Symposium: Other Minds

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SYMPOSIUM: OTHER MINDS.

By J. WISDOM, J. L. AUSTEN AND A. J. AYER.

I.—*By* J. WISDOM.

1.

"To return to Francoise, . . . if then in my anger at the thought of being pitied by her I tried to pretend that on the contrary I had scored a distinct success, my lies broke feebly on the wall of her respectful but obvious unbelief . . . For she knew the truth."—Proust.

". . . it was she who first gave me the idea that a person does not (as I had imagined) stand motionless and clear before our eyes with his merits, his defects, his plans, his intentions with regard to ourself exposed on his surface, like a garden at which, with all its borders spread out before us, we gaze through a railing, but is a shadow, which we can never succeed in penetrating, of which there can be no such thing as direct knowledge, with respect to which we form countless beliefs, based upon his words and sometimes upon his actions, though neither words nor actions can give us anything but inadequate and as it proves contradictory information—a shadow behind which we can alternately imagine, with equal justification, that there burns the flame of hatred and of love."—Proust.

SOMETIMES, looking out of the window with someone, we see what he sees, hear what he hears and feel how he is feeling. And some people, it is said, sometimes do this when the other person is far away. Remembering this we may wonder how we ever came to ask "Do we know and how do we know, the thoughts and feelings of another?" Then we remember how we came to the doubt by calling seeing what he sees as we look out of the window, not "seeing what is in his mind" but "seeing the objects he sees", the laurels in the rain, and thinking of this, speaking of this, not as "seeing what is before his mind" but as "seeing in our mind images which tell us of the

objects and correspond closely to the images in his mind which tell him of the objects ", or, cutting out the objects, we speak of this seeing what he sees as " seeing in our mind images corresponding to images in his mind ", or, cutting out his images, we speak of " seeing in our mind images from which we guess at later images in our mind " which later images we call " the confirmation of our guess at what he's seeing ". Once we've done this, we shall describe in the same way seeing telepathically what he sees. This too we shall call " guessing from shadows now at shadows to come " and be half sick of shadows. And when this web is woven, it's hard to be free of it, though it's we who wove it.

When I began a course of lectures this year with the question " What are mental facts ? " at once someone protested " But how do we know there are any ? ", which comes to " How do we know when a man's angry, or when a dog smells a rat ? " So I said " You might as well ask ' How do we know when a kettle's boiling ? ' Surely we know water's boiling when we see it bubbling ? "

" But that's different " someone said, meaning of course that the way a creature's growls are a reason for thinking him angry, or his smiles for thinking him pleased is different from the way the bubbling of water is a reason for thinking it boiling.

And no doubt it is different. Bubbles tell us water's boiling because we've so often made tea, or rather, bubbles tell us water's boiling, partly because bubbles are part of boiling, and partly because bubbles have been associated in our experience with the other parts of boiling. Now if anger were, like boiling, just a pattern of physical incidents, then a dog's growls would be a reason for thinking him angry and about to bite in the very way that bubbles in water are a reason for believing that it's boiling and will make tea. But anger is more than the pattern of physical incidents which others observe when a creature's angry. And so the reason for thinking him angry is more complicated than the reason for thinking he's growling and that if you move he'll fly at you. Conversely, the reason is

more complicated, and so the conclusion is too. We know a creature's angry not merely by looking at what he's doing and remembering what usually follows, like the doctor anticipating the course of a disease he never felt and which, if you like, the patient too cannot feel. On the contrary, we know a creature's angry by the way we feel as we look at him and the way we have felt when we have acted rather as he is acting. And since the reason for thinking a creature angry involves all this, thinking it involves it too, and therefore " He is angry " is not a description merely of the creature's physical state like the words " It's boiling " are of water's physical state.

Many people will say here " Well of course ! We all know ' He's angry ' unlike ' It's boiling ' refers not merely and even not at all, to the physical state of the creature it's about, it refers primarily to his inward state, to the state of the soul or mind which resides in his body ".

And no doubt they are entirely right. Entirely. The trouble is that what they say provides no answer to the questions " How does one know of another creature that he's angry ? Does one know ? " It's not that what they say does not suggest an answer. It does and that a bad one. For it suggests the answer " We know the state of the soul in a body which isn't ours in the way we know the state of the inhabitant of a house we never enter—by analogy ". And this won't do at all.

In the first place, when one argues from the lights behind the blinds and the clatter of the cups that the people opposite are having tea, this is based not merely on having noticed in one's own house a connexion between these things, but also upon having observed this connexion in the houses of others which one has entered. Without this support the argument would be much feebler, and much feebler still had one never stepped outside one's own front door. And now the whole falsity of this comparison begins to dawn on us. For it's not merely that a condition fulfilled in the case of inference from the outward state of a house or a motor car or a watch to its inward state is not fulfilled in the case of inference from a man's outward

state to his inward state, it is that we do not know what it would be like for this condition to be fulfilled, what it would be like to observe the state of the soul which inhabits another body. And it follows that knowing what in me accompanies the drawing of my sword is not related to my knowing what in my neighbour accompanies the drawing of his sword as knowing what in my house accompanies the drawing of the blinds is related to knowing what in my neighbour's house accompanies the drawing of the blinds.

