

Oxford

The Character of Mind

An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind

Second Edition

Colin McGinn

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COLIN McGINN

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Preface to the First Edition

This book is intended as an introduction to the philosophy of mind, suitable for the general reader and beginning student. I have accordingly avoided the use of technical terms, except those whose meaning I explain as they are introduced; a dictionary should suffice for other unfamiliar words. I have not, however, sought to protect the reader from the difficulties of the subject, and there are parts of each chapter that are likely to prove taxing to the tyro; but my hope is that these will yield to concentrated attention. On many vexed issues I have written with a boldness and absence of qualification I might not allow myself elsewhere; my aim has been to give the reader something definite and stimulating to think about, rather than to present a cautious and disinterested survey of the state of the subject. But while I have tried to say something positive about the topics with which the book deals, I have made a point of accentuating the problems each topic raises; the resulting inconclusiveness is, I think, to be preferred to facile solutions or (even worse) refusals to acknowledge the difficulties.

The book contains neither the names of particular authors nor footnotes crediting the ideas discussed to their originators. I must emphasise that this is not to be taken as an indication that the views discussed have no identifiable source, still less that their source is myself. On the contrary, every page of the book shows the influence of other writers, often in the most direct way possible; I claim no especial originality for the ideas put forward, though I dare say my treatment of them has sometimes altered their original form. My excuse for this manner of composition is that to have duly cited particular authors would have greatly impeded and complicated the presentation of the material discussed, unsuited the book for its introductory purpose. The selective bibliographies for each chapter, to be found at the end of the book, record the sources of the views dealt with, in so far as I can trace them; but it seems in order to

acknowledge the main influences on each chapter here, if only in a general way. These are as follows: Chapter 2, Davidson, Nagel, Kripke, Putnam; Chapter 4, Russell; Chapter 6, Davidson, Fodor,

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Geach; Chapter 8, Davidson and especially O'Shaughnessy; Chapter 9, Nagel, Parfit, Shoemaker; Epilogue, Dummett. I would also like to thank Anita Avramides for helpful critical comments and Katherine Backhouse for exemplary typing.

12 August 1981

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Preface to the Second Edition

It is now fifteen years since the first edition of *The Character of Mind* was written. At that time the philosophy of mind was beginning its ascent, having wrested primacy from the philosophy of language. Since then it has remained an active and vital area of philosophical interest. Quite a bit has happened in the interim, though I think it would be true to say that the fundamental geography has not altered much. Some new topics have come to prominence, but earlier perspectives have not been superseded. In preparing this new edition I have therefore not seen fit to rewrite the original chapters; instead I have added three completely new chapters that record what seem to me the major developments in the field since the book was written. This seemed the most sensible procedure for a number of reasons: there is nothing significant in the original text that I would like to withdraw; it is in general a mistake to tamper with an earlier piece of finished writing; the new material is more naturally viewed as supplemental rather than revolutionary. I hope that the new edition will preserve the merits of the original, such as they are, while sounding some fresh themes. The history of philosophy must never be forgotten, but equally philosophy should never stagnate. The new chapters are aptly seen as commentaries of a sort on the older chapters, taking further some of the ideas already in play.

This was my first book, written quickly and in some heat. I have since done quite a bit of work in the philosophy of mind, and I have not hesitated to reflect this in the supplemental chapters. These chapters may be viewed by some as idiosyncratic, but

I think they represent the direction in which my earlier discussions naturally tend--though I was not then aware of some of the twists and turns that would be taken. This is particularly true of the topic of consciousness, which now seems to me even more central and problematic than it did when I wrote the original book. In the new edition I have emphasised this topic and indicated how its intractability bears upon other topics. I have also added to the bibliography, to reflect the burgeoning of literature in the philosophy of mind.

One influential contemporary approach to the mind urges that we

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pay special--even exclusive--attention to the results of the empirical sciences. As philosophers of mind, we should, on this view, see ourselves as commentators on what the scientists are up to. I have little sympathy for this point of view, then or now. Of course, we should be interested in empirical findings, but I believe that the real philosophical problems are not to be handled in this way. Indeed, I believe that scientists carry with them a good deal of tacit philosophical baggage, which conditions the work they do and their means of reporting it. Philosophy, for me, is still anterior to science, and largely independent of it. This book embodies that (unfashionable) point of view.

The book is still offered as a ground-floor introduction to the philosophy of mind, not presupposing knowledge of technical terms and the work of particular authors. But, as before, I should say that it does not purport to be easy reading. My aim in the new edition is the same as in the earlier one: to do some real philosophy in as pithy and direct a way as possible--to get the philosophical wheels turning in the reader's mind, rather than merely providing a superficial survey of who said what when. It is meant to be clear and tough, and clear why it is tough.

I must also reiterate my indebtedness to other authors, recorded in the bibliography. As in the first edition, I have sought to keep the main text as smooth and stripped-down as possible by not fussing over precise attributions--including to myself.

I cannot help recalling the different circumstances in which the old and new editions were prepared: the former, in Earl's Court, London, on a manual typewriter, at the dining-room table; the latter, on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, on a computer and laser-jet printer, at a proper desk (at last). I am struck, however, at the constancy of philosophical themes, despite these discrepancies of time and place. Philosophy has a remarkable talent for staying the same.

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1

MENTAL PHENOMENA

Of what nature is the mind? This question identifies the philosophical topic with which we are to be concerned. But the question needs some refinement and qualification before it gives accurate expression to the range of issues with which the philosophy of mind deals. Let us start by guarding against some misleading suggestions carried by this simple way of delimiting our topic, and then proceed to clarify what sort of question it is and how we are to set about answering it.

