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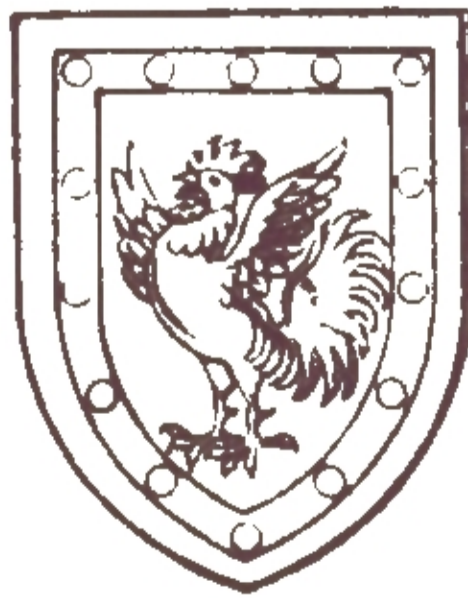
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The Mind

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The Mind

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by

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A YEAR or two ago I became interested in a resurgence of the heresy that it is the brain that does our thinking. I noticed that all attempts to deprive those who held this view of their fantasy were as strongly resisted as though the view were in fact not what its holders imagined it to be, a piece of science, but a piece of philosophy. Appeals to correct speech were discounted by the invention of new expressions, which were felt to be, although equivalent to the old ones, in some way superior. So, for example, we should say 'he has a good brain' instead of 'he has a good mind'. One wonders if the supporters of this new way of speech would not wish to substitute for 'he has a bad temper', 'he has an excess of bile'.

These writers were questioning the existence of mind. They were not at all clear what they meant by questioning its existence. Did they, for example, believe that sentences of the sort, 'He had good reasons for doing what he did' could in some future state of perfect knowledge be translated into sentences describing the movements of electrical currents? But clear or unclear, it seemed to me that since the status of the mind was in dispute, it might be of value to turn to those philosophers who had tried to prove its existence. Accordingly I turned to Descartes, to Locke and to Berkeley. And here I made two observations. The arguments used to establish the existence of mind were of such a general character as to be scarcely more than an enunciation of general principles. For example, Locke: 'We think, therefore, there must be in us something that has the power to think'. Second, that although a good deal was said about thinking, understanding, perceiving, believing, willing, doubting and feeling, it was generally assumed that it was proper to list all these, and many more, under the general head of thinking. 'What is a thing that thinks'? asks Descartes. 'It is a thing which doubts, understands, affirms, denies, wills, refuses, which also imagines

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and feels'. I further observed that although none of my authors had any doubts of the sort I have mentioned above, they were not yet in complete agreement as to what they meant when they said that minds exist. Thus neither Descartes nor Locke hesitated to say that the mind is a *Thing*, a thing which thinks, certainly, yet a thing. Descartes, it is true, says that its essence is to think, and he is forced to hold that it never ceases to think. But Berkeley will not allow that the soul is a thing. 'Question', he asks, 'whether being might not be the substance of the soul, or otherwise, thus whether being added to the faculties compleat the real essence and adequate definition of the soul?' and again, 'If you ask what thing it is that wills, I answer if you mean Idea by the word thing or anything like idea, then I say 'tis no thing at all that wills. This, how extravagant soever it may seem, yet it is a certain truth. We are cheated by these general terms, thing, is etc.'. The point of this difference may be put as follows: The word thing is properly used in talk about the world of cause and effect, not properly used in talk about self-caused events.

Whence did these differences stem? Did philosophers, as both Locke and Berkeley seem to think, discover what knowledge they impart about the mind from careful introspection? Were the differences they exhibited perhaps due to differences in their own minds as some philosophers have claimed that we differ in our ability to form mental pictures? In reading Berkeley I had been struck by the similarity between the questions raised by him and those which occur in pre-Socratic philosophy, and it occurred to me that it might be possible to throw light on those questions by examining the part played by mind in philosophy at that point in time where it first entered. I thought I might carry with me as a sort of theme Berkeley's remark, 'tis wondrous to contemplate the world empty'd of intelligences'. Berkeley does not mean that the world without intelligences would be an amazing place. He means that the world without intelligences is not a possibility as one might hold that a world without space or time is an impossibility.

