does not apply in this case: we may be speaking, for instance, about his fear of losing his job, his ambition to be chairman of the board, his concern for someone he loves, and we may speak of his character.

It is because of the appropriateness of this way of talking that we do not understand human beings as automata: a person's actions, both mental and physical, are not mechanical. A machine is not responsible for the factors which cause it to work as it does. When we do compare a human being with an automaton we do not mean that he is an automaton but that he behaves like one, and the

1 Cf Cora Diamond, "The Interchangeability of Machines", in "The Business of Reason", ed J J McIntosh and S Coval: p 70

comparison presupposes the assumption that his behaviour might have been different, that it might have exhibited independence, initiative, and even originality. The idea of a nondeterministic automaton suggests something that behaves in arbitrary and unpredictable ways. In the case of human behaviour we distinguish between actions that are arbitrary and unpredictable from those that are not, and when we say that human actions are nondeterministic we mean that they are not to be explained by reference to causes but in terms of an agent's reasons, beliefs, intentions and decisions. The most striking feature of an automaton is that it neither possesses nor lacks reasons for its operations, and this feature is one of the criteria according to which we describe something as an automaton.

Sketchy as they are these remarks point to the fact that we ought to have serious reservations about regarding the computer as a model by which we can account for the nature and importance of human thought.⁽¹⁾ Wittgenstein warned that it is only of a human being and what is like one that we can say that it thinks.⁽²⁾ A computer can be programmed to calculate, deliver predictions and play chess, and although these are to be described as intellectual activities we should hesitate to say that a computer can engage in them thoughtfully, intelligently, stupidly, carelessly, and so on: the "ability" of the computer depends entirely on its programme and is not the product of learning, practice and experience.⁽³⁾

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- 1 This is not to deny that investigations in the fields of computing and cybernetics can be of value in studying the nature of mental activity.
 - 2 Philosophical Investigations L 360.
 - 3 There are computers which are said to be self-correcting. The correcting operations have, of course, been programmed and it would surely be a remarkable machine that was able to correct errors which its programmer had not anticipated.

It is important to realise that the terms in which thought has been discussed in this inquiry do not apply to the operations of a computer. The relation between the cognitive and deliberative aspects of thought only obtains in the case of human beings. Unlike a computer a human being belongs to a community with a common language; he is able to perform actions and participate in activities which characterise him as a member of a culture. It is by referring to such considerations that we explain what it means to speak of a human being possessing concepts and the ability to act on the basis of the knowledge and understanding he has acquired. It is by reference to the fact that human beings belong to a community and are placed in social relationships that we can say that a human being can change his mind, intend to do one thing and do something else, hide his thoughts, deceive himself, take risks and, most importantly, form intentions and have thoughts, although a psychologist is likely to argue that a computer can be programmed to simulate at least some of these capacities. What must be emphasised, however, is that a computer has a programme and the relation between the machine and the programme it happens to contain, however complex and sophisticated both may be, is mechanical. Once it is seen that human beings are responsible for their own "programmes" and for the actions they perform, the notion of a programme, when applied to human beings, becomes empty and the notion of an automaton entirely inappropriate. One of the most significant differences between human beings and automata lies in the fact that only human beings have the capacity for deliberation.

In this chapter we have discussed Harman's account of the cognitive aspect of thought, an account which is developed by reference to the possession of language. His attempt to elucidate the conditional status of language by appealing to the idea of an inner language of thought or representation is unsuccessful and his characterisation of human beings as nondeterministic automata, which derives from his account of thought, must be rejected. It is now important to show how our discussion of the conditional status of language bears on the concept of deliberation.

Chapter 8CONCLUSION: KNOWLEDGE AND DELIBERATION

Our inquiry points towards the conclusion that an adequate account of how the concept of thought stands to that of agency is incompatible with a causal theory of human action.⁽¹⁾ This concluding chapter moves towards a consideration of the principal defect in the claim that reasons are to be understood as causes of actions.

(a) Deliberation. David Pears⁽²⁾ has argued that we may speak of an agent's deliberation influencing his actions and also of his actions being caused by his desires. This is a puzzling claim. If the performance of an action is explained by referring to the agent's deliberation, how is it possible to explain the same action by referring to a cause? If an action has been caused then it is difficult to accept that the agent's deliberation made any difference. The difficulty cannot be solved by regarding deliberation as a process mediating causally between desires and actions. If an agent's deliberations are causally dependent on the desires which are the real or ultimate causes of his actions, then we are understandably reluctant to refer to his deliberation as that which made the difference between his acting in one way rather than another. Pears recognises that the causal relation between human desires and actions is more complex than that between the needs and movements of simpler organisms. This is

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- 1 What is to be understood as a causal theory of human action in this context is the claim that an action is the effect of antecedent events or states. This claim is made in one form or another by Sellars, Pears and Davidson and is to be distinguished from the weaker causal thesis which allows that in some instances the relation between an action and certain antecedent conditions is not causal.
 - 2 David Pears, "Sketch for a Causal Theory of Wanting and Doing", in "Questions in the Philosophy of Mind".

because in cases of human action the causal process does not originate from a need but from a desire to perform an action.

He writes:

"The agent knows what he wants to do and is in a position to review the project and possibly to revise it. It is often argued that complications of this kind cannot be described in causal terms."⁽¹⁾

Pears does not perceive that the intrusion of the concepts of knowledge and deliberation is only a "complication" for a philosopher who wishes to maintain that the relations between desires and actions are causal. The complications do not deter Pears from arguing that such relations are causal. The fact is that "revision is seldom endless, and, when it has terminated, the agent's final desire does seem to cause his action. For there does not seem to be any other kind of connection which would give him his knowledge that he will perform it".⁽²⁾ A person's knowledge that he will perform an action, Pears suggests, is most impressive when it is based on a decision: the agent's certainty is greater in such cases because "the finality of the desire is the result either of the assumption that it is unquestionable, or of deliberation",⁽³⁾ But it is important to recognise here that the assumption that a particular desire is unquestionable (and that the action satisfying it ought to be performed) need not exclude deliberation. Perhaps it is only after deliberating that a person comes to feel that he can make the assumption. It is sometimes the case that entertaining a

1 Pears, p 99

2 Pears, Ibid

3 Pears, Ibid

doubt as to whether a certain desire or want is to be fulfilled figures prominently in a person's thinking. This is because a doubt about whether a desire is to be taken as unquestionable is necessarily concerned with whether the desire ought to be satisfied. The two ways in which a desire assumes finality and, thereby, a causal role, as Pears describes them, are not genuine alternatives. Pears grants that the finality of a desire can be the product of deliberation but still considers it necessary to ask how a person can know with any certainty that he will perform the action unless his present state of desire in some way causes it. The question is misconceived because if a person's desire causes his action then it is unnecessary for him to consider whether he is going to perform it and, for that matter, for him to know that he will: if a person is in a certain state, and that state functions as the cause of an action, then the action will simply occur. Pears does not consider this to be a relevant objection. Normally a person's "decision and his action are both produced by his desire, and, without these two connections, the connection between his decision and his action will be very weak".⁽¹⁾ The view that human beings know immediately what they will do is of no explanatory value and Pears believes that the connection between desire and action must be causal because there seems to be no other theory that can explain the phenomena.⁽²⁾

We need not be driven to any such conclusion. There are occasions on which people are either uncertain about what to do or just do not know which actions they are going to perform.

