

## THE RECOVERY OF THE HUMAN

by *Konstantin Kolenda*

In the introduction to his *Collected Papers* Gilbert Ryle says the following: "To elucidate the thoughts of a philosopher we need to find the answer not only to the question 'What were his intellectual worries?' but, before that question and after that question 'What was his overriding Worry?'" In this paper I want to ask: What was Ryle's overriding Worry? The publication of his *Collected Papers* helps to come closer to a correct answer to this question and enables us to see Ryle's central work, *The Concept of Mind*, in a clearer perspective. Because that work concentrates heavily on undermining the theory of mind as a "ghost in the machine," one may overlook Ryle's simultaneous rejection of a theory which construes mind on a mechanical model. Indeed, some critics of Ryle tended to see in his own characterization of mind some sort of behaviorist theory. As I see it, Ryle was equally opposed to viewing the human mind as a ghost as he was opposed to viewing it as a machine. The overriding Worry in all of his philosophy has been how to avoid both Duplicationism and Reductionism in our theorizing about the mind. This job is difficult because both tendencies have been most pertinacious in the history of philosophy up to and including the present. Both lead to gross distortions of what we, in our bones, know the mind to be. Duplicationism, from Plato through Descartes to phenomenology, has had many forms but always leads to the postulation of some shadowy realm of nonmaterial, independently existing objects of thought. Reductionism, from Democritus through Hobbes to J. B. Watson to B. F. Skinner and to those who claim that machines can think, makes the opposite mistake of denying or ignoring some central aspects of mental life. Ryle realized that both tendencies are bound to result in off-center philosophies, leaving behind or distorting what is characteristically human. His overriding Worry and his philosophical labors were dedicated to bringing us back to what we all can recognize as constituting our familiar human reality. This is why I am inclined to argue that Ryle, perhaps more than any other single contemporary philosopher, has contributed to the recovery of the human.

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## I

The search for a correct account of human experience has always been accompanied by a parallel or concomitant question: What is philosophy? The answer to which Ryle has gradually worked his way, learning from and frankly acknowledging his indebtedness to other philosophers—Russell, Frege, Brentano, Husserl, and, above all, G. E. Moore and Ludwig Wittgenstein—is that “philosophical problems inevitably interlock in all sorts of ways.”<sup>1</sup> “Conceptual questions are inter-conceptual questions.”<sup>2</sup> Philosophers’ problems do not arise out of troubles about single concepts, like that of *pleasure* or that of *number*. “They arise, rather, as the traffic policeman’s problems arise, when crowds of conceptual vehicles, of different sorts and moving in different directions have to be gotten under control conjointly.”<sup>3</sup> Logical troubles, Ryle tells us in another simile, arise essentially from the foreign relations of sayables, not from their domestic constitutions. He credits Wittgenstein with having led the way to this view of the nature of philosophy. For it was Wittgenstein who, both in the *Tractatus* and in his later work, enjoined us to pay deliberate attention to what can and what cannot be said, or what our prior and established conceptual commitments logically forbid us to say.

When deliberate attention *is* paid to what can and what cannot be meaningfully said about human beings, some persistent traditional ways of describing them will be shown to be arbitrary or nonsensical. One such way is what Ryle calls the “Department Store” theory, or the theory of separate but interacting faculties, such as cognition, feeling, and will. The “Department Store” theory, whatever its particular mode, tends to break up the human reality into elements, ingredients, or factors. One of the chief logical troubles with this kind of theory is that, given its mechanical or chemical model, it is wedded to a *causal* account about the relationships among these various “ingredients.”

At least a decade before the publication of *The Concept of Mind*, Ryle believed that it is a fundamental error to set up arbitrary fences between thinking, feeling, and willing. In the paper entitled “Conscience and Moral Convictions” published in 1940, he argued that “*saying* readily and *doing* readily seem to be related as species to genus, not as coordinate species of a higher genus.” A person who accepts a rule or a principle *is* being disposed to behave in accordance with it. “To ‘know’ a rule of conduct *is* to be regulated in one’s conduct.”<sup>4</sup> A person who knows the rules of grammar or of arithmetic does not *think* of these rules when he is applying them correctly and skillfully. He need not even be able to spell out or describe these rules in order to know how to apply them. This is why knowing *how* has logical precedence over knowing *that*. When we reverse the order and insist that all uses of intelligence presuppose a “knowledge that” we are easily led into the trap of duplica-