It is the breakdown of this comparison, it is the failure of the answer "We know the thoughts and feelings of others by analogy" which has tempted some to the desperate paradox "We know a man's angry like we know a kettle's boiling—from the steam we guess at bubbles and the rest, and from bubbles and the rest it's a deduction that it's boiling. In the same way, from a face we guess at hidden tears and then distress is a deduction." For though this comparison too is defective, giving as it does too simple a model for the logic of thoughts and feelings, it has the great merit of bringing out how misleading is the old model so embedded in our language, the model of the house and its inhabitant, the outward sign and the inward state. The old model suggests that even were we in no doubt as to what a man had done and the circumstances in which he had done it and in no doubt as to what he would do next, we might still be in doubt as to how he felt, in the way we might be in doubt as to what was going on inside a machine although we knew all about its outside and what it would do next. And the new comparison, though defective, begins to show us how inappropriate is this suggestion.

Can we find another comparison which shall combine the merits of the old with the merits of the new? Can we say for example that we know the feelings of another like we know the weight of thistledown, of what's too light for us to feel, or like we know the power of another creature or thing? This comparison has in it something of the comparison to the house we can't enter. For we speak of weight we can't feel by analogy with weight we can, we

use the words " weighs this " " weighs that ", and we justify our metaphor, support our conclusion, by analogy. Indeed we might suddenly feel that what analogy suggests is perhaps not so and that we never really know the weight of things we can't feel. But here we instantly realise that the doubt is not a doubt, because our conclusion as to weight is not a conclusion but purely deductive, because given the premises all is over bar the calculation and there is no finding the conclusion wrong or right.

Of course the words " finding, feeling the weight of what can't be felt " could be so used that we could easily imagine doing this. We might come to feel the weight of thistledown, only then it would no longer be light as air, and so no longer thistledown. We might come to feel the weight of things the weight of which we can not now feel, but then they'd no longer be things the weight of which we couldn't feel. We shall soon see what lies in the future, but by then it won't lie in the future. We can imagine a man doing what we now can seldom do, something which people have called " looking into the future ". This man doesn't examine seeds and with his experience predict the crop we may anticipate, he gazes in a glass and sees the flowers of the future. If this is to be called " looking into the future " then when someone says we can't see into the future what he refers to is the familiar fact that few of us can do this. But if this sort of thing is rejected as being no more than seeing the shadows the future casts upon the present, then indeed we can not know the future.

Likewise we can imagine a man doing what we now can seldom do, something which people have called " looking into the mind of another ". This man doesn't examine present symptoms and predict how the patient will go on. He sees scenes in a glass or in his mind's eye and knows they are what another sees, he feels distress and knows that another is in distress. If this is to be called seeing what another sees or feeling what he feels, if this would be real knowledge of the thoughts and feelings of another, then when someone says " We can not know the feelings of others " what he refers to is the familiar fact

that few of us can do this. But if this sort of thing is rejected as being no more than seeing the shadows of what is in another's mind upon the walls of our own, or as making two minds one, or as making what is seen partly public and so no longer mental, then indeed we can not know the thoughts and feelings of another. Once more the Agnostic is entirely right—like he was about what lies in the future. Once more what he says is true, necessarily true, because it's a tautology in that natural development of language which its proof encourages us to adopt—a tautology but fortunately a pathological one and so illuminating.

2.

"BUT" someone will say "the objects in the mind of Mr. So-and-so are different, since someone observes them." Mr. So-and-so does. And when we talk of really knowing what they are, we are not talking of knowing the unknowable, but simply of knowing them in the way Mr. So-and-so knows them.

We know things in the future and the weight of things, the weight of which we cannot feel by "deductive analogy" —"deductive" because the conclusion doesn't go beyond what supports it, "analogy" because from like cases we argue to the case before us. But the hypothesis of feelings in others which we can't feel is not like the hypothesis of weight we can't feel, not even like the hypothesis of unconscious feelings, feelings which no one can feel.

These hypotheses, it is true, are like that of feelings in others in that it is wrong to describe them as mere picturesque redescriptions of the phenomena in the cases they are used to explain. Nevertheless, for these hypotheses we may well bring out the confusion there is in questioning the existence of the unobservable entities they involve, by calling them "*connecting descriptions*". A hypothesis of this sort, it is true, is not established merely by ascertaining the phenomena in the case which calls for it, since the connexion, the analogy, must be established too. But the more these

two jobs are done the less does one who questions the hypothesis ask a question. With the objects before the mind of Mr. So-and-so it's different. For these someone can observe. Mr. So-and-so can. It might seem for a moment that ' Mr. So-and-so has a cold ' or ' Has Mr. So-and-so a cold ? ' mean nothing to us once we know how he's sneezing and are confident he'll cough. But they mean much more to Mr. So-and-so. And therefore, since we speak his language, they must mean much more to us. So the old comparison of the casket none can open but the owner, of the house with the closed doors and mock windows, is after all the best and the soul a ghost we are never quick enough to see ".

Undoubtedly there's something in all this. There's something wrong with the comparison of mental things to the utterly " unobservables ". But what ? And must we lose the ground we had gained and go back to gazing at the windows of the house that's haunted ?

When counsel claims that what his client sells is a cordial, or like a cordial, we may come at the cash value of his engaging description by recalling the reasons he has offered for it—how sweet, how pleasing in appearance, is what his client sells—like the old cordials. Undoubtedly like the old cordials. At the same time his client's product may differ from the old cordials in features which in certain connexions are very important.