1 Pears, Ibid

2 If the "phenomena" are so clearly understood why do we need a theory to explain it?

On Pear's account the uncertainty or ignorance is due to the fact that a person is not in a state of desire or at least does not desire something very strongly. This is a curious way of talking. In some cases of deliberation a person is concerned with whether he ought to act to gratify a particular desire. If deliberation is often concerned with whether a desire ought to be gratified then one is led to the view that a causal relation obtains between the decision that follows deliberation and an action. If it is admitted that the finality of the desire can be the result of deliberation then it is hard to see how one can argue that an agent's decision to act is causally produced by his desire. If this is the case then all reference to deliberation is misconceived. There are occasions when we say that a person has a certain desire which, after some thought, he decides not to gratify. Pears would have to say about such a case that the person's decision not to act was caused by a further desire, perhaps the desire to preserve his reputation rather than to make a quick profit. But here it is intelligible to say that the person has resolved a conflict between desires and that it was his deliberation that made the difference. There seems to be nothing amiss with the view that the person knew that he was not going to act just because he had, after careful thought, decided not to. The temptation to say that a person cannot know with certainty how he will act, or whether he will act at all, unless his desires cause his actions does not arise if we come to understand how the considerations governing a decision to act are involved in an agent's deliberations. Acquiring this understanding turns on giving an account of how such considerations, including desires, are intelligible. This involves showing how the

possibility of deliberation is related to the conditional status of language and if this can be accomplished then it can be shown that any attempt to fit an agent's knowledge into a causal framework is misconceived.

Deliberation may be described as a form of mental activity directed towards the performance of an action or the decision to perform it, a form of thought which presupposes that more than one action is possible in the given circumstances.⁽¹⁾ It is part of what we mean by deliberation that it makes a difference to how a person acts and in this sense it presupposes that there are considerations that have a bearing on an agent's decision. The sense in which deliberation is said to influence behaviour, then, involves the agent's understanding of the difference between performing one action rather than another. Thus deliberation is commonly described as a process of coming to a decision on the basis of reasons, it being important to remember that deliberation is very often a matter of distinguishing good reasons from bad ones. A person can perform an action for a bad reason and he may later come to see that he had overlooked something of importance. People are sometimes deceived by others, they sometimes deceive themselves, and there are occasions when they do not foresee the consequences of their actions with sufficient clarity. This points to the fact that it is not merely deliberation that makes a difference to action but also the quality of the deliberation. By this we primarily mean the care with which a person takes account of relevant considerations and the soundness of his reasoning. Deliberation is always concerned

1 The criteria by which the notion of deliberation is defined have been carefully and clearly expressed by Richard Taylor; "Action and Purpose", pp 167-184.

with future actions, an agent's own actions rather than those of someone else, and it is concerned with actions the agent conceives to be within his power to perform or to forego. If the actions are impossible, inevitable or unavoidable then deliberating about them will be pointless. When deliberation has a point there are considerations which an agent understands to have a bearing on his future conduct and it is in connection with this that deliberation is related to the voluntary character of actions.⁽¹⁾

However, the criteria by which we elucidate the concept of deliberation do not, in themselves show that deliberation makes a difference to a person's behaviour. Pears argues that both an agent's decision and his action are caused by his desire and, on this view, deliberation forms part of the causal relation between the desire and the action. The theory casts doubt on the importance of deliberation because the desire would have been causally sufficient to bring about the action even if the agent had not deliberated.

We have suggested that Pears' presentation of his case for psychological determination is misconceived and Anthony Kenny has shown how his position is fundamentally defective. In an earlier discussion of the same issue Pears argued that rational explanations of human actions have a similar structure to causal explanations of physical events, and maintained that if this structure can be sufficiently improved then it will become deterministic.⁽²⁾ Pears argues that the statement "I did A only in order to achieve B" implies that the desire mentioned by an

1 This is not to argue that all voluntary actions are preceded by deliberation, but that all actions preceded by deliberation are voluntary.

2 David Pears, "Rational Explanations of Actions and Psychological Determinism", in "Essays on Freedom of Action", ed T Honderich, p 108.

agent was sufficient to lead to the action without the interference of other desires. But as Kenny rightly points out:

.... "unless we assume that 'reason' is equivalent to 'antecedent condition sufficient in the circumstances to produce action' we cannot go on to infer that 'the desire mentioned was sufficient to lead to the action without any other desires' or that if the agent had not done A he would not have wanted to achieve B. But the equivalence between 'reason' and 'sufficient antecedent condition' is the thesis of psychological determinism; not an uncontentious premiss which can be used to establish a version of that doctrine." (1)

Nevertheless, the significance of deliberation cannot be clarified without considering the conditions which make it possible. This entails that we must show how a causal theory of human action is philosophically unacceptable. It will be argued that the phenomena which philosophers have been tempted to regard as the causes of actions are not and could not be understood as such by human agents. It is plainly unsatisfactory merely to say that human actions are not the sorts of things that can be caused, and it is for this reason that we must turn to the question of how it is possible for an agent to understand and take account of the considerations that can have a bearing on his conduct. If desires, beliefs and features of the environment are factors which an agent can understand to have a bearing on his actions, factors which he can take into account in his deliberations, then it is strange indeed to also describe them as the causes of his actions. It is in this connection that the cognitive aspect of thought and deliberation are seen to be significantly related.

A person cannot deliberate whether to perform an action if he believes that there are already causally sufficient conditions for bringing it about. If an action is the effect of certain

1 Anthony Kenny, "Will, Freedom and Power", p 113

antecedent conditions then the person will be able to predict that he will perform it if those conditions obtain. In such circumstances he cannot in any relevant way deliberate whether to perform that action for he already knows that he will. His deliberation becomes pointless when he becomes aware of any conditions that are causally sufficient to bring about his future behaviour. If he is ignorant of these conditions then his deliberation is equally pointless. As Richard Taylor points out, it cannot be denied that deliberation is sometimes illusory.⁽¹⁾

This is the case when a person mistakenly believes that alternative courses of action are available to him or when he is merely rationalising his action, trying to discover reasons for an action which he cannot, in fact, help performing. In the first case the person believes that his deliberation has a point where in reality it does not and in the second he is not, strictly speaking, deliberating at all. If it is true that all human actions are caused by antecedent conditions then deliberation must be illusory in one of these senses, and Taylor concedes that this may be the case. However, the person who believes that his deliberation will make a difference cannot consistently maintain that his actions are caused by antecedent events or states. While this is true it does not show that the agent's belief is not false. Nevertheless, we can go some way towards showing that an agent is at least sometimes justified in believing that his deliberations have a point.

