

# A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RYLE AND WITTGENSTEIN

by *O. K. Bouwsma*

## I

### FOREWORD

"Zeus said, 'I will cut them in two. . . . They shall walk upright on two legs and if they continue insolent and won't be quiet, I will split them again and they shall hop about on a single leg.' He spoke and cut men in two, like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling or as you might divide an egg with a hair." Apollo, or was it Descartes, was told to finish the job. We know what happened then, how it ensued that each half is always looking for its other half. We may, however, have forgotten that Hephaestus is represented as coming to such a pair and saying: "Do you desire to be wholly one: always day and night to be in one another's company?" Then he promised to melt them together into one. Aristophanes goes on to explain: "And the reason is that human nature was originally one and we were a whole."

There are some details in this account which suggest that Aristophanes was not in this account thinking of Ryle, but there is so much in the account that parallels what has happened and what Ryle has done, that the passage is often taken to be prophecy. For as when Hephaestus came upon the scene and found men like the halves of a sorb-apple or like the halves of an egg, so too Ryle found, not whole men, but pieces of men which when united were men. These pieces were not exactly like the halves of a sorb-apple or the halves of an egg. Ryle found ghosts chasing machines and machines chasing ghosts. Like Hephaestus, he talked to them, saying: "Do you desire to be wholly one: always day and night to be in one another's company?" Then he melted them together again. As in the other case Zeus had a reason, so Ryle too had a reason. He said that human nature was originally one and that we were a whole. In the myth, which we may regard as foreshadowing what came after, Zeus cut men in two. So too another, not Zeus, cut men in two right down the middle or the muddle of their language. And Ryle, even without all the King's horses and all the King's men, put human beings together again. And still does.

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Mr. Bouwsma is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Texas.

## II

I propose in these notes to try to become clear about at least one difference, perhaps *the* difference, between the work of Ryle, as represented by *The Concept of Mind*, the book through which Ryle has had his greatest influence, and the work of Wittgenstein, as represented by *Philosophical Investigations*. In order to do this I am going to ask the question: What was Ryle doing in that book? And what was Wittgenstein doing in that other book? That there is a difference may not come as a surprise, but I think it likely that, as in my own case, one might find it difficult to say just what the difference is. At any rate one has to make a point of taking note of the difference and then has to go on to figure out what the difference is. Of course, it is not, as I have already intimated, just any difference we are interested in. The difference should help us to understand minor, though often striking differences. The inquiry presupposes that a reader who reads both books may well get the impression that Ryle and Wittgenstein are doing roughly the same thing. Now then with a little bit of luck and effort we may attain some clarity which may help us to read both authors with greater understanding and some facility. That is the hope.

Naturally I am going about this, presenting these notes in public, with considerable uneasiness. The word "uneasiness" reminds me of what we may regard as a superficial difference between what we may find in Ryle's book and what in Wittgenstein's. It reminded me first of another expression "with trepidation." But then it reminded me that there is a list of such words in Ryle's chapter on emotion. The word "anxious" is there, along with these other words, "startled," "shocked," "excited," "convulsed," "flabbergasted," "in suspense," "flurried," "irritated," etc. In Wittgenstein's book there are no such lists. That making such lists (there are others) falls within the idea of what Ryle is doing may at least suggest that this difference should be explained in describing what Ryle is doing. According to Ryle, "uneasy," "anxious," and some other words signify agitations. So I can also say that I am agitated. I have the impression that Ryle was not agitated. He was classifying words.

If we now go on to ask the question, "what was Ryle doing in this book," supposing that Ryle knew what he was doing, which is always the case, what better way of answering that question could there be than to get the answer from Ryle himself. Here then is a paragraph from the Introduction:

This book offers what may with reservations be described as a theory of mind. But it does not give new information about minds. We possess already a wealth of information about minds, information which is neither derived from nor upset by the arguments of philosophers. The philosophical arguments which constitute the book are intended, not to increase what we know about minds, but to rectify the logical geography of the knowledge we already possess.

