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IN THE SHADOW
OF
DESCARTES

Essays in the Philosophy of Mind



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“In philosophy it is always good to put a *question* instead of an answer to a question.

For an answer to the philosophical question may easily be unfair; disposing of it by means of another question is not.”

Wittgenstein

To *Lilli and Fred*

Friends and companions
in the Cartesian shadow

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PRELIMINARY

My awakening to philosophy took place when I was an adolescent. The first book I read was *Psykologi* by the much esteemed Swedish philosopher and essayist Hans Larsson. It had a section on the mind-body problem which put my thoughts in motion. Soon after I read Wilhelm Jerusalem's *Einleitung in die Philosophie* and was especially fascinated by the account it gave of the empirio-criticist form of identity theory advocated by Mach and Avenarius. I thought out for myself a "monistic philosophy" inspired by the sources mentioned. I cannot remember my "arguments" – only that they seemed to me, at the time, "absolutely convincing".

When in 1934 I started university studies in philosophy under the guidance of Eino Kaila in Helsinki, psychology was still considered to be part of "theoretical philosophy". This meant that I also got a basic education in psychology, including a rudimentary acquaintance with experimental work. I think this was a good preparation for research into the philosophy of mind or of psychology.

Kaila was himself an eminent representative of the two disciplines which were combined with his university chair, and he had a good sense of the philosophical relevance of perceptual psychology and also of the neuroscience of his day. His contributions to the philosophy of psychology seem to me superior to much of the "sense-datum philosophy" which had flourished in England since the turn of the century. As a philosopher Kaila professed a monism (identity theory, parallel theory) which he again and again up to his death in 1958 tried to articulate in writing – without, however, ever being able to give to it a form which would have fully satisfied him.¹

My own itinerary in philosophy initially took a different direction. Under the influence of Kaila I became interested in logic and the logic-inspired philosophy of the Vienna Circle. My first work was on induction and probability. It was succeeded by work in modal logic. The discovery and study of the modalities now known as deontic contributed to a gradual shift of my interest from the philosophy of logic, first to the philosophy of norms and values, and then to the philosophy of human action. My thinking centred round concepts like cause and reason (of an action), intentionality, explanation of action, and freedom and determinism. By this route I eventually came to the philosophy of mind and my early fascination with the mind-body problem and psycho-physical parallelism was reawakened. The way this happened is reflected in the fact that my approach to the mind-body problem has been, so to speak, from the "output"

aspect of an agent initiating changes in the physical order of things and not from the “input” aspect of a subject receiving impressions from the outer world through his senses. My first dip into these waters was in the Tanner Lectures I gave in Helsinki in 1984, published under the title “Of Human Freedom”. At a symposium in Åbo two years later, Norman Malcolm commented on them in a paper “Mind and Action”. My reply to him was called “Reflections on Psycho-Physical Parallelism”.² It was after these events that I embarked on what I considered a new opening on my philosophic journey.

At first I thought I could link up with the ongoing discussion in the area. Of course I was not unaware of what had been going on “in my absence”. Beside Kaila and *Gestalt*-psychology, the sense-datum-philosophy of Russell, Broad, and Moore had been part of my early education. An uninterrupted, at times very intense, occupation with the thought of the “later” Wittgenstein for nearly half a century can be said to have continued and supplemented this education. If in what I have written in later years there are echoes of outside sources they stem mainly from Wittgenstein. I was not ignorant of the new versions of materialism and identity theory which became topics of lively discussion in the late 1950s and still continue strong, nor of the revived Cartesian dualism and the debates to which it has given rise, nor finally of the impact on philosophy made by recent brain research and artificial intelligence study. It was into these post-Wittgensteinian developments that I was hoping to integrate my own thinking. The first thing to do was to read and learn. This I did. I learnt something and my horizons broadened. But when I started writing and had to take issue with what I had read I had a strong and sometimes even frustrating impression that I had to go my own lonely way, and if I could fall back on something earlier in my own philosophical experience, it was nearly always to problems and viewpoints with which I had become familiar in early years when I was still Kaila’s student. So I abandoned plans of contributing to and taking part in an ongoing debate and decided to write, to begin with, only for myself in order to clear my thoughts on questions which agitated my mind.

In the years from 1986 on I wrote extensively but did not publish anything on some traditional topics in the philosophy of psychology centring round the notions of perception and sensation and of quality and thing. Copies were circulated to a small number of friends who could be expected to read the material with sympathy for the writer’s efforts. For the comments which I succeeded in eliciting I am most grateful.

Years later I returned to these writings, made changes and corrections and purged them of long passages which appeared to me either erroneous or unconvincing. What stood the test is published here. The material is divided into sections corresponding to the order in which they were composed.

Partly overlapping in time with those writings on problems in the philosophy of psychology were successive efforts to deal with the classic mind-body

problem. In the course of years the results of some of these efforts were published – from the Tanner Lectures of 1984 to a paper in the *Journal of Theoretical Biology* ten years later. They are reprinted here with hitherto unpublished material dealing with the same problem or aspects of it.

The writings collected in this volume do not form a unified whole. The same ground is returned to time and time again. Sometimes the successive efforts signalize progress towards greater clarity. More often, perhaps, they reflect a slight change of angle from which the problem is approached. Some things may strike the reader as inconclusive or even as mildly contradictory. It was not always possible for me to make up my mind definitely on alternative positions. I have not wanted to conceal or smooth out the agonies which thinking about the fundamental questions of philosophy always caused me.

July 1997

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I owe Professor Tom Reuter special thanks, not only for stimulating discussions of the philosophy of the body-mind relation, but also and not least for letting me profit from his expert knowledge of animal and human neurophysiology. He drew my attention to relevant literature in the area and helped me avoid mistakes which otherwise I would have committed when speculating about matters in a field of science of which I have no experimentalist experience whatsoever and only a rudiment of bookish knowledge.

I wish to thank Dr Mark Shackleton for checking and improving the language of those parts of my English manuscript which had not been published before.

The published essays are:

“Of Human Freedom”, *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values* Vol. VI.

Edited by Sterling M. McMurrin. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1985.

“An Essay on Door-Knocking,” *Rechtstheorie* **19** (1988).

“On Mind and Matter,” *Journal of Theoretical Biology* **171** (1994).

The three papers are here reproduced with minor changes by the kind permission of the sources where they originally appeared.

Finally, I thank Risto Vilkkö and Auli Kaipainen for invaluable assistance with the technicalities of producing the manuscript for the press.

NOTES

¹ Cf. my paper "Eino Kaila's Monism" in Ilkka Niiniluoto, Matti Sintonen, and G.H. von Wright (eds.), *Eino Kaila and Logical Empiricism*. Helsinki, Societas Philosophica Fennica, 1992.

² Malcolm's comments and my reply are printed in Lars Hertzberg and Juhani Pietarinen (eds.), *Perspectives on Human Conduct*. Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1988.