The question 'What is the nature of the mind?' invites the retort 'Whose mind?' We do readily and commonly speak of 'the mind', but (as Aristotle warned) this is apt to confine our attentions to the *human* mind; we thus conceive our task as that of characterising the mental life of a certain terrestrial species at a certain point in its evolutionary and cultural history. But the craving for generality which typifies philosophy recommends enlarging our area of concern: we must seek an account of the mental which applies to the minds of other animals and indeed to the mind of such mentally endowed creatures as we can legitimately imagine. It is therefore better to rephrase our question by replacing 'the mind' by 'mental phenomena'. And if we keep the intended generality of the question in mind, we shall be less prone to accept accounts of the various mental phenomena which are applicable only to certain of the creatures exemplifying them; indeed it is frequently a good test of a theory of some mental phenomenon to ask whether the proposed theory would be applicable to *all* actual and possible creatures exemplifying that phenomenon. For example, we should be suspicious of the suggestion that having a pain consists in a propensity to offer

certain sorts of verbal report, in the light of the consideration that creatures without language are capable of pain sensations. Similarly, but less obviously, we should question theories which make sense perception a matter of the acquisition of beliefs, in view of the point that some creatures seem capable of perceiving the world yet are hardly equipped to form *beliefs* about what they perceive. Or again, there are theories of emotion and of action which, while they seem appropriate to the case of human beings, fall down when we ask how they work for other creatures to which these concepts apply--in particular, theories that put (propositional) *thought* at the heart of those mental phenomena. We do well, then, for heuristic purposes as well as for the sake of generality, to allow our enquiry to take in minds other than the human. Perhaps the minds of all creatures will turn out, upon close examination, to be fundamentally alike, so that concentration on the human case will not misrepresent the nature of mind in general; but we should be alive to the possibility that minds may be of many kinds.

Our initial formulation of the question carries another implication which should not be taken uncritically for granted, namely that all types of mental phenomena are of the same nature. Not only may the mind of any particular kind of creature, say the human mind, have seams--in the sense that its component attributes are conceptually separable and hence could occur independently--but there may be nothing common and peculiar to all that we call mental. In other words, we should not let the initial naïve formulation of the question lull us into just assuming that the mental is a unified domain--or, as it is often put, that there is a single and universal 'criterion of the mental'. If there were no shared feature of all that we attribute to 'the mind', then the project of elucidating *the* nature of mental phenomena would be doomed to frustration--each type of mental phenomenon would have its own distinctive nature. Later we shall try to find a workable criterion of the mental and enquire whether we can do anything to level the variety with which mental phenomena present us; but we should be open to the prospect of discovering that what we commonly classify as mental has no significant unity of nature--indeed that our customary classification of various phenomena as belonging to 'the mind' is a mere historical or cultural accident. Certainly philosophers (and others) have shown less than full consensus, through the centuries, on the question of what belongs to the realm of the properly mental. Less drastically, it

may turn out that the concept of mind approximates to what is sometimes called a 'family resemblance' concept, similar to the concept of a game: that is, calling a phenomenon mental is not recording the possession of some interesting single property on the part of all and only phenomena so called, but is rather a matter of drawing attention to a large number of similarities and connections which are incapable of summary capture in any simple formula. It is not--or not just--that there exists no concept, aside from the family resemblance concept in question, under which all and only instances of that concept fall; it is rather that there is no substantive or conceptually innovative necessary and sufficient condition for falling under the concept--or none that is not itself a family resemblance concept. But before we address this question as to the logical character of the concept of mind, we should say something about the status of our enquiry into the nature of mental phenomena and about the method of its prosecution.

A further defect in our original question is that it does not, as so expressed, present us with a distinctively *philosophical* field of investigation; for it says nothing to distinguish the philosophy of mind from the study of mental phenomena undertaken by scientific empirical psychology. Putting aside certain deviations in the conception of psychology adopted during its chequered history, it is surely true to say that it is the business of psychology to investigate the nature of mental phenomena--to develop theories of what these phenomena are and of the principles or laws that govern their operations. How then do the two subjects differ? Answering this question requires us to take a stand on the nature of philosophy itself--what its method is and what the status of its results--as well as on the question of how the philosophical study of mind relates to its scientific study. Some have supposed the philosophy of mind to be strictly continuous with psychology, being merely more speculative; others that it represents a primitive stage of enquiry into the mind, to be left behind when experimental methods are extended to cover areas of the mental hitherto unsusceptible to properly scientific study; still others that the task of philosophy of mind is to analyse and clarify the theoretical concepts and methods employed by the science of psychology. None of these views will be adopted in this book. We get closer to the conception of the philosophy of mind adopted here by saying that we are concerned to articulate what is involved in mental concepts. This is not quite close enough, however; for it is a demerit of

this way of describing our concern, as it is of corresponding descriptions of other areas of philosophy, that it suggests that the philosophical and the scientific studies of mind treat of different subject-matters--the latter dealing with mental phenomena themselves, the former (merely) with our concepts of them. (Still more misleading is the idea that the subject matter of philosophy of mind is mental *words*.) It is better to say that the philosopher also investigates the mental phenomena themselves but that he does so by investigating mental concepts: mental concepts are more the *method* of enquiry than its object. What is (or should be) meant by saying that philosophy is concerned with concepts is this: that the philosopher seeks to discover a priori necessary truths about the phenomena of mind--truths that can be ascertained without empirical study of the mind and its operations, and truths that hold good for any conceivable exemplification of the mental phenomenon in question. And such truths are to be discovered precisely by elucidating the content of our mental concepts. So the philosopher wishes to know, without being roused from his armchair, what is *essential* to the various mental phenomena; the psychologist's aim is at once more ambitious and more modest--he wants to discover by empirical means the actual workings of this or that creature's mind.

An analogy with another field may help clarify this contrast. We can pose the question 'What is the nature of language?' and mean it in two different ways. We can mean to ask after the actual grammar, phonology and so forth of particular languages (English, say), as well as the more general question as to the properties of all human languages. These are empirical questions and their answers are not to be supposed generalisable to every conceivable language. The philosopher of language, however, has his eye on larger (if more ethereal) things: his characteristic concern is with the *essence* of language--any language--and so his procedure is to examine the concept of language with a view to discovering how any language must be. (It should be said that not all philosophers would agree with this description of their activities.) The philosopher of language is interested in the language we speak, but only as an instance of something more general--and that more general thing is to be approached by means of a conceptual enquiry. Thus the philosopher will be interested, for example, in the subject-predicate structure of English, but he will expect little or no philosophical profit from the study of irregular verbs or forms of pluralisation.

We can illustrate the above contrast, as it arises in respect of the mind, with the phenomenon of vision. The philosopher wishes to articulate the necessary and sufficient conditions for any conceivable creature to see an object, and his results are known a priori; he wants to know what it is, quite generally, to see something. The psychologist, on the other hand, is content to discover the workings of the actual mechanisms of vision in various sorts of organism--how, for example, human vision develops, what cues the eye exploits to produce a visual impression, how the human retina is composed. That human beings are subject to the autokinetic effect or that their retinas contain rods and cones are facts of interest to the psychologist; but they leave the philosopher of mind cold--his interest will be excited by such questions as whether it is (conceptually) possible to see an object with which one has no causal contact.