(b) Language as Activity What has been said so far implies that deliberation is fundamentally concerned with reasons for actions. If someone comes to believe that he has a good reason

1 Richard Taylor, "Action and Purpose", p 183

for performing an action then he can offer that reason in explaining and justifying what he intends to do or what he has done. The role of reasons in deliberation calls for an investigation of language because reasons, in company with beliefs and other mental states, are what is said or expressed by particular sentences. In this sense the possession of language is a condition of both having and giving reasons. In order to clarify the status of reasons it is necessary to pay further attention to the notion of language as a form of human activity.

In chapter six it was argued that an action has identity in falling under a description and, in connection with this, that it is unnecessary if not misleading to distinguish between the performance of an action and the sequence of movements which we identify as its performance. The point of referring to the sequence as a performance is to make clear that the movements are not the effects of antecedent causes, to indicate that an agent is responsible for them. It is one of the applications of the concept of performance to distinguish what happens to a person from what he does and this, as we have argued, involves the distinction between actions and events. Philosophers who subscribe to a causal theory of human behaviour have been inclined to reinterpret this distinction by defining actions as events of a peculiar kind, paradoxically, as events which agents intentionally perform. The validity of this reinterpretation is challenged by the argument that the performance of an action is identified as a sequence of bodily movements falling under a description. What needs to be shown is that the movements in question need not be thought of as events brought about by antecedent conditions. One may begin to do this by considering the notion that the action an agent performs after deliberation answers to a description

under which it is intentional.

An agent must understand the descriptions under which his actions are intentional, for clearly he cannot perform an action intentionally unless he knows what the action is. It is because descriptions of actions belong in a person's language, because he can describe actions and respond to requests to perform them, for instance, that it is possible for him to know what he is doing, what he has done and what he intends to do. Descriptions of actions have use in reporting what one is doing or has done and in stating what one intends to do in the future. Actions have identities and language is a condition of the intelligibility of actions in the way that it is a condition of the identities of objects, qualities and events. As Locke perceived, knowing the identity of an action depends on having an idea of it. However, the idea of an action embodied in a description belongs in the use of language in communication, and, because of this, shared knowledge of the identities of actions is maintained by the correct use of their descriptions. Since knowing the identities of actions presupposes knowing the language within which their descriptions are used then deliberation is only possible for a person who speaks a language. There is of course a sense in which deliberating actually consists of using words, this being the sense in which deliberation consists of reasoning. One cannot speak of reasoning as a non-linguistic process because reasoning involves relations between expressions. As a process of reasoning, one of arriving at a decision to act on the basis of a good reason, deliberation is an intellectual activity and what counts as an intellectual activity is not to be defined as something essentially internal. It is rather to be characterised in terms

of language, and in saying this we are primarily referring to the sense in which the possession of language is a condition of knowing the identities of thoughts, beliefs and other mental states as well as objects, qualities, events and actions. This is particularly important with regard to the claim we are defending, namely that deliberation involves the capacity to discern and take account of the considerations that have a relevant bearing on one's future actions. The important question is how these considerations are intelligible to an agent. The fact that the conditional status of language is maintained by shared linguistic practices implies the relevance and importance of considering the nature of language as a form of human activity. This can be clarified by comparing linguistic actions with bodily actions.

There is at least one important similarity between these forms of action. Just as it is misleading to distinguish between a bodily action and the physical movements which are identified as its performance, it is equally misleading to distinguish between a particular sequence of words and the act of saying something. What a person says does not in some mysterious way exist independently of the words he uses, just as a bodily action does not exist independently of an agent's physical movements. The difference between an action and an event is not a difference between something that consists of physical movements and something that does not. It is rather a difference between movements that do not occur as the effects of antecedent causes and those that do.

But the difference between bodily acts and linguistic acts are more striking than the similarities. We have argued that the identity of an action is fixed by the description that is used to

refer to it. We teach the identities of actions by using such expressions as "This is pointing", "We call this striking a match", "This is how to turn on the light", and so on. It is because actions fall under descriptions that belong to the language a person speaks that it is possible for him to decide to perform them, to repeat them and to respond to requests to perform them. It is possible to ask a person to repeat a particular action because he knows its identity. He cannot be asked to repeat something he has not done, a movement for which he was not responsible. It is true that a particular event can happen more than once - we sometimes say "The same thing happened" or "It will go on happening" - but an event is not performed. When a series of bodily movements merely occur they do so as the effects of antecedent causes, and the possibility of distinguishing between the bodily movements that are events and those that constitute the performances of actions belongs to the application of act-descriptions. If these descriptions applied indifferently to actions and events then it would not be possible to draw a significant distinction between the concepts of performance and occurrence.

Now the difference between the occurrence of an event and the performance of an action has an important bearing on the distinction, discussed in our first chapter, between the occurrence and the use of words. When words merely occur then it is not the case that a person is saying something. When a computer prints out English sentences the computer is not saying anything, and we can explain how the sentences are produced by referring exclusively to the structure of the machine and its programme. The sentences have sense and their occurrence is not arbitrary,

but for all that they are not uttered by the computer. The point can be more forcibly made by considering an example presented by Peter Geach. Geach asks us to "imagine that over a period of time a roulette wheel gives only the numbers 1 to 26, and that this sequence of numbers spells out English sentences according to the obvious code (A = 1, B = 2, etc)". Geach suggests that if we take precautions against physical tampering with the wheel "we could then have conclusive evidence that the thoughts normally expressible by the English sentences were being originated, and strong evidence that they were originated by no living organism."⁽¹⁾ Geach is correct in saying that the "thoughts" are not originated by a living organism. But neither are they originated by the roulette wheel. It is not the wheel which is saying something but the sentences correlated with the numbers; the wheel is not expressing thoughts and the sentences, although significant in themselves, are random occurrences. Yet the fact that uttering a sentence or writing it down can be described as an action does not in itself elucidate the difference between linguistic expressions and bodily actions. The difference is to be clarified by considering how linguistic actions have identity. Given that the identity of a kind of bodily action is fixed by a description, it is appropriate to ask whether the identity of a linguistic action is fixed in the same way. The answer is: clearly not. In using the term "throwing a ball" a person is describing an action, but the fact that his doing so is itself the performance of an action does not entail that this act has identity in falling under a further description. There is an internal relation

1 Peter Geach, "What Do We Think With?" in "God and the Soul", p 39.

between a correct use of words and the kind of action they identify. There is a relation in this case because it is possible to distinguish between a bodily action and the description by which it is identified. This distinction cannot be drawn in the case of linguistic action because the identity of an expression is not fixed by anything external to it. And because this distinction cannot be drawn in the case of language it is impossible to distinguish between the sense of an expression and its identity. This helps to clarify the sense in which language is intrinsically intelligible and to elucidate its conditional status. There is a striking difference between bodily actions and linguistic actions in that a bodily action is something that stands in need of description whereas the kind of sentence or term we are interested in here is a description.