Now what are the likenesses between the logic of claims about the contents of caskets and the logic of expressions of thoughts and feelings, statements about thoughts and feelings ? and are they incompatible with those differences which the Behaviourist emphasises in his crude way as important in meeting metaphysical doubt about thoughts and feelings, differences which I have tried to continue to emphasise in a less offensive way ? What were the reasons offered us for saying " After all, what is going on in my neighbour's head is like what is going on in his house or the casket he won't open for me, and not like the weight of what I can't feel, which I cannot really know only because there's nothing which would be called really knowing it " ?

The reasons were these. " He will have a cold " or " He will be in pain " or " He will see a dagger " mean more to the man they are about, it was said, than any story however complete of the symptoms of the predicted states ; he can tell in a way others can't whether these predictions are fulfilled ; he can check them by direct " observation." It seems an obvious inference that when these statements are made in the present tense he can tell by direct observation whether they are correct, and indeed there seems no need to *infer* this, for surely if one says to a man, rather oddly perhaps, " You are in pain ", then doesn't he know how right one is in a way one doesn't oneself ? It seems an obvious inference too from the fact that " He will be in pain " means more to him it is about that any prediction of his symptoms that it means more to the rest of us who speak the same language. And again there seems no need to infer this, for surely when a doctor says " Mr. So-and-so will be in pain in about an hour's time " he means to say of him what he means to say of himself when he says " I shall feel pain in about an hour's time "—a thing one might say after an operation before the anaesthetic had worn off. And this sentence means more to the speaker than any prediction of symptoms. And this more that it means is what the speaker can verify by observation. So when the speaker says of someone else " He will be in pain " he means to predict more than cries and moans and yet he means to predict the existence, not of something unobservable, but of something which will be observed and of the same sort as he himself has observed. So when we say we cannot really know the thoughts and feelings of another, we do not speak of something in principle unobservable like an unconscious feeling, or the weight of something still too light to feel, but of something unobservable like things done behind closed doors.

I believe that here in the fact that there is something that it is not self-contradictory for one man to know directly, while it is self-contradictory for others, we have a characteristic difficulty of the logic of the soul. Here is a feature of the assertions we make about the thoughts and

feelings of others which leaves us still troubled about their logical propriety long after like troubles about other things have been removed. We have doubted the propriety of our confidence in the hypothetical entities of science, in the old and universal hypothesis of matter, in all assertions as to what is right and wrong, good and bad. These doubts come from taking the logic of these things to be like the logic of a taste we may lack, of a substance behind the shadows, of a mechanism we cannot see, and they go when we recognise the defects of these false models of the transcendental. But something about thoughts and feelings forces us back to the old model for them and makes them seem the least transcendental of all things. And yet here too the old model is unsatisfactory. There would be no difficulty were it not.

Before this impasse memory of other difficulties may encourage us. In the case of doubts about right and wrong when we found the model of the moral sense defective it was not that we found a new model which was faultless. When we grasped the essence of the variable, when we removed the mystery of the universe of discourse and the worlds of fiction, we didn't do so by saying what these were, thus making the variable still constant and the unreal real still. But neither did we in these cases show how different was the logic of these from what we wished to make it by producing a new comparison that was perfect. On the contrary we were satisfied by recognising that these things had a logic all their own, that we could not stop at any of the comparisons on the way, although our destination could never have satisfied us without the journey. So in our present difficulty when someone tries to persuade us to go back we must remember why we started and critically examine his persuasions.

Let us examine a third time the argument which leads us back to thinking of our ignorance of the feelings of another as more than the temporary fact that we seldom or never know what a man's feelings are without seeing his face or hearing him speak and also as more than a timeless tautology like our ignorance of the future or the weight

of what's too light to feel. The argument begins with " It will be admitted that ' He will be in pain ' means more to the man it is about than any prediction of his symptoms ", and it is not for nothing it *begins* with this. It does so because there is something about the way the sentence works on one person, the person it's about, which is different from the way it works on others and which makes it much more impossible to say that it means on more to him than a prediction of his symptoms than it is to say this of others who hear the sentence and are not by it led to expect pain but only sensations as of symptoms of pain. And no doubt it is this difference which is the source of the curious expression " means for him ". An expression which becomes futile in view of the principle upon which the argument next relies, namely that what a sentence means to one man it must mean to everyone else who uses the same language.

Another odd thing strikes us. If we ask what more than symptoms it is that " He will be in pain " means to the man it is about, the answer is " A certain sensation ". What sensation? Pain. But how can this be *part* of what is meant by a statement which is simply to the effect that he will have that sensation?

If in order to avoid the last paradox we say that " He will be in pain " means nothing about symptoms to the man it is about, then are we to say that it means the same to the rest of us, and therefore nothing about how he will look? It is true that teaching the meaning of " He will be in pain " is not merely a matter of pointing out symptoms to the learner as in teaching the name of a mechanical disorder, it involves also saying to him when he is in pain " Now you are in pain ", but nevertheless pointing out the symptoms is part of the teaching. And these two parts of the teaching are reflected in the understanding of " He will be in pain ". It is true that it cannot be understood by one who has never felt pain any more than " smells of cheese " or " He smells cheese " can be understood by one who can't smell. But it is also true that it is not understood by one who does not understand how it is

decided whether it is true or false, that is by one who does not know the relevant symptoms. It is even more ridiculous to say that " He will be in pain " means nothing about how he will look than it is to say that " He will burst into tears " says nothing about how he will feel. For the latter sentence can be used even when his having felt quite cheerful is nothing against it. But take away all symptoms from the meaning of " He will be in pain " and immediately there is nothing we would call B's finding that C was right in saying " A will be in pain ".