tionism and produce pseudo-causal accounts of human action. To avoid this trap we should recognize that my knowing a rule does not *cause* but *consists* in my tendency to feel certain feelings and to enact certain actions. The dispositions to feel certain emotions and to perform certain actions should be regarded not as mere symptoms but as the criteria of belief and knowledge.<sup>5</sup> This does not mean, however, that "thinking," "feeling," and "doing" are synonymous. The thinking may be described as judicious or careless, the feeling as indignant or amused, and the action as impulsive or deliberate. Different kinds of adverbs may be applicable to thinking, feeling, and doing, but this does not show that there are logical gaps between thinking, feeling, and doing which should be filled by some pseudo-causal account.

For Ryle the notion of mind or intelligence is connected with the acquisition of certain skills, capacities, and dispositions in which the criteria of success or failure are logically indispensable. All learning involves the possibility of determining whether the learner got something right or wrong, correct or incorrect. In *The Concept of Mind* Ryle distinguished between drill and training. Human learning involves more than mere mechanical habituation. "It is of the essence of merely habitual practices that one performance is a replica of its predecessors. It is of the essence of intelligent practices that one performance is modified by its predecessors. The agent is still learning. . . . Drill dispenses with intelligence, training develops it."<sup>6</sup> In his later work Ryle returns to this distinction and shows by many examples that to train is to teach and that "it is and ought to be one main business of a teacher precisely to get his pupils to advance beyond their instructions and to discover new things for themselves, that is, to think things out for themselves."<sup>7</sup>

Even at the earliest stages of mental activity a learner is taught to progress beyond the simple task to a higher task. Learning to recite numerals in the right succession is not yet the ability to *count objects*, and counting objects is not yet being able to add, subtract, and multiply. Saying the letters of the alphabet correctly is but a stepping stone to spelling words. But connecting words into sentences is not making *lists* of words, for sentences can be true or false, while mere lists cannot.<sup>8</sup>

Teaching inevitably invites the pupil to make his own initiatives and to venture beyond what he has been taught. These initiatives must come from the pupil himself, from his capacity as an intelligent being. The teacher cannot be the initiator of the pupil's initiatives. "I cannot compel the horse to drink thirstily. I cannot coerce Tommy into doing spontaneous things. Either he is not coerced, or they are not spontaneous . . . to respond is not just to yield."<sup>9</sup> Even a possession of a piece of information by a person cannot be assimilated to mechanical storage. When the builders of mechanical computers talk of the memory banks of their machines, or of their storing information, they are using concepts radically different from those applicable to human intelligence. According to Ryle, "even to have learned the piece of

information *that something is so* is more than merely to be able to parrot the original telling of it—somewhat as to have digested a biscuit is more than merely to have it popped into one's mouth." A person who has a piece of information is "able to mobilize it apart from its rote-neighbors and out of its rote-formulation in unhackneyed and ad hoc tasks."<sup>10</sup> When we learn a method of doing something or of arriving at some results, we are trained to avoid certain specified muddles and sidetracks, and so are enabled to move where we *want* to move. Thus, acquiring knowledge and mastering various methods enlarges our freedom. Methods, like road signs, Ryle reminds us, are not impediments but preventatives of impediments to the flow of traffic. It is the human beings, not the methods they use, that determine what human beings do *with* them or *by means* of them.

In an essay on John Locke, published in 1965, Ryle argues that the importance of that philosopher lies mainly in his *discovering* "common sense." Locke's prescription was, according to Ryle, "that men should ask themselves what are the solidities and what are the frailties of the reasons they have for their opinions, no matter on what subject."<sup>11</sup> We must ask ourselves when it is sensible or reasonable and when it is silly or unreasonable to be sure or fairly sure of things. Locke's *Essay* was, more than anything else, a text in the *ethics* of thinking. I believe that this is, essentially, Ryle's message as well. He criticizes scientific theories of mind for omitting something that is cardinal to human thoughts and actions. Scientific theories, couched in the idioms of mechanics, chemistry, hydraulics, or psychology,

are necessarily silent about the *purposive* nature of our doings, thinkings, perceivings, etc. It is essential to them that they merit good, medium or bad marks. In our actions, unlike our mere reactions, either there is success or there is failure, and either dexterity or clumsiness. Some actions are obligatory; others are wrong; some are prudent, others are imprudent. . . . Thought is not something that just happens to us and in us, like digestion. It is something that we do, and do well or badly, carefully or carelessly, expertly or amateurishly.<sup>12</sup>

Like Locke, Ryle invites us to be our own examiners—and this is *sine qua non* of common sense.