So there is a theory. And the theory is not intended to answer any questions about minds, as though the theory were an instrument of investigation. It is intended to rectify something, no doubt another theory, but again another theory which is not an instrument of investigation. This theory is described as a myth, though it is in competition with a theory which is not a myth. If we continue to speak of theories in this connection we may assume that these are theories concerning the same thing. These theories conflict. Now what would they be theories of? Let us consider the theory described as a myth. This is the theory attributed to Descartes. The heading of Meditation II is: "Of the nature of the Human Mind; and that it is more easily known than the Body." Ryle's title is: "The Concept of Mind." There is a resemblance between the heading of the first and the title of the second. Ryle seems not to have been interested in making the point that the human mind is more easily known than the body. It should, however, be useful in getting into perspective what Ryle was doing, to remind ourselves of that theory. For Ryle was correcting that theory. We should then see what Ryle was correcting and see too in what sense it is a theory. It moves nothing. It is not an instrument of investigation. It may even be a hindrance. Is it a hindrance? The theory is not a nothing. We might say that the theory gives us a picture and in this way seems to give us information concerning what must be hidden. But what is hidden seems at the same time, "nearer than hands and feet, nearer than breathing." It, the theory, is everyman's theory of himself.

Here are relevant passages from Descartes, familiar to all of us, but useful in the present context:

But what then am I? A thing which thinks. What is a thing which thinks? It is a thing which doubts, understands (conceives), affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels.

Descartes goes on:

Certainly it is no small matter if all these things pertain to my nature. But why should they not so pertain. Am I not that being who doubts nearly everything, who nevertheless understands certain things, who affirms that only one is true, who denies all the others, who desires to know more, is averse from being deceived, who imagines many things, sometimes indeed despite his will, and who perceives many likewise, as by the intervention of the bodily organs.

We may regard what Descartes is doing here as reviewing some of that information we have and which Descartes had. Human beings do the sorts of things which Descartes says they do. Should I say which Descartes says *he* does? They doubt, they understand, and so on. Descartes must often have said: "I think I'll have another," "I understand what you said," "I wish she would be quiet," "I dreamed I saw a ship a-sailing," and so on. And what in the year of the "Meditations" was he doing? He tried, after having established it that he really does all these things, to figure out what these things

were that he was doing. And this is where the theory comes in. He knew that when he said "I think," there was something he was doing and it was not his making the noise "I think." And yet there was not something else he could hear he was doing as though he had two mouths, one for speaking and one for thinking. He spoke and then attended to something more, the more that makes of speaking something more than speaking. And so we have, as Descartes had, a problem. How to account for the difference we are all aware of? The answer seems obvious. We account for what happens here, the speaking, something we do, by something else that happens, but not here, the thinking, something else we do. Concomitant Variation. Here then is one theory. We account for what goes on above the table by what goes on under the table. If the iron filings dance on the table you can look under the table. There is, perhaps, a magnet under the table. It is not, we may say, the nature of iron filings to dance. Their nature is to sleep. As the iron filings dance, so there is all this commotion in the mouth, in the words "I think," "I understand," and so on. Now then, what about that? Looking under the table for the thinking that makes of speaking something more will not help. Looking anywhere else will not help either. Looking will not help. But there must be something which makes the difference. Language points away from itself and in the case of "I think" there is "I" behind the scenes, under the table, invisible, doing invisibly what only "I" does. This, we may say, is only a theory. In relation to it there is no table under which to look. There is no investigation. All the same what else could "I" and "thinking" be, I invisible, thinking invisibly?