If, in order to avoid these paradoxes, we say that " He will be in pain " means one thing to the man it is about and another to everyone else, then this is paradoxical in itself and it leads to the following oddity.* What does it mean to the man it is about and not to others? A certain sensation surely? In fact pain, his pain. And isn't this what it means to everyone? Doesn't it lead everyone to expect that he will be in pain? Doesn't it lead everyone to expect his pain, to expect pain? Clearly there is an ambiguity here. " So-and-so is expecting pain " may be used and most usually is used to mean that he is expecting to be in pain. But it may be used to mean merely that he is expecting that someone will be in pain. If we could set out the difference between these two processes we should set out the difference between the way " He will be in pain " works on the man it is about and the way it works on others. And this would show how it happens that it is absurd to talk of others checking the prediction in the way he checks it. Let us set down as unprovocatively as possible some of the main features of how such sentences as " I will be hungry ", " You will be hungry ", " He will be hungry " and " He is hungry ", " You are hungry " and " I am hungry " work.

Suppose a mother says to a child " You will be hungry by 11 o'clock ". Then (1a) The child will decide whether the prediction was correct by waiting with his eye on the clock till 11 a.m. and then if he begins to feel hungry saying " You were right, I am hungry." and if he does not feel

* See section III.

hungry saying " You were wrong." It is at once apparent that what we have called his deciding whether the prediction was correct consists largely in having that sensation, being in that state, which was predicted in the statement about him. Is it any wonder that *others* cannot check *that* statement in *that* way? We may add under this head that he will not be surprised to find himself complaining that he is hungry or eating biscuits. (1b) Had his mother made the same prediction about his brother and not about himself he would again have waited with his eyes on the clock, only then he would not have waited for hunger but for symptoms in his brother. (2a) And this is what his brother will do in order to verify the prediction about him: I mean of course that the brother will wait for symptoms in the child not in himself. (2b) Had his mother made the same prediction about his brother and not about himself, then his brother would have waited for hunger, I mean of course hunger in himself, that is I mean would have anticipated feeling hungry. (3) When the clock reaches 11, the sentence " You will be feeling hungry at 11 " ceases to tell the person it is about anything. In other words " You, Alfred, are hungry " can tell the person to whom it is addressed nothing, but " He, Alfred, is hungry " can tell others much. This again shows up how much knowing, directly knowing, that a mental prediction is fulfilled is being in the mental state predicted.

It is no wonder that these facts lead to trouble when we try to sum them up in our usual logical notation.*

For in that notation a sentence must mean the same to any two people provided it is unambiguous and they are both the same language. This implies of course that " A will using be hungry " either (1) means to A and the rest of us symptoms in A and only symptoms, or (2) means to A and the rest of us not only symptoms but also a certain

* That is when we try to describe the logic of private, singly-observable, things with the notation suitable to describing the logic of public things. There is also trouble when we try to describe the logic of utterly unobservable things in the notation we have for describing the logic of universally observable things.

sensation not of symptoms, or (3) means to A and the rest of us only a certain sensation.

Each of these alternatives illuminates a feature of the logic of sensations. But they are all paradoxes.

If we say that (1) " A will be hungry " means only symptoms both to A and to others so that his waiting for stomach sensations is no part of his learning the correctness of the prediction we do not have to say that others can't learn its correctness in the way he can. But to refuse to call his waiting for a sensation of hunger and saying " You were right " or " You were wrong " according to whether he feels hungry or not " part of his learning whether the prediction was correct " is outrageous : and to say " A will see snakes " means to him nothing but symptoms does not do justice to the fact that " A will see snakes (hallucinatory) " works for him so very like " A will see snakes (real) " : it does not do justice even to the way such a sentence works on others.

If on the other hand we say (2) that " A will be hungry " or " A will see snakes " means to A and to others not merely symptoms but also a sensation for A, or say (3) that it means both to A and to others nothing about symptoms but only a sensation, then not only are these statements in themselves paradoxical but both imply that one can never really know the thoughts and feelings of another. The proof, which is almost the same for both, is as follows :

1. According to (2) A learns the correctness of " A will be hungry at 11 " simply by waiting for a feeling of hunger and for symptoms in himself of this. According to (3) he learns the correctness of the predictions simply on the basis of feeling hungry.

2. A person, B, really knows the sensation of another, A, only if he knows them in the way A knows them, that is only if he knows the correctness of a prediction as to A's sensations in the way A knows it, that is only if he learns its correctness in the way A does.

3. Now when B hears a prediction such as " A will be hungry at 11 " either like A he waits for hunger (or for hunger and symptoms in himself) and simply on this basis

judges the prediction or he does not. If he does, he misinterprets the prediction as being about himself. If he does not, he learns its correctness not in the way A does.