The fact that we cannot draw distinctions between, (a) the identity and the sense of a linguistic expression, and, (b) a linguistic action and the signs of which it is composed, indicates what the difference between words and bodily movements amounts to. It is not the case that bodily movements are the means by which actions are performed, for they are what we identify as performances. On the other hand, there is a sense in which it is correct to say that words are the means by which human beings express things. Why is this only "in a sense" correct? The fact that distinctions cannot be drawn between an act of expression, the utterance of a sentence and the words forming it implies that it is the arrangement of words, the sentence, which "performs"

the act of expression. The words are the means by which something is expressed because they must be used correctly. This is essentially related to the two considerations in terms of which the distinction between the material and conditional aspects of language was explained.⁽¹⁾ These were, (1) that a statement has sense independently of its actual truth or falsity, and (2) that the meaning of a word does not depend on its physical appearance but on its syntactical role or correct use. Both considerations are closely related and are, in turn, related to the point under discussion. A person says that P by virtue of the fact that the combination of words forming P says that P. This throws some light on the notion that a language, and only a language, has conditional status and that it is only a language that is intrinsically intelligible. The fact that it is a sentence that performs the "action" of saying what it does indicates that the possibility of this expression is given in the language a person shares with others. To acquire language is to acquire the capacity to have thoughts, to express them and to compare them with reality. This does not mean that what a person says on any occasion is dictated or determined by his language. It is rather that his speaking the language makes it possible for him to have something to say on particular occasions at all. Even though we have attached great importance to the fact a sentence is a significant arrangement of signs, it is still the case that it is the speaker who uses the words or puts them together in this particular way. He can do so because his knowing how to use words entails his knowing that a sentence will say what he wants to say: language is the means by which thoughts are expressed in that thoughts are

1 Chapter 1, pp 21-22

what sentences express. It is in this sense that the possession of language is a condition of having thoughts and of formulating and expressing them. Language is also a condition of the identities of mental states, this being essentially connected with the fact that it is a condition of the identities of the objects of such states.⁽¹⁾ There is also the sense in which language is a condition of having reasons, of formulating and expressing them and of distinguishing good reasons from bad reasons. Reasons, like thoughts and mental states, are not sentences but what sentences say or express. Neither are they material entities.

But the fact that language is a condition of the intelligibility of mental acts and states as well as of physical objects, qualities, events and actions does not commit us to the view that the former are similar in kind to the latter, Whereas perceptible phenomena are described by language, thoughts, mental states and intellectual processes are rather expressed in language and, as we have said, the possibility of expressing thoughts and mental states, indeed of having them to express, is given in the language people speak.

Our remarks imply that only linguistic actions have sense or say something and this is of fundamental importance in elucidating the relations between thought and action. Although thoughts and mental states are not sentences it is correct to characterise thought in terms of language provided that it is understood as a distinctive form of human activity. If deliberation is a rational process the purpose of which is to arrive at a decision or intention to perform a particular action then the decision must be taken on the basis of reasons. Deliberation,

1 This view differs significantly from the view developed by Harman.

therefore, involves distinguishing good reasons from bad reasons, a matter of taking relevant considerations into account. Since reasons are what certain sentences express deliberation presupposes the possession of language. The notion of a person reasoning to himself does not imply that what he says to himself causes his overt actions. The considerations we have been discussing point to the fact that neither sentences nor what they express can be the effects of prior causes. A sentence is itself a significant arrangement of signs and a person is only able to form a significant sentence if he knows how to use words correctly, this being a matter of following rules. He need not be able to formulate these rules explicitly and, in any case, many such rules are not particularly formal or precise.⁽¹⁾ It is both implausible and entirely confused to argue that a cause, of whatever kind, can bring about an arrangement of signs that says one thing rather than another. A cause does not operate in terms of rules. In order to give some account of how this was possible the notions of cause and effect would need to be explained in terms which are normally absent in the context of a causal explanation. In trying to explain the nature of the causal relation appealing to the notion of understanding rules and their application would deprive the ideas of cause and effect of explanatory value. A person exercises the capacity to form significant sentences in terms of the criteria marking the difference between correctness and incorrectness in the use of words, between sense and nonsense, and between truth and falsity, and he acquires an understanding

1 A rule of language is often made clear by simply comparing the use of a word in different propositional contexts, the purpose of this being to show how the word can play a significant role in one sentence but not in another.

of these distinctions in acquiring language. It is a confusion to explain utterances as the effects of causes because understanding these distinctions cannot be explained in terms of causality. Speaking a language is characterised by the fact that rules are understood, accepted and followed and this way of talking applies to actions and not to occurrences.

If we have succeeded in showing that linguistic expressions are not effects then it can also be argued that sentences, and what they express, are not causes. This is not simply because expressions are actions rather than events but because they are actions of a very distinctive kind. If an expression functions as the cause of a certain effect, an action performed by the agent who utters the sentence or by someone else, a causal relation can only obtain if the expression is first understood, and, furthermore, understood to have a bearing on whether the action ought to be performed. But saying that understanding the expression in this way is a precondition of it functioning as a cause undermines the possibility of describing the expression as a cause. It may be that there are occasions on which the utterance of a sentence does cause an action, but if this is literally the case then it does not matter whether it is one sentence that has been uttered rather than another. It is an error to argue that an expression can be a cause and a form of words understood by a person, for if the expression works as a cause then it does not matter whether it is understood.

In arguing against the view that expressions can be causes we are reaffirming that an account of the relation between thought and action is incompatible with a causal theory of human behaviour. Since the ideas of deliberation and reason are closely

related the validity of our position depends on showing that the characterisation of reasons as causes of actions is vulnerable to criticism. We conclude our inquiry with an attempt to provide this criticism.

(c) Reasons and Causes A discussion of reasons for actions brings together the cognitive and deliberative aspects of thought. Deliberating whether an action ought to be performed presupposes that the agent knows the identity of the action (and the identities of the alternatives) and that he is able to apprehend the relevant considerations. In order to show that a person can take account of the considerations that have a bearing on his future conduct and that he can decide to act in the light of those considerations, it is necessary to test the claim that reasons can be defined as causes of actions.