It is not difficult to see that the view of philosophy as conceptual geography, as close attention to possible category-mistakes, or to what our working conceptual distinctions allow us or do not allow us to say, is but an extension or rather a form of common sense. Common sense tries to avoid nonsense, into which we can fall either by making wrong assimilations or by introducing conceptual barriers when these do not exist. Ryle's essays on ethics are particularly good examples of warning us about the latter sort of error. In "On Forgetting the Difference Between Right and Wrong"<sup>13</sup> he shows that, because the connection between *knowing* the difference between right and wrong and *having scruples* about not doing right is a *conceptual* connection, partitions between the alleged faculties of cognition, conation, and feeling

are down. "Recognizing" a moral principle is "being appreciative" of it, or *caring for* the behavior guided by that principle. This is why ceasing to care cannot be just forgetting something, and "a person who becomes less or more conscientious is a somewhat changed person."<sup>14</sup>

One should be careful, however, not to read out of the account of morality as caring the presence of knowing or cognition. It is there, *together* with feeling and volition. This is why we can put in words and argue about the principles by which we stand or for which we care or about which we feel strongly. We can also say why we believe the principles are applicable to a given situation. Of course, the intensity of appreciating a virtue may differ; nevertheless, we still can see or show that we appreciate the *same* excellence. In that sense, *knowledge* is involved in caring, although it is not something which can be forgotten, as a piece of mere information can. Knowledge of right or wrong does not go with "forgetting" or "being reminded of." This kind of knowledge is not a technique or proficiency which can get "rusty." And, to add another conceptual reminder, the loss of this kind of knowledge is a change in a person, not just in his information.

## II

When Ryle expressed his opinion about John Locke's key philosophical contribution to Bertrand Russell, Russell replied: "By God, Ryle, I believe you are right. No one had Common Sense before Locke—and no one but Englishmen have ever had it since."<sup>15</sup> In this part of the paper I want to show by use of examples that the endeavor to avoid the pitfalls both of duplicationism and reductionism has been joined by many other philosophers, not all of them Englishmen. I do not wish to claim that this was due to Ryle's work alone. He himself acknowledges Wittgenstein's pioneering contributions toward a view of philosophy which Ryle shares. But although he found many of Wittgenstein's ideas powerful, stimulating, and congenial to his own, on many issues, both of method and of substance, Ryle is critical of Wittgenstein. (He doubts, for instance, that Wittgenstein's approach to meaning via the notion of family resemblance is indeed as helpful as it seems to many followers of Wittgenstein.) Regarding J. L. Austin, who has also influenced contemporary thought, Ryle expressed the opinion that his and Austin's philosophical interests neither overlapped very much nor were in conflict.<sup>16</sup> It is safe to say, nevertheless, that all three thinkers have contributed to the creation of the philosophical climate of opinion in which the arguments to which I want to call attention could arise. It is not the point of my paper to argue for the relative importance of any one of these three thinkers, but I believe that the style and the scope of Ryle's writings have played a key role in what I have called "the recovery of the human."<sup>17</sup>

If Ryle's view of the nature of philosophy is sound, then it is not surprising

that in trying to clarify, say, the concept of human action, philosophers will try to show how various relevant concepts go together. For instance, what is the relation between desires and actions? Do desires *cause* actions? If so, it should be possible to describe the cause independently of the effect. But in the case of action this appears to be impossible, for the description of a desire must include the description of the desired action. If so, the two notions are logically related, the relationship cannot be contingent. This conclusion is further corroborated by the realization that we do not find out by observation or by induction that certain independent states, called desires, as a matter of fact result in certain kinds of action. Indeed, there seems to be no other way of specifying the desire except by specifying what is desired, and this one knows without observation.

If the causal account of desires, motives, and intentions is rejected, what do we have in its place? I. A. Melden argued that reference to desires, motives, etc., helps to *characterize* the actions themselves. Thus, says Melden, if the motive of the driver was to signal, then "citing the motive was giving a fuller characterization of the action; it was indeed providing a better understanding of what the driver was doing."<sup>18</sup> Melden adds in this context that if the motive were to be regarded as an independently identifiable episode, a Humean cause, then citing it could not possibly function as such an explanation.