Even from these brief remarks, which await discussion of specific mental phenomena for their proper amplification, it should be plain that philosophy of mind, as here conceived, is distinct from what is sometimes called philosophy of psychology, that is, the philosophical study of the nature and significance of the results and methods of scientific psychology. This latter discipline is to the philosophy of mind as the philosophy of linguistics is to the philosophy of language, or as the philosophy of physics is to the metaphysical question as to the nature of the physical world. These fields are not of course totally unrelated, but their focus and aim are different: the former fields are second-order, needing nourishment from the sciences they depend upon; the latter are self-sustaining and are only marginally, if at all, beholden to the sciences they exist alongside of. Philosophy of mind, as it is to be pursued in this book, aims for its own kind of truths about mental phenomena and is pretty much independent (both ways) of scientific psychology; in this sense the present approach is traditional in character.

Those unfamiliar with philosophical enquiry may be forgiven for doubting whether armchair elucidation of our concepts could yield anything of intellectual substance: why should we expect to learn anything significant (or even true!) from reflecting upon our ordinary concepts? This worry is in a way entirely reasonable--for surely it is not *generally* true that our concepts contain enough to surprise or interest the enquiring intellect. But only certain concepts are deemed to be of philosophical interest--those with the richness and depth to reveal something significant about the phenomena to

which they apply. Thus we do not expect that the essential nature of animal species or chemical substances or physical changes will be disclosed to us merely by reflecting upon the ordinary concepts of (say) *cat*, *salt* or *freezing*: we acknowledge that scientific investigation is needed to reveal the essential nature of these things. Why, it is reasonable to ask, should the matter stand differently with respect to the concepts of *pain*, *belief*, *action*, *person*? If the case is indeed different with these mental concepts, then that should really strike us as a significant fact--more, as a clue to the special nature of the mind, as seen through the concepts that characterise it. And that we can do interesting philosophy of mind at all shows something important about mental concepts and hence mental phenomena. What it shows is that the essence of mental phenomena is contained a priori in mental concepts: that is to say, mental concepts have a depth and suggestiveness that makes it possible and fruitful (as we shall see) to conduct a philosophical investigation of their content. (Whether *any* concept which admits of such philosophical investigation is either mental or somehow intimately bound up with the mind is an interesting question, bearing upon whether the a priori knowledge we have in these areas is connected with the special access we have to our own minds. But, fortunately, we need not take up that large question now, since the present claim is only that *if* a concept is mental then it will be susceptible of philosophical articulation.) It is thus precisely because mental concepts have this depth and translucency that philosophy of mind can be a substantive field distinct from psychology. By contrast, there can be no philosophy of chemicals independent of the science of chemistry.

The task of elucidating mental concepts involves a special difficulty, not common to all concepts in which philosophers interest themselves. Mental concepts are unique in that they are ascribed in two, seemingly very different, sorts of circumstances: we apply them to ourselves on the strength of our 'inner' awareness of our mental states, as when a person judges of himself that he has a headache; and we also apply them to others on the strength of their 'outer' manifestations in behaviour and speech. These two ways of ascribing mental concepts are referred to as first-person and third-person ascriptions, after the grammatical form of their typical expression. The special difficulty presented by these two modes of ascription is that it is clearly the same concepts that are ascribed in first-and thirdperson judgements, yet there is a strong and natural tendency to

suppose that the content of mental concepts reflects their characteristic conditions of ascription. We thus appear forced to choose from among three unattractive positions as to the content of these concepts: either (i) we favour the first-person uses and so encounter difficulty in giving a satisfactory account of how mental concepts are applied to others; or (ii) we favour third-person uses and so omit to register the special character of our first-person ascriptions; or (iii) we try to combine both uses, thus producing a sort of hybrid or amalgam of two apparently unrelated elements. The problem arises because we cannot plausibly sever the meaning of a mental word (content of a mental concept) from the conditions under which we know it to be satisfied, yet these seem utterly different in the first and third-person cases, and so the concepts are pulled in two directions at once. Historically, views of the mind can be classified according to which direction they have allowed themselves to be pulled in: either claiming the essential nature of mental phenomena to be revealed only from the perspective of the subject exemplifying them ('Cartesianism'); or claiming that the real nature of the mental is shown only in our judgements about the states of mind of others ('behaviourism'). Both views give mental concepts a unitary content, but both seem irremediably partial in their account of that content. According to which perspective you take up in reflecting upon some mental phenomenon you arrive at a certain view about the very nature of that phenomenon. It would be fine if we could somehow, as theorists, prescind from both perspectives and just contemplate how mental phenomena are, so to say, in themselves; but this is precisely what seems conceptually unfeasible, because of the constitutive connections of mental concepts with the conditions under which they are known to be satisfied. To avoid the three unattractive alternatives--Cartesianism, behaviourism, an amalgam of the two--we seem to need the idea of a single mental reality somehow neutral between the first- and third-person perspectives; the problem is that there does not appear to be any such idea--we cannot first fashion a conception of the mind and *then* go on to specify the ways in which the mind is known. In a word, there is no epistemologically neutral conception of the mind: we cannot form an idea of *what* some mental phenomenon is without adopting one or other epistemological perspective on it. In this predicament the difficulty of doing justice to both aspects of mental concepts is inherent in the topic, and is not to be dismissed as a mere confusion of thought.

Since the epistemology of mind is constitutive of its nature, and since the epistemology is thus divided between first- and third-person ascriptions, it seems that the only way to find some unity in our mental concepts is to treat one or other perspective as primary in relation to the other--to regard one perspective as better revealing the true nature of the mental phenomenon in question. The hope, then, is to find a plausible way to connect the concept so determined with the other secondary aspect of its content. There is, furthermore, no very good reason to suppose that all mental concepts will have their primary content given from the same perspective: if mental phenomena are not uniform in nature, then it is possible that some will be better apprehended from the first-person perspective, some from the third-person. The best advice to follow in practice is just to ask yourself, with respect to a given mental concept, whether justice has been done to both perspectives, and to be aware of which perspective is primarily shaping your conception of the mental phenomenon in question. There is probably no uniform way of resolving the tension generated by the two perspectives, indeed no way of completely resolving it in any particular case. This peculiarity of the philosophy of mind may in fact place a permanent obstacle in the way of arriving at a theoretically satisfying conception of the mind.