We are accustomed to think of the philosophy of mind as a preparation for philosophy in general, and particularly as a pre-

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paration for metaphysics. John Locke may be said to have set a fashion in this matter by his suggestion that 'it was necessary to examine our own abilities and see what objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with'. It is not surprising that Locke's suggestion has not been much questioned, since it seems so reasonable that one should question one's abilities before undertaking a task. Yet perhaps we should ask whether Locke's question is parallel with the one we know to be common and assume to be reasonable. We are not now comparing our own abilities with those of others, noting their swiftness to solve problems, and comparing this with our own slowness or failure. We are passing judgement on mind as such, as though it were an instrument distinct from us who use it, and to be examined without its aid. These doubts were strengthened by the reflection that little in the way of practical advice on what matters should be avoided seemed to emerge from these enquiries.

It occurred to me that it might well turn out to be the case that these enquiries were no more propaedeutic than any other questions in philosophy. And again I thought that the best place to determine whether this were so or not, would be at the entrance of the concept of mind into philosophy where, on the one hand its role would be more obvious, and on the other, the consequences of the absence of the detailed study recommended by Locke should be more apparent. I therefore proposed to examine the philosophers with whom Socrates expressed himself so dissatisfied in the *Phaedo*.

We may simplify our consideration of these early thinkers in two ways. We need not concern ourselves with their views on cosmogony except as they throw light on questions about mind. And we may note also that these philosophers all assumed that there were four fundamental states of matter: fire, air, water and earth. Further, that most of them thought that water changed into air, and air into fire. Our interest is in the logical apparatus which these philosophers used to account for such changes. Some of them supposed that all four were elements, others that only one was fundamental. Some adopted some form of atomism, others a sort of phenomenalism. The danger one must avoid in examining them is that of supposing that their speculations were

the first beginnings of science. Burnet, for example, describes Thales as the first man of science: 'It is not hard', he says, 'to see how meteorological considerations may have led Thales to adopt the view he did'. It is certainly not hard to see why men should have thought, as we know that they did think, that water changed into air and fire and again into earth. In fact this view is so generally assumed that it is hard to understand how anyone could have achieved a reputation by asserting it. But there is clearly nothing either in what was then known of meteorology or in the view just stated to suggest that everything was water. Yet of those statements attributed to Thales, and remembered by his successors, one asserts that everything is water and the other that everything is full of gods. If these statements are to be thought of as contributing to science his fame is puzzling.

We have to look for an explanation of the respect in which Thales is held by the ancients, not in science but in philosophy, and the obvious place to look for this is in the work of his successors, particularly those reported to have been in contact with him. When we are told by Anaximander that the primal stuff of all things 'is neither water nor any of the other things that it has been said to be, but a stuff different from them and without marks', we should note first of all that this utterance has the mark of the philosopher, wide generality and tremendous confidence, 'not any of the things that it has been said to be', and second, that it implies that things other than water had been suggested as the primal stuff by philosophers presumably earlier than Thales. Moreover, we must suppose that both Anaximander and those he criticised had reasons for their views, and therefore that Burnet's suggestion that Anaximenes completed the philosophy of the Milesians with his doctrine of felting is pretty sure to be wrong. Anaximenes said that 'as the air was felted, the earth first came into being'. Clearly the term 'felting' is an attempt to provide a model for the structural character the air assumes when it turns into earth, and equally clearly some such model is needed for Thales. But we would be wrong to ignore the obviously paradoxical choice of air as the stuff of which everything is made, and wrong to suppose that the felt model will do for Thales as well as for Anaximenes. The most obvious model for Thales is

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an atomic one, particles of water in a void as in mist, but packed close like bricks in a wall when solid.