Explanations of actions, if we but look at them closely and without a special philosophical bias, are not concerned with the supposedly internal workings of the agent's mind alone (motives, intentions, emotions, purposes), but also with the circumstances of the action. These circumstances are normally public and usually involve conventions. Take Melden's example of signalling. If the driver is approaching an intersection of a street, his raising of the arm can be understood as signalling. But place the same driver in the desert with no roads, no traffic, no signs, no other vehicles. What could the raising of his arm signify in these circumstances? It could not be described as signalling, except perhaps in a Pickwickian sense, or as a nostalgic wish that he were in the middle of city traffic and not in the middle of a friendless desert. Similarly, besides the point of the convention of signalling, namely, to prevent collisions and to facilitate the movement of traffic—of which the participants in this practice can be expected to be aware—there are also the purely arbitrary aspects of the convention; with the introduction of mechanical signals the action of raising one's arm has become obsolete. At street intersections in India, when they are manned by a policeman, the signals are directed at the policeman and are performed by pointing motions from the inside of the car. In sum, without presupposing or referring to some natural and conventional circumstances, explanations by motive would not explain.

Similar considerations apply to explanations of action in terms of *feelings and emotions*. A person's anger can be cited as an explanation of an action only because we know what kinds of natural circumstances normally annoy,

irritate, or vex. We know what it means to be angry because we know what kinds of situation are likely to cause anger. We may not know the particular source of anger, but we would not accept just any situation as anger-producing. Without needing a general criterion for the application of emotion words to behavior, we nevertheless know which sorts of situations explain and justify emotional responses. Anthony Kenny's observations on this point may be worth citing. "The form which emotional behavior takes is dependent on the object of emotion in question. . . . The occasion on which an emotion is elicited is part of the criterion for the nature of the emotion."<sup>19</sup> "The language of the emotions must therefore be taught in connection not only with emotional behavior, but above all in connection with the objects of emotion."<sup>20</sup> On the whole, there is an agreement as to the appropriate object of emotion. As A. R. Louch noted, "We are undoubtedly in agreement in viewing the world as containing at least some threatening, enticing, or sorrowful circumstances. And we are in fair accord in our ways of evincing these attitudes and judgments."<sup>21</sup>

Regarding *intentions*, Louch's analysis parallels Melden's treatment of motives. Intentions do not provide causal explanations. Indeed, Louch prefers to say that intentions are "ways of describing actions, not explaining them." "To talk of intentions is thus to answer the question *what* not *why*."<sup>22</sup> This corresponds to Melden's saying that to cite a motive is to offer a further characterization of an action. The only disagreement between Louch and Melden turns on the meaningfulness of the distinction between movement and actions. That distinction, according to Louch, rests upon the incoherent notion of pristine observables. He claims that when an action is described as intentional, the description already *includes* an explanation. An intentional description explains an action because it makes movements intelligible.<sup>23</sup>

We may profitably turn to Louch also for his analysis of the notion of *purpose*. To him this term is "a general title encompassing motives, intentions, needs and desires, and refers to the type of understanding that consists in justifying an action by the contribution it makes to achieving or blocking some states of affairs."<sup>24</sup> Thus purposes, like any of their manifestations, are not events or episodes. They are characteristic ways of behaving ascribable to living organisms. Attribution of purpose to inanimate things is at most metaphorical because inanimate things are not aware of, do not conceive of or feel the presence of the circumstances surrounding them. Inanimate things even lack the necessary sensory equipment which enables organisms to feel and to pursue goals. One of the important features of feelings and emotions is that they arise in a context of pursuing goals, namely, when the circumstances of action are experienced as offending or enticing, enabling or hindering, etc.

Another item to keep in mind while describing actions by reference to purpose is that a reference to *individuals* (or to collectivities treated as indi-

viduals) is always called for. In fact, this is another point of contrast between living organisms and inanimate objects. To explain the falling of an object we only need to cite a general law covering all falling bodies, but to cite a purpose is to refer to an individual who *has* this purpose. His apprehension or misapprehension of the particular circumstances in which he finds himself must be presupposed in order to identify his behavior as an action.