We have emphasised that knowing the identity of an action involves understanding the description under which it falls, for unless an agent understands the description he cannot intentionally perform the action it identifies.⁽¹⁾ This principle gives an important indication of how appealing to the conditional status of language helps to illuminate the possibility of deliberation. A person's deliberations are concerned with whether to perform actions that are intentional under given descriptions. Language is also a condition of an agent being able to apprehend the factors relevant to deliberation and philosophers who have wished to define reasons as causes have not considered this point with sufficient care. The fact that a reason is something a person

1 Cf Anthony Kenny, "Will, Freedom and Power", p 99, and Donald Davidson, "Agency", in "Agent, Action and Reason", ed Binkley, Bronaugh and Marras: p 12

has for performing an action, that to give a reason is to answer the question why one did something, suggests the important role reasons play in deliberation. We normally say that a person understands his actions to be reasonable and therefore justified in the light of what he considers to be good reasons. Now Davidson believes that this common and natural way of speaking does not account for the fact that "a person can have a reason for an action, and perform the action, and yet this reason not be the reason why he did it."⁽¹⁾ Does this show that this way of speaking is inherently misleading? What Davidson's remark indicates is that on certain occasions we may be mistaken as to why a person did something and that on some occasions a person may have more than one reason for doing something. It does not establish that there is anything wrong with the notion of a person judging an action to be appropriate by reference to what he takes to be good reasons. Davidson's argument is this:

"Central to the relation between a reason and an action it explains is the idea that the agent performed the action because he had a reason. Of course, we can include this idea too in justification; but then the notion of justification becomes as dark as the notion of reason until we can account for the force of 'because'." (2)

It is necessary to regard rationalisation as a species of causal explanation since otherwise explanations in terms of reasons will not guarantee that the reason a person had for performing an action was actually the reason why he did it. This is revealed in Davidson's criticism of Melden's claim that causal explanations

1 Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons and Causes", in "The Philosophy of Action", ed A R White, p 85. All references to this edition.

2 Davidson, p 85

are irrelevant to, and indeed distort, our understanding of human actions. (1) Melden gives the example of a motorist raising his arm in order to signal. According to Melden we specify the identity and point of the action in relation to the context or pattern in which it is performed. But Davidson argues that referring to the context or pattern alone is not sufficient to explain the action. (2) He writes:

"What is the pattern that explains the action? Is it the familiar pattern of an action done for a reason? Then it does indeed explain the action, but only because it assumes the relation of reason and action we want to analyse." (3)

This objection is unconvincing. If the context referred to contains both reason and action, then it is also true that Davidson's recommended alternative, that we explain an event (an action) by placing it in the context of its cause (a reason), is open to the similar objection that the context or pattern is assumed to contain the relation between cause and effect. It is difficult to appreciate the force of Davidson's argument because his use of the terms "context" and "pattern" is ambiguous. He uses them in one sense to refer to the wider pattern or circumstances in which an action is performed and in another sense to refer to the actual relation between a reason and an action. It is important to keep these apart and Davidson does not do so. If it can be said that a wider pattern contains the relation between a reason and an action, a wider pattern can also be said to contain the relation between a cause and its effect. But when Davidson speaks of a

1 See A I Melden, "Free Action", p 184.

2 It is not clear whether Melden wishes to claim that the pattern explains the action: see for instance, "Free Action", p 190-191.

cause and its effect forming a pattern he is referring to a relation between events, not to the circumstances or setting within which this relation obtains. When he insists that if the relation between reason and action "illustrate a different pattern of explanation, that pattern must be identified", he is again referring to a relation between events. It is Davidson's view that a different pattern cannot be identified, from which it follows that we can legitimately explain an event, an action, "by placing it in the context of its cause", a reason. He is of course aware of the two senses in which the terms "context" and "pattern" are being used. When he discusses the possibility of explaining an action by placing it in a wider context he makes it clear that this procedure does not show that the relation between reason and action is not causal. Davidson argues:

.... "the man is driving, he is approaching a turn; he knows he ought to signal; he knows how to signal, by raising his arm. And now, in this context, he raises his arm. Perhaps, as Melden suggests, if all this happens, he does signal. And the explanation would then be this: if, under these conditions, a man raises his arm, then he signals. The difficulty is, of course, that this explanation does not touch the question of why he raised his arm. He had a reason to raise his arm, but this has not been shown to be the reason why he did it. If the description 'signalling' explains his action by giving his reason, then the signalling must be intentional; but, on the account just given, it may not be." (1)

It is perfectly true that under these conditions a man's raising his arm might not be a signal. This does not show, as Davidson admits, that placing an action in a pattern or context is irrelevant to explaining the action. His point is that placing the action in its wider context does not eliminate the need to

1 Davidson, p 86

place an event, an action, in the context of its cause, a reason. Since a different pattern of explanation cannot be identified the relation between a reason and an action must be causal.

It is not necessary to defend Melden's position in order to detect the weakness in the view Davidson proposes, although it is important to mention that specifying the conditions under which a person acts certainly does touch the question of why he does so. When we know a person's reason we have a description of an action which places it in, to use Davidson's phrase, "a familiar picture", and this picture "includes some of the agent's beliefs and attitudes: perhaps also his goals, ends, principles, general character traits, virtues or vices".⁽¹⁾ Closely related to this is the fact that "To learn, through learning the reason, that an agent conceived his action as a lie, a repayment of a debt, an insult, the fulfilment of an avuncular obligation, or a knight's gambit is to grasp the point of the action in its setting of rules, practices, conventions and expectations".⁽²⁾ Given that knowing a person's reason for acting is closely related to grasping the point of the action, then the setting in which the action has a point is also the setting in which a person has a reason for performing it. We shall presently argue that this is extremely important in describing the relation between reasons and actions.

When philosophers argue that reasons are causes of actions it is important to consider how they describe the nature of reasons. Davidson argues that understanding how a reason rationalises an action presupposes that we can see, at least in essential outline, how to construct a primary reason, and the

1 Davidson, p 85

2 Davidson, Ibid

primary reason for an action is its cause.⁽¹⁾ A primary reason is that because of which an action is performed and consists of a "pro attitude" of the agent towards actions sharing a certain property together with a belief that an action, falling under a particular description, has that property. What is of interest here is the identification of reasons in terms of attitudes and beliefs. Reasons actually consist of attitudes and beliefs,⁽²⁾ and Davidson argues that "at least in a vast number of typical cases, some pro attitude must be assumed to be present if a statement of an agent's reasons for acting is to be intelligible".⁽³⁾ A pro attitude must be assumed to be present in the sense that the attitudes and beliefs constituting primary reasons are states or dispositions of the agent.

It is not hard to appreciate why Davidson wishes to identify reasons as states and dispositions. If reasons cannot be so characterised then it is difficult to maintain that reasons can be causes for the obvious reason that one can only speak of a causal relation where it is possible to identify a cause independently of its effect. Davidson is arguing that explaining an action by referring to a reason commits us to the view that the reason, in those circumstances, constitutes a sufficient antecedent condition for the performance of the action.⁽⁴⁾ The strength of Davidson's case rests on the characterisation of reasons as states and dispositions. If this characterisation is vulnerable to criticism then the claim that reasons are causes is seriously threatened.

1 Davidson, p 80

2 Davidson, p 86

3 Davidson, p 87

4 He dismisses the Humean requirement that a covering law, one stating that a person in comparable circumstances and in the same state will perform the same action, must be produced: "It is an error to think that no explanation has been given until a law has been produced." p 92.