Ryle quarrels with this theory. And he offers what he calls another theory, calling it a theory "with some reservations." Someone might question whether the theory of the invisible "I" and the invisible, inaudible "thinking" is a theory in response to the same question to which Ryle's theory is a response. I suggested in explaining the former theory that the question is: how to account for speaking, for making that noise? I went on then to understand that question by way of the analogy with the dancing iron filings. But to what question is Ryle's theory a response? If the answer is, to the question, how account for speaking, then I take it that the question is not to be understood by analogy with the question about the iron filings. If Ryle's theory is a theory about speaking and particularly about one's saying "I think," should we say that his theory corrects the former theory or that it does something radically different? The difference might then be that though he begins with a question stated in the same words, what is now meant by an account is quite different. This difference might be explained by way of a different analogy, not by way of the analogy with the questions about the iron filings. This would involve admitting that what Ryle does is not to propose one theory to correct another, which seems to presuppose two answers to the same question. There might, however, be two ways of representing the same subject matter in which

case one question would displace another. A man might ask, what's going on here, and look under the table, under the illusion that he is discovering the answer to the question: what is thinking? That would show us something of the way in which he thinks of thinking. In relation to Ryle's question and answer, there is no table.

I have written this sketch of what Ryle wrote to tell us what he was doing, to provide surroundings we need to understand him. I have also emphasized that he speaks of presenting a theory.

I want now to describe in a more general way what he is doing. What I am to say is something so simple that one must wonder why I should say it. It is also something so commonplace that anyone who has read Ryle's book knows it. And one would also have no occasion for mentioning it. But I mention it. It is this: *Ryle is telling us something*. It is as though Ryle took his reader by the lapel and said: "Let me tell you something." Presumably the reader does not know what Ryle is intent on telling him. The reader may in fact hold a certain theory and what Ryle has to tell him has something to do with that theory. So Ryle has a message: "Your theory is wrong, false. Here is mine." There is nothing unusual about this. Thousands of books are written each year in which one man, the author, tells us something he knows. Ignorance is common. So is knowledge. It is a matter of distribution. What is odd then is that I should bother about this. There are, however, other authors and other books. There are books and there are authors who have designed those books not to give the reader knowledge but the means which he may need and may use to become strong or to become skillful in some way, or even, perhaps, to become more saintly. Of course, reading such a book may not work like magic. Such a book may provide him with such direction which, if followed, may make him fit for what the author intended. If, then, Ryle says, "Let me tell you something" and the response is, "Why," Ryle may answer: "All men desire to know." If we keep in mind Ryle's distinction between knowing how and knowing that, we might say that Ryle has written a know-that book. But there are also know-how books and do-it-yourself books.

### III

I want now to suggest something about Wittgenstein's book and about what he was doing. In the preface to that book Wittgenstein wrote, "The thoughts which I publish in what follows are the precipitate of philosophical investigations which have occupied me for the last sixteen years. They concern many subjects. . . . I have written down all these thoughts as remarks." Towards the end of the preface is this paragraph: "I should not like my writing to spare other people the trouble of thinking. But if possible, to stimulate someone to thoughts of his own." At one point he says, "Thus this book is only an album." So, according to Wittgenstein, this book might be described as a book

of thoughts, or a book of remarks. The preface in any case is nothing like that of Ryle's book. The book does not offer anything like a theory of mind—or does it?—though there are numerous remarks whose subject would fall under that heading. What then could be the point of such a book of remarks? Wittgenstein does express the hope that his writing may “stimulate someone to thoughts of his own.” Should we then ask: to thoughts of what? A man, I have learned, does not ordinarily think because it pays, but he does think to some purpose. As Wittgenstein thought and investigated to some end, is not the reader in whom Wittgenstein placed his hopes to do likewise and to the same end?

In order to show the difference between what Ryle is doing and what Wittgenstein is doing I have prepared a statement (in the style of Ryle's statement) of what Wittgenstein's book offers:

This book offers what may, I think, be described without reservations, not at all as a theory of mind, in fact as no theory at all. It gives us no new information. We are well enough provided with information in the form of language to serve as the field of our confusions. It contains no arguments at all. There are no proofs. It rectifies nothing. There is nothing to rectify. There are no refutations. What then does the book do? It furnishes us with the rudiments of a certain warfare, instructs us in the use of certain instruments, instruments with which we are already furnished. Besides it furnishes us with exercises, exercises without end, war-games. And to what purpose? That we may perfect our skill in the warfare against our own confusions.