Melden and Louch agree that in explaining actions a clear line between description and appraisal cannot be drawn. Of the two Louch is more explicit. According to him, "Explanation of human action is moral explanation." "To identify a piece of behavior as an action is already to describe experience by means of moral concepts."<sup>25</sup> Goal-pursuing behavior, rendered intelligible by citing intentions and motives, cannot be described without citing values and reasons. Reasons are grounds for action. They are principles of justification, of excuse, of entitlement. Some social scientists think of values as obstacles to objective understanding. "But values do not enter descriptions of human affairs as disruptive influences; rather, they allow us to describe human behavior in terms of action. Inasmuch as the units of the examination of human behavior are actions they cannot be observed, identified, or isolated except through categories of assessment and appraisal."<sup>26</sup> To refer to an action as intelligent, fair, or foul, is to describe and to assess it. "The man or situation is not seen and then appraised, or appraised and then seen in distortion; it is seen morally. Value and fact merge."<sup>27</sup>

Melden's conclusions are similar. For him the logical substratum upon which our concepts of action are based derives from our own status as intelligent, attentive, and responsible agents.<sup>28</sup> In his book he is "concerned with actions of human beings who are social and moral beings and who are guided in their conduct by social and moral considerations in their dealings with one another."<sup>29</sup> Even in situations where explicit moral norms do not apply, we nevertheless understand the concept of human action as involving the *possibility* of descriptions in social and moral terms.<sup>30</sup>

In his study of historical explanations William Dray arrives at conclusions similar to those just examined. "I wish to claim [therefore] that there is an element of *appraisal* of what was done in such explanations; that what we want to know when we ask to have the action explained to us is in what way it was appropriate."<sup>31</sup> The normative character of principles of action is clearly recognized by Dray. "The general belief that people act for sufficient reason does not arise out of definite pieces of evidence in particular cases; it is a *standing* presumption which requires contrary evidence in a particular case to defeat."<sup>32</sup> There is no denying that there are such cases, and when uncovered they entitle us to suspend the presumption and to describe human actions in terms of neuroses or queer beliefs. Furthermore, statistical, sociologically-determined regularities or empirical laws should not be dismissed when relevant, but they cannot be used *in place of* ordinary ad hoc explana-



tions. The point is that empirical generalizations will not suffice. As Dray puts it succinctly, "We give reasons if we can, and turn to empirical laws if we must."<sup>33</sup>

Dray brings up another point which in my opinion lies at the center of the epistemological issues of the contemporary discussion of action. The question concerns the status of the "because" in explanatory statements of the form: "He did x because of y." Dray correctly remarks that in our descriptions and explanations "the particular 'because' does not carry its language level on its face; it has to be determined by other means."<sup>34</sup> The force of that "because" is different depending on whether it connects the action with an empirical law or with a principle of action. The connection of an action with the principle from which it flows is, once more, noncontingent, while its connection with an empirical law is external, attributed merely from the spectator point of view. Melden's treatment of the same point is also instructive. He says, "What we need to do is to recover our sense of the character of our experience of and our thinking about the things we want, *because* we want them. But here the *because* marks not the occurrence of an event that produces such experience and thinking but rather their character."<sup>35</sup> Melden emphasizes the *appraisal* aspect of such a "because," and on this point his position is similar to that of Louch and Dray. Melden also believes that the notion of "wanting or desiring, like doing, is subject to rational appraisal,"<sup>36</sup> and that "rationality is as much a feature of wanting and doing as it is of thinking."<sup>37</sup>

The main thing to note about this way of looking at human actions is that it shifts the emphasis from actions to their agents. The importance of moving from the action to the agent is brought out in the comment Melden makes on Anscombe's fanciful illustration. Suppose that someone picked out all the green books in his house and spread them out carefully on the roof. When asked why he did this, he replies: "No particular reason; I just thought I would." Melden's comment on this is, "here the words are intelligible, but not the man."<sup>38</sup> This means that not all explanations will make sense or be acceptable, and certainly not those which leave us completely in the dark as to any possible human interest, need, goal, or purpose. Unless some rationale is offered for the spreading of green books on the roof, the understanding is baffled. With a sufficient strain on our imagination, we conceivably could come up with such a rationale, but the measure of the strain would be the measure of a possible understanding.