We have suggested that if reasons are to be characterised at all then they are to be described as the things said by the sentences people utter when they give their reasons. This indicates how a non-causal account of the relation between reasons and actions may be supported. Consider the sentence "He prepared the meal because he was hungry". This seems to imply that his state of hunger was his reason for acting. But it must also be remembered that a reason is essentially something a person gives or states. When a person replies to the question "Why did you prepare the meal?" by saying "Because I was hungry", he gives the reason for the action and it can hardly be denied that the sentence makes reference to his physical state. One cannot conclude from this, however, that his physical state and his reason were identical. A physical state like hunger is experienced and it is possible to imagine people experiencing certain states and yet not conceiving them as having a relevant bearing on their actions. Although the state of hunger is universally understood to have a bearing on action, this is because human beings understand that hunger is to be satisfied in certain ways. But to speak of physical states being understood to have a bearing on action, or as influencing decisions and intentions, is at variance with the claim that these states are the causes of actions. As we have intimated, one reason why this is so is that experiencing a certain state does not entail that it is understood to have a bearing on action. Another reason is that while it is perfectly natural to speak of experiencing hunger it is extremely unnatural to speak of experiencing reasons. We speak of being hungry and of having reasons, but being hungry is not itself the reason why a person prepares food. If it was then it would be plausible to argue

that his reason was the cause of his action. The unsatisfactory character of this way of speaking can also be illustrated by considering the fact that the giving of reasons is a practice that has its home in contexts of discussion and argument. It is in such contexts that reasons provide adequate or inadequate justification for the performance of actions. A sentence expressing a reason can occur in an argument, but we cannot make sense of the claim that a physical or mental state can occur in an argument.⁽¹⁾ I can say that my reason for performing an action was the conclusion I drew from certain premisses. In that sense the conclusion I arrived at was my reason. Mental and physical states, however, are not in themselves either premisses or conclusions.

These considerations suggest that philosophers who wish to identify reasons as mental and physical states fail to see the significance of the distinction that must be drawn between reasons and the conditions in relation to which people have, formulate and give reasons. The person in our example has a reason for preparing a meal because he is hungry: his being hungry gives him a reason for acting and this does not mean that his physical state is itself his reason. He might have had a different reason. For instance, he might be preparing the meal because he is expecting a visitor. Again, it is correct to say that he has a reason for performing his actions because he is expecting a visitor. But it is confusing to say that his mental state is the reason why he acts in this way. This is particularly important in connection with the possibility of deliberation in such cases.

1 Unless, like Harman, we define the states as sentences.

The man might have thought that the visitor would not be expecting a meal or that he was a person who did not deserve such a reception, in which case he would have acted differently. If we regard the mental state of expectation as the reason for the person's actions, and, therefore, their cause, then we make it impossible to distinguish between his reasons and the conditions in relation to which those reasons are intelligible and appropriate. This distinction is important, for mental and physical states are among these conditions. The distinction is there to be drawn and observing it does not make reasons mysterious: a reason is nothing more nor less than what a person can say if someone asks him why he is doing something, why he did it or why he intends doing it.

We are arguing, then, that it is an error to confuse reasons with the conditions in relation to which it can be said that people have reasons for acting. The plausibility of Davidson's case for accepting a causal theory of action depends on identifying reasons with states and dispositions which are among the factors which give people reasons for doing certain things in particular circumstances. This is a serious error. When a person says "I prepared a meal because I was expecting a friend", he is giving a reason and in doing so he is mentioning the consideration in the light of which he understood the action to be appropriate; by mentioning his mental state he is making explicit why he had a reason for doing what he did and, we may assume, a good reason. The fact that we can ask whether this gave the person a good reason presupposes that there is a distinction between a reason and the grounds for holding that reason and believing it to be adequate or compelling. Mental and physical

states are not normally described as the products of decisions. A person becomes hungry through lack of food. The action of fulfilling this want, on the other hand, often is the product of a decision. Similarly, a man, after discovering his wife's infidelity, may become extremely angry. While he does not in any ordinary sense decide to be angry it can be perfectly correct to say of an angry cuckold that, given his anger, he decides to act in one way rather than another. In such a case it may be possible to accept that his behaviour was not impulsive because we came to understand that he had a good reason for his actions. The distinction between good and bad reasons presupposes that a person can decide on the reasons on which he intends to act. For example, it is perfectly intelligible to say of a man that although he was extremely jealous he decided not to start divorce proceedings. In this case it is correct to say that he did not regard his jealousy as giving him a good reason for a certain course of action. Reasons enter into a person's deliberations because there are conditions against which reasons are identified and judged to be acceptable. What must be shown is that these are not causal conditions.

It is important to understand that people do not just happen to have reasons for what they do. We wish to emphasise here that distinguishing between reasons and the conditions in relation to which people have, accept and reject reasons does not make it necessary to appeal to the argument that the connection between wants and actions is logical rather than causal. This argument, as Kenny points out, is confused although it embodies an important insight:

"The a priori truth is that wants are specified and identified by their fulfilments: in order to know what wanting ϕ is you must know what ϕ ing is; the desire to ϕ differs from the desire to ψ precisely to the extent that ϕ ing differs from ψ ing; and so on." (1)

And Kenny goes on to cite Don Locke's argument that the conceptual connection between wants and their fulfilments does not rule out the possibility of their being causally connected.

Locke states:

"The mere fact that a want is described or identified or even defined by reference to some action no more shows that the action must, with logical necessity, follow upon that want than the fact that the smell described by reference to coffee shows that coffee must, with logical necessity, be present where the smell is. Coffee and the smell of coffee are, in Hume's terms, distinct existences: one can occur without the other, and that, it seems is all that is required for "Humean" causation." (2)

However, this criticism is only relevant to the argument under discussion if reasons are identified as mental and physical states, that is, as wants of various kinds. It is true that wants are specified and identified by reference to the actions that fulfil them, but it is not at all obvious that reasons are specified and identified in the same way. A person may raise his hand with the intention of casting his vote for a particular proposal. His intention is revealed in the intelligibility of the action, but we cannot discover his reason for voting in this way from the action alone. An action performed for a reason is necessarily intentional, but even though we may know that a person did something intentionally we might not know his reason.

