

Gilbert Ryle



1 Philosophical Significance

Gilbert Ryle was a prominent ordinary language philosopher at Oxford around the same time as J. L. Austin. He is most famous for his work in the philosophy of mind. In his book *The Concept of Mind*, he gives an extended discussion of (you guessed it) the concept of mind, and argues for an understanding of that concept in roughly behaviorist terms. He is often remembered for his discussion of “category mistakes,” i.e. philosophical confusions generated by mixing terms from two different “categories.” Ryle thought of philosophy as akin to cartography: the philosopher’s job is to map the concepts used by competent speakers of our language. According to Ryle, just as I can know my way around a city without being able to recognize a map of it, ordinary speakers often know how to “get around” in our language without explicitly knowing what rules they are following when they do so.

2 Writing Style

Ryle is usually a very entertaining read. He is prone to figurative and metaphorical language, and he often hedges his claims by saying that they are merely supposed to be “helpful ways of thinking about the matter.” This pragmatic mindset is connected to his goal, which is (roughly) to accurately map the rules governing our concepts, rather than to discover deep truths about the world.

3 Reading Questions

These reading questions are intended to help you focus when doing the reading. You are not required to write up answers; this is purely for your benefit. This class tests you on how well you understand the authors that we cover, and these questions are intended to help promote that understanding.

- 1) What is the “Official Doctrine” about the mind?
- 2) What is a “category mistake”? How is this connected with Ryle’s critique of the Official Doctrine?
- 3) According to Ryle, what do the following two sentences have in common?
 - a. She came home in a flood of tears and a sedan.
 - b. There occur both mental and physical processes.
- 4) What would Ryle say to Chalmers? What would Chalmers say to Ryle?