Our concern, Melden says in his book, is to learn something about the character of both the man and his action. Of an understood action one may properly speak as *fitting* the person, his character and his motives.<sup>39</sup> In his analysis of wanting, Melden emphasizes that stating a reason for what one is doing aims at eliciting an understanding of what the person might do with the thing wanted. And he adds, significantly: "That it does this depends of

course on our common understanding of people, and our knowledge of their circumstances."<sup>40</sup>

That actions are expressions of persons is vigorously argued by Anfinn Stigen in his article "The Concept of a Human Action."<sup>41</sup> He states his position quite explicitly: "What we try to understand is, strictly, the meaning of the *person*, not the meaning of the *action*, and what in fact I do understand, or misunderstand, is the person or his thought and intention, not strictly the action."<sup>42</sup> The view as stated may contain some exaggeration; one may be tempted to read it along the lines of the Buberian I-thou confrontation. But I don't think Stigen intends his view to be read this way. He merely stresses the point that understanding actions involves understanding their agents, which is an obvious corrective to all those points of view which make the mistake of wanting to treat human action exclusively from the spectator point of view. To do this is to make a logical error, because a reason for an action is always the agent's reason, and the question raised in the quest for an explanation is whether acting from *that* reason is intelligible.

Stigen, like Melden, wants to distinguish between movement and action, and he finds the difference decisive because in the latter the attention shifts from what is in movement to the mover. Hence, for him, in the analysis of "action" the person, or the person's mind, becomes central. Not surprisingly, he joins Melden and Louch in claiming that action is "a proper object for *evaluation* or appraisal, moral and intellectual." "Movements are described, but not evaluated. Actions are primarily evaluated, i.e., judged in respect of their worth."<sup>43</sup> Stigen also observes that "the great majority of words used in evaluating actions serve to pass judgment simultaneously upon the actions *and* the person; they serve to judge the person along with his action, following the dictum that one should be judged by one's actions." Some examples: "prudent," "clever," "considerate," "gentle," "mean," "vulgar."<sup>44</sup> He is also of the opinion that in the case of such words the reference to the person is *primary*: a wise action *bears witness* to the wisdom of the person.

### III

The conclusion I wish to draw from this collection of reminders is that they call us back to the centrality of the explicitly human dimension in all our experience; hence the title of this paper. But human agency has more than one workshop. The world is not only a subject for science. It is also a workshop for our practical efforts in which values and moral norms provide standards of appraisal and judgment. In addition, the world can be seen as a matrix for aesthetic and poetic experiences. Besides artifacts there is also art, and much of human effort, especially in civilized periods, is spent on making our surroundings aesthetically pleasing. Here our evaluations and appraisals are not any less serious, although under some conditions they may appear dis-

pensable. When they are dispensed with, however, when the arts, music, and literature fail to flourish, we tend to speak of humanity's dark or barbaric ages. "Art" and "merit," as Melden reminds us, are logically related.<sup>45</sup>

Ryle admires the writings of Jane Austen because she was also a moralist who brought to literature "the copious and elastic discriminations" in her characterizations of human beings. According to Ryle, these discriminations had been discovered by Aristotle and rediscovered by Shaftesbury. "Shaftesbury has opened a window through which a relatively few people in the eighteenth century inhaled some air with Aristotelian oxygen in it. Jane Austen had sniffed this oxygen."<sup>46</sup> Novelists before Jane Austen described people in terms of the Calvinistic ethical and psychological bipolar vocabulary. They reduced everything to antitheses of Black and White, Virtue and Vice, Reason and Passion, or Duty and Pleasure. People were destined either for salvation or for damnation. Ryle admires Jane Austen's varied and many-dimensional vocabulary when applied to human beings. "Her descriptions of people mention their tempers, habits, dispositions, moods, inclinations, impulses, sentiments, feelings, affections, thoughts, reflections, opinions, principles, prejudices, imaginations, and fancies."<sup>47</sup> All of these words are needed to tell us what it means to have a mind, for the word "mind" stands "not just for intellect or intelligence, but for the whole complex unity of a conscious, thinking, feeling and acting person."<sup>48</sup> Because of this unity of various dimensions, aesthetic vocabulary is often appropriate, as Shaftesbury had realized. Jane Austen also speaks of the beauty, good taste, elegance, liberty, rectitude, harmony, or integrity of a mind. "Jane Austen's people are, nearly always, alive all over, all through and all round, displaying admirably or amusingly or deplorably proportioned mixtures of all the colors that there are, save pure White and pure Black."<sup>49</sup>