With these abstract matters of method duly noted, let us now descend into the realm of the mental and attempt some sort of preliminary classification or taxonomy of what we find there. When we have divided up the territory we can return to the question whether there is anything each type of mental phenomenon has in common with all other types. Many schemes of classification have been suggested, each with its merits and demerits; the scheme that we will find most useful in what follows divides mental phenomena into what we can call *sensations* and *propositional attitudes*. By sensations we shall mean bodily feelings like pains, tickles, nausea, as well as perceptual experiences like seeming to see a red pillar-box, hearing a loud trumpet, tasting a sweet strawberry. These differ in an important respect, which calls for a subdivision within the class of what we are calling sensations: bodily sensations do not have an intentional object in the way perceptual experiences do. We distinguish between a visual experience and what it is an experience of; but we do not make this distinction in respect of pains. Or again, visual experiences represent the world as being a certain way, but pains have no such

representational content. Grammatically, perceptual verbs are transitive; words for bodily sensations are adjectival. Nevertheless, there is a point in classifying them together, because they are both defined by their phenomenology, that is, by how they *seem* to the subject. They both have what is sometimes called 'qualitative content'. It is natural to say that what it is to undergo a sensation, in this broad sense, is a matter of what it is *like* for the subject of the sensation. The second main category consists of those mental phenomena which have propositional content, that is, the ascription of which involves the use of a 'that'-clause, as in ' Jones believes that the sky is blue.' This class of propositional attitudes itself has important subdivisions, as significant for some purposes as the fact that they are all endowed with propositional content. Thus we are to include not only cognitive states like belief but also conative and affective attitudes--for example, desiring or intending that you get an apple, and fearing that you will be run over. A propositional attitude, of any of these kinds, is identified by two factors: the type of attitude it is--believing, hoping, fearing, intending etc.--and the proposition on to which the attitude is directed. We are not inclined to suppose that propositional attitudes are, like sensations, defined by a distinctive phenomenology. This difference affords an illustration of the way in which our conception of different mental phenomena can be dominated by either the first- or third-person perspectives. In the case of sensations we seem to be taking up the first-person perspective, considering what it is like for the subject of the sensation and ignoring, or regarding as secondary, how a person's sensations are presented to others. In the case of propositional attitudes it seems more natural to accord central importance to how the attitude figures in shaping a person's propensities to act; the dispositional properties of propositional attitudes seem integral to their nature. In neither case can we wholly eliminate the contribution of the less dominant perspective, but the nature of the phenomena directs us to regard different perspectives as primary in respect of the two mental categories.

This twofold classification is not exclusive in the sense that any given mental state has just one of these characteristics. Consider seeing that it is sunny or being terrified that you will be called upon to make the speech: these mental states have both sensational and propositional aspects, and so are identified both phenomenologically and by way of the propositions to which they are related. About such mental states we might say two things apropos of the suggested

taxonomy: we might claim that they are really compound mental states, made up of a sensation and a propositional attitude in combination, and that the taxonomy should be applied at the noncompound level; or we might say that the taxonomy classifies mental *features*, not mental states as we find them--and in the above cases we have to do with the two sorts of feature exemplified in a single mental state. Either way the taxonomy retains its usefulness.

Sensations have the look of something simpler, more primitive, than propositional attitudes. Sensations are present in animals not really up to propositional thought, and babies evidently feel things before they begin to think things. Sensations seem to belong to an earlier and more primitive stage of evolution and individual development; propositional attitudes are to be seen as superimposed upon a prior basis of sensation. Sensations are pre-rational in the sense that their enjoyment is not sufficient to qualify a creature as a rational agent, whereas the onset of propositional mental states is coeval with the introduction of rationality. When we attribute beliefs and desires to a creature we are in the business of making rational sense of its doings; but attributing sensations does not involve us in making *sense*--in this sense--of anything. When we explain a person's behaviour by attributing propositional attitudes to the person we represent the behaviour as rational from the person's point of view (that is, his set of beliefs and desires); but when we explain behaviour by ascribing sensations to a creature we are not yet in the realm of explanation by *reasons* but are merely exhibiting a pattern of (non-rational) cause and effect. As a consequence, the need to represent a creature's propositional attitudes as rationally related one to another, the whole forming a (relatively) coherent web, has no real analogue in the ascription of sensations: there is nothing like propositional content to confer logical relations between sensations, and hence no normative constraint shaping the pattern of sensations a creature may exemplify. The question of the rationality of a sensation does not arise.

Further differences between sensations and propositional attitudes emerge when we consider how the notion of *consciousness* applies in the two cases. We can come at this question by asking how the idea of the unconscious is to be applied to the two sorts of mental phenomena; and here we immediately notice a striking asymmetry between the cases. Common sense recognises, and Freud drove the point home, that propositional attitudes may be uncon-

conscious: we may be unaware of the beliefs and desires that influence our actions and conscious life--we may indeed be quite incapable, save in special circumstances, of becoming aware of these. For this reason there is no contradiction or incoherence in the idea of a propositional attitude which never reaches consciousness. And this suggests that the property of being conscious is something superadded to a propositional attitude; it does not belong intrinsically to a belief that it be a conscious belief. But the case seems otherwise with sensations; we cannot conceive of them as existing in a state of unconsciousness, with consciousness as an extrinsic property only contingently satisfied. This is simply because to have, (say) a pain is to feel a pain, and a felt pain precisely is a conscious pain. Of course there is the odd phenomenon of, as we say, not noticing a pain one nevertheless has; but what a strict parallel with propositional attitudes requires is the possibility of someone having an intense and terrible pain throughout his life and yet never being conscious of it--and this appears unintelligible. If a sensation departs from consciousness, we suppose it to go thereby out of existence; but not so with propositional attitudes. This difference needs to be explained, and it prompts the suspicion that what it is for the two sorts of mental phenomena to be conscious may not be the same. The difference also bears out the intuition, mentioned earlier, that different epistemological perspectives are appropriate to conceiving sensations and propositional attitudes: for if the latter mental states are not intrinsically conscious, then we cannot take the first-person perspective to be constitutive of their nature, since in ascribing unconscious beliefs or desires to oneself one is in essentially the same epistemological situation as he who ascribes those states to one. Since our conception of the intrinsic nature of propositional attitudes is not sensitive to whether they are conscious or unconscious, we find it natural to take up a third-person perspective on them; but because sensations cannot be unconscious we naturally take what is distinctive and definitive of them to be the manner of their presentation in the firstperson case.