Therefore a person, B, cannot learn the correctness of a prediction about a person, A's, sensations in the way A himself does. Therefore no one really knows the sensations of another.

The third part of this proof may be set out more fully as follows : If when B hears someone say to A " Snakes at 6 " he doesn't wait for snakes but for symptoms in A then he interprets the prediction correctly and checks it like we all would. But then he doesn't check it like A would. If on the other hand, when B hears someone say " Snakes at 6 " to A, he waits for a sensation as of snakes, then either he takes the sensation as of snakes (or the sensation and symptoms in himself) to fulfill the prediction or he does not. If he does, then he misinterprets the prediction and therefore does not come to know its correctness in the way A does. But if he does not, then either he checks the prediction not in the way A does or he misinterprets the prediction. For if B, upon seeing snakes, does not look only for symptoms in A but looks for them in someone else or in everyone else then he has misinterpreted " Snakes at 6 " to mean " Snakes for C " or " Snakes for everyone ! " that is, roughly, " Real Snakes ". But if upon seeing snakes he looks only for symptoms in A in order to check the prediction then he doesn't come to know its correctness like A does. Or does he ? Some would say he does, since like A he waits for a sensation of snakes, and like A he looks for symptoms in A. Others would say he doesn't, because he doesn't look for symptoms in himself while A does look for symptoms in himself.

Shall we say that a man can't make the movement another makes, can't do what another does, because if A scratches his head then either B scratches his, A's, head too, and therefore he doesn't do what A does since he doesn't scratch his own head, or B scratches his, B's, head, and therefore again doesn't do what A does since A scratches A's head ? Or shall we say that B does what

A does if A scratches A's head and B scratches B's head? Or shall we say that B does what A does if A scratches A's head and B scratches A's head? These things are so simple that we can keep control of the notations and use or refuse the paradoxes without harm and at our convenience. With the notations for describing the peculiarities of sentences about sensations this is not so easy but it's possible. And in particular it's easy to see that if the case in which B knows A is hungry by feeling hungry himself and then finding symptoms in A is called " B's knowing A's sensation in the way A knows it ", then the proof that we never know the mind of another can no longer be based entirely on self-evident premisses but requires also the premiss that in fact no one ever does know the sensation of another in the extraordinary telepathic way described. And when this premiss is needed, immediately the conclusion diminishes from the paradox that we *can't* know the minds of others to the statement of fact that we *don't.**

For it becomes the statement that no one has telepathic knowledge of the mind of another. For it then *is* this statement put in the paradoxical and misleading form that no one knows, no one really knows, the mind of another.

The pure paradox that we *can* never know the mind of another emphasizes the differences between everything we do call or might be tempted to call one person's learning the correctness of a prediction about the mind of another and what we call a person's learning the correctness of a prediction about his own mind. It does this by using these differences to persuade us to call *nothing* knowing the correctness of a prediction about the mind of another in the way he knows it himself.

And this is easily done. For a person, A, is said to learn the correctness of a statement to the effect that he, A, will have a certain sensation largely by having that sensation, while another person's, B's, having that sensation is of course not called his learning the correctness of the statement about A. And if asked who knows best how

* I have here added to the first draft of this paper in response to Mr. Ayer's criticism that it was obscure.

a man feels, he himself or someone else, we readily answer "The man himself". It then remains only to call the way a man knows his own feeling, his own mind, the only real, direct, way of knowing his mind, and it follows at once that no one can have direct and real knowledge of the mind of another. Reached by this route "We cannot know the mind of another" is a necessary truth in that natural development of ordinary language which its proof persuades us to adopt.

The statement of fact that we never *do* know the mind of another is also something of a paradox. For, of course, in the most usual use of words we do all sometimes know how a particular person is feeling although at times we do not, and it is only in a new sense of "knowing the mind of another," that we seldom or never do this although we can conceive of ourselves doing it quite often. The semi-paradox that we never *do* know the mind of another emphasizes how what is ordinarily called "knowing the mind of another" differs from a knowledge we may imagine ourselves to have, a knowledge which comes by having feeling or image or sensation just like that which we attribute to another and basing on this our beliefs about his mental state in the way we base on the images and feelings of memory our beliefs about the past. The semi-paradox emphasizes these differences by using them to persuade us to call only this imagined sort of knowledge, "real knowledge of the mind of another". This is easily done. For clearly such knowledge would be more like the knowledge a person has of his own mind than is our common knowledge which is based on what we can see of his face and what we can hear him say. And as we have noticed when considering the pure paradox there is in us all an inclination to call a man's knowledge of his own mind the best and most real knowledge of that mind.

Those who say "We never do really know the mind of another", having persuaded us to deny the title of "real knowledge" to what we ordinarily call by this name by holding up a new ideal knowledge to which we should confine the title, then remark that we seldom or never attain to

this ideal. And they are quite right. We seldom or never do. It's a fact—a familiar fact.

When someone says, " We never know the mind of another " we need to ask him* whether (1) he wishes to say that the sort of thing we would ordinarily call " knowing the mind of another " doesn't happen—if so he makes in quite ordinary language a statement of fact which is false, or whether (2) he wishes to say that the particular sort of intimate, telepathic knowledge of another's mind which would give us knowledge of his mind comparable to our knowledge in memory of the past seldom or never occurs—if so he makes in a readily acceptable caricature of ordinary language a statement of fact which is true or whether (3) he wishes to say that we cannot know the mind of another in exactly the way he does himself—if so, in a readily acceptable extreme caricature of ordinary language he makes a statement which is necessarily true, couldn't conceivably be false.