Ryle's essay on Jane Austen is an illustration of the positive doctrine propounded in his *Concept of Mind*, where he invites us to move away from the abstract view spawned by psychologists and speculative epistemologists toward a full-blooded study of the workings of man's mind. Examples of such studies, he tells us in that book, can be found in the works of "economists, criminologists, anthropologists, political scientists, and sociologists, by teachers, examiners, detectives, biographers, historians, and players of games, by strategists, statesmen, employers, confessors, parents, lovers, and novelists."<sup>50</sup>

This invitation to examine carefully the concrete ways in which the human agency can manifest itself calls also for paying attention to some subtle yet important differences between "explanation" and "understanding." When the focus of our interest is a human action, what is called for is not so much explanation as understanding. "Explanation" is not quite felicitous because, like "excuse," it is usually asked for when there is a presumption that something is untoward or has gone wrong. "Explain yourself!" is a locution reserved for naughty boys and shady characters. Understanding, on the other

hand, calls for some degree of empathy, sharing, trying to see the situation from the agent's point of view. I can understand that he boasted from vanity, because I myself am not immune from that disposition. In his comment on Ryle's views, Anthony Kenny states as follows. "Being told that a man acted out of vanity helps us to understand his action not because (as Ryle thought) we say to ourselves 'Yes, of course, he often acts like that,' but because we say to ourselves 'Yes, of course, *men* often act like that.'"<sup>51</sup> Explanation which deals with actions, Louch suggests, must attend, among other things, to the audience to whom it is offered.<sup>52</sup> Dray concludes that "when we give an explanation in terms of the purpose which guided the action, the problem which it intended to resolve, the principle which it applied, etc., we adopt the standpoint from which the action was done: the standpoint of the agent. In adopting this standpoint, the investigator appreciates the agent's problem, and appraises his response to it."<sup>53</sup>

It may be worth remembering in this connection Wittgenstein's suggestions that the reality of other persons' presence, of their pains or intentions is a matter of attitude and not of abstract certainty. Louch echoes these suggestions in saying that "the difference between men and machines is first of all a difference in attitude. . . . The machine which cannot make a mistake, suffer pain, appreciate a joke, succumb to emotional displays is not going to raise problems as to whether we have really created a man."<sup>54</sup> This remark makes it plain that we cannot understand something as an action without recourse to some fundamental capacities of our common humanity. To understand an action is to recognize it as a *natural* thing to do, as corresponding to or fitting the kind of being man is. In actual situations this is, of course, done by considering the intelligibility of motives, emotions, and intentions, and their appropriateness to given circumstances. This cannot be done without presupposing the common possibilities of men.

It would be a mistake, however, to interpret this analysis as leading up to a new treatise on human nature. Nothing in Ryle's views, nor in the views of the other writers discussed, suggests the permanence or essential unchangeability of the human form of life. Louch is surely right when he says that "Psychoanalysts and psychologists, writers, critics and philosophers, cannot in the same sense [that of a physiologist] be said to provide the lineaments of human nature, conveyed as permanent and enduring features of man's life. They deal instead in the changeable patterns by which behavior is justified."<sup>55</sup> In this respect history, anthropology, and literature are to be studied as demonstrations of the variability and creativity of the human race. Such studies may enlarge our grounds for rational decision and appraisal and may clarify our own customs, institutions, motives, and goals. Moral and cultural diversity are not to be deplored, and universal principles remain abstract unless and until a concrete contact calls for an emergence of a moral community for which these principles become relevant.<sup>56</sup> In confronting a

different society, and even in studying a different age, we need not and cannot "empty" ourselves, as the historian Herbert Butterfield suggests that we should. Furthermore, the evidence that the agent or agents with whom we are dealing—either in life, in recollection, or in imagination—are not like-minded with us has its own important lessons to teach. The interest in foreign, including primitive, cultures and societies on the part of contemporary youth is indicative of the ways in which different societies can affect and possibly transform one another. And regarding the appeal of literature, there is something to be said for Thornton Wilder's observation that poets do not necessarily give us deeper insights but express our more urgent longings. This is perhaps why we say that the artists and poets are ahead of the rest of us; they sense the direction which our still unarticulated longings are taking, and they use their special talents and their respective art forms to articulate these longings for us.