Of course, I should not say that Wittgenstein or anyone else would approve of that statement. Let it serve rather as a statement of the way in which, it seems to someone, that he has understood the book. I should like now to enlarge on this. The book is not, like Ryle's book, “a well-ordered book proceeding from one subject to another in a rational order and without breaks.” It scarcely has a beginning, and if we allow that it has a beginning, where is the middle and where is the end? Still the book, the endless book, is here and some people read it even to the end. Some people make of it, as they make of *Finnegan's Wake*, the continuing obstacle race of their lives. It is a challenge, something to be conquered, like Everest. Is that so? Here is my question: Wittgenstein might have had all these thoughts and might have made all these remarks, have enjoyed the thoughts, and have perfected all these remarks, and thrown them out of the window. He did not. Why not? They were kept for us. I am now going to suggest a reason. *He was concerned to teach us a skill.* Quite early he invented a skill. Whether he first discovered himself practicing it and then reflected upon what he was doing, and so discovered the skill—perhaps someone knows. Two things are involved. There is the practice of the skill and the teaching of the skill. In the teaching there is also the practice. Not only does one learn by doing but one also teaches by doing. But in teaching one must, besides exercising the skill, explain what

one is doing, lead someone into doing it, prepare the way, nudge one into taking part, and so on. Accordingly, this is how I am regarding this book. In this book Wittgenstein teaches a skill. It is, accordingly, no wonder that readers are bewildered and distraught when they try to read this book. For where is there another book like this one? But then where is there another book designed for or employed in teaching this skill? For the skill is extraordinary.

Consider: there are problems, philosophical problems, innumerable. According to Ryle these come to us in the form of mistakes. *The Concept of Mind* is devoted to "a whole batch of mistakes." Ryle needs, to rectify such mistakes, the mistakes and the language of all that information referred to earlier. If a man has the skill to tell us to which category a term belongs, he can correct the mistakes. Philosophy might then be described as the activity of correcting these and other such mistakes. If there are a hundred such mistakes, then with correcting a hundred, the task of philosophy would be finished. As men have studied rocks and trees so philosophers study certain artifacts, namely, mistakes. In this way one may come to look upon philosophy as an accessory of linguistics. I am not complaining about this.

I want now to say something about that skill which I said Wittgenstein tried to teach. To begin with I must again call your attention to this, that what Ryle describes as a mistake Wittgenstein describes as the expression of a linguistic confusion. Any such expression of confusion is considered, however, not as anything isolated in one's life. It is rather regarded as a symptom of a certain intellectual disposition, an original disposition to slip. In this respect confusion is like sin which is also original. Everyone knows that sin cannot be dealt with sin by sin. It is the disposition that must be changed. Accordingly, just as in the case of sin it is the sinner who must be saved and no treatment of this or that sin or a whole batch of sins can keep the sinner in check, so too in the case of thinkers and their confusions. It is the human being who falls into confusion who needs help. How then is he to be helped? Since his confusions arise out of the language which he understands and with which he is familiar and by reason of the forms of the language, by misleading analogies, which plague us in endless ways, he must be put on his guard. He must be instructed in the anatomy of confusion and disciplined and exercised in the art of discovery and of dispelling his confusion. This is not a task which is ever finished. The temptation to confusion is as hardy and enduring as the temptation to sin. The aim is clarity and with clarity peace.

Two things make philosophy possible. (How is philosophy possible?) A certain feature of language and a certain disposition on the part of the thinker. The feature of language is the presence in our language of surface analogies between different areas of that language. The disposition is the disposition to be misled. The language cannot be changed. But the disposition can be

held in check. There seem to be two approaches. One is to study the language. The other is to alert the thinker.