Nearly always the truth of the matter will be that the sceptical speaker is neither definitely doing one of these things nor definitely doing another. He is like a man who has moved a piece, a chessman perhaps, upon a board before us, but when we move in reply, explains that he is not playing exactly the game ordinarily played with the pieces he uses and that further he has not quite settled what modification of the ordinary game he plans to play. We shall not come to conclusions with him till this is settled. Is he making a statement of fact or is he making a statement which is necessarily true? He will resent this question for he will feel that with it we are trying either to force him to plod beside the scientist always subject to the vagaries of nature or to banish him to the *a priori* where blows indeed no wind of chance and *ipso facto* no breath of life. He is convinced that somehow he is revealing something about the world and yet making a statement which has all the necessity, all the immunity to chance, of a logical or mathematical statement.

So he may be. For a tautology may reveal something

* Cf. A. J. Ayer, The Terminology of Sense Data, Mind, Oct., 1945.

about the world. A tautology made without modifying ordinary language may do this. Still more may one like " Tigers burn bright in forests at night ". To see the world we must connect things and as we connect them more or in a new way so we see old things anew. Even a logical statement, which by definition cannot involve any modification of linguistic inventions and which therefore in a sense cannot connect things in a new way, but can only underline connexions already made, can reveal to us what we had not realized. Thus the equation " God exists " means " Something is divine " disconnects " God exists " from " God knows " and " God loves " and so breaks the power of an analogy suggested by the shape of sentences and very confusing, as we know, in certain connexions. Still more can a metaphysical statement which may modify language, connect or disconnect things in a new way. And when the philosopher says " We can never know the mind of another " the proof he offers makes us realize that, when from a man's face or what he says we guess he's angry, we are not like one who from the outside of a house guesses that it is inhabited *and could make sure.*

Unfortunately the words " We cannot know the mind of another " also suggest that when from a man's face or words we guess at his feelings we *are* like one who from the outside of a house guesses that it is inhabited, but can not make sure, because he can't unlock the door or because the windows, though seemingly transparent, are not or because he lacks the power of gazing in a crystal and so ascertaining what goes on behind closed doors. And thus the very words used to break the power of the analogy of the house and its inhabitant are in conformity with that analogy and encourage it.* This is why it is so very necessary to be clear

* This is characteristic of the expression of metaphysical advances. Thus to say " Matter does not exist " is to speak as if matter were something over and above sensations which is just what those who say it mean to deny. Schlick said that we now know that there are no such entities as numbers and thereby spoke as if they were things, though fabulous, the very way of speaking his statement was directed against. Wittgenstein did the same when he said " We have the idea that the meaning of a word is an object ". The same habit lingers when we say " Material things are logical fictions ", " Numbers and meanings are logical fictions "

as to whether one wishes to use them to make the scientific statement that we lack telepathic knowledge or to make the metaphysical and tautological statement aimed against the confusing analogy, embedded in our language, of the house and its inhabitant.

To sum up then : The words " We can not know the mind of another " or better " We can not really know the mind of another " may be used to reveal something about the world and at the same time to say something which can't be false. But this is not done, cannot be done, by making a statement of fact which has all the necessity of a tautology.

True, one who says " We cannot know the mind of another " may use these words to make the statement of fact that we lack telepathic knowledge and if he does he is making that statement in a modification of ordinary language in which it is necessarily true that we lack knowledge of the minds of others *unless we have telepathic knowledge.* But if so he is still making a statement which may at any time become false, because we may come to have the power we lack.

And again, one who says " We cannot know the mind of another " may use these words to make a statement which is necessarily true because made in a modification of ordinary language in which absolutely nothing is to be called " knowing the mind of another in the way he knows it himself " and absolutely nothing is to be called " knowing the mind of another " except knowing it in the way he knows it himself. But if the sceptical speaker is using words this way then at once he is not making a statement of fact, he is not telling us of something we have missed. For then his statement that we can't know the mind of another has become like the statement that we can't possess the heart of another when we have decided that this description is not to be applied until that other has no desire apart from our own and is then still not to be applied because then that other is no longer other.

Once more then we reach the result that the words " the impossibility of knowing the mind of another " may

stand either for something like the difficulty, or if you like, the impossibility of knowing the future from a crystal or for something like the impossibility of knowing the future just as we do the present, either for a prolonged accident or for a timeless necessity, either for a fact or a tautology, but not for something which is both. This is the result we reached on p.126. The difference is that now we know the proof and therefore the point of the tautology and that now we can hold to it. We can now hold to it because we have seen how it is that, while there is one person for whom it is not impossible that he knows what is in the mind of a certain person, it is impossible for everyone else. For we have noticed how there is a language, and one we are half inclined to use, in which, while it is not self contradictory to say that A knows the mind of A, it is self contradictory to say of anyone other than A that he knows the mind of A.

3.