Dray agrees with W. H. Walsh, his coworker in the vineyard of the philosophy of history, that "the most important generalizations used in an historian's explanations do not come from any of the sciences; they are fundamental judgments about human nature."<sup>57</sup> He also quotes approvingly Walsh's conclusion that historical explanations are "judgments about the characteristic responses human beings made to the various challenges set them in the course of their lives, whether by the natural conditions in which they live, or by their fellow beings."<sup>58</sup> Although Dray makes here a reference to human nature, neither his nor Walsh's account needs to be wedded to a static interpretation of that nature. Indeed, as we have just noted, among the challenges facing all human agents are those set by changing natural conditions and by other fellow beings, including those who live—in our age of instant communication—in foreign cultures and in remote parts of the globe. Mutual understanding is more likely to occur if behind the actions of others we try to see attempts to realize, in *their* ways and in *their* circumstances, intelligible alternatives of being human.

#### NOTES

1. Gilbert Ryle, *Collected Papers*, (New York, 1971), II, p. 372. Hereafter abbreviated as *CP*.

2. *CP*, I, p. 189.

3. *CP*, II, p. 325.

4. *CP*, II, p. 187.

5. *CP*, II, p. 192.

6. *The Concept of Mind* (London, 1949), p. 42.

7. *CP*, II, p. 453.

8. This is something that Rudolf Carnap's theory of meaning, for instance, overlooked or ignored. Cf. Ryle's discussion of Carnap in *CP*, I, pp. 225-235.

9. *CP*, II, p. 458.

10. *CP*, II, p. 457.
11. *CP*, I, p. 152.
12. *CP*, I, pp. 153–154. Cf. also *CP*, II, p. 432: “The thinker cares, at least a little bit, whether he gets things right or wrong; he is at least slightly concerned to think properly. This involves that the question of justification is always a live question.”
13. *CP*, II, pp. 381–390.
14. *CP*, II, p. 388.
15. *CP*, I, p. 147.
16. *Ryle*, ed. O. P. Wood and G. Pitcher (New York, 1970), p. 14.
17. In his review of *The Concept of Mind* Stuart Hampshire has ventured a prediction that turned out to be literally true. “Professor Ryle writes with Aristotelian pregnancy, and almost every paragraph contains observations which require and will certainly be given, thousands of words of discussion.” After exerting its powerful influence for over twenty years in the English-speaking world, the book is now available in Spanish, Italian, German, French, Dutch, and Polish translation. A translation into Hungarian is in preparation.
18. A. I. Melden, *Free Action* (London, 1961), p. 88.
19. Anthony Kenny, *Action, Emotion, and Will* (London, 1963), pp. 48–49.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 66.
21. A. R. Louch, *Explanation and Human Action* (Oxford, 1966), p. 89.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 107.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 121.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 56.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 56. Louch does not mean by morality adherence to or advocacy of a particular moral code. “Morality, considered philosophically, needs to be thought of, not as that set of prescriptions for action or models for human agency that one affirms, but any pattern or argument, any model for behavior that is of the persuasive or ideal-appealing form” (p. 102).
28. *Free Action*, p. 158.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 179.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 180.
31. William Dray, *Laws and Explanations in History* (1957), sections reprinted in *Readings in the Theory of Action*, N. S. Care and C. Landesman, eds. (Bloomington, Indiana, 1968), p. 261.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 275.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 270.
35. *Free Action*, p. 164. The practical-normative use of “because” is also discussed in detail by Arthur E. Murphy in his *Theory of Practical Reason* (La Salle, Illinois, 1965).
36. *Ibid.*, p. 128.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 133.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 106.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

41. *Inquiry*, XIII (Summer 1970), 1–31.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
45. *Free Action*, p. 145.
46. *CP*, I, p. 291.
47. *CP*, I, p. 289.
48. *CP*, I, p. 290.
49. *CP*, I, p. 290.
50. *The Concept of Mind*, p. 304.
51. *Action, Emotion, and Will*, p. 95.
52. *Explanation and Human Action*, p. 233.
53. *Readings in the Theory of Action*, p. 277.
54. *Explanation and Human Action*, p. 132.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
56. For this reason, A. E. Murphy, in *Theory of Practical Reason*, claims that in morality the notion of community is more central than that of universality.
57. The uselessness of generalizations or laws of human behavior in explaining actions, including those in the works of fiction, is forcefully argued by Theodore Mischel in his article, "Psychology and Explanations of Human Behavior," reprinted in *Readings in the Theory of Action*.
58. *Readings in the Theory of Action*, p. 272.