Whatever model Thales did adopt we can be sure that it entailed some conservation of matter, since this is the point of the assertion that everything is water, and since all the philosophers we are to consider held some such dogma. I call it a dogma because the evidence for it could hardly be adequate—not to disparage, since without conservation, natural explanation is impossible. The doctrine is stated most clearly by Anaxagoras less than a century later: 'The Hellenes follow a wrong usage in speaking of coming into being and passing away; for nothing comes into being or passes away, but there is a mingling and separation of things that are. So they would be right to call coming into being mixture and passing away separation'. Some such doctrine as this occurs in all our philosophers, even to the characteristically philosophical concern with our ways of speaking. We are reminded of Berkeley's 'strictly speaking we ought not to speak of things but of ideas', or Russell, 'We should not say it is certain that this is a sheet of paper but only that it is very very probable'. Anaximander says, 'Into that from which things take their rise they pass away once more, as is meet'. Again: 'He did not ascribe the origin of things to any alteration in matter, but said that the opposites in the substratum, which was a boundless body, were separated out'. The marks which Anaximander denies in the boundless are the distinguishing marks of the opposites, the boundaries of hot and cold. They are also the marks by which we distinguish one object from another. There is an obvious parallel with Berkeley: 'Thus, for example, a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name apple'. Consequently the absence of marks is explained by coalescence of the opposites in the original stuff, and their separation accounts for 'coming into being'. Coming to be is not really coming to be but coming to be observable.

Anaximenes is not so clear; '. . . and the form of air is as follows. Where it is most even, it is invisible to our sight: but cold and heat, moisture and motion make it visible'. This would be

more difficult to understand were it not for the clear parallel with Anaximander. Heraclitus is explicit: 'This world, which is the same for all, no one of gods or men has made; but it was ever, is now, and ever shall be, an ever living fire, with measures of it kindling and measures of it going out'. And again: 'All things are an exchange for fire and fire for all things, even as wares for gold and gold for wares'. These philosophers are concerned with the possibility of offering a rational account of the genesis of the world. They are, therefore, especially conscious of the puzzle presented by the seemingly contradictory requirements of reason. If explanation is to be possible it must be possible to postulate that nothing simply springs into existence (like Athena from the head of Zeus) and nothing simply vanishes. Coming to be and ceasing to be will not do. Yet coming to be is the very essence of our question. So coming to be must be shown to be not really coming to be but only separation, or felting, or mixing, or packing together like bricks in a wall. And since in ordinary speech we do commonly say that things come into existence, and pass away, ordinary speech must be loose. Thus early, there arises the conception of a strict way of speech, free of such philosophical improprieties as coming to be, and free also of the contradictions which ordinary speech seems to harbour. The poem of Parmenides may be thought of as an essay in precise speech: 'How, then, can what is, be going to be in the future? or how could it come into being? If it came into being, it is not; nor is it if it is going to be in the future. Thus is becoming extinguished and passing away not to be heard of'. Parmenides takes the strictures on common speech seriously. If we ought not to say that anything comes into being, we ought not to say that anything was or that anything will be.

Thales, I suggested, must have supposed that everything consisted of irreducible particles of water. Changes in appearance would be brought about by the coming together and separation of these particles. This seems a simple and attractive geometrical picture, but it contains a difficulty. Unless the particles move there can be no reason why anything should ever change. If the particles do move the simplicity of the theory is lost. For a mechanical explanation we need a conservation of motion as

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well as of matter : some such principle as that nothing moves unless it is pushed. But if the water particles do not move without being pushed, and everything is water, how does anything ever move. So everything is full of gods. The water particles are ageless and deathless, there was no time when they were not, nor shall they ever cease to be, and they are self-movers. This need not prevent a rational account of change, but it does need qualification. The simplest such qualification is that all water particles should move in the same way, but this diminishes the analogy between the self-moving particle and a living organism. It also involves the water particles in two types of motion, self induced and that produced by other water particles.

We are now in a better position to understand the logical differences in the accounts given by Thales' successors. The issue about which we can expect such differences to turn is that we have just discussed ; how is rational explanation of change possible ?

Anaximander asserts that all those who have postulated a single stuff from which everything derives are wrong. Instead he supposes that change, and in particular coming to be and passing away, are due to the separation out of opposites in a substratum which is, until they are separated out, imperceptible. The difference between appearance and reality gives a simple solution to the puzzle in Thales that earth is earth and yet water. Anaximander speaks also of an eternal motion and something capable of begetting. In the passage already quoted on conservation he says that things (the opposites) make reparation and satisfaction to one another for their injustice according to the ordering of time. What is of interest here is that propriety, injustice, reparation and order are all linked with the doctrine.