1 Anthony Kenny, "Will, Freedom and Power", p 117.

2 Don Locke, "Reasons, Wants and Causes", American Philosophical Quarterly, 1975; pp 174-175.

This is closely related to our point that it is a confusion to assume that having reasons for acting is a contingent matter: a reason is not something a person merely happens to have at a particular time and it is not to be identified with a mental or physical state a person happens to be in. As Davidson himself recognises, a discussion of reasons must involve the notion of decision:

.... "generalisations connecting reasons and actions are not - and cannot be sharpened into - the kind of law on the basis of which accurate predictions can reliably be made. If we reflect on the way in which reasons determine choice, decision and behaviour, it is easy to see why this is so. What emerges in the ex post facto atmosphere of explanation and justification, as the reason frequently was, to the agent at the time of action, one consideration among many, a reason. Any serious theory for predicting action on the basis of reasons must find a way of evaluating the relative force of various desires and beliefs in the matrix of decision; it cannot take as its starting point the refinement of what is to be expected from a single desire." (1)

Now the notion of a decision to act must be understood in connection with deliberation and Davidson's defence of a causal theory of action gives a distorted view of the relation between reasons and decisions. The view that reasons, as states and dispositions, determine choices and decisions is important to a causal theory of action, hence the need to evaluate the relative force of desires and beliefs in relation to decisions. According to this theory a decision only makes a difference to how a person acts in that his decision is dependent on his desires and beliefs. What makes it difficult to accept this claim is the fact that on Davidson's account reasons are causal conditions given independently of an agent's decisions. It hardly makes sense to say both that an agent's decision (and the deliberation which led to

1 Davidson, p 91

it) makes a difference to how he acts and that the decision was determined by his states and dispositions. In a later discussion of the same issue Davidson writes:

.... "when we offer the fact of the desire and belief in explanation, we imply not only that the agent had the desire and belief, but that they were efficacious in producing the action. Here we must say, I think, that causality is involved, ie that the desire and belief were causal conditions of the action." (1)

This leaves no room for the notion that a person decides to perform an action in the light of what he takes to be a good reason, in the light of his deliberations. And it is not surprising that Davidson is faced with the impossible task of giving an account of how reasons cause actions "in the right way", that is, of how an action is performed for one reason rather than another:

"For a desire and a belief to explain an action in the right way, they must cause it in the right way, perhaps through a chain or process of reasoning that meets standards of rationality. I do not see how the right sort of causal process can be distinguished without, among other things, giving an account of how a decision is reached in the light of conflicting evidence and conflicting desires." (2)

Davidson doubts whether such an account can be given, and even if it could the notions of evidence or "good reasons for believing" could not be dispensed with. The difficulty in providing such an account, however, derives from the attempt to combine the two ideas which Davidson assumes to be built into the notion of acting on a reason, the idea of cause and the idea of rationality. A reason, Davidson states, is a rational cause, hence the curious

1 Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy" in "Philosophy of Psychology", ed S C Brown: p 44. Although Davidson seems to be expounding the weaker causal thesis here (see p 189, note 1), his discussions of action, in general, suggest that he is defending the stronger causal thesis that the relation between desires and actions is one of event causality, ie desires and beliefs are identical with physiological states and events which are causally related to bodily movements.

2 Davidson, Ibid, p 45.

problem of explaining how a cause can bring about an action that is judged to be reasonable in the light of beliefs and desires "of the right sort". The notion that a causal process must meet standards of rationality presents a serious difficulty and Davidson might well despair of spelling out the way in which attitudes must cause actions if they are also to rationalise them.⁽¹⁾

The difficulties in Davidson's discussion derive from two assumptions: that since there is a distinction between explanation and justification then the relation between reasons and actions must be causal, and that reasons are states and dispositions. Both assumptions lack justification. An acceptable account of the concepts of decision and deliberation involves a distinction between reasons and the conditions in relation to which human beings identify and understand them as such. If, for example, a man is beset with conflicting desires he is able to understand why they conflict and to realise, perhaps, that only one of these desires gives him a good reason for performing a certain action. He decides to act in the light of what he understands to be a good reason and this implies that people can and do determine what are to count as reasons, that reasons are not given independently of deliberation and decision. It often happens that a person decides that a certain desire does not give him a good reason for fulfilling it. The statement that his reason for resisting this desire is another desire is a misleading way of saying that another desire gives him a better reason. To say that conflicting desires are conflicting reasons is to abandon the idea that a

1 Davidson, "Freedom to Act" in "Essays on Freedom of Action", ed T Honderich; p 153.

person is responsible for the reasons on which he acts, a view which forces one to conceive intentions and actions as being entirely dependent on the relative strength of a person's desires. This position⁽¹⁾ does not take account of the fact that the "strength" of various desires is something which a person understands and considers. The strength of a desire is not necessarily the criterion by which a person decides whether the desire gives him a good reason for fulfilling it. An acceptable account of the role of reasons must allow that there is a significant relation between deciding what to do and distinguishing between good and bad reasons. It is cogent to speak of a difference between the desires a person believes he ought to fulfil and those he does not, but this difference must be explained in terms of his believing that he ought to perform some actions but not others. This follows from what Kenny describes as the correct insight contained in the claim that the relation between a want and its fulfilment is logical rather than causal. The difference between a good reason and a bad reason is not identical with a difference between one desire and another. But to understand the difference between good and bad desires is to understand that some actions ought to be performed but not others. There is a sense in which we can speak of good and bad desires but only because people distinguish them as such in terms of the reasons on which they decide how to act: a person decides to perform an action because he has a reason for fulfilling a particular desire and we cannot say about such cases that the desire is itself the reason. When there is a conflict between desires

1 It is the position which forces Davidson to despair of accounting for how attitudes must cause actions if they are to rationalise the actions.

the question of which desire to fulfil is central to a person's thinking. His deliberation is not a matter of his waiting on the strength of his desires but of establishing a reason for fulfilling one desire rather than another, and this enables us to argue that there is a significant relation, one could say a logical relation, between deciding how to act, which may be described as the purpose of deliberation, and establishing the reason that justifies the action. Once it is shown that there is a distinction between having a particular desire and deciding whether it ought to be fulfilled (which is deciding whether having the desire gives one a good reason for acting), we are in a position to say that an agent's desires, attitudes and beliefs are among the considerations which his deliberations take into account. Once it is granted that these considerations are understood to have a bearing on a decision then they cannot, in those instances, be causes of actions. A person has grounds for believing something to be the case; the adequacy of the evidence gives him a reason for believing. Similarly, a person has grounds for deciding in one way rather than another. What he decides is to perform an action, but deciding how to act is not independent of identifying the right reason for acting and unless these were intrinsically connected it would make little sense to speak of his actions being related to his decisions. Deliberation is concerned with reasons as well as actions and we may go further and say that it is concerned with actions because it is concerned with reasons. It is this connection which is essential to the possibility of an agent understanding his actions and judging them to be reasonable and justified. It is in accounting for this possibility that the conditional status of language is important.

Davidson himself recognises that our attribution of beliefs, desires, goals and intentions is within a system of concepts which is that of the agent himself.⁽¹⁾ What is misleading is Davidson's claim that these concepts are "in part determined by the structure and beliefs of the agent himself". The view we are defending is that the intelligibility of desires and beliefs is to be explained in terms of the conditional status of language. This is not to argue that being in a physical or mental state is determined by the concepts we have or the language we speak, but merely that knowing what the states are presupposes the possession of language. We are insisting that having reasons and distinguishing between good and bad reasons presupposes the intelligibility of the considerations which an agent understands to have a bearing on how he should act. It is in the context of deliberation that a person comes to understand the considerations that give him a good reason for acting. Furthermore, the criteria by which a person distinguishes between good and bad reasons are embodied in and are expressible in the language he shares with others. If a person cannot say or give any indication of why he considered one reason to be better than another he can hardly be said to know that one was better than the other.⁽²⁾ The very fact that there is a distinction between the idea of a good reason and that of a bad one shows that there is an extremely important sense in which reasons stand as much in need of justification as actions. We may state this simply and clearly by saying that it is only a good reason that justifies an action. The fact that reasons are open to justification, that they are subject to the application of relevant criteria, shows conclusively that reasons are not

1 Davidson, "Psychology as Philosophy", p 42

2 It might be said that he lacks the very idea of a reason.

identical with mental and physical states given prior to deliberation and decision. A person is responsible for the reasons in the light of which he understands his actions to be justified. If he is not then we could hardly say that he was responsible for his actions.

