
Mental Reality

second edition

Galen Strawson

with a new appendix

A Bradford Book
The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England

© 1994, 2010 by The Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, and information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

This book was set in Sabon by SNP Best-set Typesetter Ltd., Hong Kong, and was printed and bound in the United States of America.

First printing, 1994.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Strawson, Galen.

Mental reality / Galen Strawson.—2nd ed., with a new appendix.

p. cm.—(Representation and mind series)

“A Bradford book.”

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-262-51310-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Consciousness. 2. Behaviorism (Psychology). 3. Mind and body.

4. Materialism. 5. Philosophy of mind. I. Title.

B808.9.S73 2010

128'.2—dc22

2009011301

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Preface

Behaviorism is dead. No one still believes that mental concepts can be satisfactorily analyzed just in terms of behavior and dispositions to behavior.

Neobehaviorism survives—the view that mental life is linked to behavior in such a way that reference to behavior enters essentially and centrally into any adequate account of the nature of almost all, if not all, mental states and occurrences. This view is very widely accepted.

One of my purposes in this book is to argue that neobehaviorism is false, given the common philosophical understanding of the word ‘behavior’, and that reference to behavioral phenomena is given the wrong place in most contemporary accounts of mind. This argument can be extended, for the same seems to be true of reference to publicly observable phenomena in general and also, perhaps, of reference to nonmental phenomena.

Such arguments are negative. Insofar as a positive view is put forward in this book, it might be called ‘naturalized Cartesianism’. Naturalized Cartesianism couples belief in materialism with respect for the idea that the only distinctively mental phenomena are the phenomena of conscious experience (respect is not yet acceptance).

In chapter 1, I declare some assumptions and make some comments about what it is to be a realist—a real realist—about conscious experience. In chapter 2, I raise and develop three large questions:

1. *The nonmentality question* What part does reference to nonmental phenomena play in a satisfactory account of the nature of mental phenomena?

2. *The public-observability question* What part does reference to publicly observable phenomena play in a satisfactory account of the nature of mental phenomena?

3. *The behavior question* What part does reference to behavioral phenomena play in a satisfactory account of the nature of mental phenomena?

Most of the rest of the book is my attempt to answer these questions.

Chapters 3, 4, and 5 consider the nonmentality question. Chapters 3 and 4 discuss materialist approaches to the “mind–body” problem. They defend the view that we must be radically ignorant about fundamental aspects of the nature of the physical, if materialism is true, and argue that the espousal of materialism is partly a matter of faith. Chapter 5 then considers some nonmaterialist or idealist approaches. Descartes and Berkeley are discussed at some length because their problems are exemplary and because they are independently interesting. I argue that there are strong but ultimately inconclusive reasons for supposing that the existence of certain sorts of mental phenomenon essentially requires the existence of nonmental phenomena.

The first five chapters assume that we have a reasonably robust and widely shared understanding of the word ‘mental’ that is well anchored in agreement about paradigm cases. Chapter 6 discards this assumption and raises directly the question of which phenomena are mental phenomena. No firm conclusion is reached. Some recommendations are made. The suggestion that all truly mental phenomena are conscious, experiential phenomena is considered at some length.

This precipitates a discussion of intentionality in chapter 7. I argue that much of the supposed difficulty of the problem of intentionality is illusory. More particularly, I argue that if any deep difficulty arises in giving a “naturalistic” account of the existence of intentionality, it is not really distinct from the difficulty that arises when one tries to give a naturalistic account of the existence of conscious experience. The account of the nature of the mental and of intentionality developed in chapters 6 and 7 constitutes the second main focus of this book.

Chapters 8 and 9 turn back to questions (2) and (3), the public-observability question and the behavior question. Together the two chapters constitute the main attack on neobehaviorism. I consider pain and desire, and hence, more generally, sensations and so-called “propo-

sitional attitudes.” I argue directly for the view that reference to behavior does not have the place it is commonly thought to have in a correct account of the nature of mental phenomena. Chapter 8 confronts Wittgensteinian arguments for the centrality of reference to behavior, arguments that appeal essentially to facts about language and meaning. Chapter 9 takes on functionalist and other arguments that make no such appeal.

Pursuing the behavior question, chapter 10 reconsiders our use of the word ‘behavior’. I argue for a realignment of the notion of behavior that has the consequence that neobehaviorism is after all partly true, and indeed trivially true, although not for the reasons for which it has usually been thought to be true. If the realignment is acceptable, it follows that the answer to the behavior question can be ‘A large part’, even if the answer to the public-observability question is ‘Very little part’ or even ‘No part’.

Chapter 11 offers a brief summary of the argument and suggests that the correct conclusion for the philosophy of mind to draw from the study of artificial intelligence is the opposite of the most common conclusion.

The book does not form an indissoluble unity so that it must be read as a whole or not at all. Chapter 2 is programmatic in character, and chapters 3 and 4 form a unity, but all the other chapters can be read separately without much difficulty. Major dependencies of one chapter on another are indicated by cross-references.

I conceived this book in 1979, when writing a D.Phil. thesis on free will. At that time I wrote sections 1.4, 1.7, and parts of chapters 5, 6, 8, 9, and 10. The Weather Watchers, who appear in chapter 9, featured in my D.Phil. thesis (1983) and survived in an obscure footnote in the resulting book, *Freedom and Belief* (1986). I wrote a brief first draft of this book in 1986, while at New College, Oxford, but then turned to other work until 1988–1989, when I wrote the first full-length draft and began to use the material in seminars at the University of Oxford. I am grateful to many of those who attended those seminars for their comments, as I am to audiences at the Australian National University, Birkbeck College, Princeton University, Rutgers University, and the universities of Aix-en-

Provence, California at Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Liverpool, Reading, and Sydney.

I wouldn't be surprised to be told that everything here that is both true and of philosophical interest has been said somewhere by somebody else. It is over 350 years since Descartes remarked, "It is impossible for each individual to examine the vast numbers of new books that are published every day" (Descartes 1642, 2:386), and the situation has not improved. Philosophers often have the experience, when reading something recently published, of thinking "I've already said that," and this is unsurprising, for the same thoughts occur independently to different people, and no one can hope to read more than a small part of what is written. People also forget where their ideas come from. Often they wrongly think that they have had a new idea because they have couched it in an idiom or context different from the one in which they first encountered it. Occasionally they are disinclined to acknowledge the source even when they can remember it. I have recorded debts where I am aware of them, and I have recorded debt-free convergences of opinion. No doubt I have debts of which I am not conscious. I hope that the way in which I have put things together will be of use in current philosophical debates about the mind.

I would particularly like to thank Sebastian Gardner, Mark Greenberg, John Heil, Derek Parfit, Paul Snowdon, and P. F. Strawson for their comments on various parts of the text. They have corrected me on some matters and helped me to take others further. I would also like to thank John Searle for sending me, in advance of publication, two draft chapters of his book *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (1992). Finally I would like to thank George Bealer, Ron Chrisley, Jerry Cohen, Dan Dennett, Jerry Fodor, Brian Garrett, Edward Harcourt, Ward Jones, Martha Klein, Stephen Law, Dan Lloyd, Michael Lockwood, Penelope Mackie, Fred Schueler, Seana Shiffrin, Steve Simpson, Michael Smith, Helen Steward, Charles Taliaferro, and Alan Thwaites for a variety of useful objections and observations. For help of a less philosophical kind, I would like to thank Redmond O'Hanlon, Andrew Rosenheim, Ann Strawson, Emilie Strawson, Anna Vaux, and Teri Mendelsohn of the MIT Press.