Here are a few sentences from Wittgenstein which may help.

Philosophy is a battle against the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language (109).

The problems are deep disquietudes: their roots are as deep in us as the forms of our language and their significance is as great as the importance of our language (111).

The philosopher's treatment of a question is like the treatment of an illness (255).

My aim is to teach you to pass from a piece of disguised nonsense to something that is patent nonsense (464).

"What is your aim in philosophy?" To catch flies.

Here are a number of remarks describing the skill. In each case the remark is an adaptation of Wittgenstein's own language.

It is the skill required to resist an urge to misunderstand the workings of our language.

It is the skill required to battle the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language.

It is the skill required to bring peace when troubled by deep disquietude.

It is the skill required to escape the captivity of a picture.

It is the skill required to bring back words from their metaphysical use to their everyday use.

It is the skill required to destroy houses of cards.

It is the skill required for uncovering one or another piece of disguised nonsense.

It is the skill of adapting reminders to a certain purpose.

One may gather from these variations that Wittgenstein was not thinking of what he was doing as correcting mistakes. It was not mistakes, but an urge, a bewitchment, a fascination, a deep disquietude, a captivity, a disorientation, illusions, confusions—these, the troubles of the mixed-up intelligence, that Wittgenstein sought to relieve. I have emphasized that Wittgenstein's interest was not in any particular problem but in the bothered individual, particularly in the hot and bothered.

(Is this, perhaps, what distinguishes Wittgenstein as a European, a Viennese, a man who read Kierkegaard and Dostoevski?)

He sought to bring relief, control, calm, quiet, peace, release, a certain power:

The skill required to show one who is lost in the labyrinth the way to go home.

One thing is plain. When Wittgenstein wrote, he wrote thinking. He thought not only of the subject but wrote as though while writing he kept his eye on the reader, making sure that the reader was keeping up with him.



He wrote, engaged in a dialogue with the reader, asking questions, making suggestions, giving wrong answers, letting the reader speak up with objections, sometimes making absurd replies, urging him to agree or disagree, pressing upon him difficulties, pushing him into a corner, keeping the reader on edge, nudging, teasing, taunting, pricking him. He never spoon-fed a reader and no reader ever left with a pocketful of Wittgenstein which he could repeat as his own. He kept the reading strenuous. Nothing is gained here without straining. Wittgenstein's interest is in the reader and his interest in the reader is not to tell him something he does not know but to intensify the discomfort he already has and then to help him to think himself out of trouble. Frequently one cannot tell who in the dialogue is speaking, whether the writer or the reader or whether some third person has come in uninvited. Of Socrates, Kierkegaard said that he rarely tells anyone anything. Wittgenstein too is careful of that. It must be then that Wittgenstein, like Socrates, supposed the reader had need of something else.

Wittgenstein's style is sometimes described as cryptic, and I remember someone's saying that in reading Wittgenstein he got the impression of a man in a petulant mood. (Is petulance a mood?) "Cryptic" I understand. It is as though Wittgenstein purposely hid the meaning of what he had to say and no one is to have it for the asking. He will have to dig for it. Nearly every paragraph is offered as an exercise, a challenge. Not many people are prepared to read a book in this way or are willing to pay such a price for a reward one cannot anticipate. Reading this book is for almost anyone a gamble. There are fine sentences. But there are more in Shakespeare. These remarks about Wittgenstein's style are intended to reinforce what I said earlier. They are the marks of a meddler. He isn't satisfied with telling the reader something. He nags. He intends to get under your skin, to get into your hair, to make you uncomfortable, to drive you to self-examination and improvement.