We said that consciousness is intrinsic to sensations but extrinsic to propositional attitudes: to have a sensation is to have it consciously, whereas the presence of propositional attitudes is not sufficient for them to be conscious. What needs to be added to the mere presence of the latter to render them conscious? It does not seem right to suppose that we need to add a phenomenology--a way it

seems to the person to have the propositional attitude in question--for we saw that these mental states are not defined by what it is like to have them. Nor is it at all clear what it would be to add a phenomenology to a mental state--certainly we cannot make sense of that idea in respect of sensations. So it does not seem correct to regard the consciousness of propositional attitudes as the same sort of thing as the consciousness of sensations. This suspicion is reinforced by the consideration that it seems to be a necessary condition (and arguably a sufficient one) of a belief being conscious that one believes oneself to have that belief, that is, that one have a second-order belief; but this is not plausible for sensations, since it seems possible to have sensations, and *eo ipso* have them consciously, and not be capable of beliefs of any kind, let alone second-order beliefs--think of simple sentient organisms. If these reflections are on the right track, then the notion of consciousness is not univocal in application to the two sorts of mental phenomena; so again our taxonomy corresponds to real differences among mental phenomena.

The conclusion just reached bears critically on the question whether it is possible to devise or discover a criterion of the mental, a feature common and peculiar to mental phenomena. It bears on this question because the most promising candidate for such a criterion invokes consciousness as the touchstone of what is of the mind. This criterion needs careful formulation, since we have already acknowledged that some mental states can be unconscious. One way of preserving the consciousness criterion in the face of this point is to say, not that a state of a person is mental if and only if it is conscious, but rather if and only if it *could* be conscious. This is nearer the mark, but there is the question what is the force of the 'could'. We want to allow that a person may be psychologically incapable of bringing the contents of his unconscious to consciousness, and that this incapacity may be as radical as you wish. In view of this we do better to weaken the connection with consciousness still further while not severing it altogether: let us then say that a state is mental if and only if it is *of the same kind* as states which *are* conscious. Thus an unconscious belief, even a necessarily unconscious belief, rates as a part of the mind because it is the same kind of state--namely, a belief state--as states which simply are conscious. This criterion uses the idea of consciousness essentially yet allows room for the radically unconscious. However, even if this criterion is roughly correct it is unclear whether it provides exactly what we sought, namely a single

differentiating property of all that is mental. For, first, the criterion scarcely rates as a surprising piece of conceptual analysis; it sounds a bit too much like saying that games are distinguished by the fact that they are activities which are *played*--the analysis seems too close to what it is meant to analyse. And, second, it resembles the case of games and playing in another way, in that the concept of consciousness, like the concept of playing, is itself a family resemblance concept (although the family has only two members). That is, since the notion of consciousness is not univocal--it consists in different things in different cases (compare playing)--we have not really supplied a single common property satisfied by all varieties of mental phenomena. We cannot think of consciousness as a homogeneous property--like being red or straight--shared by all mental phenomena which have it; our classification into the mental and the nonmental must then rest upon a looser basis of similarities and connections, as does our division of activities into games and nongames. (What is not, however, as clear as we might wish is whether our habit of dividing the mind from the rest of the world really reflects a genuine division in nature and not just an accident of convention or intellectual history. The less iconoclastic position is to be preferred, but a vulnerability to the iconoclast should be admitted.) Perhaps the concept of mind resembles the concept of life in this respect: we do pretty confidently divide the world into the living and the non-living, but we are hard put to it to produce any but a trivial specification of what enables us to effect this division. We can, of course, say that something is living just if it is *animate*; but this is too close to mere synonymy to be informative, and besides exhibits the same sort of (quasi-)family resemblance character as the concept it is supposed to define.

We might hope to fill out and fortify our criterion of the mental by giving an account of what consciousness is. One way of doing this is to ask how we would set about conveying what it is to be conscious to someone who lacked this concept. However, this looks like a hopeless enterprise, because the notion of consciousness seems available only to those who already know what it is to be conscious by virtue of being conscious: that is, if you are conscious you know what it is to be so (if you are capable of knowledge at all); but if you are not you will never learn. Consciousness, like redness or sweetness, belongs to that range of properties that can be grasped only by direct acquaintance: just as a man born blind cannot really know

what it is to be red, so a being without consciousness cannot be taught what it is to be conscious--and not because, not being conscious, he cannot be taught anything. And concepts which can be grasped only through acquaintance with what they are concepts of are, by definition, concepts we cannot hope to explain in a noncircular manner. But there is, compounding the ineffability, a way in which consciousness is elusive even to acquaintance, as an exercise in introspection will reveal. Consider your consciousness *of* some item--an external object, your own body, a sensation--and try to focus attention on that relation: as many philosophers have observed, this relation of consciousness to its objects is peculiarly impalpable and diaphanous--all you come across in introspection are the objects of consciousness, not consciousness itself. This feature of consciousness has induced some thinkers to describe consciousness as a kind of inner emptiness; it is nothing per se but a pure directedness on to things other than itself. No wonder then that it is hard to say what consciousness intrinsically is.

There is, though, something instructive that we can say about the nature of consciousness--and this is that the possession of consciousness is not a matter of *degree*. Put differently, the concept of consciousness does not permit us to conceive of genuinely borderline cases of sentience, cases in which it is inherently indeterminate whether a creature is conscious: either a creature definitely is conscious or it is definitely not. Note that this is a claim about what it is to be conscious, not a claim about our *knowledge* as to whether a creature is conscious. There can certainly be cases where we are not *sure* whether a creature is conscious, so that our ascription of conscious states will be tentative; but this is irrelevant to the question whether, *if* the creature is conscious, this can be a matter of degree. To see this, suppose you know all the facts about a creature: could all the facts leave it indeterminate whether the creature is conscious? We could know all the facts about the colour of some object and yet admit that it is inherently indeterminate *which* colour the object is, since we allow that there can be borderline cases of (say) blue; but it does not seem that a parallel situation could obtain in respect of consciousness. Thus we can make no sense of the possibility that a state of a creature might be a borderline case of sensation, precisely because sensations are necessarily conscious. The case is somewhat different for propositional attitudes: it seems less than evident that there cannot be borderline cases of belief, as perhaps with certain animals; but

this is because beliefs are not necessarily conscious--and borderline cases of belief will not be borderline cases of *conscious* belief. If consciousness is an all-or-nothing matter, then it follows that the possession of a mind is also an all-or-nothing matter, since consciousness is what characterises the mind. There may be many kinds of mind, but none of these is a case where it is inherently indeterminate whether there is mind or not.