Anaximenes says that the stuff of which all things are made is air, and that it is felted together to make clouds and earth. Now if we remember what felt is like, we shall remember that its most striking feature is that its fibres cling together. And when we do remember that, we remember also Anaximenes' other assertion that 'just as our soul being air holds us together, so do breath and air encompass the whole world'. Air is also a self mover but its force is attractive. This doctrine is linked with Anaximenes'



theory of coming into being and its avoidance of empty space. Instead it is supposed that air might be stretched. The difficulties which these theories are propounded to meet are two. The most important is that Thales' account requires that his water particles should be atoms, irreducible by definition. But how, asks Anaxagoras, should a thing cease to be by being cut? The other arises from the part played by the void in Thales' philosophy. It seems on the face of it odd that a thing should be what it is because it is made up of so much nothing.

All three Milesians, however, make use of the analogy of life for self motion: Anaximenes calls it soul. All three are torn between asserting and denying the mechanical principle that nothing moves unless it is pushed. They are torn because, although their account of motion is mechanical, what moves is not mechanical. To use the language of theology, soul is immanent in the world of their construction. When we come to Heracleitus we find this doctrine denied: 'Of all those whose discoveries I have heard there is not one who attains to understanding that wisdom is apart from all. Wisdom is one thing. It is to know the thought that steers all things through all things.' The sense of this passage is made clearer by another from Anaxagoras, 'All other things partake in a portion of everything while Nous is infinite and self-ruled, and is mixed with nothing, but is alone, itself by itself. For if it were not by itself, but were mixed with anything else it would partake in all things . . . and the things mixed with it would hinder it, so that it would have power over nothing in the same way that it has now being alone, itself by itself'.

No doubt you are struck by the confidence with which men, ignorant of any precise knowledge such as Dalton possessed on which to base their grand theories, and therefore (you may rightly say) without any basis for theories about the world, made these wide claims. The truth is that we are misled, by the unfortunate adoption of the atomic theory, into viewing the whole enterprise as an essay in prophecy. But the arguments which these philosophers discussed were not primarily concerned with the nature of the world but with the nature of explanation. They tried to state not what the world is like but what the world must be like. Their

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sayings appear to have all the marks of dogma, yet there is clear evidence that they were subjected to frequent and many-sided criticism. I suspect that, far from naïve acceptance of the power of reason, they were continually astonished to find such a powerful weapon in their hands. Yet the argument appeared inescapable ; if things might come into, and go out of, existence, no explanation was possible. So at least we can say what the world must be like if it is to be intelligible.

Now if one adds to the doctrine that the mind has power to lay down conditions under which the world is intelligible, the further doctrine that mind is the only self-mover, and in fact sets everything in motion, it is easy to understand how these philosophers went on to say that the order which they found in the world, the succession of the seasons and the revolution of the firmament is in fact placed on the world by mind. It is hardly possible that they should have done otherwise. If mind sets everything in motion it must do so according to rule, since this is the nature of mind. Mind is not only self-moved, it is self-ruled. Heracleitus says that it is 'thought that steers all things-through all things', Anaxagoras that 'Nous set in order all things that were to be, and all things that were and are not now and that are, and this revolution in which now revolve the stars and the sun and the moon, and the air and the aether that are separated off'.

If we compare this with later writers we shall see how little the basic principles have changed. Consider, for example, Kant's attempt to explain synthetic *a priori* propositions, i.e. to explain how it appears possible for statements which involve matters of fact to be necessarily true. Kant not only regards mind as capable of determining the conditions under which rational explanation is possible. Because he applies the causal principle to perception, and therefore supposes that what is known is the joint production of the mind and something in itself unknown, he is able to make the mind actually determine the order in which what is known (i.e. the world) appears to us. Berkeley follows the pre-Socratics even more closely : 'There is no active power but the will, therefore matter, if it exists, affects us not. What affects us must be a thinking thing, for what thinks not cannot subsist'. And

again, 'If the world be granted to consist of matter 'tis the mind gives it beauty and proportion'.