#### IV

I asked: What is Ryle doing? One answer is: Ryle is asking: What is the man, Descartes, doing? To begin with Ryle is fascinated by what Descartes says. The strangeness is enough to make what Descartes says attractive. If Descartes were present Ryle could have asked him, but there is some reason to expect that Descartes would not have understood the question nor realized that there was anything strange about what he said. So Ryle has to find the answer for himself. He says, "Descartes is telling us to what category the term 'I' belongs." But we should take notice of what is strange about what Descartes said. He asked: "What am I then?" It is not as though he were asking his wife—he had no wife—"If I am not your husband, what am I then?" The question does not enter in that way. But neither does he ask as his wife might: "What am I then? A thing, an object, a so-and-so object, that's what I am

and I resent it." With that she slams the door. But Descartes asks, "What am I then," and goes on without any resentment: "I am a thing." But he doesn't stop there. He goes on, "A thing which thinks." If only the young wife had heard that she might have been reconciled. As we know Descartes goes on: "What is a thing which thinks? A thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines and feels." Here then are strange questions and strange answers. Strange? With what are we contrasting these questions and answers? Well, Descartes is not suffering from amnesia. He does not expect someone to answer his question with "You are the best plumber in town." Or: "You are the father of modern philosophy. You are to receive the Oscar." Were answers such as these answers to Descartes' question there would be no occasion for Ryle's question. So Ryle answers Ryle's question: "Descartes is telling us to what category the term 'I' belongs." "I" is a thing-word. It certainly isn't a do-word.

Have I now explained what Ryle was doing and what Wittgenstein was doing? At any rate I know what I said. Ryle takes up a problem, anyone's problem. It can be dealt with independently of anyone. It is like a scientific problem. It is a problem of language and we need not ask who said what, even if we know who said what. The language we know and that is all we need to know, as Keats did not say. If you want to know to what category a term belongs, go to Ryle. Ask him: To what category does the term "uneasy" belong? He will tell you: To the category "agitation."

As far as I can make out this is not how Wittgenstein regarded his problem. His problem is always someone, an individual in trouble. This someone is his troubler, a man in language-trouble. This man says something. What he says is like a rash. But his sickness is in the underground. Something compels him to say this. That is why there is no common-sense answer to a philosophical problem. One has, accordingly, to uncover, not what compels him to say what he says but to discover what he may be persuaded compels him to say this. To uncover is to remove it and the compulsion.

One may recognize in this approach an analogy to psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis also is a matter of treating the individual. The explanation is provided in terms of what is hidden. But what is hidden? In psychoanalysis the analyst may say that it is something long forgotten. It need not concern him to discover just what that is. The compulsive patient does not quit washing her face because she now remembers just what happened and now says: "So that is it. That is why I wash my face." She may remember what never happened and that may do just as well. The purpose is to rid her of this compulsion to wash her face. In a similar fashion people say things under a compulsion. The compulsion is explained by what is hidden. And what now is hidden? A grammatical analogy. But which one? Perhaps there are some likely ones. But here as in the other case the object is not to hit upon the analogy that really explains it, explains the compulsion. The object is to hit upon the

analogy that one may assent to as what has compelled one to say this. The idea is that with this assent the force of the compulsion is broken. It is not, by the way, that one feels any compulsion. The compulsion may be expressed in the words: "It must be so. . . ."

There is something else involved. Though there are standard philosophical problems and standard compulsions, there are no standard explanations which bring relief. And this is why no man can provide the explanation for another. Here it is every man his own analyst. The teacher can only try to introduce him to this new possibility of self-examination and probing. The idea in any case is to get him to regard some grammatical analogy or other as the explanation. Of course, before one is disposed to entertain any such possibility in his own case he already has become acquainted with the distinctions required for a perspective of the workings of language and with the boundless range of grammatical analogies provided us, with the occasions for being misled. The child learns the language. At five years of age he cannot only play jacks and skip the rope—there is language in these too—but he can tell a story, can complain, scold, speak a piece and so on. He is soon furnished with a rich supply of analogies. At what age is he misled? At what age does he become philosophical?