The concept of mind contrasts in this respect with the concept of life, for it is not difficult to persuade oneself that the latter concept does admit of borderline cases. Our concept of the living is vague enough to allow us to envisage the possibility of things about which it is simply not determinate whether they are living--think of bacteria and various kinds of organic molecule. But in the case of consciousness its possession is a matter of there being something 'inner', some way the world appears to the creature; and we cannot imagine the position of a creature for whom it is indeterminate whether there is such an 'inner' subjective aspect. This contrast between life and mind is made especially vivid by considering the genesis of these properties in evolution. In the case of life we have to do with a gradual transition from the plainly inanimate to the indisputably living; but in the case of consciousness we cannot take such a gradualist view, admitting the existence of intermediate stages. The emergence of consciousness must rather be compared to a sudden switching on of a light, narrow as the original shaft must have been. According to this thesis about consciousness, we conceive the minds of lowly creatures as consisting in (so to speak) a small speck of consciousness quite definitely possessed, not in the partial possession of something admitting of degrees. Perhaps this feature of consciousness is connected with the apparent *simplicity* of consciousness; for if consciousness is a simple quality it cannot be made up of constituents whose separation might produce borderline cases. Or perhaps it is because consciousness is so different from the merely material that nothing could count as an instance of something intermediate between them--a consideration that does not apply to life. Whatever the explanation is--whether indeed the all-or-nothing character of consciousness can be explained--this seems to be a feature that any account of consciousness must respect. And there are theories of the mind, such as materialism and behaviourism, that will find this feature problematic, since the concepts in terms of which they choose to explain mental phenomena do not themselves exhibit this

all-or-nothing character. It is therefore in place to ask, of any theory of the mind, whether it can accommodate this feature of consciousness--and if it cannot, what view it takes of the intuition that consciousness is so constituted.

We may summarise this chapter as follows: the aim of the philosophy of mind is to conduct an a priori investigation into the essential nature of mental phenomena, by elucidating the latent content of mental concepts; mental phenomena can be approached from a firstperson or a third-person perspective, both of which need to be integrated (if this be possible) into a unitary account; these phenomena may usefully be divided into sensations and propositional attitudes, which differ in their nature; both classes of mental phenomena are intimately bound up with consciousness, though not in the same way; consciousness itself is known only by acquaintance, is diaphanous, and is not a matter of degree. With these preliminaries to hand we can now turn to discuss some of the problems surrounding the nature of mind.

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2 MIND AND BODY

THE question as to the relation between mental phenomena and physical states of the body, specifically of the brain, is generally referred to as 'the mind-body problem'. There is a reason for calling the question of the nature of this relation a *problem*, which may be put as follows. When we think reflectively of mental phenomena we find that we acknowledge them to possess two sets of properties: one set which invites us to distinguish the mental realm from the physical, the other which firmly locates the mental within the physical world. Among the first set of properties are subjectivity, infallible first-person knowledge, consciousness, meaning, rationality, freedom and self-awareness. These properties are not to be found in the world of mere matter, and so lead us to suppose the mind to be set apart from the physical body: we seem compelled to accord a *sui generis* mode of reality to mental phenomena. The simplest expression of this conviction that the mind must be distinguished from the body is the feeling that a pain or a thought could not really just be a mere arrangement of molecules, of whatever degree of complexity. That which pertains to consciousness seems just different in nature from any physical facts about a person's body. Yet, on the other hand, we have to reckon with another set of truths about the mental, apparently pushing us in the opposite direction: mental phenomena cannot be conceived as quite *outside* the physical world, as abstract entities such as

numbers have been supposed to be, enjoying no commerce with mere matter. Thus we equally recognise the following truths: that the mind has some sort of spatio-temporal location, roughly where the body is; that each mind has a characteristic mode of embodiment determined by its capacities to perceive and act--

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indeed that the notion of a disembodied mind is (to say the least) of dubious coherence; that there are causal connections of many kinds between mental events and physical events; that the brain, itself a physical organ of the body, is intimately related to mental activity, its integrity and functioning necessary to the integrity and functioning of the mind; that mental phenomena seem to emerge, both in evolution and individual development, from a basis of matter organised in physically explicable ways. These considerations incline us to regard the mind as *somehow* physical in nature, since it is natural to suppose that only what is itself physical could be so enmeshed in the physical world.

It is impossible not to be impressed with the applicability of both sets of properties to the mind, and to admit that both must find a place in any account of the relation between mind and body. The problem is that the two sets of truths seem to be in fundamental tension, since one set makes us think the mind *could* not be physical while the other tells us that it *must* be. It is this tension that makes it appropriate to speak of the mind-body *problem*. (Notice that the problem of mind and body is not the prerogative of man; it arises also for other animals. And it helps, in freeing our thoughts or prejudice and ideology, to consider the problem in application to minds other than our own: nothing essential will be lost if we take rats or monkeys or Martians as exemplars of the problem.)

A satisfying solution to the problem would allow us to acknowledge both sets of truths about the mental by relieving the tension between them. Simply repudiating outright one set or the other would also relieve the tension, but at an intolerable cost. In practice, suggested solutions have tended to be pulled in one direction or the other, according to how impressed their authors have been with one or the other set of properties; they have then tried to do justice to the aspects of the mental deemed secondary, generally without producing full conviction. As is typical in philosophy, we are here confronted by a conceptual conflict which cannot be easily resolved in a way that does justice to all the conflicting considerations. Thus, on the one hand, various brands of *dualism* are offered as metaphysical expressions of the idea that the mind is different in essential nature from the body: mind and body are conceived as distinct things or substances, more or less tenuously related. On the other hand, there are

versions of *monism*, holding that there is only matter and its material attributes, mind being a particular kind of arrangement of

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the material world. Predictably enough, dualism is driven to desperate expedients in endeavouring to relate the mind back to the physical world from which it has been extruded; while monism is forced to deny or distort the distinctive characteristics of the mind. Let us review some of the more instructive defects of traditional dualism and monism, hoping thereby to edge nearer to a position which combines their attractions while avoiding their difficulties; we shall, however, find that this is no easy task. We begin with monism.