We come now to the final stage of this development. If the mind is self-ruled it must be ruled by principle. It cannot be ruled by causes because causes lie outside the thing caused. If it is not ordered, the overriding principle that nothing comes to be and nothing passes away is lost, so it must provide its own order. It must act on principle. Anaximander hints at this in his use of the words 'justice', 'propriety' and 'order' in the passage which I quoted on conservation. Anaxagoras is more cautious. It is for this reason that Socrates criticises him in the famous passage in the *Phaedo*. 'I never thought', he says, 'that after he had said that these things were set in order by intelligence, he would introduce any other cause for them than that it is best for them to be as they are. My glorious hope was quickly snatched away from me. As I went on with my reading I saw that the man made no use of intelligence, and did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other absurdities. And it seemed to me as if one should say that Socrates does with intelligence whatever he does, and then, in trying to give the causes of the particular thing I do, should say first that I am now sitting here because my body is composed of bones and sinews,'. Berkeley seems to share Socrates' view for he says: 'No sharing betwixt God and Nature or second Causes in my Doctrine'. And are they not right? If nature is set in order by mind, that order must surely be in terms of what is best.

But now the difficulties begin to mount up. Is the order placed upon nature, placed there by that mind which also seeks to discover that order? For if it is, the discovery is a mockery, and, if it is not, the problem of explaining nature is turned into the problem of understanding another mind, for example, the mind of God. If the order is God's order we have added to the problem of explanation, the problem of evil. If the order is our own we lose the very essence of mind, the ability to act for the best. In a world in which everything is for the best, it is impossible to act for the best. One is reminded of that Platonic heaven, in which the soul as yet untrammelled by

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the body, surrounded by the purest of intellectual objects, the forms of knowledge themselves, is yet unable either to know or to think. This, I take it, is the bottomless pit of nonsense into which the Parmenides of the dialogue thrusts the young Socrates.

We possess two forms of explanation, each of which is useless without the other, each of which makes demands on the other. Any attempt to produce unity thrusts us on one or other horn of the dilemma. Either knowledge and action are both made impossible because knowledge and action are made the same (we cannot know what we ourselves have created) or knowledge and action are made impossible because mind and object are made the same. Once philosophers had agreed to attribute some degree of the order of nature to mind, their difficulty was to know where to stop.

What I hope has emerged from this review of the early Greeks is that the general character of mind is determined by the forms of explanation. Because two standard types of explanation, that in terms of cause and effect and that in terms of reason, were current in Greece six hundred years before Christ and are current now; the polar concepts 'self-moved' and 'moved by another' are also the same now as then, and determine our talk about mind.

These concepts are *not* equivalent to the concepts of reason and cause: reasons certainly entail self-movers, but self-movers need not have reasons. (Some philosophers have questioned this.) Consequently the will and reason form an uneasy unity. If will is emphasised, mind tends to become an uncaused cause, that is a special sort of cause not a reason. If reason is emphasised, if it is a thought that steers all things through all things, a law, we tend to think of mind itself as law. So Plato suggests that the soul is like a form. Perhaps the soul is the form or the law of the body.

There are two lines along which enquiry might be useful. I suspect that the division of the forms of explanation into two—reason and cause, is an over simplification, and that one might well find that some of the forms do not fit into either of the large groups. I have in mind the use by botanists and others of the form of purpose where the analogy is not complete and some of the entailments are consequently omitted. For instance, the fact

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that botanists ascribe purposes to plants does not imply that they take plants to have feelings. ('No agent can be conceived indifferent as to pain or pleasure' says Berkeley.) The unconscious mind of the psychologists, the language of possession (possessed by a devil) and quasi-possessional forms like conscience, a sense of justice, or guilt, or even a respect for learning might prove not to fit either the form of reason or the form of cause. This possibility is not unconnected with another line of enquiry which might prove of interest. I suspect that the reason for the great development of philosophy during the period we have been considering, though not itself of immediate use to science, arose from a sudden access of knowledge about the natural world (such for example as the ability to predict an eclipse), and that this was due to the necessity of re-examining the forms of explanation which were called into use. If this is true it would suggest that it is not strictly true that the forms of explanation have remained unchanged.



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