But the claim that reasons are not causes depends ultimately on what we take to be the significance of the conditional status of language, for it is the possession of language that makes deliberation possible. If it is correct to say that knowing the identities of particular objects, qualities, events, actions, beliefs and other mental and physical states is essentially connected with knowing the correct uses of the terms that refer to, describe and report them, the case against a causal account of the relation between thought and action gains in strength. In the context of deliberation a particular desire does not have a bearing on an action as such but, strictly speaking, on the question whether it ought to be performed, and this presupposes that the agent knows what this desire is. Given that knowing its identity involves knowing the identity of the action that would fulfil it, then knowing the identity of the desire, in the context of deliberation, logically entails an agent understanding that it has a bearing on his conduct, that it could influence his decision but not itself cause it. If a person has the capacity to understand that something has a bearing on whether he ought to perform an action then it would be contradictory if he also understood it as the cause of either his decision or his action.

The point of saying that a discussion of reasons brings together the cognitive and deliberative aspects of thought is that deliberation presupposes knowledge, and, very fundamentally,

what we have been calling knowledge of identity. Unless we can give some account of how human beings can know what things are, of how they can know the identities of mental and physical states, then we cannot begin to understand how people can consider and think about the things that concern them. We have attempted to show how a consideration of the nature of language is essential to this enterprise and how this, in turn, lends support to a non-causal account of the relation between thought and action. Our discussion in this concluding chapter has concentrated on the theory proposed by Davidson but the criticisms we have advanced against this particular theory apply to any causal account of human action.⁽¹⁾ Our discussions have not been intended as an exhaustive inquiry in either epistemology or the philosophy of action and what we have said, in this and in earlier chapters, about the nature of language stands in need of more detailed clarification. We do claim, however, that the considerations that have been discussed are relevant and important to elucidating the relation between thought and action. If our discussions have carried conviction then the argument that thought must be considered an essential feature of human agency has been given some degree of support.

1 See Appendix 1

APPENDIX 1Action Without Deliberation

In chapter eight it was argued that it is a confusion to say that the reason which an agent comes to establish and accept in the course of deliberation is the cause of his performing an action. This does not entail that a causal explanation can be given of actions that are not preceded by deliberation.

It is possible to argue that Davidson fails to locate the causes of actions in the right place and in a recent article Frederick Stoutland argues just this.⁽¹⁾ We do not wish to criticise the main part of Stoutland's paper, which is an excellent development of Wittgenstein's attack on the notion that propositional attitudes are processes or events, but only his conclusion.

Stoutland correctly points out that the mistake embedded in the kind of theory advanced by Davidson is the assumption "that the invariable causes of an agent's behaviour when he acts intentionally are the beliefs and desires which justify the action".⁽²⁾ As an alternative Stoutland argues that it can be shown "that there are factors which are not independent of the agent's action which can cause his behaviour". By "factors not independent of the agent's action" he means factors belonging to the context of action, "the circumstances which constitute the act as the intentional act that it is".⁽³⁾ He refers to Wittgenstein's point that acting intentionally or voluntarily "is, in many cases, characterised as such by a multitude of circumstances under which

1 Frederick Stoutland, "Causation and Behaviour", in "Essays on Wittgenstein in Honour of G H von Wright", ed J Hintikka.

2 Stoutland, p 318

3 Stoutland, Ibid

the action takes place rather than by an experience which we should call characteristic of voluntary action",⁽¹⁾ and then suggests, without fully explaining it follows from Wittgenstein's remarks, that if there is, in the circumstances in which the action "takes place", an event or a process then it may be understood as the cause of the agent's behaviour.⁽²⁾ Stoutland believes that normally such an event or process may be identified and that the agent's behaviour can be explained in terms of its causal operation. Does this constitute an acceptable alternative to Davidson's version of the causal theory? Consider the way Stoutland illustrates his thesis:

"You ask me to pass the salt and I pass it, responding to your request automatically as it were. This is an intentional act, though if 'intention' means anything like a state of mind, then I had no intention to pass the salt before I passed it: it went too quickly for that. Yet there was an intention embedded in that act (perhaps a belief too), the intention that the salt get to you in response to your request, an intention that could come before my mind only after I passed the salt, and which was not therefore a cause."⁽³⁾

He is perfectly correct in saying that the act is intentional and that the intention is not its cause. He is also right in saying that the request is an essential part of the context, for it is by reference to the request that the act is explained and understood. But everything we have said about the nature of actions and how they have identity conflicts with the idea that the request is to be defined as the cause of the action. Stoutland argues that this event "meets the minimal requirements, for it is an event whose occurrence is prior to my behaviour and which

1 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "The Blue and Brown Books", p 157

2 Stoutland, p 319

3 Stoutland, Ibid

is separable from the context, though necessarily a factor in the understanding of my act and therefore in the context which constitutes my act as the intentional act it is."⁽¹⁾ Although this is true, it does not follow that the request causes the response. Understanding that there is a relation between the request and the response involves knowing which event to refer to in explaining why the response was made, and it must be assumed that the agent himself has this knowledge; we would be reluctant to say that his act was intentional if this was not the case. Stoutland does not perceive that although the act was performed automatically, without prior deliberation, it would not have been performed at all unless the request had been understood. His remark that the cause has "a physical dimension, for you produced sound waves and they affected my ears" indicates this. What is important is that understanding the request is a matter of understanding the kind of response it calls for. This means that the request is intrinsically understood as having a bearing on one's actions, as the sort of thing that influences one's behaviour. It only makes sense to describe the response as automatic if it is understood as the kind of act that did not require deliberation. If it is said, without qualification, that the response was the effect of a prior cause, then it becomes impossible to explain why the person responded in this particular way rather than in another. The fact that the sound waves ("the physical dimension") were signs and that they were understood is of the utmost importance in describing this example. That the person understood this use of words and responded correctly and appropriately shows that talk of a causal relation here is confusing. Describing the

1 Stoutland, pp 319-320

response as automatic does not mean that the person did not have a reason or that he could not have acted differently. An action can only be described as automatic if it also makes sense to say that it could have been preceded by deliberation. Even with an action as simple and as familiar as this there can be circumstances in which it is not performed without thought. Suppose I dislike the man who asks for the salt or that I want to offend my host. These considerations may influence how I act or how I decide to act, but the influence is not causal.

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