The clearest and most uncompromising version of monism is the thesis that mental phenomena are literally identical with physical phenomena: if a person has a sensation or a thought and a neurophysiologist is examining the relevant portions of his brain, then the mental state is nothing other than the physical state thus observed. Moreover, whenever a mental state of that type occurs in a creature's mind there is the same type of physical state in the brain, these being identical. This sort of monism is sometimes called the type-identity theory. The model for such type identities is said to be provided by such theoretical identifications as that of water with H₂O or heat with molecular motion: just as we may be presented with one and the same phenomenon in two different ways and subsequently discover the identity, so--it has been claimed--we may be presented in two different ways with a mental phenomenon, physically and (more familiarly) mentally. An analogy would be this: a substance, such as water, may present quite different appearances when looked at with the naked eye and when examined with a microscope, so that it will not be obvious that it is one and the same thing that is thus presented. Similarly, it is said that pain may appear in one way to you who are enduring it and in another to the brain scientist examining your grey matter--yet the same thing is being presented. To make sense of these cases of discovered identities we need a distinction between the *property* denoted by a word and the concept it expresses: we can then say that 'water' and 'H₂O' denote the same property (the same *type*) yet do not express the same concept (have the same meaning). Properties are what get identified; concepts are what make the identification empirical and informative. Thus it is claimed that 'pain' and 'C-fibre stimulation' may denote the same property although they express different concepts. And just as H₂O constitutes the nature of water according to modern chemistry, though this is not derivable from the concept of water, so C-fibre stimulation may constitute the nature of pain according to modern neurophysiology, though this is

not contained in the concept of pain. What this type-identity theory attempts to do is to account for the physical involvements of mental phenomena by identifying mental properties with physical properties, while at the same time allowing room for (at least some) of the distinctive features of mind by keeping mental and physical concepts distinct. This is an appealing and ingenious idea; but can we really conceive the relation between mental properties and mental concepts on the model of the water and heat cases?

There are a number of closely related difficulties in any such view, which seem to have a common source. It is not that there is some general problem with the idea of distinct concepts picking out the same property; indeed this is precisely what is wanted to describe what is going on in the uncontroversial cases of theoretical identification. It is rather that mental concepts are intuitively such that no physical concept could characterise the essential nature of the mental property denoted. In other words, it seems that mental concepts already contain the essence of mental phenomena and that physical concepts are necessarily unsuited to this role; whereas, by contrast, it seems implicit in our ordinary concepts of physical substances, for example, the concept of water, that they do not already contain the essential nature of the substances they denote but rather leave a gap into which a scientific characterisation of the substance is to be slotted. The former concepts close off what the latter leave open.

As we should expect, the essence-specifying character of mental concepts is tied to their epistemology: that is, how mental phenomena are presented from the first- and third-person perspectives determines their nature as revealed in the concepts applied from those perspectives. Thus from the first-person perspective the fact of consciousness is what informs our conception of the nature of mental states; and it is consciousness which seems incapable of possessing a physical nature. From the third-person perspective our conception of mental states is informed by the behavioural criteria we use to apply mental concepts to others; and criterial patterns of behaviour seem equally incapable, though for different reasons, of having a physical essence in the brain--they are too loosely connected with states of the brain for that to be feasible. As we remarked in Chapter 1, the first-person perspective is more integral to sensations than to propositional attitudes, so this perspective will dominate in fixing our conception of the nature of sensations: their subjective phenomenological nature is what blocks identification with the physi-

cal, since the physical world does not possess this feature of firstperson subjectivity-- it is purely objective in nature. In the case of propositional attitudes, the third-person perspective is at least as important as the first-person perspective in shaping our conception of these mental states. Thus it is natural to look to their ascription to others for the ground of their irreducibility to the physical; and here we find principles governing their ascription, and hence (partially) definitive of their nature, which are inapplicable to physical states of the body. The principles in question concern the connection between the possession of propositional attitudes and the notion of rationality: in our ascription of propositional mental states we must always attend to the logical relations that hold among the attitudes ascribed, and so propositional attitude ascriptions are (partly) controlled by various *normative* considerations--that is, considerations about what attitudes the person *ought* to have, given that he has others. So in describing someone psychologically we must conform our ascriptions to certain canons of rationality, or else we will not be making sense of the person: without some measure of conformity to normative considerations we shall not be able to find the person rationally intelligible. These principles, implicit in all our thoughts about the thoughts of others, are peculiar to the mental realm; our ascription of physical states to a person's body and brain needs no sensitivity to principles governing what physical states the person *ought* (rationally) to be in given that he is in certain other physical states. So it seems that propositional attitudes, by virtue of their constitutive involvement in the normative, are not the *sort* of state whose nature could be given in terms of physical states, in view of the indifference of the physical to the normative.

The manner in which normative considerations operate from the third-person point of view is mirrored in a certain way from the firstperson perspective, and this brings out a connection between rationality and self-consciousness. A person adjusts his beliefs (and sometimes his desires) under two sorts of pressure: the impact of new information which confirms or disconfirms the beliefs he already holds; and by noticing inconsistencies, of a logical nature, between the beliefs he already possesses. Since a person is not simultaneously aware of all his beliefs, it is perfectly possible--indeed commonplace--that conflicts among beliefs go unnoticed; it is thus possible to believe something as well as believing its opposite, precisely through lack of omniscience about what you believe. But once

such a conflict comes to awareness one or the other belief must go--normative considerations then operate to determine your beliefs. What is notable is that normative principles influence your beliefs in the most obvious and decisive way when you become *aware* of your beliefs and hence of their inconsistency. If a person were not aware of his beliefs, then he could not be aware of their inconsistency; but awareness of inconsistency is (primarily) what allows normative considerations to get purchase on beliefs; so the rational adjustment of beliefs one to another seems to involve self-consciousness, that is, knowledge of what you believe. Without such self-consciousness the control of logic over thought would be deprived of its compelling force; rationality as we know it requires knowledge of the contents of one's own mind. We might find some small corroboration of this point in the irrational ways of the Freudian unconscious: perhaps unconscious thoughts tolerate more illogic in their interrelations than conscious thoughts because they are not similarly subjected to the normative scrutiny consciousness brings--knowledge of one's attitudes breeds intolerance of their irrationality. We might then see the adherence to normative considerations in the third-person case as presupposing an ascription of self-consciousness to the subject of the attitude ascriptions thus normatively controlled: we try to find the other rational because we assume him to be a self-conscious appraiser of his own rationality.