BUT now alas, just when all seems well, a new whisper disturbs our complacency: "How *can* two people attach the same meaning to a statement, when the one can check it in a way in which it is impossible for the other to do so?" How *can* two people be concerned with the same proposition, the same fact, when the one can ascertain the truth of that proposition in a certain way, while it makes no sense to talk of the other ascertaining its truth in that way? This is the same difficulty, coming from the eccentric logic of sensations, as that we have just investigated. But one who puts the difficulty this way pretends to have another way out and leads us to a different destination. He says: "Face the difficulty at once and say that a sentence such as 'A will be hungry' means something different to A from what it means to the rest of us. You will then not be forced into admitting that we can never know the feelings of another. For you will be able to claim that we do know

the statements we make about the feelings of another in the sense that *we* attach to them ". It's not till later that we find that in order to preserve our knowledge we have followed a guide who leaves us in an isolation even more profound—not indeed among enemies whose words may be all lies but in a place where for ever there is beside our own voice only the chatter of the monkeys.

We have caught a glimpse of this person before. It was when we considered the paradoxes we have now worked till they are no longer paradoxes and noticed (p. 16) how they depended upon the principle " A sentence must mean the same to any two speakers unless it is ambiguous ". He had then only a rather freakish air because he just hinted that we might deny this principle. Now he's becoming bolder. Is he a friend or an enemy ?

When we dealt with the riddle " Can one man do what another man does ? ", we set out what makes paradoxical the answer " Yes " and in doing so set out what leads to the answer " No " : and in setting out what makes paradoxical the answer " No ", we set out what leads to the answer " Yes ". Likewise in setting out the paradox involved in " A sentence must mean the same to any two speakers " and in " Mr. So-and-so will have a cold " means the same to any two speakers, we have set out what now seems to force us towards " ' Mr. So-and-so will have a cold ' means more to him than to us ", and therefore towards " A sentence need not mean the same to any two speakers ". And if we now welcome this last paradox and set out what is involved in it, we shall see how we can still deny it and insist that " Mr. So-and-so will have a cold " means the same to him as to everyone else and that every sentence means the same to any two speakers of the same language.

Suppose someone says " We can't know what lies beyond the horizon ". We reply " Don't be absurd. What you mean no doubt is that we can't know what's beyond the horizon like we can what's before us. And that's a tautology.

For it's self-contradictory to talk of knowing the remote just as one knows the near". He may reply "But it can't be self-contradictory, because there may* be someone doing this, *e.g.*, observing a fire in Fleet street, at the very moment that one cannot oneself. And such a person is learning the truth of a statement with the same meaning as that one is wondering about. Now it cannot be sensible to talk of one person's knowing something in a certain way and absurd to talk of another person's knowing that thing in that way". Let us now meet this by saying that "Fire in Fleet Street" doesn't mean the same to people in different places. For this is true in a sense fatal to the Agnostic. And no harm is done if we are careful.

Imagine that people all over the country hear on the wireless "A fire is now raging in Fleet Street". Those in Fleet Street have a different and more direct means of checking this statement than those in Brighton or even those in Streatham. Those in Fleet Street have only to open their windows or their eyes, and they will be disappointed if upon doing so they see no flames. But the newspapermen on holiday by the sea will be astonished if they find the Front in flames. They may use their eyes of course and observe their editor mount a bus for the station, like people on the Euston road may watch the engines hurry from opposite St. Pancras' Church. But, unlike those on the spot, they can not instantly, by opening their eyes, obtain sensations ultimately and overwhelmingly connected with the words "Fire in Fleet Street."

Let us say that the news means something different to listeners far from the scene from what it means to those who are there, and that it means to those at Brighton charred timbers and hurrying firemen in 60 minutes by the Southern Electric, to those in the Strand flames from the window, to watchers in Fleet Street nothing, since it

* This is one respect in which the puzzle about things in the distance differs from the puzzle about things in the soul. For things in the soul we may say *must* be known. Further the description of an event as Mr. So-and-so's anger tells who may know it but "Fire in Fleet Street" does not. See also note 1*b* to p. 33.

tells them nothing.* Only if we say this, that the words have different meanings to listeners in different places, we must remember that they all speak the same language, that the case is not like that of people who being in different places speak a different dialect. On the contrary, were the news to have the same effects on a man in Brighton as it has on one in the Strand so as to give us some inclination to say that it means the same to him as it does to the man in the Strand, then we should say that the man in Brighton didn't understand English, that the words didn't mean the same to him as to the rest of us and therefore not the same as to the man in the Strand. We should say " The man in the Strand correctly understands them to mean a fire in Fleet Street, the man in Brighton incorrectly understands them to mean a fire in Brighton or a general fire, a fire everywhere. He attaches the wrong significance, or no significance to the spatial suffix ' Fleet Street ' or ' here ' ". In the same way if a man were to hear the words " Voices in Joan of Arc's ears " and then listen for voices, we should say that the words meant for him something different from what they mean for the rest of us and in that way something different from what they mean for Joan of Arc. We should say " He incorrectly takes the

* The peculiarity of a man's knowledge of his own sensations I have tried to bring out in Other Minds VII, Mind Vol. LII, N.S., No. 207.

