

GILBERT RYLE, *On Thinking*, edited by Konstantin Kolenda, Totowa, N. J., Rowman & Littlefield, 1979, 136 pp.

There is plenty in this posthumous book to overcome the standard *prima facie* objection to publishing from an author's *Nachlass*. The bounty includes (1) delicious Rylisms, (2) moments of considerable historical interest, and even (3) some positive contributions to current tangles in the philosophy of mind. Moreover, although the book is a collection of nine independent papers Ryle composed during the last decade of his life, there is, if anything, too much unity of theme in the collection, for all the essays deal in one way or another (and with a fair amount of repetition) with the question that quite properly exercised Ryle in the wake of *The Concept of Mind*, with its peculiar brand of behaviorism: what is *Le Penseur* (Rodin's famous statue) doing? He is not, to appearances at least, *behaving*, or if he is, his behavior is consistent with too many different accounts of his concurrent thinking (his "inner story," we are tempted to say, but Ryle fights hard to keep us from saying it). The quintessentially human *activity* of just sitting and thinking got short shrift in *The Concept of Mind*, as Ryle's critics always insisted, so Ryle turned to filling the lacuna. The result, an unordered mixture of very cautious and begrudging concessions to the opposition, lambastings of strawmen, and canny observations, could not be called complete or successful, but it will be fascinating to veterans in the opposition.

Like many powerful and original thinkers, Ryle sometimes lapsed into self-caricature in his late years, and often his jocular lists of Different Doings get tedious or ludicrous, but there are compensating gems: e.g., of Wittgenstein's *Investigations* Ryle observes that "Its accents are occasionally quite governessy," and in commenting approvingly of a section of Vendler's *Res Cogitans*, he says: "Associationism, empiricism and behaviorism do not, for once, raise their Skinner-like heads; nor does angelic rationalism brandish against them its flaming French sword."

Ryle was proud of his curious self-imposed abstention from footnotes (a policy that forced

the supporting scholarship of *Plato's Progress* into self-defeatingly ungainly parentheses within the text), and part of the point of this was to rise timelessly above the fleeting controversy of the day. Thus one finds little commentary in Ryle on his contemporaries and especially his critics. This makes the modest collection of comments on Skinner, Chomsky, Austin, Quine and Wittgenstein in this volume all the more valuable. Of more substantial historical interest, however, are the many remarks that cast light back onto the project of *The Concept of Mind*, both its doctrines and methods. The former variety are too numerous to summarize; of the latter I was struck especially by the confirmation in this book of my longstanding suspicion that Ryle's method, such as it was, was utterly unreliable—capable of producing wonderful insights and reminders of forgotten (and important) truths, but even more capable of producing dire warnings against non-existent temptations, endless parades of red herrings, and obfuscatory sidesteppings. For instance:

A student who has been taught some arithmetic or some French grammar has already learned in some measure to think out arithmetic problems or problems in composing or construing French prose. All learning is learning to tackle problems of this, that, or the other specific varieties. There are no residual *problems* [my italics] of purely generic sorts (66).

But who would have thought so? What, though, or generic problem-solving *talents*, or strategies, or methods? Or, closer to his denial, what of very abstract problem-*types*? The slight shifts of ground that bamboozle the reader of *The Concept of Mind* are less concealed here—or perhaps I've just learned to spot them better.

The positive contributions to current issues are sparsely scattered, but genuine. "Thought and Imagination" contains an excellent and typically graphic description of creative thinking and problem solving, valuable in its own right, but put to dubious use. Ryle brandishes it against those who are enamored of the computer as a modeler of human thought, but the distinction he draws so crisply between mere clanking computation and freewheeling thought is *exactly* the distinction drawn in computer science between algorithmic and heuristic processing—two strikingly different ways a *computer* can do its work. A better informal description of heuristic search has not been given. But Ryle has other observations on this topic that have not yet been assimilated by current theorists of thinking, especially his discussion of the conditions under which people take deductive steps (the parable of the Abbé's first penitent, pp. 127-28), and his scattered observations on the *minor* role of explicit "words in the head" during thought.

This slender book is attractively designed—though *Le Penseur* should surely have pre-empted the Escher hands-drawing-hands on the dustjacket—but contains a disconcerting number of misprints. The worst is a missing line of text on page 39, but one wonders whether Ryle would be amused to read that Plato's apocrypha now includes the *Memo* (95).