These reflections on propositional attitudes, rationality and self-consciousness encourage a further thesis, namely that the very possession of propositional attitudes requires self-consciousness: for the possession of propositional attitudes requires sensitivity to principles of rationality, and such sensitivity in turn depends upon awareness of one's attitudes. It follows from this thesis that there cannot be creatures with propositional attitudes which lack self-consciousness--a claim we might well find independently plausible. Thoughts (and the like) are indeed a sophisticated accomplishment, not granted to all creatures possessed of minds, that is, capable of sensations. And note that there is no parallel argument connecting sensational mental phenomena with self-consciousness: sensations are not subject to normative considerations, and so do not in the same way point us in the direction of self-consciousness. This asymmetry between sensations and propositional attitudes in respect of self-consciousness thus seems intuitively acceptable; and we have an *explanation* of it once we connect rationality with self-consciousness.

What we also have is a link between the constitutive principles that prevent the reductive identification of propositional attitudes with brain states, that is, the principles of rationality, and the phenomenon of consciousness. Consciousness thus appears to be at the root of the physical irreducibility of both sensations and propositional attitudes.

The thesis that mental concepts do not determine properties with a physical nature naturally leads to the claim that mental and physical types are not *necessarily* correlated; indeed the latter claim, if correct, can be construed as an argument for the former thesis. This is because an identification of properties is not compatible with the possibility that they be independently instantiated. Thus suppose we find pain to be correlated in human beings with C-fibre stimulation: if this correlation is merely contingent, so that it is possible to have one of the correlated items without the other, then they cannot be identical. And it does *seem* that a creature *could* have pain and not C-fibre stimulation: pain might be correlated with some other kind of physical state in that creature. (The converse possibility, C-fibre stimulation without pain, is harder to assess; we shall return to it.) Quite generally, with respect to any mental attribute it seems possible for different creatures to possess the attribute and yet differ in what sort of brain state correlates with the attribute. So the connection between mental state and correlated brain state cannot be so intimate as to warrant calling the latter the *nature* of the former, in the way that H₂O may be said to constitute the nature of water. This is not to say that mental states are only contingently embodied or that they may be exemplified in the absence of *any* physical correlates; it is just to make the more modest--but still damaging to typemonism--claim that there is no *unique* physical basis for any given mental type.

The purport of this claim may be seen from a comparison with what we want to say about computer programmes and the physical hardware in which they are exemplified. In order for a computer programme to run it needs to be 'embodied' in the physical hardware of an appropriate machine; but the nature of the programme itself leaves open what sort of hardware may embody it--and so the same programme may be run on different sorts of machine. But this analogy, though it brings out the modesty of the contingency thesis in respect of mental and physical properties, should not be immediately taken to demonstrate that mental concepts and computer con-

cepts are concepts of the same kind--specifically, that the mind is to be compared to a computer programme. This plainly does not follow from the fact that both are only contingently connected with physical properties, and indeed brief reflection indicates that the source of the contingency is different in the two cases. In the mental case it was consciousness that seemed to render monism implausible: since consciousness could not have a physical essence, we can conceive of conscious states being associated with different bodily conditions. But in the computer case this is not the ground of the contingency; it seems rather to be the *abstractness* of computer programmes that gives them a non-physical nature. Mental states do not seem similarly abstract, and so the source of their irreducibility to the physical is quite different from that of the physical irreducibility of computer programmes. Nevertheless the analogy between abstract states and conscious states is instructive; it helps us to see that it can be true a priori that a range of properties is necessarily not capturable in purely physical terms--and so to appreciate the difficulties of monism better.

The shortcomings of type-monism make it tempting to resort to dualism. Dualism is the doctrine that mental phenomena inhere in an immaterial substance which is utterly distinct from the material substance composing the body: just as physical states are qualifications of a certain kind of stuff, namely matter, so mental states are qualifications of a different kind of stuff, incorporeal in nature. This doctrine can seem attractive because it takes with the utmost seriousness the idea that mind is essentially different from matter, to the extent of introducing a special sort of substance to constitute the nature of the mental: the hope is that if we locate mind in a specially fashioned stuff we shall be able to do justice to, perhaps even explain, the distinctive features of the mental. There are, however, at least three classes of objection to the dualist theory, which are formidable enough to remove its apparent attractiveness.

First, the idea of a peculiarly mental substance is, when you think about it, extremely weird: it is quite unclear that there is any intelligible conception associated with the words 'immaterial substance'. This is shown in the fact that the alleged substance tends to get characterised purely negatively; it is simply a kind of substance that is *not* material. But we need some more positive description of what it is if we are to be convinced that we are speaking of anything comprehensible. In fact, we are prone, in trying to form a coherent concep-

Of what nature is the mind? So Colin McGinn starts his first chapter, and this is his guiding question. He pursues the answer with a boldness and provocativeness rarely encountered in philosophical writing. As he explains, my aim has been to give the reader something definite and stimulating to think about, rather than to present a cautious and disinterested survey of the state of the subject. The Character of Mind provides a general introduction to the philosophy of mind, covering all the main topics: the mind-body problem, the nature of acquaintance, the relation between thought and language, Satan a Student of the Mind. "For thousands of years Satan has been experimenting upon the properties of the human mind, and he has learned to know it well. By his subtle workings in these last days he is linking the human mind with his own, imbuing it with his thoughts; and he is doing this work in so deceptive a manner that those who accept his guidance know not that they are being led by him at his will. The great deceiver hopes so to confuse the minds of men and women that none but his voice will be heard." A large portion of Mind, Character, and Personality presents general guiding principles. This is interspersed and supplemented with materials setting forth practical admonitions and counsels in the setting of the relationship of the teacher and the student, the minister and the parishioner, the physician and the patient, or the parent and the child. In them we see the future teachers and lawmakers and judges, the leaders and the people, that determine the character and destiny of the nation. How important, then, the mission of those who are to form the habits and influence the lives of the rising generation. 10.