(*a*) The different meanings of " Big Ben points to 12 " to persons, at different distances is given by " To a person 100 miles away this means Big Ben pointing to 2 o'clock in two turns of my clock with the speedometer at 50, to a person 50 miles away this means Big Ben pointing to 1 o'clock in one turn of my clock with the speedometer at 50, etc. ", or by " This means to a person 100 miles away Big Ben pointing at 4 o'clock in 4 turns of my clock with the speedometer at 25, etc. ". These accounts of course are simplified and neglect grit in clocks and defective speedometers. The full account involves all the laws of nature, which once they are ascertained are put into the meanings of words. It is no miracle that they can then be pulled out again.

(*b*) The description of the different meanings of sentences about the distant can be given in terms of sentences about the present. The description of the different meanings of sentences about sensations can be given only in sentences about sensations. This leads people to fancy that these are being given a circular definition. But no definition is being given. The description of the use of general sentences cannot be given without the use of any such sentence. But this only means that we can't describe their use by a rule for providing substitutes. When we ask " What is the variable ? " or "What is consciousness ? " it is not that general or psychological sentences are unintelligible to us.

words ' Voices in Joan of Arc's ears ' to mean voices in his own ears or public, real voices, voices in everyone's ears : he attaches the wrong significance, or no significance, to the personal suffix ' in Joan's ears ', in ' Joan's mind ' ". Again we have asked " Does ' Voices in Joan of Arc's ears ' mean more to Joan of Arc than it does to others, and if so what more does it mean ? " The answer is " It doesn't mean more, any more than ' Fire in Fleet Street ' means more to those on the spot than it does to others and consequently there is no answer to ' What more does it mean ?' " except that it doesn't mean more. It follows at once that it is as misleading and wrong to say " ' Voices in Joan's ears, pain in her heart ' means nothing to Joan when she is already hearing the voices and feeling the pain, although it means something to others ", as it is to say, " ' Fire in Fleet Street ', means nothing to those already watching the fire, although it means something to others and what is more its meaning reaches a maximum just before a person reaches the spot ". But although it is dangerous to say these things because in the usual meaning of " meaning " they are false, they are well worth saying in a modified meaning of " meaning ", in which the meaning of a word to a particular person at a particular place at a particular time is a matter of what, if he knows the language, it must do to him then and there. For then these paradoxical statements about meaning something different, meaning more, meaning nothing, express what can otherwise be said only with another expression, such as " works differently for ", " does more work for ", " does nothing for ", which expression is again liable to be misunderstood. It is liable to be misunderstood in the way " means more " is liable to be misunderstood, and although less liable to be misunderstood in this way, that is as attacking the truth that any sentence must mean the same to any two speakers of the same language, it is more liable to be misunderstood as referring merely to the fact that " Fire in Fleet Street " may mean more to a man whose business is there than it does to one whose business is elsewhere, that is to unconventional, unsymmetrical differences. There is indeed at this

juncture no substitute for luck and goodwill except industry—industrious description of the detailed differences between hearers and equally industrious description of the likenesses, and this will involve not merely a description of the use of the particular expression giving trouble such as "He hears voices", but also a description of other expressions in the same linguistic constellations, such as "I hear voices", "You are hearing voices", "You will hear voices", "Everyone will hear voices", "There will be voices", and at last the whole language.

And what point have these descriptions which are so apt to mislead or so laborious? None—unless we wish to answer the question with which we started "How do we know that a man is angry? Surely we do know this and yet how can we, since all we really know is how he frowns and growls?" But if we wish to free ourselves of that puzzling question and positively to gain that sort of new view of the world which a new language and a new grasp of language gives, then these dangerous or tedious descriptions are not merely useful but essential. For without referring to the facts we have dangerously described as sentences having different meanings for different people, we could not understand how true it is nor how it's true that no one can know what lies beyond the horizon or behind the windows of the soul. For without referring to these facts we could not understand how it is also true that, while one person may know these things, others cannot.

4.

AND it's not until we have understood these things that we ask "Why is it that familiar facts and truths have been so confusingly expressed?" Have we perhaps missed the deepest meaning of these metaphysical doctrines so absurd and so profound?

"Let us consider letters" Virginia Woolf writes, "Life would split asunder without them. 'Come to tea, come to dinner, what's the truth of the story?, have you heard the news?, life in the capital is gay, the Russian

dancers . . .' These are our stays and props. These lace our days together and make of life a perfect globe. And yet, and yet . . . when we go to dinner, when pressing finger-tips we hope to meet somewhere soon, a doubt insinuates itself; is this the way to spend our days? the rare, the limited, so soon dealt out to us—drinking tea? dining out? And the notes accumulate. And the telephones ring. And everywhere we go wires and tubes surround us to carry the voices that try to penetrate before the last card is dealt and the days are over. 'Try to penetrate', for as we lift the cup, shake the hand, express the hope, something whispers, Is this all? Can I ever know, share, be certain? Am I doomed all my days to write letters, send voices, which fall upon the tea-table, fade upon the passage, making appointments, while life dwindles, to come and dine? Yet letters are venerable: and the telephone valiant, for the journey is a lonely one, and if bound together by notes and telephones we went in company, perhaps—who knows?—we might talk by the way."*

This isolation which we may defeat but cannot vanquish, does it find voice in the old puzzle as to whether we really know what is in the mind of others? Does the contradiction in the philosopher's request for perfect knowledge of others reflect a conflict in the human heart which dreads and yet demands the otherness of others?

* *Jacob's Room*, p. 91.